

**Four Lakes Green Party Endorsement Questionnaire 2019,
TJ Mertz, MMSD Board of Education Seat #5**

1. We ask that those seeking our endorsement become a member of the Four Lakes Green Party. Are you a member or are you willing to become a member? Why are you interested in the Greens' endorsement? What kind of a relationship would you like your campaign to have with the Greens? As a Green-endorsed candidate, we would ask that you refuse to accept financial support from corporations and corporate interests. We also ask that candidates that we have endorsed either support other Green Party-endorsed candidates for office, or refrain from publicly endorsing candidates running against other Green-endorsed candidates. Are you willing to agree to these requests?

I am not a member, but would join.

I know and admire some of the members of the Four Lakes Green Party, share the vast majority of the positions of the Green Platform, and admire the local work of the Green Party.

I would expect the campaign to prominently list the Four Lakes Green affiliation, and would hope the party would promote my candidacy and – this is most important – provide volunteers.

I have no intent to seek or accept donations from large corporations, however, it is possible that local small businesses may do in kind support/donations that I would accept.

I have already endorsed two alder candidates (Grant Foster and Tag Evers). I would not rescind those endorsements. At this time, I do not intend to endorse any other candidates this cycle, but without having seen the Four Lakes slate or how the candidates present themselves, I can't promise. I think it would be highly unlikely that I would.

2. In what ways are you currently active in your community? Have you run for public office before?

I have served on the Madison Metropolitan District Board of Education and this takes up about 95% of my community activism time and energy. Previously I had been active with Progressive Dane, and a variety of state and local educational advocacy groups. In 2011 I ran for Alder; I don't recall a formal Four Lakes endorsement opportunity in that election, but some people involved with the party were very helpful and supportive.

3. Poverty, criminal justice and racial disparities are primary issues in county and city government and our schools. What policies will you advocate for as a board member to address the various ways in which these issues affect our communities? What other issues would you describe as primary issues?

I am going to take poverty and racial disparities first. With both of these, my life-long commitment to public education is based on my belief that it is one of the best tools we have to reduce inequalities of all kinds, to build a better society. One of the things I have tried to do as Board Member is move away from seeking solutions by simplistically reducing students to a single demographic category, or test score. Even in broad district-wide discussions it is essential to understand that the challenges faced by immigrants from Africa overlap with, but are not identical to African American students born in Madison. The closer you look at multiple intersections of identities or challenges, the better you can understand what is happening. Teaching and learning does not take place at the district level, it happens in classrooms, and I think that our classroom teachers are best positioned to to understand and

help their students, which is why I have also fought for their voices to be heard at all levels, their knowledge respected, and their autonomy protected.

One of my highest priorities will always be those students who we are failing with, who are struggling the most, and most of these are students of color, students in poverty, immigrant students, and students with disabilities (and often combinations of these). Often this means striving to make sure their basic needs are met, frequently in conjunction with community partners. With others, it might be improved, more relevant instruction and curricula. For many of our special education students, staffing and resources are not adequate. Some practices, like smaller class sizes and consciously working to build more inclusive classrooms, schools, and professional communities will help all students. There is much more to be said.

On criminal justice, the intersection with the district is in both how we address behavior internally, and our relations with the police and the criminal justice system.

I was one of the earliest and strongest supporters of the attempt to replace punishment with support and education, and limit exclusionary practices while making them productive, that is known as the Behavior Education Plan. I still believe in those goals, celebrate the progress we have made, and am well aware of how far we have to go. We still have too many instances of disruptive behavior, too weak a sense of community and belonging, and are doing too little to provide support and education. I have and will continue to work to provide the resources and create the culture where the goals will be realized. This is long term work.

Some of the progress we have made includes significant reduction in the number of expulsions, more careful use of suspensions, and expansions of restorative justice practices. One thing I have worked hard on, with some success, is expanding protections for students when they become involved in a police investigation at school.

This brings us to the issue of police in schools. I was one of two Board Members who pushed for discussion and changes to our ERO contract, instead of rubber stamping what had been in place for almost two decades. I was one of the Board Members who insisted we break current practices and convene a working, public committee, made up of diverse community members, to consider both further changes and the broader questions. I was a member of the committee, am proud of the work we did, and was honored to have served with such knowledgeable and dedicated people. I am pleased that the recommendations of that committee have served as the basis for contract negotiations with the city, and are being implemented internally. [The committee recommended many positive changes](#), but did not recommend ending the ERO program at this time. I agree with that recommendation, for many reasons. The primary one is that past experience and recent changes to state laws make it all but certain that police will often be in our high schools, and I believe the best way to protect our students from undue criminalization is to have some of those officers be familiar with our schools, students, and staff; trained according the recommendations of the committee, subject to a district oversight committee, and bound by a contract.

4. Environmental issues, such as transportation, water pollution, and fossil fuel infrastructure, are important in county and city government. What policies will you advocate for as a board member to address environmental issues in our community? What other issues would you describe as primary issues?

I have not done as much on this as I should. I have supported school gardens and out door education. I have pushed (with little success) for green and sustainable buildings. I have not done enough and would welcome ideas, and support to move ideas forward.

5. Tell us about your campaign. How is your campaign team organized? How have you been campaigning in your district so far? Is your campaign raising awareness of any other issues relevant to the Green Party's principles of grassroots democracy, social and economic justice, nonviolence, and ecological wisdom?

My campaign got off to a slow start, but I have good experienced people working with me. We will be doing forums, social media, traditional media, lit drops and canvassing, phone calls, and events. Grassroots democracy is central to my campaign (and for me a precondition for success with the others). As I wrote in my [campaign announcement](#):

I believe the most important issues are the erosion of trust and accountability.

I stand second to none in celebrating the great work of our students and staff, but believe continued improvement requires more. Too often concerns about public relations take precedence over forthrightly facing our failures. Too often discussions and even decisions take place behind closed doors. Too often the knowledge, experiences, and insights of many of our staff, our students, our families, and our community are marginalized.

Accountability begins at the ballot box, by electing a Board that is willing and able to insist upon transparency, public processes, and a responsive administration. I have continually demonstrated my commitment to these.

In order for us to provide our students the education they deserve, we need to work to repair the breakdowns of trust we see manifested in the divisions within our schools, within our community, and between too many of our families and our schools. We need to respect each other, assume the best intentions, and work together with honesty and hope.