MTI-VOTERS
2020 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 17, 2020.

MTI-Voters will be interviewing candidates on the evening of Wednesday, January 22, 2020 between 5:00 and 8:00 p.m., at MTI (33 Nob Hill Road).

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

   a. I believe in the power of education to change lives, communities, and destinies. My story as a Black Male with an IEP who experienced poverty and homelessness in MMSD is a testament to that. Every person has the right to a high quality public education. Here in Madison, our education system has effectively disenfranchised Black and Brown students through generations. While we have incredible educators and staff that help students learn and overcome adversity, we need systemic change. I’m running for the Board of Education because we must root out the injustice in our education system; cultivate the voice and agency of our students, and support educators and staff in demanding environments.

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

   a. At its best, education liberates individuals by empowering them to control their own destinies. Quality public education means schools build communities where all children can see themselves thrive no matter their background; where students learn holistically, which means their social-emotional needs are met and cultivated; and where they are challenged with high-quality, rigorous academic curricula. Quality public education means educators and staff are supported to inspire and rouse the curiosity of their students in their unique learning journeys. Quality public education means parents and community members are engaged and given opportunities for meaningful input.

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

   a. We have dedicated staff who are committed to educating and supporting our students. MMSD staff are the first ones in our buildings and last ones to leave every day. While Act 10 has put us in challenging circumstances, I am proud to say we gave teachers and staff the largest pay increase in at least a decade within the first two months of my being appointed to the Board of Education. I’m deeply committed to compensating staff and ensuring they have a stronger voice in School Based Leadership Teams (SBLTs).

   b. Our community invests in our schools and students. From the YWCA and Healthy Kids Collaborative to community schools and the Black Excellence Coalition, community partnerships foster and support the incredible talent in our schools. While there is much work to do in enhancing existing partnerships and
building new ones, there is a clear willingness on the part of MMSD’s community leaders and organizations to collaborate with our district.

c. We have one of the most trans-inclusionary policies in the country. We should all be proud that we are a national leader for our students with trans-identities, and thankful for our students who got us here with their relentless advocacy.

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

a. Hiring and retaining Black and Brown teachers

b. Disproportional results for Black and Brown children

   i. From literacy rates to discipline, especially at the intersection of students with IEPs, we have work to do to ensure our schools are spaces where everybody feels a sense of belonging and can thrive.

c. Community participation in district governance and transparency

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

a. Contextually, it’s worth noting that Black teachers make up only 7 percent of public school teachers nationwide. The US has never fully recovered from the Black teacher exodus following Brown v. Board. We must be intentional, strategic, and exhaust all options in this challenging environment. I believe in investing heavily in grow-your-own programs, scholarships, student loan debt forgiveness, and stipends to incentivize our students to pursue degrees in education and teach in Madison. Additionally, working with our recruitment team, we should proactively recruit teachers from HBCU’s and other Black and Brown educator associations. Finally, like many institutions in Madison, we have to improve the climate and culture for Black professionals in MMSD.

b. When I speak to students about justice, I talk about the world we inherit and our responsibility to make it better. Like many educational spaces in America, we inherited a school system that was not created for Black and Brown students to thrive. This is especially true for our Black and Brown students with special needs and/or disabilities. As someone who graduated from MMSD with an IEP, I know how important student support services and school psychologists are to a student’s social-emotional and academic growth. Fundamentally, we must prioritize investment in mental health services and wrap around services rather than punitive punishment systems. Just as critical is fully investing in quality early childhood education such as all-day 4K and even birth-to-three programs. All day 4K benefits all children, and it particularly benefits our students from disadvantaged backgrounds. MMSD’s partial-day 4K classes have proven results in closing literacy gaps and better social emotional outcomes.

Moreover, we must continue the work of implementing a new science-based literacy curriculum with substantial input from teachers on which materials we purchase and professional development that
makes sense. Fortunately, an avalanche of new research, “The Science of Reading,” has helped guide our thinking in this undertaking.

When we talk about restorative justice, we cannot limit the conversation to alternatives to discipline for Black and Brown children. We must embrace restorative justice as a way of life and concept to heal the injustices in our education system perpetrated on Black and Brown children. I am working on the creation of a city-wide Black Student Union (BSU) so the school board will clearly hear their voices. Our educators and staff are committed to justice and educating all of our students -- we need on-going, comprehensive restorative justice training for all district staff and administrators and support they need.

c. The school board is not your average governing body; it deals with sensitive subjects close to people’s hearts. Students, staff, parents, community partners, and constituents deserve more voice and opportunities to engage in board decisions. As such, I recommend forming a citizen task force to provide recommendations on how we improve transparency and engagement with community members, especially Black and Brown parents.

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

a. Fully fund all-day 4k for public school districts

b. Allow public sector unions, especially teachers unions, to collectively bargain

c. Fix the school funding formula to prioritize equity. The current formula doesn’t favor districts like MMSD with high numbers of students experiencing poverty and high equalized property value.

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

a. As a member of the Board of Education, we have a platform. It’s our responsibility to strategically use that platform and advocate on behalf of our children. In many areas, including full-day 4K and equitable school funding, we can find common cause with school districts across Wisconsin - rural, urban and suburban – to apply pressure and advocate for change.

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

a. Children don’t learn in a vacuum. Some of our young people walk into our schools having experienced incredible amounts of trauma.

b. Our state government has been hostile to public education over the last 8 years. While Governor Evers provides a glimmer of hope, our state legislature remains an obstacle

c. Over the next 20 years, our student enrollment is projected to decline or, at best, remain even.
9. How do you think the MMSD can best meet these challenges?
   
a. By taking a holistic view of education, we can partner with community service providers to provide wraparound services and address the needs and traumas of our students. From hiring more student support staff such as psychologists and guidance counselors, to offering opportunities like support groups for students with incarcerated parents, we can help students overcome adversity and improve their social-emotional and academic outcomes.

b. See 7A.

c. There are things we can do to make MMSD schools attractive to new parents. By improving trust and engagement over time, upgrading our four comprehensive high schools, and investing in educational opportunities for children that reflect their diverse cultures, interests, and gifts I believe we can change the narrative.

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?

   a. See 5A.

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

   a. A history of white supremacy in America, accruing overtime. Through systematic disenfranchisement and dispossession, communities of color have been neglected and harmed while being told it was their fault, or that it never happened at all. Conceptually, we must get rid of the “at-risk” child and instead examine and change the society that put children “at-risk” in the first place. We must move with a sense of urgency to move resources, human and otherwise, to historically disenfranchised communities.

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

   a. Instrumentality schools are great opportunities for innovation and specialization. Nuestro Mundo and Wright (formerly a charter) are clear examples. Like our public schools, we must hold them to a high standard for our students and meet MMSD requirements. Our challenge is to see where we can replicate, scale, and build off those innovations and successes throughout the whole public school system.

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

   a. I do not support private charters, but they do exist in Madison. I do not like losing per-pupil dollars to 2X charters.

14. What are your thoughts about vouchers (using public funds to pay for private schools)?
a. I do not support public money going to unaccountable voucher schools.

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

16. Describe which of the following issues you believe teachers and other employees should have a voice in and what that would look like?

   a. Their pay and benefits
   b. Their working conditions
   c. Their students’ learning conditions (e.g. class size, use of technology, building conditions, behavior response)
   d. Curriculum and assessment selection and decisions

   All of the above; this looks like maintaining the collaborative handbook process, further democratizing the SBLT, and fighting for full collective bargaining rights at the state level. Many of these decisions are ultimately board decisions and teachers should have a voice in all of the above.

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

18. School staff experienced a reduction in take home pay after Act 10 was passed and salary increases have not kept pace with the cost-of-living. The District is experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified employees. If elected to the Board of Education, what is your plan to increase pay for school staff?

   a. I will advocate for better teacher compensation at the state and local level; as well as listen to staff on how we improve staff climate and morale for all teachers, especially teachers of color. Moreover, it is absolutely critical we advocate and pass the operating referenda to maintain teacher compensation and class size policy.

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

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

20. 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. Campaign for their necessity, especially the operating referendum. A strong, vibrant Madison is dependent upon a strong, vibrant school system. The operating referendum is critical for maintaining class size policy, staff compensation, and strategic equity projects. These referenda are absolutely necessary to invest in our children, educators, and buildings.

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?
a. If the operating referenda fails to pass, depending on state level variables, we will face a ~$7-10 million budget shortfall over the next four years. Those cuts can’t be from just one area of the budget. It then becomes necessary to speak with all stakeholder groups and community members to build a consensus of collective sacrifice. We all know the difficult position that the state puts school districts in.

b. $10 million would go a long way to building all-day 4K capacity, building maintenance (assuming the facilities referendum passes), and housing stipends, student loan debt forgiveness for teachers, and total teacher compensation

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

a. More citizen committees commissioned by the board, diversifying PTOs, implementing Parents of Color advisory groups like we have at Whitehorse and La Follette, and better including their voices in decisions made by SBLTs.

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?
   The BEP is an ambitious plan for inclusion of students who experience behavioral health challenges in the classroom. Fundamentally, its intention was to address the gross disciplinary disparities between white and nonwhite students.

b. What are your thoughts about the implementation of the plan?
   The plan wasn’t adequately resourced and staff wasn’t provided enough professional development to incorporate restorative justice into the culture of our schools and classrooms. We have to be more intentional about what we ask staff to do and conscious of initiative overload.

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

a. I see them as a collaborative governing team of eight. The Board provides oversight, accountability and crafts long-term strategies, goals and philosophies, as well as writes policy and passes annual budgets. The superintendent is responsible for implementing plans, managing the district, and reporting to the board on progress.

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

a. I have a variety of thought partners: former and current educators, board of education members, administrators, and advocates; MTI and connections at teachers unions across the country; and large cross-sections of students, parents and community stakeholders/partners.

26. Are you seeking MTI’s endorsement of your campaign?
27. Are you seeking MTI political action contributions for your campaign?

a. 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?

a. I graduated from MMSD schools as a Black male with an IEP who experienced homelessness and was once considered chronically truant. I know the first-hand the challenges faced by the students we are struggling to engage and help. As we all know, there are no easy solutions to the challenges we see in education. It requires a large-scale collective commitment to our children and deep belief that all children are capable of learning.

29. Who has endorsed your campaign? Looking forward to releasing names of endorsers publicly very soon.

30. Who serves on your campaign committee? A variety of friends and thought partners

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?

a. No.