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

My professional career has been rooted in the belief that education is the foundation for success. We are primed for opportunistic change in the Madison Metropolitan School District. We have impending new leadership, a relatively new school board, and teachers, administrators and community members who are committed to ensuring the success of Madison Public Schools. I want to support district initiatives that foster the success of all students and provide the resources necessary for teachers and staff to do their work in an environment that celebrates and continues to create opportunities for innovative initiatives that meet district and community goals. I believe so strongly in public education and it is time to utilize my professional and personal experience to further the interests of the Madison Metropolitan School District as a member of the school board.

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

Public Education exists to equip all children with the necessary skills to be successful. Quality public education is the notion that we must have flexible systems and sustainable structures in place that continually adapt to meet the needs of students, families and school staff. Quality public education is an institution that must not collapse against competing interests. It will persevere for as long as those charged with maintaining it believe it can, and so we all as a collective community of teachers and learners must share the responsibilities required to advance and succeed.

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

   a. MMSD teachers and administrators are committed to student learning and student success. We are proactively seeking solutions to address needs by supporting innovative learning environments such as Micro Schools, Community Schools and Charter Schools like Badger Rock and Nuestro Mundo.
   b. MMSD operates from an equity focused lens. The Welcoming Schools Initiative, The Black Excellence Coalition and Think Tank, and Dual Language Immersion Schools are key examples of this. We are not afraid to take bold statements.
   c. MMSD attempts to engage the community. I do believe that MMSD wants to have all community members have a voice in public education. I think at times this is difficult, but I do believe that MMSD is committed to this engagement.

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

   a. There appears to be significant distrust around services for special education.
   b. MMSD is struggling with its perception in the community. As a result, we have parents that are seeking alternatives paths away from our schools for their children. We need to create a culture of visibility and transparency so that we highlight the incredible work happening in our schools every day.
   c. MMSD should be leading the nation in increasing our reading and math proficiency scores. We need to do better in these domains.

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

   a. Ensure that we have shared leadership models in place. For example, we should ask for a parent advisory group to be formed around special education.
b. Develop an information campaign for the community so that they may embrace the school district as our most precious public display of democracy. Leverage our community partners to help tell this story.

c. Assess rigor and content relevance in every classroom.

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

a. Help create systems that ensure funding for students through post-secondary education. Our narrative about going to school and going to college is too oversimplified and students are entering college underprepared and then leaving with substantial debt.

b. Inform policies that support initiatives to bring awareness and provide funding to treat the mental health crisis we are witnessing in our communities and schools.

c. Ensure that programs that meet the basic needs of every person are well funded and established. I believe this helps remove some of the burden from our classroom teachers.

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

I would advocate for these needs by creating a public narrative created by continual conversations with community leaders and stakeholders. I believe that at the root of most change are relationships that allow for the exchange of ideas. I will also advocate for data informed decision making that will help the school board, teachers, administrators and the community as a whole move towards necessary decision making that makes sense for our district.

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

a. Students leaving public schools.

b. Teachers leaving public schools.

c. Historical oppression of marginalized populations.

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

a. We need to transform the narrative around our public schools so students stay. I spoke a bit about this in an earlier question. This will be a key component of my tenure as a school board member.

b. We need to build infrastructure and supports that retain teachers. We must document and understand why teachers are leaving and we must address this and fix it.

c. We need to continually acknowledge our past with sincerity and move forward with open minds.

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 first step to this is retaining the teachers we currently have. On a macro level, I will work with MMSD Human Resources to better understand attrition among teachers and staff. I will look at exit interviews to help synthesize why we are losing our teachers, especially our teachers of color. That data will inform, at least partly, what needs to change structurally to help retain teachers.

I also believe that “grow your own” programs can be successful, however, that it is just one part of the solution. I think we need to partner with our local colleges to ensure that teacher prep programs also attract teachers of color. We need to make the road to becoming a teacher more seamless while still maintaining the necessary rigor so teachers are well equipped and prepared for the classroom.
11. What do you view as the underlying issues involving the opportunity gap? How would you address those?

In my opinion, the complex answer to this question is that the opportunity gap is perpetuated by underlying racial and economic disparities that are rooted in historical oppression. This is an overwhelming issue, so I would like to address it by reflecting on my own practice as a teacher.

The question I always reflect upon is: What is the underlying issue that is not allowing my students to be successful in my classroom? I have pondered this question for 15 years, and I believe the answer is rooted in two main categories. First, I believe that sometimes our unconscious bias leads us to believe that some students can’t do things that other students can do. Whether that is reading difficult text or solving complex mathematical equations it is not unheard of to have a student show up in our class and for us to think, “I’m not sure they can do this.” I believe that this assumption has led to lowering the rigor necessary for students to advance. Second, some research that has guided my work for the past few years is The Opportunity Myth. In a nutshell, the Opportunity Myth is that students believe if they show up to school, do what is asked of them and meet the expectations of their teachers they will be ready for the future. Unfortunately, research has shown that at multiple grades students are not actually doing grade level work and thus are not advancing to the appropriate academic levels. This cycle just perpetuates itself until students graduate and then find themselves drastically underprepared for their future.

I would address this in our school district by sharing this research and looking for institutions who have adopted some of their practices to see where we might be able to work on increasing rigor in our classrooms to continue to close the chronic opportunity gap.

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

There is tremendous opportunity to use instrumentality charter schools to explore alternative ways of teaching and learning across the district. I support public charter schools governed by the BOE.

13. What are your thoughts about private charter schools governed by others? (Non-instrumentality schools)

Charters should provide public schools with the means to do their work even better. By using Non-instrumentality schools, we lose the intentional partnerships that I believe are necessary for success. I do not support Non-instrumentality schools. I do think as leaders of our district we need to gain the competitive advantage and help our community see why Madison Public Schools are the best place for their children.

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

I do not support vouchers.

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

I have been active in my children’s school since kindergarten. I am a regular classroom volunteer. I have attended PTO meetings and I have met with teachers and administrators on multiple occasions. Issues that motivate my attendance include the recent math curriculum implementation, teacher attrition and school climate issues.

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
I believe there should be an advisory board of teachers and other employees to have a voice with the board of education about their pay and benefits.

b. Their working conditions
Teachers and other employees should have multiple opportunities to speak about their working conditions. I believe the first responder to this should be school principals. If this does not provide the changes needed, teachers should be able to readily connect with other administrators or board members if their working conditions are not what they need to be for student success and for their own job satisfaction.

c. Their students’ learning conditions (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions, behavior response)
Teachers voices need to be heard, loudly, on this issue as well. Teachers are the subject matter experts on student learning conditions. This could be done through advisory groups, a strong presence by the BOE in schools and multiple methods and opportunity for feedback.

d. Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions
I believe there should be an advisory board of teachers and other employees to have a voice with senior leadership and curriculum designers about curriculum and assessment. Teachers are in the classroom every single day and are tasked with implementation of proposed curriculum. It just makes good sense to get that necessary feedback.

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?

This is a multifaceted issue and thus it needs to be looked at from a multifaceted lens. My initial plan to increase pay for school staff would be to dig into the numbers. Where is the money currently allocated and where might there be places to reallocate funds to teacher salary pools? Are there other funding sources that can cover externalities that schools absorb into their budget? Having a critical eye and an understanding of the myriad complexities will be key.

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?
      This is something that I have recently learned about and I think it is fantastic. I support it wholeheartedly. It provides the necessary checks and balances to ensure that MMSD employees are being well supported.

20. The school board is considering two referenda questions for the community to vote on in 2020 – one for facilities and one for operating expenses. Do you support these referenda? Yes.

   a. If yes, how will you work to support the passage of these referenda?
      I will work with the community to help them understand the investment they are making and what it means to the economic growth and vitality of Madison for years to come. Transparency will be important, as will ensuring that the money secured from these referenda support and fund what we explained they would.
21. 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?

If I am tasked with identifying $10 million worth of cuts, I will first look to areas that have the least amount of impact on student learning and teacher morale and retention. I will first look for cuts in non-essential process and procedure expenditures. I will then look at administrative positions that are not direct teacher or student facing and identify places where efficiencies might be possible.

If I can invest $10 million in our schools I will invest in physical infrastructure that supports the fine arts, STEM programs and athletics.

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

I believe that MMSD really tries to provide parents and students with a voice on issues that impact them. I have been impressed over the past few months with the number of sessions open to the community to provide feedback. From my experience this is an extremely complicated yet essential form of communication. This communication is the backbone on which trust is built. If you ask for feedback, you need to be well positioned to respond to the feedback. That being said, we need to continually find ways to bring voices to the table, ensuring that those who are sometimes not heard are included and receive a response. This will require multiple levels of outreach including e-mail, social media, US postal mail and ultimately face to face conversations.

I do believe that MMSD has tried to use some advisory groups, but as a parent I have found this process discouraging. A few years ago I tried to get on an advisory group and my calls were not returned. These sorts of structural breakdowns are not acceptable.

23. 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 think the goals of the BEP are essential to student success. I believe in systems that reduce out of school suspension. I believe in systems that support excellence and equity. I believe that every MMSD student is a scholar capable of learning.

b. What are your thoughts about the implementation of the plan?
   Given what we have learned through family and staff feedback the BEP has fallen short of what it intended to do. I believe this is rooted in the lack of strategic implementation that was provided when the BEP was first released. A lack of support staff at implementation and throughout the time the BEP has been in place has contributed to an ineffective plan that has caused a lot of stress and disruption for everyone involved.

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

I believe that shared leadership is essential to the transformational change in front of us. I believe we need to leverage ourselves as equal stakeholders with equal commitments to public education and the students we serve.

25. Who do you plan to seek advice from should you be elected to the Board of Education?
I will look to previous board members for advice. I will also consult retired teachers and administrators from the district. I am fortunate to already have several of these connections. I also have several people in the community that I look to for advice. These include senior leadership at Edgewood College and Madison College, as well as previous members of the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin.

26. Are you seeking MTI’s endorsement of your campaign?
   Yes.

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

28. 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 was recently asked about what’s motivating me to run. I loved this question because I really believe it gets at the heart of who I am as teacher, a learner and a leader. Over my career I have seen incredible students overcome unthinkable challenges and barriers. They have inspired me to push myself as a teacher and never make any assumptions about the child in front of me. Rooted in the success of these students is their teachers. Every student I have ever met can tell me a story about the teacher who believed in them, the teacher who made a difference. We have incredible students and amazing teachers. We need to continue telling that story to reignite our cities commitment to public education.

29. Who has endorsed your campaign?

   I am currently working on this and expect to have endorsements in the near future.

30. Who serves on your campaign committee?

   Missy Dittmer-Herrmann

31. Are you aware of any conflicts of interest which may prohibit you from voting on certain items before the Board of Education? If so, what are they?

   I am not aware of any conflicts of interest which would prohibit me from voting on any items.