

**Progressive Dane Endorsement Questions for 2019 School Board
Candidates**

Thank you for having a conversation with Progressive Dane about your candidacy for the Madison Common Council. We appreciate the opportunity to learn about your priorities and campaign. To prepare for the interview, we ask that you respond to the following questions in writing. You may email your responses to office@prodane.org **by midnight on Wednesday, January 9th, 2019.**

These questions and your responses will serve as the basis of the interview with the Progressive Dane Elections Committee.

Please email your responses to office@prodane.org.

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1. Why are you running for elected office?

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 colorblind 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. Parents had to bring snacks everyday because the school had three lunches ranging between (10-1PM), she was getting bullied everyday and was experiencing mental health issues. It was during the training 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 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 knew of 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 of the school board with the diverse community who they are elected to represent. It has been very challenging to close the gap of understanding and cultural knowledge of the people voted 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.

I am running for School Board 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. What are your 3 biggest areas of concern with MMSD, and what would you like to see changed to address these concerns.

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' voice: 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. 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 experienced.

I was personally and professionally transformed by those experiences. I later learned examples of teachers leading restorative justice and other educational justices practices across the country. I am confident on what should be first step in our district - Teachers and Staff Leadership are essential to success.

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 create 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. Teachers and staff understand equity practices will support and elevate the great work they already committed to do.

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

3- Behavior Education Plan (BEP): Prior to the BEP implementation, many community leaders (including myself) shared with the 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, the DPI has decreased their investment in compliance and significantly increased 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.

3. Please read the attached education platform. What recommendations do you have for additions and what pieces of the platform would you prioritize? Is there any proposal, that you do not support?

Recommendations:

The platform articulate well key points that are foundational to the achievement of educational equity. I took note of wordsmithing suggestions of a few areas:

Transparency, Participation, and Open Government #9:

Ensure that public can voice their opinions within a democratic process without intimidation.

Provide ways for non-native English speakers to request interpreters for public meetings in order to increase access for our immigrant communities.

Public School Funding #2:

Include students receiving special education services

Charter Schools #f:

Evaluate segregation impact based on the school attendance area demographics.

Equity and Inclusion #3:

It maybe important to list specific programs. I have experienced a lot of scrutiny with DLI programs more than I've heard push backs for Talented and Gifted or Advanced Placement.

#8 Suggestions on a more inclusive and less deficit-language:

Replace the word minority to ethnic groups or diverse ethnic groups. The word minority implies inferiority and uphold a majority superiority. Also this term is no longer applicable since students of color represent the majority of student body.

Replace the word disabilities to "students receiving special education services"; poor families to "families that qualify for free and reduced lunch"; include Q for "Queer"

#11 Replace bilingual/ESL to "non-native English speakers or multilingual"

#12 Replace homeless students to students experiencing homelessness

I would prioritize:

All my priorities would be supported through an Equity and Inclusion framework

Social Emotional Development of Students

Community Schools

Transparency, Participation, and Open Government

4. Evaluate the issue of transparency with the way the School Board currently operates, what problem areas do you believe need to be addressed and how will you work to address them?

The State of Wisconsin, Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has learned that accountability with mandates have not resulted in positive changes. In fact, these pressures often results in less transparency, less understanding and transactional relationships.

It is possible to create a culture of accountability, dialogue and shared responsibility. However transparency is clouded when oversight becomes unbalanced and adversarial interactions between administration and school board foster a lack of trust hindering leadership. The Board leadership and behavior impacts the relationship between district staff, community and other stakeholders. As previously mentioned, no positive outcome will be achieve by one body alone, no single board member or superintendent or teacher can achieve the equitable outcomes we desire.

Transformative work starts with honoring the relationships and having clarity on the problems, priorities and barriers. The school board articulates the policies and procedures to inform administration of priorities and vision. Administration must be clear on what is expected and emulate the board's decisions to promote the practices needed to support the vision.

My training and experience have allowed me to understand public and community demands while balancing institutional needs. Knowing, understanding and collaborating with the multiple stakeholders are critical to school success. My organizing and community credibility will be well used to ensure open communication between Board, Administration and the public.

5. Do you support the recommendations from the ad hoc committee on educational resource officers (EROs)? What are the most important elements of safe schools?

I believe the work of the committee was very important. This is my area of expertise due to my work with the Restorative Justice. The Restorative Justice Program started at the school level and has expanded to the community due to a partnership with local law enforcement and Dane County. I led those partnerships and forged innovative collaborations to address racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system, giving our students a chance to repair their mistakes without damaging their entire life.

The committee shed light on many disparities and negative outcomes that impact our most fragile students and their families. I was disappointed to see the steep learning curve of many board members in understand the impact that school decision has on our children, and the close connection with the criminal justice system. The work of the committee identified the lack of knowledge of happens during police interactions and no data was being collected. The police in the schools is not an isolated issue, however procedures for police in the schools are sorely needed and is the key element the committee proposed.

Overall I support PD's Platform #19 under Equity and Inclusion

Many of their recommendations were necessary to better inform our community and shape policy. However, an area of criticism is that greater accountability and oversight does not result in better outcomes. I believe that balanced shared-accountability can transform the way in which we do our work and measure our progress.

The most important element of safe schools is a health indicator. School safety should be addressed by the expansion and implementation of proactive approaches versus reactionary measurements. In fact, prevention and community building are more cost effective strategies compared to punishment, high-level interventions, suspensions and expulsions.

Work and learning conditions are essential components of great schools. Teachers deserve respectful work conditions that includes updated facilities where they feel safe. Students deserve a learning environment free of bullying, violence and racial profiling. Madison is now experiencing the symptoms of a less-than-optimal education system. When students don't feel engaged, connected and a sense of belonging, it is likely that disrupt behaviors occur.

Increased violence, theft, and guns in the hands of children are social problems I've seen growing up.

I have proactively worked to address violence in our schools while reducing racial disparities. As a board member I will prioritize facilities updates to ensure our students and staff feel safe as well as strengthening our school community. I will prioritize:

- Investing in support staff to engage with Youth and community partners.
- Strengthen implementation of Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices through an equity lens.

- Increasing comprehensive resources to mental-health and counseling services
- Reducing exclusionary practices that impact students of color and students with disabilities.

I believe that people feel safe when they feel honored, loved and respected. Once elected, I will continue encourage more dialogue between school and community and support a on-going committee formed by community members, school staff and board members.

6. What strategies do you favor to address the achievement gap?

There are many achievement gaps, they manifest differently in different schools. These gaps were not created by individuals, rather by years of systemic and structural barriers.

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 fostering a natural pipeline of teacher's 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: Mindfulness and self-care strategies can be taught and reinforced at each stage of development.

- 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 in to to schools to do their good work so kids with mental health needs can be supported. The initiatives to bring therapy services to kids is innovative and I will support it.
- I also support the efforts in the district to support students and families with complex mental health needs in the community.

7. Do you support charter schools? What can the school board do to protect against the constant pressure of privatization?

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 1/3 due to privatization. I have worked for nonprofits and public agencies since I was eighteen.

My daughter is an alumni 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.

Strong and collaborative leadership can strengthen our schools. Madison schools have the potential of becoming leaders in inclusion and educational equity. There are plenty of local resources and local leadership committed to ensuring every child receives what they need when they need.

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 practice program and share the success with our communities.

I will work with our current governor to create legislative protections and derail the growth of charter private 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.

FOR NEW CANDIDATES ONLY

8. What are the unique qualities and perspectives that you will bring to this office?

As a queer, immigrant, first-generation US citizen, tri-lingual, single-mother, I bring many unique perspectives to this office. Our school board needs a community member who knows what our children and their families are going through and I have the personal experience and interest to ensure our schools thrive, along with all our students including our students of color, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities.

I have over ten years working with families, students and educators in the Madison area. I have shown a lifetime commitment to serving all students with a specific focus on students of color. My Masters Degree is in Educational Leadership Policy, and I have worked as the Restorative Justice Director at YWCA Madison, as the *** at Madison Metropolitan School District, and as the *** at the Department of Public Instruction. My education, professional commitments, and volunteer commitments offer a lifetime of evidence that I am committed to the progressive value that all students deserve equal access to opportunities in schools and communities.

I have been a parent leader, I have been an MMSD employee, I work for DPI, and now I'm ready to serve on the Madison school board.

9. In what ways are you currently active in your district and the community at large?

I serve in many Boards and committees with a mission to address racial disparities in the city and the State of WI:

- Board Chair of community develop fund (Forward Communities Investment), that provides grants and loans to non-profit organizations with a mission to address inequities
- President, Latino Education Council - Advocacy group to support Latinx students and families navigate the education system (PreK-16) and provide scholarships for undocumented students
- Board Member, Madison Area Technical College - Madison College provides open access to quality higher education that fosters lifelong learning and success within our communities.
- Board Member, Badger Rock Neighborhood Center - Provide open access to quality higher education that foster lifelong learning and success within our communities
- Member representative of WI Department of Public Instructions, Latino TaskForce - UW Extension Collaborative