

**2020 Maryland Primary Election
Montgomery Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
SEIU Local 500**



SEIU: 2.2 MILLION WORKING MEN AND WOMEN FIGHTING FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

The Service Employees International Union is the largest and fastest growing union in North America. SEIU's mission is to build strength to gain fair wages, healthcare, pensions, safe workplaces, and respect for working Americans.

SEIU represents over 45,000 Healthcare, Property Service, and Public Sector Workers in Maryland and Washington D.C. More specifically, SEIU Local 500 represents 15,000 women and men working in universities, community colleges, public schools, pre-school education, child care, and in service to communities and the public interest in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

Thank you for participating in the SEIU Local 500's Candidate Questionnaire and Interview Process. SEIU Local 500 will consider your responses as we make a recommendation to our membership for both your party nomination process and/or the general election. To help assist us in our endorsement process we ask that you answer all questions as completely as possible and return by Monday, February 10th by 5:00 PM.

Return by e-mailing completed questionnaire to BOTH:

Travis B. Simon
Political Director
simont@seiu500.org

&

Dolly Kildee
SEIU PAC Chair
Dollykildee@hotmail.com

Also, if you have additional questions or concerns please contact Travis at 540-335-2969 or Dolly at 301-670-5543.

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

I affirmatively seek the endorsement and support of SEIU, its members, and their families. In seeking this endorsement, I pledge to support the rights of workers to join a union and collectively bargain. I understand that as a community leader, I may be called upon to help workers form unions, including speaking with employers and urging them to respect these same rights. Further, as an elected official, I will maintain regular contact with SEIU Local leaders and members. Any campaign contribution I may receive is from SEIU members who voluntarily give small monthly donations.

Name: Lynne Harris

Office Sought: Montgomery County Board of Education – at-large

Phone: 240-462-1483

Email: Lynne4Students@gmail.com

Signature: _____

1. Our union believes that economic inequality is one of the greatest threats facing our communities and the future of public education. If elected to the Board of Education, what initiatives would you be willing to undertake to begin addressing this critical issue?

Economic inequality is one of the greatest threats facing our communities. Economic inequality, housing inequality, transportation inequities – all have resulted in de facto segregated neighborhoods, which means de facto segregated schools. And our data shows that students in highly segregated schools, and schools with high rates of poverty (using FARMs as a proxy) do less well than our students in less diverse, lower poverty schools. Educational excellence is one of the best antidotes to economic inequality – providing students with a wealth of post-high school options. For that reason, ensuring that every school is uniformly excellent, and a wealth of high quality academic opportunities are available to all students, is the primary thing the Board of Education can do to address economic inequality.

I believe the Board of Education has a duty to be courageous in creating a system of diverse schools, instead of resting on the diverse school system that we have. If our average countywide FARMs eligibility is 37%, we shouldn't have any school with a FARMs rate higher than that – yet 40 of our 208 schools exceed that measure and we have true pockets of poverty where FARMs rates are above 70%. We are also a majority/minority school system, yet we have schools with almost no students of color, and schools that are more than 90% non-white.

We need to take steps that increase diversity in all schools – research shows that all students do better in truly diverse schools – and we have to ensure that all level-alike schools offer the same basic courses and opportunities. Then we need to make sure that opportunities that can't be available at all schools (like VAPA, Global Ecology, Language Immersion, and CAP) are **accessible** to all students – using proximity and transit modeling for geographic accessibility and – as a last resort – online learning. Finally we must make sure that the most challenged students have some of our strongest and most talented teachers and administrators.

Academically, we need to continue to expand our CTE programs, and market them robustly to ALL students – students are more engaged and far less likely to perform poorly academically or have attendance issues if they see real value and have deep interest in their courses. Our CTE programs also arm students with tools to leave high school with real economic opportunity – having attained professional licensure, certification, apprenticeships and experience in high-demand fields like IT, cybersecurity and health care, that make them truly career ready as soon as they graduate. Not only are they equipped to earn a living wage, but also have the ability to earn while they learn if they wish to pursue additional educational opportunities like college.

We also need to commit to implementing the Community School model with fidelity in our highest poverty schools, using the Concentration of Poverty grant funds provided by the Blueprint for Education to create robust Community School pilots in eight schools in 2020-21. Community Schools can help reduce economic inequality because the wrap-around services included in Community Schools include county partners who serve adults who are un- or under-employed with workforce development and job skills training.

External to our school system, the Board of Education and County can share relevant data on workforce development and growth trends, and strongly support Smart Growth initiatives that would start to make it possible for people to live anywhere in the county they wish – safe, walkable communities well-served by transit with truly affordable housing close to our biggest county employers.

2. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future recommends fulltime preschool for all of Maryland's 4 year olds, low income 3 year olds and those with special needs. If elected, will you support actively including SEIU Local 500 in discussions with the BOE and the Superintendent of how this may be achieved? Including options of neighborhood home childcare providers as deliverers of these services?

I have long been a supporter of universal pre-k as one of the most effective and comprehensive steps we can take to close the achievement gap --- for too many young children, that gap starts before they even set foot in a classroom. Funding expanded pre-k – to ensure every 3 year old has access – is a huge priority. Ensuring we have the capacity to deliver an evidence-based pre-K curriculum with fidelity across the county will require a comprehensive approach in which the school system, county Department of Health and Human Services, and childcare providers throughout the county collaborate to craft a comprehensive plan to ensure that pre-k programs are equitably available throughout the county, and are of uniformly high quality.

MCPS currently provides some headstart and pre-k programs, but lacks the infrastructural capacity to bring that to scale. I strongly believe that the best decisions are made when all stakeholders are substantively engaged in the decision-making process. That means working with representative organizations like SEIU to put together the strong, evidence-based academic program we want, and ensure that those delivering that academic program are well-trained, have all necessary resources readily available, have excellent, and ongoing, professional development opportunities and (since pre-k programs will likely be widely located – some inside schools, some in county facilities, some with neighborhood providers) a network of colleagues with whom they can plan, share best practices, brainstorm, and generally feel connected.

Planning with stakeholders to operationalize pre-k county-wide must also include discussions around data and reporting, empowering pre-k teachers/providers with the tools to refer children for screening, ensuring that all pre-k students receive relevant supports, and making sure that all of those things are efficient, and are useful to (not overly burdensome on) the pre-k providers. Ensuring that pre-K programs throughout Montgomery County are implemented with fidelity, so that everyone’s children – no matter where they live, how much they earn or what language they speak - can participate in a pre-K program of uniformly high quality, is yet another reason that SEIU – as the representative of many professionals who will be delivering Montgomery County’s pre-k programming and services, must be at the planning table.

3. The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future also recommends elevating the teaching profession by increasing compensation to teachers. Will you support increasing compensation for all of MCPS employees?

As a teacher, I know that EVERY staffmember inside the halls and walls of my school is essential to the work of the school. EVERY staffmember. Paraeducators, building services staff, security staff, lunchroom staff, IT support staff, bus drivers – everyone plays an important role in making our schools safe, welcoming spaces for our students to learn. I support finding sustainable methods and regular funding streams to increase compensation – including provisions for paid family leave – for all MCPS employees on a regular basis, much as is done for the federal workforce.

4. What are the three top issues motivating you to run for the Board of Education that would impact our members and their children, and their communities?

1.ENGAGEMENT - Including developing meaningful processes that bring the voice of students to the table for every MCPS decision. Not just testimony at a hearing or a board meeting, but truly operationalized throughout the offices, departments and divisions of MCPS. Students are the #1 customers of our school system. They know things about our schools that no one else does, they know things about their peers that no one else does, their daily experience in our schools must inform MCPS decision-making. The wisdom of students, and their ability to strategically solve problems faced by students in the 21st century, is a huge and valuable resource that should be tapped.

But – the student voice is often overlooked, and never routinely and substantively included in deliberations and decision-making. MCPS, through its ongoing work to increase community engagement, operationalizes the inclusion of communities in policy-making and important decisions. It reaches out through PTAs and community groups and homeowners associations and the like to engage on policy and capacity issues. MCPS has a long history of collaborating with representative organizations – like MCCPTA, NAACP Parents Council, Identity, MCEA, SEIU, and MCAAP – around the operating budget. But there’s no history of reaching out to students or student organizations in the same way. That should change.

We also must develop regular processes to ensure we are truly, substantively engaging **all members** of our school communities, so we don't just hear the loudest voices, or the people most savvy about advocating for their interests. Unless we view all members of our school communities – students, families, staff – as smart, valuable partners who can meaningfully inform all MCPS deliberations and decisions, we simply can't make the best decisions.

Directly contacting families, students and staff when major changes are proposed in a school – including door-knocking, virtual meeting opportunities, and fully translated meetings and materials. Continuing to reach out through every available communication platform. Empowering our teachers and staff with up-to-date information about proposed changes so that they can discuss those with anyone they meet in the course of their work... all of those methods of engagement will help our school system better inform everyone who is interested, and invested, in the success of our schools.

2. Open Data – In MCCPTA, we've been urging MCPS to move to true Open Data for years. The common refrain – we're legally prohibited from sharing some of the data stakeholders want to see – is untrue. Many comparable school systems openly share data – performance data, climate data, utilization data, spending guidelines, etc. – without triggering the legal and privacy concerns cited by MCPS. Building trust requires transparency. The data should be available in a format that allows easy comparisons and projections, and should also permit the creation of tables and charts that people can download. Transparency requires data sharing – the good, the bad, the indifferent – so that all of us see and know the same things at the same time, and can bring our collective expertise to problem-solving, implementing good ideas and evidence-based best practices, and holding one another accountable.

3. Consistency Czar(ina) – I would like to see MCPS dedicate a person/office to surveying our schools for consistency in programming, opportunities, communication, implementation and the like, and deriving a list at each level (ES, MS, HS) – of what each school should have, no matter where it is. Programs, opportunities, communications, expectations, processes, and courses that should be common to all. Then, a comprehensive and user-friendly database that specifies the common, required programming and clearly identifies the school-to-school differences— these programs are here, these courses offered there, this extra staff at the other place etc.

Two immediate benefits. To MCPS - the system would have a current and accurate source to know exactly which courses and programs are being offered and implemented where, and can work to make programs, courses and opportunities equitably available across the system, using proximity modeling, transit resources etc. MCPS would also have a clear means of holding itself accountable to offering the same basic level of courses, including accelerated and enriched opportunities, in all schools. MCPS would also have a comprehensive source of data identifying how essential parts of the work of our schools differ school-to-school – like how urgent communications are handled, how maintenance requests are made and monitored, how each school partners with its staff around school improvement and school climate.

The benefits to students, staff and families – an easy way to identify courses, opportunities, policies and programs of interest and access them, plus a clear list of expectations for them to take forward to any school they attend/in which they work. How well informed you are - as a parent, a staff member, a student - about everything happening in your school shouldn't depend on which school you're in.

A benefit common to all is a means of assessing and quantifying student demand and interest – to make course and program offerings as responsive to student interest as MCPS says it is, and to help MCPS track – on a continual basis – whether it has the staff and facilities necessary to deliver all courses of interest – some of which require educators with specific education, professional experience, or training, or specific facilities and equipment, in order to properly deliver course content and provide high quality instruction.

- 5. The public discourse regarding the county budget process always seems to pit the school system budget priorities against all other funding priorities, as if they were mutually exclusive of each other. Our union sees this as a significant problem. If elected, or reelected to the Board of Education, how would your leadership approach alter this dynamic?**

Writ large, I think Montgomery County needs to live up to its progressive bona fides with a clear message that **everyone**, no matter where you live, how old you are, whether you have kids in MCPS or not, **everyone** benefits from a strong

public school system. And that's not just words, there is a sound base of evidence demonstrating that it is far more cost effective to fund excellent schools than to pay the social and economic costs of underfunded, lower quality schools.

Strong schools attract businesses and investment. More business and investment equals more living-wage jobs. Strong schools attract new residents and developers. Strong schools produce the NextGen workforce. Well-prepared graduates fill in-demand jobs, earn that living wage, and become engaged and active county residents. They are less likely to require public assistance, commit crimes, and more likely to have stable families. As the Kirwan Commission's full report persuasively shows, Montgomery County (and Maryland) will more than recoup our investment in strong schools by the long term reduction in health care costs, long term social stability, the reduction in demands on social services and the long term increase in the tax base that comes from a well-trained, well-educated and innovative workforce that chooses to remain in Montgomery County – in part because of quality public schools.

The Board of Education must consistently and persuasively share that message throughout the county, along with the evidence that supports it. The Board must also work with our union partners to share that vision of strong schools, in part by partnering with SEIU and other groups to share information about what makes MCPS a good workplace, and how MCPS is creating a continuous pipeline of qualified graduates who can find their career in our schools. That work includes working with SEIU and other groups to ensure that MCPS continuously improves in its role as one of the largest employers in the county – consistently showing that MCPS is a good place to work and build a career.

The Board of Education's role in increasing public and Council support for our schools is to clearly and succinctly share the sound research and economic evidence that shows the enormous, cost effective benefits of strong schools. Whether you work in our school system, have students in our school system, hire students who are career ready because of our school system, or are a resident of the county who benefits because the county workforce is smart, capable, and competitive in the 21st century marketplace – in part because of our school system – you benefit from strong schools.

6. Will you pledge to make full funding of collective bargaining agreements a priority in the school board's budgeting process?

Yes

7. Will you commit to opposing the contracting out of Montgomery County Public School jobs?

Yes, except for narrow, short-term projects requiring unique outside expertise, like WXY Architects who are performing the MCPS boundary analysis, or the chemical analysts who did our water quality/lead analysis.

A longstanding concern about hiring from my years of advocating on many MCPS issues is the extent to which MCPS persists in placing former teachers and administrators in jobs for which they aren't truly prepared by education, training and experience, instead of hiring people who have the right skills for the job. As example we have many jobs requiring true professional and educational expertise in areas like crisis communication, child protection and human resources filled by former teachers or administrators. We also have unmet needs for non-educator expertise – like systems engineers, maintenance engineers and IT staff, and an ever present need for good paraeducators. The demand for those jobs, like the enrollment in our schools, is not going to decrease. We have to plan and hire to meet the needs of our system. Contracting out our system's needs is a band-aid, and doesn't serve us well.

8. If asked to do so, would you provide a letter of support to workers for their efforts to form a union?

One word. Yes.

9. Viability is an important consideration for our union in determining which candidates to support. A well-funded, strategically sound campaign means an opportunity for us to provide a meaningful "value added" to

your efforts. Can you describe your campaign structure, the amount of money you've raised, and your strategy for winning? (Please note that our committee will hold this information in strict confidence.)

I am fortunate to have built a large network of countywide support after having spent thousands of hours over the last decade advocating for and with schools, students, and school communities all over the county. I have a core kitchen cabinet of 20 people – each of whom brings a unique depth of knowledge about our school system and a unique set of skills – fundraising, web design and management, social media, translation skills, communications, campaign management, experience as a candidate, etc.

My time spent advocating for schools at the state and local level has also resulted in key endorsements – County Executive Marc Elrich, Councilmember Evan Glass, former BOE candidates Julie Reilly and Lynn Amano – and many others forthcoming.

I also have a large group of students working with the campaign who appreciate the work I've done over the years to augment the student voice in MCPS, and support them in their advocacy. We're staffing voter registration drives, sharing many areas of our collaborative work via social media, and knocking on doors each weekend.

Our fundraising is moving along well. We have pledges totaling \$50,000, but are working to be strategic and sustainable in our spending and budgeting. I don't want to take in more donations than I need. Of note, all of our vendors (signs, campaign literature, t-shirts) are union, and local.