

## **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?

The big answer is that I believe we have an obligation to contribute to the improvement of our community, and work for a better future. Getting more specific, I have long considered public education to be one of the most important ways we do this, and this led to my research, teaching, and activism in education. I struggled with the decision to run again; in the end because I have seen democratic practices at all levels of the district erode, too many students falling too far behind, too many staff members being disrespected, I think my knowledge, skills and commitments are more important than ever. Other than my family, serving on the school board is the most important thing I do.

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

Public education is one of the most important places communities come together to manifest their values and collectively work to build a better future. This must be done in an inclusive and transparent manner; that is what “public” means. My values begin with treating people with respect, especially our staff, families, and students. They include recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities within our community, but not losing sight of public schools as a place where we explore and build on our commonalities.

For students, public schools must both prepare them for success in the world as it is, and give them the tools to improve that world. Success and improvement aren’t just about economics and academics, rich cultural experiences, a sense of social belonging and mutual obligation, and emotional well-being are all part of it.

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

Passing referenda.

Adding programs and initiatives (not so good at evaluating or phasing out).

Classroom Action Research

As a parent, I want to add that say my sons have had many very high quality ,talented teachers, and good opportunities for rich and varied educational experiences.

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

Making the rhetoric of shared decision-making and collaborative problem-solving a reality.

Data analysis and program evaluation.

Meeting the needs of our most challenged students, whether academically, behaviorally or otherwise, both those in special education and those who are not.

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

First, I believe improving the first two would help with the last, and on all of these my record is strong. I have supported the [MTI platform on school climate](#) (including democratically elected SBLTs), sought to open up Board processes, listened to staff, students and families and tried to bring their concerns to the table. I have had some success improving data use at the Board and district level (although I still often have to ask for more information, and on occasion do my own analyses) , but less so at school level where in the toolkits and practices I see too much misuse and overuse of data, especially standardized test scores. There is much more to be done with this at all levels. Our program evaluations still vary greatly in quality, and the implementation of findings is often lacking. I will continue to push, and ask the hard questions. There is much to be done here also.

The district can't do everything we would like for, or with every student, and when choices must be made, I always think we must focus our resources, time and energy first on the most challenged students first. Step one is that focus informing all decisions. Steps two and three, and beyond vary greatly as do the sources of our students' struggles. For some students it is working to make sure their basic needs are met, often doing this in conjunction with community partners (and advocating that the partners have the resources they need). With others, it might be pedagogy and curricula that better reach them (including the Arts). With our special education students, staffing and resources are not adequate. Some things, like smaller class sizes and teaching loads, consciously working to build inclusive classroom, school, and professional communities will help these, and all students. More directly, our systems of interventions and alternative programs have had limited success, and need much more attention. I will continue to work on all of these.

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

Fully fund the education of all students.

Phase out vouchers (I co-authored an MMSD resolution calling for this).

Address economic inequality via living wages, affordable housing, universal healthcare, enhanced earned income credits, fairer tax policies, union supporting legislation instead of union destroying legislation, economic development investments to benefit the many and not the few....

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

On the first two, I have supported these as an individual through advocacy and testimony before legislative committees, and as Board Member via MMSD and WASB resolutions. I will continue to do this. My advocacy on the last has been more as an individual, and mostly by supporting and volunteering with candidates who support these initiatives. I would continue all of this.

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

The push for privatization and “reform” which depend on creating a false narrative of incompetence and crisis in order to attack teachers and unions, school boards, and their very idea of public education. This leads funding cuts, low morale, distractions from the hard work of education, and more.

The “reform” industry, which uses this sense of crisis for personal profit and to push destructive policies like standardized test-based teacher evaluations and compensation, overly standardized curricula, budget cuts, “portfolio” districts and more.

A lack of deep community/family engagement. There are pockets of deep engagement at many schools, and in relation to some programs, but in general and especially at the district level, there are fewer people paying close attention.

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

The first and best way is to provide quality education for all students, to show that public education can and does work in our diverse community. This is the counter-narrative we need to make a reality.

We must also identify and present the flaws and faults in the “evidence” and “research” used by privatizers and “reformers.”

We should keep representatives of the reform industry out of our district (something I have tried and failed to do).

In a number of answers above I wrote of “shared decision-making” and “democratic processes,” these are part of what I think is one of the biggest issues facing our schools, and the lack of these is an important reason why our community and family members are only engaged with the district at a superficial level, treated more as focus groups than partners and citizens. Too often discussions and decisions have taken place behind closed doors, or those decisions are rushed. Much too often the knowledge, experiences, and insights of many of our staff, our students, our families, and our community have been marginalized. I have worked with staff, students, and community members, and made sure their questions were answered and their concerns were addressed. I have pushed for more expansive and open public processes and better use of data and improved program evaluations.

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?

I think the dedicated HR position we created this year is a good start. Common sense, what I have heard from current and former educators of color, and all the best research shows that the workplace culture and working conditions are central to attracting and retaining teachers of color (to an even greater degree than this is true for all teachers). The key factors are respect, participation in decision-making, support, and autonomy. These are all things that are high on my agenda, for all of our staff.

I also think we need to invest more in our “grow our own” programs, and explore expanding the TEEM scholars, with scholarships tied to fulfilling future employment obligations. Perhaps this could be done on a wider basis, in conjunction with other MSAN districts, and university partners.

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

See also the second part of the answer to question #5, as well as the last parts of the answers to questions #6 and #9.

First, like many I follow Gloria Ladson-Billings in preferring “Opportunity” to “Achievement” in order to refocus on what we can do. I also prefer “Gaps,” plural, because the differences in challenges and outcomes are related to, race, language, gender and gender identities, economics, parental education, and more. So one thing is to use language that leads to more informed actions.

I also want to add that respecting the professional judgment of our front line educators, listening to them in district and school wide decisions, and giving them more autonomy in their classrooms will help with gaps, as well as morale, climate, community, retention and more.

Last, I am going to cut-and-paste excerpts from my 2016 answer to this question (there have been some improvements in the last three years, but not enough):

Some (but not all) of my concerns and proposed actions, in no particular order:

- *As noted above, I have serious concerns about the way MTSS is being implemented. The emphasis on strengthening “core instruction” has some merit, but I do not think adequate resources and attention are being devoted to those who continue to be well behind.*

- *MMSD still needs to get a better handle on student mobility, target more support to students entering new schools and monitor their progress closely for at least a year.*

- *Class size matters. SAGE classes are now at 18, class sizes elsewhere appear to be growing.*

- *Social Worker, Psychologist, and Counselor case load sizes matter too. I think all of these are too high.*

- *The “Early Warning” system is a good idea, but the key is providing interventions and supports to students before they fail, and I don't see those sufficiently present. With current caseloads (see above), providing these will be difficult.*

- *With things like the 3d grade literacy effort, too much emphasis had been placed on community volunteers (ie Schools of Hope) or “partnerships.” The core educational work of the district should be in the hands of district professionals, with community organizations supplementing, not supplanting. We are seeing some changes here, with an effort to target tutoring to students closer grade levels, but that takes us back to the first bullet point and MTSS.*

- *I support Culturally Relevant Curricula and Pedagogy.*

- *I think the emphasis on standardized testing and data has many problems. On one hand, we are reducing students to numbers, and paying little attention to real limitations of standardized tests to assess student learning. In this way we put too much weight on the tests. In another sense, we do not use the tests to their full potential. This is mostly in the area of program evaluation, but also general school and district progress monitoring. A few examples:*

- *Very rarely is any data except proficient/not proficient reported or used. This limits the information available and shifts the focus away from those who at the bottom, far from proficient.*

- *Very rarely are cohorts used. With MAP measures, we compare this year's 5th grade to last year's. This makes little sense.*

- *In SIP plans, goals are based on the previous year, not the Fall scores of current students. This also makes little sense.*

*So we need to do both less and more with data, in order to serve our students better.*

Reading this list, I want to add attendance. We must do much better making sure students are in school.

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

I recently voted in favor of renewing Nuestro Mundo's charter, but as a general rule do not favor charters. I also think MMSD does a very bad job evaluating charter proposals, drafting charter contracts, monitoring our existing charters, and considering renewals.

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

Opposed.

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

Opposed. I co-authored the MMSD resolution calling for vouchers to be phased out.

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

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.

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?

I will always support COLA increases, and the concept of advancement via steps and lanes. If we must cut staff in order to reallocate, I would start by looking at central office, Administrative, and NUP positions.

I believe in the near future another operating referendum may be necessary, and I think educator compensation should be explicitly included in that.

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.

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?

Cuts (these are places to begin looking, some of which I have already proposed)

- Examine every central office administrative and NUP position.
- Facilities rentals and more efficient use of our facilities.
- Conference travel.
- Moving technology replacement cycle from 3 years to 4 or 5 years.
- Find efficiencies via multi-grade classrooms.
- Consultants.
- Use evaluations to phase out programs with limited success.
- Examine every school based position that is not primarily devoted to direct student contact.

Additional Investments

- Targeted class size, teaching and case load reductions (similar to the targets in the [Budget amendment](#) that was passed in 2017.
- Increased special education staffing.
- Behavioral and Mental Health.
- Grow our own programs.
- Facilities maintenance.
- Compensation.
- Improved interventions and alternative programing.

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

See the last part of the answer to question #9.

I want to add that making decision-making more transparent and public must be part of the answer. Critical things like the actual allocations of staff to schools are not presented to the Board for a vote, and are only revealed well after it is too late to make meaningful changes. I have tried to change many of these practices, but the majority of the Board has not joined me.

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?

I support the philosophy of the plan, which replaces punishment with support and education, limiting exclusionary practices, and when students are removed making that time productive.

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

Like many, I am increasingly frustrated. Most days, in most schools and classrooms things are working with most students, but the exceptions impact too many students and staff members.

Last year we had an internal evaluation that emphasized the complexity of the challenges and called for creativity and new perspectives. Following this we had a report from an unqualified consultant on staffing that showed little creativity (or understanding), and recommendations from an ad hoc committee that was dominated by the perspectives that have been in charge from the start. Not surprisingly, these produced some worthwhile recommended tweaks, but few developed worthwhile big ideas. I was not the only Board member who expressed dissatisfaction at the initial discussion. Unfortunately, it may be too late to do much more for next year.

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

The Superintendent works for the Board, collectively, and the Board is the public's path to accountability with the Superintendent and the district as a whole. I am in a minority of the Board, in that I do not think we have exercised our authority sufficiently.

More generally, I think that the administration should present the Board with choices, thorough analyses, and recommendations. Too often we are given only recommendations, even when Board members ask for choices, and the analyses (if provided) read more like recommendations.



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

I will continue to communicate with staff, especially those working directly with students, former Board members, students, parents, and informed community members.

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?

28. Who has endorsed your campaign?

Current list attached. Updated lists will be posted at [mertzformadison.com](http://mertzformadison.com)

29. Who serves on your campaign committee?

The core people are Jackie Woodruff, Sue Pastor, Norm Littlejohn, and Robert Godfrey.

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?

My spouse is an SEA, which means I have not and can not participate in any item directly related to SEA compensation, but may with other bargaining units and job categories. In the past, this has included health insurance benefits for all employees, but if a differentiated plan were proposed, I may in the future participate in discussions and votes for those parts that do not impact SEAs.

## **Endorsements – TJ Mertz, MMSD Board, Seat #5 (as of 1/11/19)**

### Dane County Board Supervisor

Richard Kilmer

Michelle Ritt (also MMSD teacher)

Andy Olsen – former

### Madison Alderperson

David Ahrens

Barbara Harrington-Mckinney

Rebecca Kemble

Batch Samba Baldeh

Andy Heidt - Former

### Madison School Board Member

Nicki Vander Meulen

### Former Madison School Board Members

AnnaMarie Moffit

### Waunakee School Board Members

Mike Brandt

### Former Fitchburg Mayor

Steve Arnold

### Verona Mayor

Lukas Diaz

### Current and Former Teachers & Staff

Emily Adah

Cindy Ball

Carolyn Michaelis Berard

Kathryn Burns

Maria Cavicchio

Laureen Chagnon

Susan Cee Cee Cohen

Peggy Coyne

Troy Dassler

Jamie Domini

Liz Donnelly

Elizabeth Doyle

Alexandra Fayen

Jennifer Foster

Jennifer Greenwald

Suzy Grindrod  
Loren Hegge  
Iris Hengst  
Robert Godfrey  
Tina Koval Godfrey  
JoAnn Jensen  
Michael Jones  
Mary Klehr  
Jesse Lyne  
Rob Larson  
Kathleen Halloran Liksa  
Favian McMurray  
Amy W Noble  
Jaci Olson  
Julia Peterson  
Erin Proctor  
John Radamacher  
Carmen Rasmussen  
Susan Roehlk  
Erin Selbee  
Clare Sequin  
Fred Swanson  
Greg Vallee  
Chris Vander Ark  
Echnaton Vedder  
Kati Walsh  
Virginia Woods

Other Supporters

Jon Becker  
Vic Busenbark  
Susan & Jesus Covarrubias  
Adam Chern  
Peter Gascoyne  
Michael Martinez Johnson  
Joanne Juhnke  
Christina Kendziorski  
Edward Kuharski  
Rob Larson  
Norm Littlejohn  
Lesleigh Luttrell  
Larry Orr  
Susan Pastor  
Robyn Perrin  
Todd Alan Price  
Jenny & Bob Quinn

Richard S Russell  
Tim Slekar  
Jeff Spitzer-Resnick  
Rachel Maciejewski Schluter  
Chuck & Connie Smalley  
Donna Vukelich-Selva  
Carol Weidel  
Betsy Wilcox  
Jackie & Karl Woodruff