

MTI-VOTERS

2019 School Board Election Questionnaire

Cristiana Carusi—Seat 3

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?

I'm running because I believe every child has the right to a world-class education in their local schools. I believe in the power of public schools to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and foster justice and equity. Public schools are our only public institution with the potential to prepare every single child for a better future, and create a more just and equitable world. However, the glaring opportunity and achievement gaps in our school district tell us that we aren't meeting this potential. We must do better.

I'm running on my track record as a public education advocate. I have spent more than a decade attending school board meetings and advocating for students, staff and families, both as a mom and as a citizen who is passionate about the power of public education. As a result, I am highly knowledgeable about the issues and challenges our district is facing, and I am well-prepared to serve our community on the school board.

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

Quality public education is focused on the whole child. Our children deserve a rich curriculum that is challenging, inspiring and culturally relevant, professional interventions when needed, small class sizes that foster healthy relationships and inclusion, and a firm commitment to fine arts, world languages and the humanities. Quality public schools are committed to equity and social justice, and this commitment is reflected in policy, resource allocations, curriculum and course offerings, extracurricular activities, and community participation and support for schools. Schedules and curriculum reflect the goals of a well-rounded education and lifelong learning; they are not driven by standardized tests. Public schools must do more than prepare children for jobs and careers; a quality public education prepares young people for citizenship in a democratic society. High-quality public schools have a healthy balance of experienced and new teachers, and staff have a voice in decisions about curriculum, professional development and how classrooms are run. Staff, families and the community are engaged in shared governance of their schools. As a school board member, I will prioritize working and learning conditions that are good for both students and staff. Our classrooms should be joyful places to learn and work.

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

- a) K-8 fine arts and a broad range of electives, including fine arts, at the high school level
- b) Social justice curriculum and student organizations addressing social justice
- c) Collaborative handbook process. Compared to what other districts are experiencing with their handbook processes. MMSD is in much better shape.

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

- a) Educating all children. Not all children are thriving in Madison's public schools.
- b) Behavior Education Plan (BEP) implementation
- c) The condition of our buildings

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

- a) MMSD should address educational inequities first by giving teachers a strong voice in school improvement. This is a common characteristic of many schools that have successfully narrowed achievement gaps. In order to support other evidence-based strategies to improve student achievement, MMSD should focus on small class sizes (particularly at high-poverty schools), full-day 4K and other early childhood interventions, and retaining experienced teachers. The MMSD strategic framework includes some promising strategies such as elevating community voice, giving schools more flexibility and creative space, adopting culturally-relevant curriculum, and hiring a more diverse workforce. The school board needs to be actively engaged in putting these strategies into practice
- b) See #22b
- c) The district is considering a facilities referendum in 2020. Should this move forward, staff, families and the community need to have ample opportunities for input. Before we consider building new schools, we need to invest in our existing facilities. Well-maintained, updated buildings will better support learning and foster a sense of pride in our public schools.

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

- a) Close the Office of Educational Opportunity and phase out voucher programs
- b) Fix the school funding formula and increase state aid to schools
- c) Reimburse a higher percentage of legally-required special education funding (the current reimbursement rate is less than 26 percent) and provide funding for mental health care in public schools

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

I am currently working with GRUMPS and the Wisconsin Public Education Network to meet with our state representatives about education priorities. We are advocating for both Governor Evers's education budget (which includes funding for special education reimbursement, student mental health and full-day 4K) and changes to the school funding formula that came out of the Blue Ribbon Commission hearings. I am hopeful we can work toward repealing legislation allowing independent charter school authorizers and phasing out voucher programs. I will continue this advocacy if elected.

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

- a) Privatization of public education
- b) Accountability systems that disproportionately emphasize standardized test scores
- c) Economic and racial inequities that perpetuate achievement and opportunity gaps

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

Corporate school reform is becoming normalized across the US and in Madison. As a school board member, I would push back against reforms that encourage privatization, diminish teachers and their profession, standardize classroom instruction and encourage teaching to the test. While MMSD can't solve deeply-rooted economic and social inequities, our district can increase its commitment to sustainable community schools that provide support and services for our most vulnerable students throughout their time in MMSD, and elevate the voice of underrepresented families and communities in decisions about our schools.

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

One of MMSD's strengths is our ethnic, cultural and linguistic richness. More than half of our students are students of color, and over 100 languages are spoken in the district. Our staff should reflect our student body.

First and foremost, I would meet with and listen to teachers of color, and act on their ideas for creating a work force that better represents our student population. MMSD can continue to support opportunities for EAs and SEAs to become teachers, with an emphasis on staff of color. "Grow Our Own" programs are not enough, however; MMSD needs to be a place where teachers of color want to work once they are licensed. If we make our schools more just, equitable and appealing to students of color, more teachers of color may want to work in MMSD. We need to cultivate a culture of trust and respect throughout our district so important conversations about race and racism can happen. Furthermore, MMSD can retain staff of color by giving them a stronger voice and opportunities for leadership in deciding what happens in our schools, including teaching, curriculum, school improvement and professional development.

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

The achievement gap is rooted in institutional racism, which is intertwined with poverty. Additionally, nearly two decades of educational reforms under No Child Left Behind and ESSA have resulted in a narrow focus on standardized test results as a measure of achievement. These reform efforts have reduced investment in public urban schools and diverted funds to privatized voucher and charter schools. We are heavily dependent on test data to measure gaps and monitor progress, yet this data provides a limited understanding of students' learning and does not take into account the intricacy of their lives. As a school board member, I would continue efforts to address implicit bias in our schools and district, encourage critical examination of how institutional racism and school reform perpetuate gaps, and advocate for a more balanced approach to evaluation and accountability.

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

While I am open to considering proposals for public (instrumentality) charter schools, I believe that improving our neighborhood schools should be our top priority. Instrumentality charter schools should only be considered if they will provide a service or function that can't be accomplished in neighborhood schools. Charter schools in our district need to be able to serve all students, including students with disabilities. We must consider the impact of charter schools on students *not* in these schools, including adverse effects on budgets, staffing and enrollment at our regular schools.

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

I am opposed to non-instrumentality charter schools chartered by school districts, as well as schools chartered by independent authorizers like the Office of Educational Opportunity. Publicly funded schools should be publicly accountable and governed by elected school boards.

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

I am opposed to vouchers. School "choice" takes choice away from public school staff, students and families by draining resources from our schools.

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 been attending school board meetings since 2007. I served in leadership roles on the Crestwood and Jefferson PTOs. I also participate in Westside PTO/East Attendance Area PTO Coalition meetings. My attendance is motivated by a desire to support children, staff, families and public education, and to facilitate public participation in decisions about our schools.

16. Describe which of the following issues you believe teachers and other employees should have a voice in and what that would look like? Teacher separations in MMSD have increased nearly five-fold since 2010. This is a serious problem for our district and children. Teachers and other employees should have a voice in all of the following issues:

- a. **Their pay and benefits:** We need to reinstate collective bargaining so that staff can bargain for pay and benefits relative to other parts of the handbook/contract.
- b. **Their working conditions:** Staff must have an equal voice in decisions about their teaching assignments, planning time, professional development and work done off contract hours.
- c. **Their students' learning conditions** (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions, behavior response): Budget and policy decisions about students' learning conditions are made by the school board. Staff voice is critical in making good decisions about how to best invest our resources in technology and facilities, including investments in school safety. As a school board member, I will visit schools so I can hear from staff first-hand about learning conditions in their classrooms.
- d. **Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions:** Staff should have more input into decisions about curriculum and assessment, as well as creative freedom to engage their students in learning that is both culturally relevant and appropriately challenging.

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

Yes. I would fully support a return to collective bargaining as a school board member.

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?

While we need to offer a step and lane schedule that attracts and retains staff, annual across-the-board cost of living adjustments (COLA) that keep up with the rate of inflation are critically important for retaining experienced staff and preventing salary compression. See question 20 for ideas about possible cuts to fund COLA. I would oppose further cuts to benefits. I would also oppose performance-based raises, as this works against collaboration.

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, as long as it gives employees power in determining their working conditions and compensation. Joint MTI/AFSCME/Administrative Committees should inform and support the process.

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?

I would prioritize budget reductions in the following areas: external consultants, out-of-state travel, staff professional development, central office administration, non-union professionals, standardized testing, and land purchases. I would consider lengthening technology replacement rates and focusing the technology plan on equity rather than 1:1 devices for all students (particularly our younger students). I would also consider a return to mixed-grade elementary classrooms at some schools as long as the primary focus of this strategy was on teaching and learning, with cost savings as a secondary benefit.

I would prioritize investment in programs and strategies to increase equity, support inclusion and close gaps, including small class sizes (particularly at high-poverty schools), special education staffing, expanding Mental Health in Schools district-wide, full-day 4K, summer school preparation for honors and AP classes (geared toward students of color), expanding the restorative justice partnership with the YWCA, annual cost-of-living adjustments for staff, and building maintenance and improvements.

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

Students and families need greater voice and influence in district decision making, and decisions need to be more transparent. In our schools, democratic selection of School Based Leadership Team members and family and community engagement in the School Improvement Plan process could provide families and students with a stronger voice in choosing priorities and setting goals. At the school board and administrative level, if elected I will prioritize transparency and question the practice of making decisions outside of open meetings. I will insist

that board policies regarding public engagement and input are followed and protected. I will support efforts to increase participation in Student Senate, so that its membership and leadership better reflects the demographics of the district.

22. Are you aware of the MMSD's Behavior Education Plan? Yes. I serve on the MMSD Guiding Coalition on Equitable and Restorative School Discipline.
- a. If so, what are your thoughts about the goals of the plan? I fully support the goals behind the district's shift from an emphasis on exclusionary discipline to supportive and restorative approaches in managing classroom behavior. Reducing suspensions and expulsions, addressing the disproportionately high rates of suspending African American and disabled students, and keeping kids in class as much as possible are central to closing gaps, and confronting inequality and racism.
 - b. What are your thoughts about the implementation of the plan? The implementation of the Behavior Education Plan has been problematic. MMSD needs to support its growing number of students with intensive social and emotional needs, especially students experiencing trauma. We need more psychologists, social workers and nurses to meet our students' needs. Students need access to mental health care, and I support expansion of Mental Health in Schools, where partner agencies provide therapy and other services for students, into every school in our district. Staff should have a voice in determining the professional development and support they need to successfully practice restorative justice and address the needs of students experiencing trauma in their lives. District administration should continue to work with the MTI Joint Committee on Safety on BEP revisions and handbook negotiations.

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

The Board of Education hires, employs and evaluates the Superintendent. It is the board's job to ask hard questions and make the best decisions for our schools. While I firmly believe in the value of finding common ground and having an open mind about new ideas that will move MMSD forward, the Board of Education has the right to question or reject the recommendations of the administration. They should not be expected to make decisions about new programs or initiatives without full information regarding goals, implementation, costs, accountability and district-wide impact.

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

MMSD staff, students and families across the district

Local and state organizations: GRUMPS, Wisconsin Family Ties, Wisconsin Public Education Network, Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Madison Partnership for Advanced Learning, Centro Hispano, Urban League, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, REAP Food Group
UW-Madison and Edgewood College Schools of Education

National Organizations: Journey For Justice

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

In 2012, I was part of a coalition of parents and staff that founded Madison's public education advocacy group—SCAPE, or School Community Alliance for Public Education—in the wake of Act 10. Since then I have invested countless hours in grassroots organizing to make our schools better. Our wins include protecting funding for Ready Set Goal conferences, securing funding for smaller class sizes and special education, advocacy for fully funding the staff cost-of-living adjustment in 2018, and crafting a strong district wellness policy.

28. Who has endorsed your campaign?

State Representative Lisa Subeck
Michele Ritt, Dane County Board supervisor, MMSD parent and teacher
Fatou Ceesay, mother of two MMSD students
Anna Moffit, former Madison school board member
Jeff Spitzer-Resnick, civil rights attorney
Joanne Juhnke, disability-policy advocate and MMSD parent
Nino Amato, CEO & board chair, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging & Health Groups
Amy Noble, school social worker
Jesus and Susan Covarribus, MMSD custodian and teacher
Cindy Schlicte, MMSD parent and educational therapist
Jen Greenwald, MMSD parent and teacher
John Rademacher, MMSD parent and teacher
Rachel Sauer, MMSD parent

29. Who serves on your campaign committee?

My campaign committee shares a commitment to public education and working toward educational equity in local schools.

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 may not be able to participate in discussions and votes on Badger Rock Charter School because of a research partnership between my employer (the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems) and the Center for Resilient Cities.