

2020 Board of Education (BOE) Primary Election Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed questionnaire to contact@bettermontgomery.us by 5:00pm on Friday, January 31, 2020.

Name: Mitra Ahadpour
Town or City of Residency:
Potomac
Education: Medical Doctor
Professional Background
Medical Officer at the U.S. FDA
Political Background: NA

I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking BOE office and I understand that Coalition for Better Montgomery PAC reserves the right to share my responses with the public.

Candidate Signature: Mitra Ahadpour

Date: 1/31/2020

Part 1

1. Why do you want to serve on BOE?

I want to serve on the board because we need fresh and innovative thinking to address the complex challenges faced by our students and their families, and because we need more collaboration with our larger community, to listen to their ideas and concerns more broadly and more inclusively. With students at the center of all our decisions, together, we can implement innovative initiatives to ensure our student have safe, enriching schools that support them in being ready to take on the challenges their futures will hold and to be successful throughout their lives.

2. Why do you consider yourself the best candidate for the BOE seat you filed for?

I am an MCPS parent, a results-oriented executive addressing complex health policy issues daily and an accomplished primary care physician who listens deeply. I will bring to the board fresh ideas, evidence-based decision making, and collaborative partnerships with a wide variety of stakeholders from our community.

3. What are your top three priorities if you are elected?

My top 3 priorities include: 1. Transforming the educational norms we use currently to instill new vision for school health so that all of our students can be prepared for success throughout their lives; 2. Creating community-driven school strategies in collaboration with students, parents, teachers, counselors, staff and administrators; and 3. Increase transparency, accountability and responsive communication in MCPS and BOE decision making.

Part 2

1. **BOE Policy-Making and Policy-Interpreting**

What issues do you see the BOE has in its policymaking and policy-interpreting process? How would you improve the current process?

The board undertakes an enormous and important role in guiding, overseeing and safeguarding the quality of our public schools. It is a giant effort, and I am convinced that the current board has the best interests of the students at heart. However, the ineffectiveness of the process the BOE used in rolling out the current boundary study demonstrated their misunderstanding of the important processes involved in managing change – in obtaining critical and ongoing input from students, parents, educators and members of the broader community. We need an increase in transparency and communication to determine the will of our community stakeholders. Furthermore, after a policy

is developed in collaboration with all the stakeholder groups, there should be responsive follow-up on the impact that policy has had, including a sensitive examination of any unintended consequences as a direct result of effecting that policy. A continuous improvement process is an important part of effective organizations. Additionally, a structure needs to be created such that the student member of the board should be connected with the SGAs of all schools to ensure consistent input and discussions from all interested parties and stakeholders.

2. Operating Budget

What issues do you see in the FY2021 MCPS operating budget? What would you do differently?

A few of my recommendations are funding for increased salaries for teachers and paraeducators; more availability of mental health and substance use services for students, including more counselors; evidence-based practices to be implemented to improve the quality of our schools; and implementing innovative initiatives such as providing support to new teachers and new administrators to improve retention; and developing quality schools with engaging curricula.

3. Curriculum

Do you believe MCPS curriculum is rigorous enough? What specific improvements would you suggest?

It is problematic to have a one-size-fits-all approach to educating hundreds of thousands of students in our county in essentially the same ways. Instead, it would be far more effective to embrace a deep understanding of each student's learning strengths and challenges, to result in far more effective education for students. I see many exciting opportunities to implement more individualized educational programs for students, which is supported by extensive research that seeks to create the educational sector of the future.

4. School Boundary

Do you agree with the recent revisions of policy FAA in which one factor, demographic characteristics of student population, was elevated above the other three factors (geography, stability of school assignments over time and facility utilization)? Do you think it is necessary to conduct a countywide school boundary analysis based on this change? If so, what action would you like the BOE to take in the future as a result of the information provided by the boundary analysis?

We know that fostering inclusion, diversity, equity and civility benefits all students. I think most of us would also agree that disparities in academic and career outcomes based on one's race or economic background are unfair and unacceptable. We need multi-faceted policies developed in collaboration with students, parents, educators and community members to address these disparities. Dividing communities, as the current boundary study rollout has done, has resulted in many unintended consequences, including creating divisions among friends, mistrust, and much anxiety. Simply collecting and using raw numbers to examine boundary lines does not begin to give us a complete picture of the realities of our community and neighborhood schools.

Many unfortunate outcomes can result when introducing comprehensive social change of this nature, such as any eventual boundary change would create - the sadness of children being moved away from their friends, their lack of ability to participate in after school events because of further travel requirements, and sleep deprivation factors caused by traveling further from their homes to attend other schools can negatively affect their health, which in turn harms their educational attainment.

Given the rapidly changing populations in Montgomery County, as we are gaining an estimated 3,000 new students each school year, we need to understand how to best use our existing facilities and think carefully about how we meet the needs of new populations. Examining how we can best maximize our tax dollars and use our existing school system effectively is important, and must be done in an open and close partnership with our community members.

5. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Many of MCPS buildings are aging and in need of repair, updating, and in some cases, replacement. How would you set priorities for school construction and renovation?

There is need to prioritize student, parent and teacher engagement as the BOE strategizes and activates plans for school improvement. Our focus should not simply be on infrastructure creation, but on having quality schools available for all students. We need to think innovatively on how to create schools that support healthy, social, emotional and academic development. To set priorities for school construction and renovation, a few areas to analyze are current and projected enrollment; school conditions; and equity. Striving for rebuilding schools with sustainable infrastructures, “green” schools, will cut costs while creating safer, healthier learning environments. To be successful we need to hear the voices of students and engage families and communities in the conversation of school improvement policies.

6. Gifted and Talented (GT) Program

BOE has changed how GT programs are administered in recent years. Do you consider these changes having a positive or negative impact? What initiatives will you undertake to ensure that the needs of GT students are met?

During the interview, I can share my experience with the GT program, as my daughter attended part of one. I challenge us to rethink the GT program by having rigorous curriculum available to all students, which would reduce underrepresentation of diverse learners. We need to move toward personalized learning options for all of our students and explore the exciting new methods that are available to us.

7. Opportunity Gap

What metrics would you use to measure the opportunity gap among students? Do you think BOE/MCPS has initiated and implemented policies and programs successfully to reduce the opportunity gap? What specific ideas or proposals do you have to close the opportunity gap?

We need to understand and reduce inequalities so that all students have the opportunity to flourish. We should have metrics of the system – to best understand the learning conditions necessary for all students to thrive, and the outcomes those conditions can bring about.

8. Kirwan Commission

Do you support the recommendations by the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education (Kirwan Commission) and why?

I am supportive, as this is an amazing opportunity to create a world-class education for all students and close the opportunity gap.