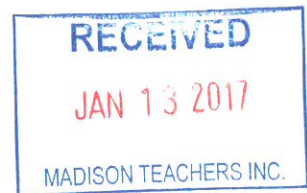


Vander Meulen



## MTI-VOTERS

### 2017 School Board Election Questionnaire

Please respond to the following questions. If you wish to add to/clarify your response, please do so by attaching the additional information, and designate your response by the corresponding number which appears in the questionnaire. ***Please deliver your responses to MTI Headquarters (821 Williamson Street) by January 13.***

***MTI-Voters will be interviewing candidates on the evening of Tuesday, January 24, between 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm.***

1. Why are you running for the MMSD Board of Education?

I am running for office to make a difference and to be a voice for the voiceless. I know it sounds cliché, but it's not. I was a special needs student growing up, and as an Autistic adult I know far too well the challenges that students who are underrepresented face in our school system. I believe that status quo isn't good enough. Our students and our teachers deserve better. Every child deserves a quality public education, and right now every child is not receiving one.

2. Name three things you believe the MMSD does well.

MMSD does an excellent job at teaching reading, has an excellent and inspired teaching staff, and MMSD affords students excellent extra-curricular opportunities.

3. Name three things you believe the MMSD needs to improve.

My three biggest areas of concern with MMSD are as follows: the achievement gap, the lack of benchmarks in the behavioral education plan, and the extremely high number of suspensions and expulsions of middle and High School Students.

4. How do you think the MMSD should address these challenges?

The top priority of MMSD has to be addressing the achievement gap. The State of Wisconsin has the lowest graduation rate for students of color in the nation. That is a first no one should be proud of. My plan to address this issue is to create peer mentoring opportunities, increase students' job exposure, and focusing on increasing cultural diversity in school and in the workplace.

The second issue that MMSD needs to focus on is the behavior education plan. The behavior education plan was created as a replacement for the zero tolerance policies of the past. The Behavior education plan is suppose to simplify the code of conduct for students, set appropriate goals and provide meaningful feedback to teachers. However, the program has yielded results that have been far from conclusively successful.

- A. I believe there must be clear goals and objectives. In my conversations with teachers, one of the most frequent critiques was that the plan is confusing because there is no way to measure progress. The solution I think is most reasonable would be to implement a checkoff system in which the goal is listed in rubric format. If the child meets the goal they would receive a plus, if they don't meet the goal they would receive a minus with an explanation on how the goal can be met.
- B. Teacher training we must teach the entire staff-- including administrators and aides-- how the Behavior Education Plan works. This training should be done at a time convenient for staff, and should be a paid training.
- C. Specific care should be taken to prevent discrimination against low income, minority, and disabled students in the Behavior Education Plan. This can be done by providing a multicultural liaison.

5. Name three things you believe the State of Wisconsin could do better to support public schools.

1. Repeal Act 10
2. Provide mentors to young teachers
3. Limit the charter and voucher programs

6. How would you advocate for these needs as a Board member?

I would strongly oppose any charter program in the district-- public or private-- that didn't guarantee that special needs student IEP's would be met. I would also staunchly oppose any public or private charter that uses a lottery system. Children shouldn't be pitted against each other to get an education, but that's what a lottery system perpetuates.

7. What do you believe are the three greatest external challenges facing the MMSD.

Voucher and charter schools are the biggest threat to MMSD. These programs weaken public education from the inside out using untested methods. Moreover, charter and voucher schools often lack accountability, leaving open the possibility for fraud and malfeasance. Voucher schools often are under regulated, and underperforming, yet these schools aren't held to the standards of the public schools.

8. How do you think the MMSD can best meet these challenges?

9. What are your thoughts about public charter schools governed by the BOE?

I have always been against charter schools, both public and private. Any school controlled by outside forces other than the public schools leads to confusion and creates a two tiered educational system. The fact that there must be a lottery to get into a public school is unfathomable. Education should be for all and not be determined by luck, chance, or pseudo

science. My second concern with public charter schools involves students with special needs and whether they would be welcome in public charter schools. By welcome I mean will their IEP still be valid, and will their rights be protected when budgets get tough and cuts need to be made.

10. What are your thoughts about private charter schools governed by others? I am against private charter schools run by others. The purpose of a public education is for the Board of education along with the superintendent and the Department of Public Instruction to decide the right goals and methods for teaching. These are elected positions using public tax money and these positions should be staffed by members of the public school not by a private company who often lacks the knowledge and understanding of the local school districts.

11. What are your thoughts about vouchers (using public funds to pay for private schools)?

My position on School Vouchers is very simple—I am firmly against them. I feel that school vouchers weaken public schools and discriminate against individuals with disabilities. It is an accepted matter of constitutional law that institutions receiving public funding may not discriminate on the basis of sex, creed, religion, race, or disability. However, voucher schools allow such discrimination to occur when they limit the participation of students with disabilities in the voucher program. As an autistic adult, I find it objectionable that public funds are given to voucher schools that would never accept a student with multiple disabilities like myself.

Voucher schools often are under regulated, and underperforming, but these schools aren't held to the standards of the public schools. The fact that a voucher school can siphon money from a public school for such things as transportation of students while denying students with special needs entrance is simply unacceptable. As an Autistic adult these voucher programs would never have accepted students like me, which makes this issue that much more meaningful for me.

12. **Non-incumbents only:** Have you ever attended a PTO, PTA meeting or a school board meeting? If so, what issues motivated your attendance?

Yes, I have attended school board meetings in the past. My reason for going was because I cared deeply about the issues discussed (in this particular meeting, the issue discussed was increased funding for mental health programs.)

13. Do you believe that teachers and other employees should have a voice in issues that impact...?

a. Their pay and benefits

Absolutely, the teaching profession is all too often overworked and underappreciated. Teachers are a building block of civil society, equipping young people with the skills they need to be successful. Given the importance of their profession, it is essential that teachers have a voice regarding their pay and benefits.

(over)

b. Their working conditions

Yes, teachers should have a say in their working conditions. Too often teachers work long hours in outdated buildings, crammed into classrooms with far too many students.

c. Their students' learning conditions (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions).

It's hard to teach in this modern society without adequate technology but that's what we are forcing our teachers to do. Slow internet combined with crumbling classrooms and tight budgets limit the abilities of all teachers to educate their students. Therefore, it's my strong belief that teachers should have a say in their student's learning conditions

d. Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions

Teachers should have an active part in curriculum decisions, because ultimately the teacher is responsible for making sure the curriculum decisions are satisfied.

14. Would you support the reinstatement of collective bargaining rights for all public employees (currently prohibited by Act 10)?

I definitely would support the reinstatement of collective bargaining rights to all public employees. Act 10 is the single worst piece of legislation created by the State of Wisconsin in a generation. The right to collective bargaining is essential to protect teachers health care,

pension plans, and insurance rates. Furthermore, collective bargaining benefits are needed so teachers can be paid what they are worth.

15. School staff experienced a reduction in take home pay after Act 10 was passed and salary increases have not kept pace with the cost-of-living. The District is experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified employees. If elected to the Board of Education, what is your plan to increase pay for school staff?

Under Act 10 collective bargaining is prohibited, but referendums are not prohibited. Therefore, I would support referendums on the school itself, and use the funds to improve both the school and teacher benefits.

16. Are you aware of the MMSD collaborative employee handbook process with employee representatives? Yes I am aware of the program.

a. If so, do you support the continuation of that process?

I support the continuation of this process.

17. Do you believe that parents and students should have a voice in issues that impact them?

Yes I believe students and parents should have a voice on issues involving their school. I think MMSD needs to strengthen the relationship between the schools and their students and families. I would do this by creating community forums, in which the board goes to the students-- not the other way around.

18. Are you aware of the MMSD's Behavior Education Plan?

Yes I am aware of the Behavior Education Plan.

- a. If so, what are your thoughts about the goals of the plan?

The problem with the behavior education plan is its lack of goals and benchmarks to measure progress. It's a good start but it needs a lot of improvement.

- b. What are your thoughts about the implementation of the plan?

I have problems with how the Behavior Education Plan was implemented. I believe the plan must have specific ways to measure success. Additionally, I am concerned that there has been a slight increase of the number of African-American male suspensions due to the new plan when the purpose of the plan was to decrease the number of suspensions among African-American and students of color.

19. What do you see as the proper relationship between the Board of Education and the MMSD Superintendent and Administration?

I believe that the best way to answer this is through a quote by my good friend and advocate Jeff Spitzer-Resnick who stated that "The role of a board member is to praise the superintendent when they do well, and to ask the hard questions when they don't."

20. Who do you plan to seek advice from should you be elected to the Board of Education?

I plan to seek advice from former board members. I am currently in contact with both Nan Brien and Arlene Silveira both former members of the Madison School Board.

21. Are you seeking MTI's endorsement of your campaign?

Yes I am seeking MTI's endorsement of my campaign. Teacher's rights are a central part of my campaign to improve the Madison School System. I would be honored to have MTI's recommendation.

22. Are you seeking MTI political action contributions for your campaign?

Yes, I am requesting MTI political action contributions. In an ideal world elections would be publically funded, but that's not the case in this day and age. Therefore, to get my vision of

improving the MMSD school board out to as many people as possible, an MTI political action contribution would be incredibly helpful.

23. Is there anything else you would like MTI members to know about your candidacy and why you are seeking election to the Board of Education?

Yes. I am running to give all students a chance at a quality public education, because I deeply believe that public education is a right, not a privilege.