

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.

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

In 2011, I attended a Parent Leadership training sponsored by MMSD district. The MALDEF (Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) taught us about school governance, education policies, educational rights and community/parent advocacy. I learned the impact of color-blind policies on Brown and Black K-12 students.

My daughter was nine years old; she struggled academically; her third grade class had over 30 students. She was getting bullied everyday and was experiencing mental health issues. It was during the training that I understood that my daughter - and every child - have a protected right to education, and that students of color around the country often experience under-resourced and overcrowded schools that undermine their access to equitable education.

The following year, I successfully organized Nuestro Mundo Community Schools' families to attend a historic meeting, where we heard testimonials of children and their Spanish-speaking parents advocating for a new building for the school. After the testimonials, one of the former BOE members said that although she appreciated so many families in the audience, she wanted us to know that there were other families experiencing similar situations, but they weren't present. I paused after hearing that comment. It made me upset. She didn't know how hard it was to coordinate carpools and print maps of downtown (most parents had no idea where the district office was located). Then I thought, she was right. A lot of our families do experience great disparities and we never hear their voices. I thought my job was to organize parents in all schools and bring them to speak to the board members, because they could influence policy after hearing what parents' experiences and do something about it.

I was surprised when the same board member was the only dissent vote and was not in support of the plea of close to 100 families present at the meeting. At that moment, I heard my calling to continue to organize families and ensure that elected officials would serve them. I soon realized the cultural mismatch of our elected officials on the school board with the diverse community whom they are elected to represent. It has been very challenging to close the gap of understanding and cultural knowledge to serve people like me. The mismatch of our sense of urgency and deep analysis of systemic oppression was evident. In 2012, I was encouraged by former school board members Bill Clingan, Bill Keys and Juan Jose Lopez to run for school board. In 2013, I came in third in a primary, but the year is 2019 and Madison is poised for a new era and in need of a candidate for change. Our schools are now at a majority students of color with 40% Black and Brown children who need representatives that look like them. The time was right to again throw my hat into the ring.

I am running for the Board of Education so our children can experience Educational Justice and Educational Equity. Addressing district gaps starts at the board level first, a strong board well versed in educational equity and the impact of systemic oppression is critical to move the district to yield the results they intend to achieve.

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

Quality public education looks like a school community in which all students, families, teachers and other school staff feel a sense of belonging and that they matter. In such a school community, students' basic needs are met so that they can focus on learning, creating the foundation for lifelong learning and critical thinking fostered by their public education. In such a community, we move beyond a focus on *equality* to a focus on *equity* - in which all students have equal access to opportunity and students get what they need to be successful.

Quality public education happens when students experience equal educational opportunity regardless of race, ethnic background, religion, or sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen. Quality public education happens when students are protected from discrimination based on their identities. Quality public education happens when all students have an opportunity to learn about themselves, and to grow and further develop their abilities. It happens when families understand what is expected of them and their roles in the education of their children.

It happens when teachers feel safe, respected and experience good working conditions. Quality public education can only happen where the state and district invest in our teachers and school staff and provide them with the professional learning and resources they need to perform their job. Quality public education happens when our state provides equitable distribution of funding and adjusts/increases budgets based on districts' needs.

Our schools can and should be healthy communities for students, teachers and staff. This means: smaller teacher:student ratios, security plans in place, adequate resources to support teachers in classrooms, fewer disparities between schools, regular listening sessions among all school communities, transparency leadership, creatively finding teachers the space to innovate according to their shifting classroom needs, better communication among all parties, better utilization of our active PTO groups, increased communication with families, promoting family school partnership, more social workers in our schools, discussions around innovative, alternative policy shifts to further address disparities.

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

1- Partnerships and collaboration: the district has come a long way and has developed great structures for supporting and enhancing external partnerships i.e. from its work with community groups like The Boys and Girls Club and the YWCA, Madison to more national entities such as the Minority Student Achievement Network..

2 - Collaborative approach to address (meliorate) the impact of Act 10 on MMSD teachers and address job security and a team approach to problem solving.

3 - The needs assessment, research, model and implementation of community schools.

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

Schools cannot function or achieve positive outcomes and growth working in silos. We have an opportunity through collaborative work internally (students, teachers, administration and board) and externally (families, community members, city, county and state) to create sustainable change. Some of the areas of great concern are:

1- Teachers' voices: teachers' voices are often absent in identifying solutions and informing policy (i.e. discipline, professional development, etc.). The district is quick to invest in external experts and dismiss the local resources available in our school buildings. Schools that have a high level of teacher voice demonstrate a stronger school climate, increased academic achievement and retention.

While working as a Restorative Justice Director, I had the opportunity to sit in community circles with hundreds of teachers and staff across our district. During that time I learned the great impact of Act 10 and the negative narrative in our schools caused in our most resilient personnel. I quickly re-formatted what was intended to be a training in restorative justice to support youth, to a restoration for teachers. During those circles, we focused on humanizing our staff, taking a moment of pause, reflection and healing, in order to acknowledge the hurt and pain so many have been experiencing.

I was personally and professionally transformed by those experiences. I later learned about examples of teachers leading restorative justice and other educational justices practices across the country. I am confident on what should be a first step in our district: Teachers

and staff leadership are essential to success and must be included in any and all policymaking.

2- Racial Equity benefits all students: There is often a misunderstanding that culturally responsive practices or racial equity only serves students of color. Creating a system of equity where every student receives equal access to the educational opportunities available in our schools and community creates a fertile ground for educational equity. Educational equity means each and every student will be provided the educational services needed, when they are needed. "Culturally responsive practice" means education is designed to include the student with the most need in the classroom, which also causes all students to feel included. It means that teachers will have the conditions needed to perform their job as their classrooms are filled with more and more Black, Brown, and international children each year. Teachers and staff understand equity practices will support and elevate the great work they have already committed to do.

Investing in the classroom community and its members is the best long-term solution to address disparities and inequities. Teachers, staff and administration should be leading racial equity strategies, understanding the systemic barriers that have prevented proportionality in academic success, and implementing the practices needed to transform the school environment.

Our district is still struggling in adopting a racial lens in conversations, practices and policies. Right now the district still focuses on providing the same services to all students; such a focus on "equality" rather than "equity" inevitably leaves behind students with the greatest needs ie. students of color and students with IEPs. Sometimes fairness is not about making sure everyone has the same services, but rather about distributing resources according to greatest needs. To address racial equity, we must go beyond equality where everyone gets the same things, to a place where every student has an opportunity to get what they need to be successful.

3- Behavior Education Plan (BEP): Prior to the BEP implementation, many community leaders (including myself) shared with the former administration (Dan Nerad), our concerns of district-wide implementation. We warned of the potential unreadiness of the district for such a large-scale initiative. The plan relies greatly on a shift of mindset and values, impossible to be accomplished by only mandates and compliance. In fact, DPI has decreased their investment in compliance and significantly increased investments in supports such as technical assistance and professional development. The latter has been proven to have long-term transformational impact.

The BEP, like any plan, can always be improved, however the biggest challenge is in the implementation. There is a great opportunity for the BEP to inform district culture. However, culture cannot be forced into or regulated to change. I would support an increase in coaches and the adoption of equitable coaching strategies to work parallel with district staff. In addition, I would recommend a decision-making equity analysis to identify the unintended consequences of the BEP and understand what teachers and staff need to further support their work. The BEP should be an important tool of the district for the actualization of the district's vision, not a point of disagreement and contention.

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

There are many achievement gaps, and they manifest differently in different schools. These gaps were not created by individuals and are not the fault of "poverty" or the "culture" of certain communities, but rather by years of systemic and structural barriers -- some of which go way beyond the scope of MMSD. That said, MMSD has incredible power to work towards resolving these disparities and even evolving the underlying K-12 education infrastructure in positive ways.

1 - Equity for Teachers: When talking about equity in schools, the conversation often centers on the equity imperative as it relates to student academic achievement, school resources and student services. Little-to-no attention is given to equity for teachers. I am committed to creating an environment where teachers are provided opportunities to grow, thrive and lead and also to fostering a natural pipeline for teachers' leadership. Every school has untapped teacher leaders. Creating opportunity to elevate and support these teachers would increase the indicators of a healthy school.

2 - Community schools: Community schools are a great example of a collaborative approach to addressing systemic inequities. This model fosters integrated student and family support by providing wrap-around services to meet the basic needs of students and families; increase learning opportunities for the entire community; increase and motivate engagement by building a supportive community; promote a collaborative leadership and practice. Targeted community schools could be used as testing grounds for a wider partnership with city-county around housing stabilization and transportation efforts. This work could address the challenges of students with high mobility in the district.

3 - Wellness for students and teachers: Schools present an amazing opportunity to provide support for the emotional development and mental wellness of the whole school community. The school district can provide a range of supports; for example, mindfulness and self-care strategies can be taught and reinforced at each stage of development.

Other suggestions include:

- Proactive-identification of students with early signs of depression or anxiety (which we know are on the rise) can identify students early and provide supports (individual and group counseling) to prevent needless suffering and increase capacity for learning..
- Teachers can learn mental health literacy and can identify and support kids at the classroom level.
- We can invite community therapists into schools to do their good work so kids with mental health needs can be supported. The initiatives to bring therapy services to kids are innovative, and I will support such actions.
- I also support the efforts in the district to support students and families with complex mental health needs in the community.

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

It is critical that MMSD increase its partnership with state offices. My plan is to:

- 1 - Increase funding for MMSD in general: Schools have experience increased accountability without additional funding. I am hopeful with the new State of WI leadership, MMSD will have the budget needed to address the many complex issues.
- 2 - Increase investment in early childhood: Limited part-time 4K has a potential to increase racial disparities in the early years. There is a great body of research that support literacy and educational practices be introduced at early age to increase readiness for all students.
- 3 - Eliminate private schools subsidies, or, at the very least, increase accountability of these vouchers schools to hire licensed teachers and have inclusive practices for students with IEPs and LGBTQ+ students.

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

I am a strong believer in a collaborative approach to achieve a common outcome. Through my many leadership roles in the community at both local and state levels,, I have forged relationships far and wide, from parents of color to community leaders and municipal officials. I have networked with our current governor and members of his cabinet. These relationships will be vital to successful advocacy as a Board member. I will also leverage the willingness of local elected officials (city alders and county supervisors) to enhance strategic



school-city-county partnerships to address the many complex issues experienced by our students and families.

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

The greatest external challenges are:

1 - Privatization: Education Secretary Beth DeVos support for expansion of voucher program, lack of support for our public schools and the continued attack on the progress achieved during the Obama era will be a constant threat to our public education across the state.

2 - Educational disproportionality: Alongside the above threat comes the growing demands and pressures on our schools, and increased accountability has not translated into increased funding. MMSD is challenged by balancing delivering results with addressing systemic issues and opportunities gaps. Lastly, MMSD's persistence racial disproportionality in academic achievement, special education services and discipline referral impact how our families and community at large view our schools.

3 - The national negative narrative towards immigrants, increased ICE enforcement and uncertain immigration policies continue to impact our students' mental health and hinder the ability of our families feeling they belong in our community and schools.

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

MMSD is well positioned to meet these challenges in the following ways:

- Make our schools a welcoming and nurturing place for all students by listening to teachers more, giving them the space to be innovative, foster their leadership and responding to classroom needs
- I believe promoting and achieving educational equity can create equitable opportunities. One of the strategies I support is the continue investment in community schools. Community schools are a great example of a collaborative approach to addressing systemic inequities. This model fosters integrated student and family support by providing wrap-around services to meet the basic needs of students and families; increase learning opportunities for the entire community; increase and motivate engagement by building a supportive community; promote a collaborative leadership and practice. Targeted community schools could be used as testing grounds for a wider partnership with city-county around housing stabilization and transportation efforts. This work could address the challenges of students with high mobility in the district.
- Supporting our undocumented students and families at both the district level and

encouraging on-the-ground work at individual schools most affected by national immigration policies and actions. For example, while working at MMSD, I lead a large project to support our families that included a communication strategy, protective policy and professional learning to all our building staff.

- ❑ More focus on mental health in the schools through the ways I set out up above.
- ❑ Shifting the Narrative: The achievement gap experienced by our students of color perpetuates a threat to their educational achievement and their parents and community's trust in our public schools. Once elected, I will work in uniting our communities and engage community leaders in sharing a new narrative for our schools. I will elevate the work of our teachers, enhance a "best practices" program and share the success with our communities.
- ❑ I will work with our current governor to create legislative protections and derail the growth of private charter schools.
- ❑ Lastly, our communities, in particular our communities of color must learn the danger of private-charter schools. They are not fit to serve our students - in particular our students of color and students with Individualized Learning Plans (IEP). From school closings, exclusionary practices and little to no accountability, private-charter schools must become and remain irrelevant to our families.

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?

MMSD has actually considerably improved the recruitment of teachers of color comparatively to previous administrations. However despite many efforts, MMSD still struggles retaining teachers of color. Once elected here are the things I would focus on:

- ❑ Teachers Development: Ensure that MMSD has leaders that understand the importance of supporting teachers of color and have the skills to do so. Invest in professional development and support their leadership. Develop differentiated training for teachers of color.
- ❑ Mentorship focusing on belonging: All teachers should feel they belong in our schools. Teachers of color may experience isolation and lack of support. Mentorship programs and affinity groups often help increase connection and create sustainable communities.
- ❑ Policies and Practices: Review of our protection and unintended discriminatory policies and practices and acknowledge systemic pressures that impact teachers of color different than their White peers.

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

The underlying issues resulting in the many gaps MMSD students experience has been caused by the deep and historical institutional oppression experienced by students of color, students that qualify for special educational services and students experiencing poverty. There is no one strategy to address hundreds of years of inequities.

Once elected, I will work with local communities, local and state partners to address systemic changes. First, MMSD would need to identify where are our greatest inequities aligning target equitable strategies. Second, collaborate with teachers, administrators, community members, students and families to address this issues. Eliminating silos and creating a shared-vision-responsibility engaging with all stakeholders. Lastly, adjust the strategies focusing on racial equity.

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

I am not in favor or expansion of public charter schools, however they have played a key role in our district i.e. Nuestro Mundo Community School, Wright Middle School (currently a magnet school) and Badger Rock Middle school. I will focus on making our schools better for our students, specifically the ones historically underserved by our district.

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

I do not support and will never vote in favor of public dollars to fund private enterprises. I am a third-generation public worker; both my parents retired from public offices. My father is facing his retirement fund cut by one third due to such privatization efforts. I have worked for nonprofits and public agencies since I was eighteen, and have devoted my life to the public sector and the needs of its citizens.

My daughter is an alum of a public charter school (Nuestro Mundo). Public charter schools have a place in our district to serve as a place for innovation and research to practice. Nuestro Mundo served as a pilot to the expansion of dual-language programs in our district which has benefited both English Language Learners as well as native English speakers who have now gained the critical skill of being bilingual in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual country and community. As is often the case, when we center the needs of the people who are most marginalized, there are benefits to all.

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

I am vehemently against the use of public funds to pay for private schools. Our public dollars should be use to invest in our public schools and our students. I will continue to advocate against voucher schools and make sure our families understand the threat they pose to public schools and their lack of accountability.

15. 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 started attending parent meetings and school board meetings over a decade ago, when my daughter entered kindergarten.

The issues that have motivated me have changed over the years. At first, I wanted to learn how I could support my daughter and better understand the school system in Madison. I have since: become a chair of Nuestro Mundo Site Leadership Committee, I was a Board member of Nuestro Mundo, Inc., I served at the Sennett Family Engagement Committee and organized the Latino Parent group. Attended LaFollette meetings regarding Dual Language Program, School Safety, Personalized Pathways, Schedule changes, etc.

I have attended several board meetings over the years for different reasons: to advocate for the Nuestro Mundo new building, renew the Nuestro Mundo charter, and to speak up on other programs such as Personalized Pathways, the Dual Language Program, the ERO contract renewal, and the Special Education Plan.

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 them! Teacher's voice is often absent in identifying solutions and informing policy (i.e. discipline, professional development, etc.). The district is quick to invest in external experts and dismiss the local resources available in our school buildings. Teacher's leadership and voice is critical for the success of students. I will create formal and informal ways for teachers' to voice their experience and become part of the solution.

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

Yes, absolutely! I believe that our new governor could at the very least give teachers an increased bargaining power.

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 understand the district has a committee reviewing compensation. I plan to support the recommendations regarding increase of school staff pay. If elected, I would prioritize:

- 1 - during budget exercises looking for places that might not be panning out in the most productive manner to redirect resources (of course, always a difficult decision), and
- 2 - seek alternative revenue streams. In the past MMSD has had success getting referendums passed, and this might be one option to consider for bi-annual raises or at the very least, singular bonuses. But other sources of revenue might be considered for such raises as well: more organized fund-raising, event planning, grant seeking, or other out-of-the-box thinking to de-emphasize reliance on taxes, for example. Obviously this question deserves more deliberation with a lot more stakeholders involved.

I am a viable candidate that has no conflict in advocating and recommending teacher's salary increases. It is absolutely necessary to ensure that our educators feel that our district values them. We must offer competitive salaries and good working conditions.

- 3 - I would also research subsidies i.e. childcare, student loans repayment programs, that could alleviate common educator experiences.

Work and learning conditions are essential components of great schools. Teachers deserve respectful work conditions that includes updated facilities where they feel safe. Everyone benefits when teachers feel a greater sense of belonging! School climate improves, and staff feel connected to their workplace. We can and should have all educators experience healthy schools and healthy communities!

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. The employee handbook is currently the only process that guarantees teachers participation in compensation decision making. I will also support creative strategies to ensure our staff feel a greater sense of job security.

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

I would prioritize administration salary cuts and central office position cuts as well as budgetary efficiencies.

If you could identify \$10 million in additional investments what would you invest in?

I would prioritize investment in all-day 4K, invest in behavior prevention strategies, hire more teachers and increase teacher and staff salaries.

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

I have a few ideas of how MMSD might improve the amplification of parents and students' voices:

- Develop more ways for parents and students to weigh in, particularly on issues that impact them directly. For example, the parent groups that Jen Cheatham have set up are excellent as well but they are often at times in the middle of the day, excluding working parents. The BOE meetings only have limited formats for input and we might brainstorm other (less intimidating, less structured) ways for input.
- Encourage follow-up when input is given. For example, the regular MMSD parent surveys are great but there is little follow-through with them. What happens with the data? Very little is communicated to the parents.
- I would personally commit to going into the schools regularly to meet with student groups to hear what is happening in the schools.
- Consider rotating the meetings for the BOE around town to places like community centers and leaving time to mingle with community members to give more opportunities for feedback and suggestions. In another words bringing the Board to the community.
- Encourage the development of standards for communication between teachers and parents. Right now some teachers have websites, some have email, some use Infinite Campus, some are great with communicating about the students and the class to parents and yet many parents are in the dark most of the year. And ensuring that parents have a way to communicate with teachers as well. Perhaps a technical solution to this could be found (of course, in consideration of families who might not have Internet access).
- Increase access for non-native English speaking families and make it easier for them to request interpreters.

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?

Overall, the plan is sound and based on national best practices.

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

Prior to implementation many community leaders (including myself) shared with the administration (former Superintendent Dan Nerad) our concerns of district-wide implementation. The plan relies greatly on a shift of mindset and values, impossible to

accomplished by mandates and compliance. In fact, the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction significantly increased supports, technical assistance and professional development to address system-wide changes.

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

Although technically the BOE is the "boss" of the superintendent and administration, I see a "proper relationship" being more about collaboration, partnership and guidance between the two parties. In the past we have seen how unproductive acrimonious relationships between the board and the administration can be and I would strive to listen to the professionals about what they think is best while weighing the needs of Madison children and serving the people who elected me as well.

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

I have a good relationship with many former Board Members that I will continue to seek advice from: James Howard, Ed Hughes, Juan Jose Lopez, Bill Clingan, Bill Keys. There is a cadre of elected local and statewide officials that would serve as mentors during my term: Melissa Sargent, Chris Taylor, Sheila Stubbs, Carousel Bayrd, Jeff Pertl, JoCasta Zamarripa among others.

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

Yes, receiving the endorsement of our teacher's leaders and fellow educators would mean a lot of our campaign,

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

Yes, I believe financial contribution would be beneficial to winning the election.

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?

As a School Board member, I will fund proactive prevention strategies for safer schools. Our schools can and should be healthy communities for students, teachers, and staff. Here is a summary of my campaign platform:

- Increase student access to mental health and counseling services addressing disparities in special education
- Address violence and bullying while reducing racial disparities

- Create a respectful work environments for our teachers and staff, including updating facilities for better work conditions and safety
- Promote and support family and youth engagement and participation in student life
- Increase access to training and support for culturally responsive practices

28. Who has endorsed your campaign? Elected Officials:

Shelia Stubbs  
WI State Representative

JoCasta Zamarripa  
WI State Representative

Paul Soglin  
Mayor, Madison

Frances Huntley-Cooper  
Former Mayor, Fitchburg

Shawn Pfaff  
Former Mayor, Fitchburg

Michael Flores  
Former Madison School Board

James Howard  
Madison School Board

Juan José López  
Former Madison School Board

Gloria Reyes  
Madison School Board

Shiva Bidar  
Alder, Madison

Julia Arata-Fratta  
Alder, Fitchburg



Amanda Hall  
Alder, Madison

Arvina Martin  
Alder, Fitchburg

Jeff Pertl,  
Dane County Supervisor

Judge Marilyn Townsend

29. Who serves on your campaign committee?

Treasurer Joe Sensenbrenner, Jan Sternbach, Sara Alvaro, Megan Diaz, Jon Gramling

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?

Financial budgetary items regarding Madison College STEAM Academy  
Financial items regarding Special Education Racial Disproportionality. The Department of Public Instruction, Legal Council, is currently reviewing any future conflicts. I will make sure to make public any conflict and recuse myself accordingly.