

**MTI-VOTERS**  
**2019 School Board Election Questionnaire**

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

I want to serve on the MMSD School Board for the love of learning. I believe in this community, and know we are capable of coming together to innovate our schools through empowering students and teachers. I want to be a part of making Madison a place where children, families, and educators feel supported, celebrated, and included by their school's leadership. As a graduate from Madison public schools, an educator in the district, and a mother of two, I have firsthand experience within the community. I've worked with MMSD teachers, the city's talented students, and their supportive families. Madison has the tools to ensure that our children have access to the most relevant technologies. We have the drive to empower students to resolve conflict, seek solutions, and value each other. We have the ability to invest in our community by growing competitive public schools that nurture a new generation of innovative Madison leaders. We have the resources to help our children to imagine the future of Madison from inside their classrooms. We are a community that prides ourselves on our progress. We are not a district to be defined by our past; we are a community of learners willing to embrace the work needed to ensure that every student in Madison succeeds. We will address racial disparities relentlessly until our schools are places where students of color are recognized, valued, and provided with meaningful opportunities for success and inclusion. We need to seize the opportunity to cultivate our students' intelligence and to support the educators in our community. The world we are leaving for our young people is full of challenges. Young people will have to learn how to live sustainably, solve issues like climate-change, learn to live in harmony with others and with nature, and take on a political system that seems to be more interested in maintaining inequality than finding solutions to our world's problems. These are great challenges, but I believe, with the help of great schools, our youth can do this. Young people have always been the motivators of change. As an educator like you, I know how important this work is to the future of humanity.

2. What does quality education look like to you?

Quality education begins with leadership that can create a welcoming learning environment for all, where students are able to learn free from stress, trauma, and bullying. Zaretta Hammond, who many teachers in this district have read, explains how students are not able to learn if their trauma is triggered and a fight or flight response

ensues. Too many of our students are dealing with this exact challenge on a daily basis. Often times teachers are asked to do too many things in a day, with little planning time. Cramming too many things into a day makes students feel similarly overwhelmed. Creating a safe, calm learning environment means that administrators and principals trust, respect, and appreciate their staff. When teachers feel good about themselves, they tend to make students feel good about themselves as well, and of course when students feel good about themselves, they tend to treat each other well. A quality education, like a thriving society, begins with treating each other well.

A quality education may look different for one student than it does for another. Schools districts should have a wide variety of available learning environments to cover the many different needs that their students have. MMSD does a good job of creating bilingual environments, such as Nuestro Mundo, an alternative high-school, like Shabazz, and collaborations with many area nonprofits to serve our youth. But we need to keep introducing new innovation in education. Many districts across the country offer - within their own districts - public Montessori schools, Waldorf Schools, and schools of the Arts. There are school districts that grow their own food and prepare their own lunches, others that focus on sustainability. I want our students to have many of these options available to them in our MMSD schools.

A quality education not only works for the privileged, but works for the most vulnerable in our society. Education can be a major factor in determining who will grow up to have financial stability and opportunity in our country. Those that do not excel in our schools are much more likely to end up in poverty, incarcerated, or to have a worse quality of life. All too often, students who grow up in poverty do not excel in our schools, perpetuating a cycle. The injustice of this becomes even worse when we consider race and poverty. 75% of Black children in our district grow up in poverty. Great schools with great teachers have the potential to be a great equalizer in society. As Billy Joel once sang, "We didn't start the fire..." but a quality education has the ability to put it out.

### 3. Name three things you believe that MMSD does well.

Despite the loss of collective bargaining, the decrease in pay, and that the state of Wisconsin has seen a decline in recent years from it's previously strong of a reputation for treating its teachers well, MMSD has been able to recruit and keep some amazing and talented teachers.

MMSD also excels at creating collaborative partnerships and seeking new and innovative approaches to education. From Dual Language Immersion, to micro-schools, and partnerships with organizations ranging from local nonprofits to the YMCA and Madison College, MMSD has brought new methods, introducing bilingual education and restorative justice practices to serve our diverse student body.

We also have a history of educating creative and free-thinking students. High school students were some of the first to occupy the capitol building in response to the Act 10 bill. Teachers supported students and vice versa in those moments. In 2019, as much as any year, we should hope to continue doing this well for the future of our schools and our communities.

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

(responses to #4 included in answer #5, below)

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

Please find here three areas MMSD could improve, along with ideas on how MMSD could address them:

MMSD could improve in staff representation. Representation is important from Hollywood movies, to elected officials, to our teachers and administrators in our school systems. Children of color need to be able to see themselves in positions of power in all the areas of life that white students get to see themselves in order to visualize their own success. Representation tells young people where they belong in our society. MMSD could improve in the area of representation in a number of ways. First, in the DLI programming, MMSD has struggled to hire Latino teachers, despite having an ever growing population of young, bilingual, Latino adults. MMSD often hires teachers learning Spanish as a second language (such as my husband). MMSD has recruited teachers from Spain, rather than from the Latino population in the U.S. or even recruiting teachers from Mexico, who share an identity with many of the students that they would teach in MMSD. In addition, Black and Asian students are underrepresented in the DLI programs, and in Gifted and Talented, while overrepresented in Special Education programming as well as in discipline.

MMSD could also improve in offering diversified learning environments and curriculum to meet the needs of all its diverse learners. The Pathways program that MMSD is beginning to implement needs to be examined with a lens toward equity. We cannot

allow our schools to overwhelmingly push students of color and low-income students toward careers in manual labor positions, while pushing affluent white students toward higher education and to occupy the positions of power in our society. This merely perpetuates the status quo on issues of race and class. Although surely with many exceptions East High School, with a higher concentration of students of color and poverty, has historically been a gateway for students to work at Oscar Meyer and other low-skilled jobs, while West High School, with a greater presence of affluence than East, has historically funnelled students into the UW-system and beyond. In addition, we need to be preparing students for an ever-changing world. More than half of the 10 highest-earning jobs in 2016 didn't exist ten years earlier. Rather than focus on preparing our students for low-income careers or work that may not exist in 10 years, we need to prepare them to be capable, self-advocating, adults that can lead this country into the sustainable and equitable city, state, and country that we need to be.

Lastly, MMSD could invest more in their teachers and in retaining good teachers by increasing pay and benefits, as well as providing teachers more opportunities for growth and innovation in the classroom. While at a state and national level, we may not expect increased funding in our public schools, locally we are able to leverage local taxes as well as prioritizing funding within MMSD to make sure our teachers have the means to be the best they can be for our students.

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

On a state level, our schools have suffered from years of decreasing funding, teachers are leaving the profession, or leaving the state, and much damage has been done to public education by our past governor's efforts to redistribute money for education to his wealthy friends in business and commerce. Fortunately, with new leadership in the governor's office, I have hope that the state of Wisconsin can begin to reverse much of this damage and begin to truly support education again. First, we could reinstate the collective bargaining agreement for teachers and other public employees (eliminate Act 10). Second, we could increase funding for public education in Wisconsin. We could also make changes to the state Department of Public Instruction to allow for opportunities to hire talented teachers of all backgrounds as well as teachers that bring creative solutions to our particular needs at our local schools. This could be done along with funding for current teachers and new teachers to access more professional growth opportunities of their own choosing to keep up with our ever-changing needs as public institutions of education.

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

These issues are very concerning to me, and as a school board member, I will fight alongside teachers and community members to make our state a more hospitable place for public educators. I will also fight within the state and our local tax base to keep our schools well-funded. Governor Evers recently appointed me to the Criminal Justice Reform Council, and I expect working closely with him, we will be able to turn things around in the state of Wisconsin.

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

The greatest external challenge facing MMSD is that we live in a state in which the previous governor and many members of the state legislature are hostile towards public education, as well as toward the teachers that provide this education. They have turned Wisconsin into a state that is undesirable to teachers, and a state where schools are underfunded. Another external challenge is the federal administration's demonstrated hostility toward public education. As a supporter of private charter schools, school vouchers, and defunding public education in Michigan, Secretary DeVos could implement devastating changes at the national level. Lastly, I believe external challenges such as poverty and race and class divisions in our society are challenges that our students and families face and that MMSD can play a role in overcoming. I do expect that these issues may get worse considering the leadership of our nation and of our state legislature.

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

At a time like this, when we are feeling unsure about the support we will get for our public schools on a State and Federal level, we must seek new ways to support each other as a community on a local level. If we do not get the necessary funding from State and Federal levels we can do what we can pass local referendums to fund what is necessary. As a city, only around 20 percent of us voted for Donald Trump or Scott Walker, and Madison has a wealthy tax base and a demonstrated commitment to progress. If we can look on each other as a community that needs each other and takes care of each other, we will be able to provide schools that work for all our children with a staff that is loved and compensated well for their work. We also need to be efficient as a community and critical of ourselves, while investing in what does work well and being

willing to change what does not. In Boston, school lunch is free to all students because they realized that it costs more to verify income than to provide free lunch to all.

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?

As I mentioned earlier, MMSD has struggled to hire Latino teachers, years ago deciding to recruit teachers from Spain instead of Mexico, or hiring bilingual Latinos from here in Wisconsin. Principals also hire many more bilingual white teachers (such as my partner Sandy). I believe, we need to hire bilingual teachers that look like and share culture with the students they work with, and this can be done by tapping into our growing population of bilingual Latinos here in the state. Similarly, MMSD would benefit from hiring more Hmong teachers, as well as begin to offer dual-language classes in Hmong and English. Often times the few Hmong teachers MMSD does hire are half-time or travel between two or three different schools. Lastly, MMSD needs to hire more Black teachers. Studies have shown that even having one Black teacher in elementary school can increase a Black student's chance of graduating from high school by up to 40%. MMSD does hire a few Black teachers, however, it is often more common to see Black staff hired as SEA's or security guards. We need to examine this practice, because whether we intend to do so or not, we are sending the message to all of our students that Black staff are meant to be 'assistants' to white teachers, and these messages are harmful to our most vulnerable students. In order to recruit and keep quality Black educators, we should make sure to promote a welcoming environment where Black people are seen in positions of leadership in our schools, teacher unions, elected officials, and in the greater community of Madison. Also, if we are going to keep Pathways, I would love to see a cohort of future teachers, representative of our students, on a pathway to being educators. And of course, if we want to keep quality educators of all kinds, we should pay teachers better and make sure they feel empowered in their positions.

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

I believe I have commented on facets of the "achievement" gap in answering some of the other questions, but let me briefly list solutions here to what should better be labeled the "opportunity" gap. I support the evidence-based practices of equity and inclusion. These include recruitment and retaining of teaching staff of color; curriculum and

instructional design that is inclusive, representative, and and responsive; establishing a school culture that is rooted in self-determination and consent; and a holistic educational approach that responds to a child's individual needs, strengths, and interests.

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

I do support innovative education, and some “public charter” schools are helpful. MMSD instrumentality charter schools James C. Wright Middle School and Nuestro Mundo are examples of these. Nuestro Mundo has shown MMSD that bilingual education is not only possible in an instrumentality charter, but that it can be implemented as an option in many of MMSD’s other schools. Instrumentality charter schools are not the only way to accomplish innovation, and decisions about the use of this option should also consider whether programs, partnerships, or increased educator flexibility might accomplish similar goals.

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

I am not a supporter of private charter schools, school vouchers, or any form of privatizing public education. Policies that seek to take resources away from public schools, and redistribute them to affluent families to send their kids to private school are harmful to our most vulnerable students. I don’t support for-profit education; running a school like a business, as many private charter schools do, is a problem because as a business the goal is to increase profits, and this can come into conflict with what should be a school’s number one priority, an excellent education for every child.

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

I am not a supporter of school vouchers for reasons mentioned above

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

As a student having attended MMSD from K through 12, and as an educator working for the Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools (GSAFE), I have attended far more School Board meetings than I can count. One of the latest issues that motivated me to attend was the issue of Educational Resource Officers in our high schools. I have taught

MMSD high school students at the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center, and seen evidence of the disproportionate arrest of Black students in our high schools. It was not uncommon for me to teach a class of ALL Black students at the detention center, some of whom were arrested at our schools. This prompted me to get active in the discussion of how to better use EROs in the schools, and to look deeply into our role in sending students of color into the school-to-prison pipeline. This issue is a complicated one, because I have met personally with most of the EROs serving in our high schools and they are all very good people. Just as it is wrong to rest responsibility for our district's opportunity gap on the backs of individual teachers, it is wrong to place blame for the school-to-prison pipeline on the backs of our EROs. Institutional change, however, is necessary in both areas.

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

I believe not only that teachers and other employees should have a say in all of these matters, but that their ideas and input should be a top priority when considering policy. Teachers having a voice in these matters looks like the teachers' union, MTI, collecting teachers' ideas and input and negotiating these ideas with the administration and board. To truly have a voice, the administration and board must highly respect the ideas that MTI brings to the table, and do all that they can to center these ideas in policy and practice.

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

I would not only wholeheartedly support this, but I would be willing to help teachers fight hard for it. In the following years, as Wisconsin thankfully has a new governor, I would use my relationships to pressure the state to make this very important change. I worked hard to help elect our new governor and he and I have a very good relationship. Of course, Republicans in the state legislature are working hard to limit his powers, and

they still have a majority, so this fight will be difficult. Fighting hard alongside teachers and other public employees, however, I do believe we can succeed.

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?

See also my answers in question 8. If we do not get the necessary funding from State and Federal levels we can pass local referenda to fund what is necessary to keep teachers well paid. As a city, Madison usually supports more funding for schools when needed. If we can look at each other as a community that needs each other and takes care of each other, we will be able to provide schools that work for all our children with a staff that is loved and compensated well for their work.

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

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

As I understand, the MMSD collaborative employee handbook process is one of few in the country, where representatives of MTI and school administrators collaborated in the content of the employee handbook, that addresses much of what has replaced the collective bargaining agreement which expired in July of 2016. Although I'm sad to see the collective bargaining agreement go, I certainly would support the continuation of a process that seeks collaboration, as long as employee representatives are happy with the process. Certainly, we will work tirelessly in the fight to reinstate collective bargaining for teachers and other public employees on a state level.

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?

With a budget of close to half a billion dollars, an increase or decrease of 10 million represents about a 2% change. I would prefer that that we increase funding to our schools by much more than this, and working with our new governor, I think we can get this done. However, if we had an extra \$10 million, I would hire around 200 new teachers, which would reduce class sizes over the entire district. This effort could also

specifically be tied to the goal of hiring more teachers of color, which in turn will help provide part of the solution to our district's achievement gap. If we must cut \$10 million from the budget, I would recommend that most, if not all of the amount be cut from the cost of administration in the Doyle building. Although we have some very good administrators, we spend a lot of money there, while our teachers buy supplies out of pocket and organize Go Fund Me campaigns. Three other ideas for cutting unnecessary costs would be to spend less money on over testing our students with standardized tests, stop hiring as many expensive consultants, and to replace many of the professional developments that teachers are required to attend with stipend money to be used by each teacher for attending conferences or education related events of their own choosing. The top down approach of mandating teacher development assumes that all teachers need to add the same skills to their repertoire, when the reality is that each teacher has their own unique needs and experience, and letting teachers decide how and where to focus their improvement would be more effective and less expensive.

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

Parents and students need to have a voice. I would like to help create student newspapers in middle and high schools and make sure that the ones we currently have flourish and become even more of an avenue for communication with parents and input from students. I would also help create more podcasts and webseries for both students and parents to access electronically. We need to create a culture on the board, and in the administration, as well as all of our schools, where all parents feel welcome and appreciated, where their input is valued and listened to. We need to create a variety of ways for parents to access and show leadership, in ways that parents view themselves as participants and audience members. I would like to see us using a proactive approach to utilizing educational tools as a means to communication and collaboration with parents.

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

I am familiar with the Behavior Education Plan.

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

It does not do enough to empower the students to take agency in navigating their own behavior. The Behavior Education Plan does take some amazingly proactive steps to lessening children's exposure to exclusionary practices, and for that I applaud it.

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

One of the issues I have with it is that it puts too much of the emphasis on the teacher and may even lead teachers feeling like they need to spend too much time on "behavior management" and have less time to focus on providing quality instruction

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

The Board of Education's role is to provide oversight and a way of holding the administration accountable to the public that our schools serve. As elected officials, members of the School Board need to advocate for the MMSD students, parents, and staff. This can mean bringing attention of issues to the administration where issues are not being addressed properly, as well as seeking new leadership of the Administration when necessary. After all, the superintendent is hired by the board. As co-executive director of GSAFE I treat those that we hire with respect, provide the opportunities for their success, and hold them accountable for their work. This type of relationship is also how I will treat the superintendent and administrators as a member of the school board.

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

I believe that the people with the best ideas are those that are directly involved and impacted by decisions. This means that teachers, students, and parents that spend time in our public schools are often the experts and the ones who can bring awareness of issues as well as have the solutions. I plan on regularly seeking the advice of these experts.

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?

I love this community, the one I grew up and went to school in, and the community I now work for in Madison. As I have shown as an instructor of the course Foundations of Leadership and as an executive director at GSAFE, I will work very hard to make a better future for all of our students. I would be excited to be endorsed by MTI and continue to work hard to make our schools places that our teachers and staff are proud of.

28. Who has endorsed your campaign?

Here is most of an ever-growing list of early endorsements:

Madison Alders, Shiva Bidar-Sielaff and Arvina Martin  
Dane County Board Supervisors, Carousel Bayrd, Yogesh Chawla, and Jeff Pertl  
State Assembly Representatives, Sheila Stubbs and Chris Taylor  
Dane County Sheriff, Dave Mahoney and County Clerk, Scott McDonell  
Omega School Executive Director and Madison's Poet Laureate, Oscar Mireles  
Progress Center for Black Women founder, Sabrina Madison

29. Who serves on your campaign committee?

My campaign team is made up of dozens of volunteer community members, including teachers, students, and parents. My campaign manager is Jan Sternbach.

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?

Board policy requires Board members to recuse themselves from voting and remove themselves from discussion when the Board is addressing any matter that presents an actual or perceived conflict of interest, as determined by that member's own judgement. I will strictly adhere to this policy, avoiding even the appearance of conflict when relevant. I could foresee having to contemplate recusal based on my partner, Sandy Welander's, employment with the district, my children's potential attendance in MMSD schools or MSCR programming, or related to my employment with GSAFE or my membership on the Fair Wisconsin Board. It is extremely common for one or more BOE member to call attention to an agenda item or separate items from the consent agenda in order to recuse themselves from voting on matters, and I imagine my own membership on the board and recusal decisions will be consistent with what we have seen across board members in recent years.