

MTI-VOTERS

2019 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 by January 11, 2019.***

MTI-Voters will be interviewing candidates on the evening of Wednesday, January 16, between 4:00 and 8:00 p.m.

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

As a single mom with a first grader in our Madison public schools, I want to be part of the group finding solutions to issues that affect all of our children, so that every child leaves our Madison Public Schools with a sense of belonging and community prepared to live their best life. I want to be more involved. I have the personality to collaborate with others and good leadership skills. There is nothing more important than making sure our schools are the best they can be. They are the foundation of our community.

My personal experience in the public school system was difficult. Growing up in Middleton, WI during the 80s & 90s while being Jewish as well as the daughter of an Iranian immigrant separated me from the norm. I have memories of being excluded during school activities that focused on Christian holidays and other events that did not support my own heritage and identity. I felt left out much of the time and was bullied by my peers for my differences. During my middle school years my grades started to decline as I focused more on fitting in at school than doing actual school work. By the time I was in my junior year of high school, I was far enough behind in credits that it looked as though I would not graduate with my class. That is when I was given the opportunity to attend an alternative high school in my district. Though I still had classes at the regular high school, I also attended classes with an emphasis on teaching life skills in a smaller class size setting. I worked closely with one teacher in particular to ensure that I not only graduated but also applied and was accepted to UW-Eau Claire where I earned my B.S. in Biochemistry. This teacher changed the course of my life.

Without the public school teachers involved in my formative educational years I would not be where I am today. As a member of the MMSD school board, I want to be able to give our school staff the support they need to continue to lift up our current and future students so that they have the opportunities I was given and more.

2. Please describe what quality public education looks like to you?

The public education system is the foundation of our society. It is a right of every member of our society to have access to free, quality, equitable public education. It's where we can prepare our students to receive the skills for lifelong learning and prepares them to be critical thinkers and active members of our society who are ready to change the world. Quality public education means students need to see themselves in our schools. This means culturally relevant curriculum; it means teachers who look like our students; it means students and teachers feel safe and feel like they belong. It also means that teachers and students feel like they have an authentic voice in the way our schools feel and look and that they are part of the decision making.

Quality public education is fully funded. It provides equitable access for all, accepts and embraces all, and meets all students where they are to build up their success. Quality public education has the resources and staff to be able to do all of those things.

Quality public education also means that our staff is treated with respect and our staff has a voice in their working conditions, their pay and benefits, their students' learning conditions (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions, behavior response) and curriculum, assessment selection and decisions. There are many reasons LA teachers went on strike on Monday and many reasons that they are not the first ones to do so in the last year. They won't be the last either.

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

- a. Celebrating and honoring our community's racial, cultural and gender identities - MMSD has very supportive LGBTQ+ policies, a wonderful focus on Black Excellence and culturally relevant teaching. These are part of the values of our district that are not a part of many districts across the nation.
- b. Our teachers!!! The Madison teachers are some of the most dedicated, professionals in education and are extremely creative and determined to do what is right for our students in the face of the lack of resources, support and respect they need to do their jobs. We need to recruit and retain our excellent staff.
- c. Our MMSD schools are moving toward better nutritional values. I'm impressed with the salad bar selection at some of our schools and that parents are involved in stocking healthy snack pantries in the schools. My involvement with Chef in the Classroom through REAP and other programs like Farm to Table that they have partnered with MMSD helps bring fresh, locally sourced foods into our schools.

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

- a. Racial equity. We need to do the work and not just talk about this issue. We need to create a formula unique to the needs of individual schools. Needs are different in different areas of the district, one formula does not work for all of our schools. We need more support staff, social workers and counselors to take care of kids' social/emotional and mental health needs. Smaller class sizes would allow for deeper relationships. We need more teachers, specifically more teachers of color and not more administration.
- b. Staff morale is at an all time low making people leave the field for many reasons: Pay is not competitive. Teachers are not treated as professionals, challenges with the BEP create stressful working conditions. Special education supports and resources need to be fully funded. Special education funding, resources and supports for the BEP, accurate and transparent data collection, and mental health services need to be front and center.
- c. Teacher, student and community voices are extremely important and not many are being heard and taken into account when making decisions in an authentic way. Joint MMSD/MTI committee work needs to be respected. As a parent I want my ideas taken seriously and as a Franklin-Randall parent I have seen our Parent Empowerment Groups (PEG) as a powerful venue for our Hmong, Black and Latinx parents to

ask questions, push back, get information and be an authentic part of their child's education. MMSD should be creating more authentic venues for communicating and getting feedback from families.

- d. I know this question asked for three but I need to add one more - Transparency: in board meetings, in data collection and sharing, in new programs and initiatives.

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

MTI has done a lot of work toward the formation of how to address these challenges in your School Climates Our Staff and Children Deserve. It all comes back to supporting our most vulnerable students.

- a. To address racial equity we need smaller class sizes which create stronger relationships between students and staff as well as between students and their peers. We need to bring a focus to our students of color, who have IEPs and make sure our students experiencing trauma are getting the supports and resources necessary. We need to investigate the disproportionate number of students of color who have IEPs. This means we need to prioritize this in the budget as the budget is a measure of what we value. When we address the needs of the most vulnerable students everyone becomes stronger. Teachers need relevant and teacher directed trainings to learn how to create culturally responsive classrooms. MMSD has an amazing staff who are already this work. We need to tap into that talent and share the amazing things happening in some of our classrooms with those that are struggling with racial equity.
- b. Shared leadership! Democratically elected SBLTs: listen to teachers
- c. Stronger supports for mental health and behavioral needs

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

- a. Stop funding two school systems. Phase out vouchers and private charters.
- b. Equitable funding across the state and fully funded public ed for all.
- c. Our state leadership has passed multiple bills in the last few years creating additional barriers for our families of color. We are moving in the opposite direction and should be passing bills that eliminate barriers for our families of color.

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

I think MTI and MMSD should be working as a team to address these state issues. We all have the same goal for our children. Unfortunately the past Walker administration was successful with using a divide and conquer strategy. Now that there is a new administration, I plan to be a part of a moving these issues forward.

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

- a. state funding- we need a new funding formula that is equitable across the state
- b. culture of “choice” - public funding diverted from our public schools is problematic.
- c. structural barriers for success for our families of color (institutional racism, bills passed that make life harder on the poor, transportation, housing, etc)

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

Refer to question seven in addition to passing more referendums. I’m aware that referendums are not the answer but only a temporary solution. MMSD administration and school board members need to be more vocal about advocating for a new state equitable funding formula.

10. What ideas do you have to support the recruitment and retention of teachers of color so that our workforce is more representative of our student population?

- a. Democratically elected SBLTs: Our staff of color need more of an authentic voice in the decision making processes in our schools. They need a venue to be leaders in our schools and supported in those roles. If staff of color are a part of the decision making process in our schools, they will feel like their voices are valued and that the work they are doing truly makes a difference.
- b. Supporting new staff of color: We need to be supporting Grow Your Own so that we have staff of color from our community that know our community. I would also like to see more thought out and funded mentorships for staff of color. Many times staff of color are alone on a staff with many white faces. It can feel alienating and our staff of color need to feel the strong support and power that comes being a part of a community who understand them not just in their own schools but across the district. I know that MTI has started this work by created a Black Educators group. I would like to see this expanded and supported.
- c. Our wider Madison community needs to be a place where our teachers of color actually want to live and thrive. This is a complicated issue as there are many reasons why people of color don’t want to stay in Madison.

11. What do you view as the underlying issues involving the achievement gap? How would you address those?

Students experiencing poverty and trauma enter school without being school ready which puts them at a disadvantage. 4K is starting to address some of these issues and I would like to build upon this program.

Some parents have had negative experiences and do not trust the system. Relationships are strained or broken. We need a well thought out, concerted effort to repair these relationships. I've already addressed how important student, parent and teacher voices are in decision making.

We need more teachers, counselors, social workers, special education supports and behavioral supports. We need to create smaller class sizes and address social/emotional and behavioral struggles.

Staff need training in order to be culturally relevant practitioners. Staff need training to understand the intricacies of racial issues. The school district needs to invest in with our time and resources.

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

I support public charters that are governed by the BOE.

13. What are your thoughts about private charter schools governed by others?

Private charter schools governed by others remove funding from public schools. I do not support this.

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

Vouchers remove funding from public schools. I do not support this.

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

I have attended PTO meetings at my son's school. I've volunteered in the classroom and playground.

16. Describe which of the following issues you believe teachers and other employees should have a voice in and what that would look like?

- a. Their pay and benefits
- b. Their working conditions
- c. Their students' learning conditions (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions, behavior response)
- d. Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions

ALL of the above!! I know there is a joint MMSD/MTI committee process currently. I support a process that involves teacher voices. Of course the ideal would be for teachers to have their collective bargaining rights back.

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

YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

18. 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?

Looking at the current budget there are some areas that would allow for increasing staff pay. Expensive consultants draw funds away that could be used for our staff salaries. I'm aware there is a joint MMSD/MTI committee on compensation. The work of this committee should be honored and used as a starting point for joint conversations. The timeline on the decision on cost of living change needs to be prioritized.

19. Are you aware of the MMSD's collaborative employee handbook process with employee representatives?

Yes

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

Yes, but as I stated in question 16, board members need to ensure that the process genuinely fosters staff voices. I will prioritize that, if elected.

20. If you had to identify \$10 million in necessary cuts, what would you prioritize cutting? If you could identify \$10 million in additional investments what would you invest in?

a. \$10 million in cuts: I would look at consultants and facilities rentals. Also how many non-union professionals (NUPs) and administrators who have been added to the Doyle building.

b. \$10 million in additional investments: MORE staff! More counselors, more social workers, more special ed teachers and special education assistants. I would also look to create additional community partnerships to offer more mental health services.

21. How do you think the MMSD could improve in providing parents and students greater voice on issues that impact them?

Please refer to question 4 part C.

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

Yes

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

The plan itself has some really good intentions to move towards racial equity in our schools. Moving away from zero tolerance, implementing more Restorative Justice and moving away from suspensions are all great ideas that I wholeheartedly support. Acknowledging systemic racism should be accounted for.

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

Even though the core ideas are good, there aren't enough resources and staff to implement the plan. Many staff aren't trained to implement the BEP. Administration, school staff and community members need to work together in revising the BEP.

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

The board of education oversees the MMSD superintendent and administration. The relationship needs to be professional and collaborative while each side maintains its given roles. The goal of the board of education, superintendent and administration should be creating the best quality schools for students and staff.

I would like to make sure admin and the superintendent are being transparent to the board and that the board is transparent with the public. We need to make agendas easier to find on the internet and get things posted earlier than the minimum day or so. Not reducing the number of minutes for public comment, have public comment at all meetings, not just a few are also important. As a board member I would like to see a contrast between the administration and the school board. Both should recognize the value of separation of powers and the importance of a true democracy. More transparent and timeliness given to the public and opportunities to provide input should be given.

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

Past school board members Bill Clingan, Marj Passman, Arlene Silveria, Anna Moffit as well as teachers Michele Ritt, my sister who is an ESL teacher at Middleton High School, my brother in law Ben Kollasch who works for the MMSD DLI program, current Franklin teachers and then of course I will reach out to various parent and student groups focusing on parents and students of color.

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

YES! Absolutely! This is the most important endorsement. MTI is the very heart of our school system. MTI speaks for our children.

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

Yes.

27. 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?

I am running for the board of education because I want the best for our students and our staff. Strong public schools are the foundation for a strong, healthy community.

28. Who has endorsed your campaign?

Many MMSD staff and community leaders have expressed support. I am working to compile an official list.

29. Who serves on your campaign committee?

Michele Ritt, Norm Littlejohn, Adrienne Blow and Tyson Vitale

30. Are you aware of any conflicts of interest which may prohibit you from voting on certain items before the Board of Education? If so, what are they?

I have no conflicts of interest as a voting MMSD Board of Education member.