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1. Why are you running for elected office?

The big answer is that I believe we have an obligation to contribute to the improvement of our community, and work for a better future. Getting more specific, I have long considered public education to be one of the most important ways we do this, and this led to my research, teaching, and activism in education. I struggled with the decision to run again; in the end because I have seen democratic practices at all levels of the district erode, too many students falling too far behind, too many staff members being disrespected, I think my knowledge, skills and commitments are more important than ever. Other than my family, serving on the school board is the most important thing I do.

2. What are your 3 biggest areas of concern with MMSD, and what would you like to see changed to address these concerns.

There are many things – like school climate, the behavior education plan, the budget – that will be before the Board in some fashion with or without my effort, the choices below are things where I have to work to bring attention to and/or they inform everything I try to do.

You have to start with the students, and for me that means starting with the students who we are failing with, those in danger of being functionally illiterate, or barely illiterate, those who are 2,3,4,5 grade levels behind by (almost) any measure). The district can't do everything we would like for or with every student, and when choices must be made, I always think we must focus our resources, time and energy first on those students first. Step one is that focus informing all decisions. Steps two and three, and beyond vary greatly as do our students. For some students it is working to make sure their basic needs are met, often doing this in conjunction with community partners (and advocating that the partners have the resources they need). With others, it might be pedagogy and curricula that better reach them (including the Arts). With our special education students, staffing and resources are not adequate. Some things, like smaller class sizes and consciously working to build inclusive classroom and school communities will help these, and all students. More directly, our systems of interventions and alternative programs have had limited success, and need much more attention.

For the second two, trust and accountability, I am going to quote from my campaign announcement:

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.

MMSD needs to do much better with transparency, (inclusive) shared decision-making (at all levels, from the Board to the classroom), and we have to earn trust by exercising trust.

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?

This is one where – since I am not required to submit answers – I am only going to answer partially. Some of the platform is ill-informed (lacking knowledge of present policies and practices) , some of it is ambiguous, and some of it is at a level of specificity that is impracticable. I am not going to go line-by-line and identify all the places where I can see these possibly leading to me not supporting. This also informed my choice of priorities. Under some of the big headings, I am strongly in support of the vast majority of the items, but there may be 2 or 3 where I am not. I will answer the first part on priorities and identify some important things I disagree with.

Priorities:

- Transparency, Participation, and Open Government (although I don't think meeting notices posted in every school is necessary).
- Public School Funding – both the state and local aspects of aligning resources to needs.
- Labor Rights.
- Equity and Inclusion (with the exceptions of “End exclusionary practices, zero-tolerance policies, and in-school arrest; Put a moratorium on all out-of-school suspensions; Expand ...AVID/TOPS”).

Major Items I do not support

“End exclusionary practices, zero-tolerance policies, and in-school arrest” – Exclusionary practices are sometimes necessary and positive; for me the key is make sure that the time spent away from the classroom is supportive and productive. I have zero-tolerance for sexual assault, for firearms in schools, for extreme violence against students or staff, however zero-tolerance doesn't mean you then write a student off or give up on them. MMSD policies discourage in-school arrests, but we do not have the power to end them.

Stop contracting with Madison Police Department for educational resource officer presence in schools. – I support the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee (see below).

End the practice of expelling students. – We are expelling very few students these days, less than a handful a year (many others are being placed in an expulsion abeyance program), and the early readmit dates have been relatively short, but I do think some expulsions – for sexual assault, firearms in schools, and extreme violence against students or staff should remain in place.

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?

See above. I am only going to list some of my concerns and efforts.

I have a proposal to bring appointed “advisory” under open meetings practices that I have been unable to get on an agenda (see here) – <https://madisonamps.org/2018/05/12/how-should-the-mmsd-board-of-education-operate/>

I have increasing concerns about the practice of Board Members discussing proposals, practices and agenda items in “briefings” with senior staff prior to public meetings (some proposals never make it to an agenda). I do not participate in these because I think we need to do our business in public (and believe these may violate open meetings laws).

I have repeatedly voted against going into closed session. Some of these were due to a lack of clarity about the topic, others were cases where the law allowed a closed session, but I did not think it was necessary.

As implied above, many things are decided by not deciding, the Board never takes a vote. I have continually pushed for votes, especially on early budget matters.

I have also continually pushed for better and fuller information to be provided to both the Board and the Public.

One Board Member can only do so much, as a I quoted above: “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.”

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?

Yes., I support the recommendations from the ad hoc committee on educational resource officers (EROs). I am proud of my work in bringing the police in schools issue forth, in forming the committee, in working with the committee, drafting the recommendations, and (where we are now) supporting these recommendations in negotiations and as the basis for internal MMSD policies and practices.

The second part seems abstract to me. With that in mind, I would initially say that respect, and a sense of community and belonging are the most important elements of safe schools . But these are things we have limited control of.

More concretely, I have supported efforts to enhance these, as well as the expansion of our Behavioral Health partnership, as well as school social work and psychological services, and doing much better with supportive responses to disruptive behavior. I have also opposed the use of metal detectors, and excessive spending on “hardening” our schools.

What strategies do you favor to address the achievement gap?

First, like many I follow Gloria Ladson-Billings in preferring “Opportunity” to “Achievement” in order to refocus on what we can do. I also prefer “Gaps,” plural, because the differences in challenges and outcomes are related to, race, language, gender and gender identities, economics, parental education, and more. So my first strategy is to use language that leads to more informed actions.

For my second, I would refer to the first part of my answer to Question #2.

I also want to add that respecting the professional judgment of our front line educators, listening to them in district and school wide decisions, and giving them more autonomy in their classrooms will help with gaps, as well as morale, climate, community, retention and more. This is true with all educators, but both research and personal experience show that it is especially important for retaining and attracting educators of color.

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

I recently voted in favor of renewing Nuestro Mundo's charter, but as a general rule do not favor Charters. I also think MMSD does a very bad job evaluating charter proposals, drafting charter contracts, monitoring our existing charters, and considering renewals.

Other than advocacy and exposure, under current state law there is very little we can do to slow the expansion of privatization and non-district charters. I have been active on these fronts for over a decade, and have recently worked to expose the unacceptable practices of the UW-System chartering office.

Less directly we can emphasize how our district differs from charters. I think transparency, and more open and inclusive decision-making must be part of this.

Last, and far from least, we need to continually enhance and improve the educational experiences of our students.