



MCEA Questionnaire MCPS BoE Candidates 2024 Primary Election

Natalie Zimmerman, District 2

1. Why are you running for this position? What personal attributes, characteristics, and experiences make you the right candidate for this position?

I am running because I want to affect real change. I saw the ineptitude of the system come to a point this year and I am truly afraid for its potential to continue. There is an opportunity for a recent classroom teacher to enter the board without the strings of personal ties to the establishment that can work for the interests of educators and students. I believe it is abhorrent that Montgomery County Board of Education does not have a specified teacher member and I hope to be the advocate that teachers deserve while serving on the Board of Education.

2. Please share an overview of your campaign, including your key endorsements, fundraising, campaign plan, and why you believe you will be a competitive candidate.

My campaign centers around my experience as a public school teacher. I know the system from one of its most crucial points of success, which makes me extremely qualified to speak from it.

My undergraduate degree is in international studies and political science. I am educated in this field and I can utilize my training as a member of the Board.

I believe I am a competitive candidate not only because I am experienced as a teacher, but because I come with the experiences of a teacher. I know how to balance an absurdly high number of demands at once and meet the needs of many with few resources. I know hard work because I work like a teacher. I am committing to work hard for students and educators of MCPS.

3. How can MCPS better meet the needs of students who are pursuing a career pathway approach and would benefit from an expanded Career and Technology Education (CTE) in the county? Please provide specific details.

I come from a school district in Michigan that was rich with CTE opportunities for students. I believe that education should encompass as many opportunities for students as possible - especially to expand the number of sites for students. Not every student is college-bound, but every student must be afforded the opportunities to succeed.

4. What is your stance on the amount of standardized testing in MCPS for measuring student achievement? To what extent do you believe MCPS is complying with current testing laws and regulations?

I strongly believe that students are over-tested. When I taught 4th grade, there were 18 instructional days used for state and locally mandated testing during April and May alone for my ten-year-old students. This goes against the requirement laid out in the 2017 Maryland Law "Less Testing More Learning". I believe secondary teachers should have more voice in the assessment of their students, including the use of final exams. If MCPS wants to be student centered, then students need less time being assessed and more time learning from the high-quality educators that the county employs. Tests communicate a number or score, not achievement nor potential. MCPS must reduce testing requirements.



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5. Do you support employee Paid Family Leave policies for professional, supporting services, and administrative staff? Please explain your position.

I find the current 2 days of paid maternity leave to be barbaric. In a female dominated field such as education, MCPS is shameful in not supporting the women who choose to give birth and moreover, shameful in the lacking policies on Paid Family Leave. The upcoming Time to Care Act outlines 12 weeks of paid leave with benefits beginning of January 2026. MCPS must go further and contribute more than their 50 percent.

6. How would you address critical concerns with staff recruitment and retention?

One of the biggest problem in gaining and retaining highly qualified staff is the lack of a living wage. The other problem is that we demand more and more of the each member of the system from day to day creating an untenable workload. My positions on addressing this include paying all staff more, as there are shortages everywhere across buildings and positions. There is a Special Education crisis. There are open positions in Central Office, Human Resources, and the Employee Assistance Program. As more work is added to staff, there are fewer and fewer resources to support them. We must stop the hemorrhaging of staff by creating manageable workloads, hiring more people, and increasing wages.

7. State your view of the contract negotiation process between the Board of Education and MCEA. What do you see as your role in that process?

It is the role of the board to engage with the negotiation processes, which includes MCEA. Quite frankly, I do not understand the Board's current hands-off approach in this endeavor. Should I be elected, I will be involved in this process and I will be an advocate for staff and student needs. No matter the cost of the negotiations, I will not be afraid to ask the County Council to fully fund the MCPS budget.

8. Are you aware of the issues concerning the increasing time and workload demands on educators? What ideas do you have to address this issue? Please provide details.

As a current classroom teacher in MCPS, I am fully aware of the demands and their steady increases. Teachers need smaller classes and more planning time. Teachers need to feel fully entitled to end their work day at contract hours. Teachers need 100% management of their own planning time. Teachers are professionals that are able to control their own planning and set their own meeting times.

9. What do you view as MCEA priorities? How will you work with MCEA to achieve those priorities?

MCEA's priorities are to support, grow, and champion all teachers across the county. Teachers working conditions are the students learning conditions. MCEA wants true collaboration with each interested party in order to create a system that functions soundly and equitably. As a member of the Board, I would be the first to sign up to collaborate on this endeavor by advocating for MCEA to my fellow board members and to the County Council.



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10. Why do you think that the County Council didn't fully fund the budget for MCPS last year? What makes you the ideal candidate to facilitate and build relationships that prioritize fully funding the budget?

Members of the board need to build relationships with the County Council. The Board must always advocate for our students and educators, and as a member, I will not be afraid to push for the County Council to act in the best interest of our schools. Fully funding the budget is essential to our success as a school system and I will utilize every avenue I have to get the crucial funds to our students.

11. What will you do to ensure the Board of Education does not delegate its decision-making authority to the superintendent and their staff?

While the role of the superintendent is necessary, we have seen how the position can become easily corrupt. Without the accountability to constituents that the Board of Education holds, the superintendent can easily become swayed and follow their own interests. I would advocate for the Board of Education to have their own staff that is independent of MCPS staff. MCPS bringing critical information to the Board allows for misrepresentation of data and fact.

12. Do you believe that the Board of Education has delegated their decision-making authority to the Superintendent and their staff? Please explain.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Education to employ and oversee the Superintendent and this shall not be reversed. Decisions have been given to the Superintendent and their staff in the past and I do not believe this should be afforded to them again in the future. The Board must demand to take decision making power over MCPS and to ensure that all future Superintendents are working for the Board of Education in Montgomery County. The Board would be prudent to vet and scrutinize each candidate for Superintendent to the fullest capacity to certify that the future of MCPS is in honest and capable hands.

13. How do your views support protections for diversity and equity in hiring, curriculum, and operations?

As an abolitionist teacher, I support and advocate for my students based on diversity and equity every single day. Students should be able to look around their school and see people who represent them in all staffing positions. Speaking from experience, the diversity of the elementary curriculums is abysmal. The Board of Education should not only be requiring lessons surrounding diversity, inclusion, and equity, and choosing curriculums that spotlight and uplift the identities of our students, but allowing for teachers to have the freedom to choose texts and resources that will not only teach the standards, but will include and celebrate the students they educate in their classroom every day with respect to their race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, language(s) etc.

14. How will you actively work to get a balanced view on the state of MCPS? What sources will you use to get your information?

My first source of information is through my firsthand experience as a teacher. I will continue to utilize my experiences with my colleagues and consult their opinions on the state of MCPS from relationships at previous schools.



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I find local sources, such as MoCo360 and Montgomery Perspective, to offer a neutral perspective on news events in the county.

15. What are the three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if elected to the Board of Education?

1. Fully fund the MCPS budget
2. Exterminate corruption, bullying, and cronyism in MCPS
3. Ensure a high-quality public education to every student in MCPS

16. As a Board member, would you support and advocate for smaller class sizes? Do you believe that the Board's class size guidelines should be required, or merely advisory? Please explain your response.

Class sizes should absolutely be smaller. The research is clear. Beyond that, as someone who has spent much time in an elementary classroom as the educator, I know the value of a smaller class. Students can get more individualized attention and therefore learn at a higher rate. Having smaller classes creates a more manageable workload for educators at all levels. The guidelines should be required and followed to the letter. Teachers and students deserve the benefits of a smaller class size.

17. As a member of the Board of Education, how would you balance honoring ratified contracts with other priorities, especially in tight fiscal times?

The law is clear on a contract. A contract must be upheld with penalty of law. There will always be other interests competing, but contractual agreements must come first. After that, student and staff needs are a priority.

18. What is your position on expanding the opt-out policy beyond that which is required by state law?

MCPS is a system of public schools. School choice does not fit within that public school system. School choice is an illusion of selection that does not benefit our neediest students and creates further inequity. Should the opportunity come for me to change any requirements of the state law to include reducing the opt-out policy, I will be partaking in that opportunity.

19. What will you do to protect and remove barriers for student access in an inclusive and representative curriculum at MCPS?

I believe that diversity is a fact of our school system, but inclusion is an act and choice. I will always act to include and represent the diversity of our students by funding DEI initiatives, choosing curriculum initiatives that are anti-racist, and pushing for further professional development in regards to diversity and inclusion.

20. What are your thoughts about the MCPS practice of continually relying on outside consultants and private contracting for everyday business? How would you propose MCPS better utilize their in-system resources?



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MCPS should be utilizing as many in-house resources whenever possible. The system already has the professionals who have the needed expertise to fill these roles. MCPS choosing to hire outside consultants instead of paying its highly-qualified educators more money is taking funding away the real needs of MCPS and devalues the work of educators.