

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS RETIREES ASSOCIATION
Political Action Committee

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR BOARD OF EDUCATION
2020

The County school budget pays a significant portion of retirees' health insurance costs. What is your position on maintaining or improving upon this commitment to MCPS Retirees?

The impacts of the 2012 pension shift have now been fully phased in, so the county should be able to maintain its obligations to our retirees going forward, absent a major economic downturn. I support MCPS maintaining its obligation to fund our portion of retirees' health insurance costs.

Mandatory state and local student testing receive much criticism from some. What are your thoughts on student testing? What would you support as a Board member?

As a teacher and parent, I don't believe we should do any testing unless it provides valuable information to help inform instruction, monitor student progress, and help us identify students who require additional supports to achieve to their potential.

While I see value in an objective, comprehensive test that is tailored to evaluate comprehension of core curriculum and academic content, there is absolutely no value in administering a test that is not effectively reflective of the relevant curriculum. In addition, I am troubled by MSDE mandated testing when the State doesn't collaborate with Maryland's 24 school systems to ensure that the school systems are aware of the content evaluated on these state mandated exams. I have additional concerns when MSDE can't/won't share "cut" scores with the schools – particularly, as with the MISA, when MSDE is requiring that students pass the MISA to satisfy graduation requirements, but can't tell the schools what a passing score will be.

Fortunately MCCPTA was able to lead a charge to get MSDE to remove the MISA "passing" requirement until cut scores are transparently shared, but I remain concerned that specific content to be assessed isn't being made available to enable school systems to assess the MISA's fairness and relevance.

I am also generally supportive of the Less Testing, More Learning legislation, but do believe that MCPS needs a commonsense testing strategy that holds students accountable for essential learning, without grading and assessment policies that allow students to game the system – like the 50% rule, and policies that place heavier weight on first semester grades.

If the County Council had to cut the school operating budget, they historically asked the Board to prioritize. What programs would you reduce or eliminate?

If I had to hit the “pause” button on programs in the proposed FY21 operating budget, it would be the expansion of Innovative School Year and Dual-Language/Two-way Immersion elementary schools. Not because I don’t find these programs valuable, but because delaying expansion for a year would permit MCPS to gather another year’s worth of data on how the programs are working, and what could be adjusted to make implementation more effective and efficient.

In addition, an additional year could facilitate a far better process of community engagement with the school communities to which Innovative Calendar or Two-way Immersion are to be expanded – community engagement surrounding initial rollout of both Two-way immersion (particularly at Whetstone and Rolling Terrace) and Innovative Calendar (Arcola and Roscoe Nix) was far from optimal. MCPS can and should do much better.

What is your overall assessment of the job that MCPS is doing for children? Explain.

Overall, I believe that MCPS is very well-intentioned and truly wants to help every student achieve.

My main concerns relate to the following issues:

- Lack of real-world accountability for students – too many MCPS policies that allow students to shrug off academic obligations yet suffer little academic consequence
- The need for more comprehensive and holistically supported strategies for supporting undocumented and newly arrived students – especially those with significant interruptions in education. We mean well, and we try – but MCPS lacks a process for following and supporting these students once they’re assigned to a school. How well we support students and families, and how connected they feel to MCPS, largely rests on the shoulders of PPWs and PCCs – who may or may not have the training and professional development to help these students successfully integrate into our schools, and navigate their academic journey in MCPS.
- We are a diverse school system, but we aren’t a system of diverse schools. De facto segregation in our schools is real, and we have significant pockets of poverty, and persistent populations of black and brown students who underperform in comparison to their white and Asian peers. All of that needs to change – with a substantive, intentional, proactive approach to ensure that we are evolving into a far more equitable school system.

What is your position on vouchers for public or private charter schools?

Generally I oppose spending public money on any school that isn't a true public school, and even though most states that permit public charter schools claim that the public charter schools must adhere to all or most of the same reporting, admission and other legal obligations as true public schools, my reading hasn't yielded many reports of successful "public" charter schools that do in fact educate student populations that mirror the demographics of the public schools in the jurisdiction in which they operate.

Education Weekly published a piece in 2018 that looked at how responsive public charter schools were to inquiries from parents of special needs students. Using a 'secret shopper' methodology, the project reported that in general charter schools were between 5-10% less likely to respond to inquiries from parents whose children had significant special needs than they were to other inquiries.

There are also significant concerns about the number of public (and private) charter schools that fail, the fact that teacher training and accreditation requirements are not the same – many jurisdictions don't require charter school teachers to have teaching credentials, and a lack of oversight regarding curriculum. And although almost every state requires charter schools to adhere to all state and federal civil rights legislation, anecdotal reports of discrimination – particularly based on religion and gender-identity – are troubling.

Unless and until all of those concerns were demonstratively and substantively addressed, I can't see supporting public charter schools.

Name: *Lynne Harris* **BOE District:** *at-large* **Date:** *January 27, 2020*

Please return the completed questionnaire and the candidate bio by January 24, 2020 to Loudov37@gmail.com