

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.

Michael Fryar
Gaithersburg

Bachelors Communications, Masters Early Childhood Education (constructivist theory), Masters Business Administration, J.D., Military Police – Ft. Leonard Wood, Investigation of Child Abuse and Neglect – Department of Children and Families, CT

Professional Background: Teacher, Administrator, Attorney/Advocate

Political Background: Active – Former Candidate for City Council, Hartford CT (lost)

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: *Michael J. Fryar*

Date: 1/27/20

Part 1

1. Why do you want to serve on BOE?

I have spent 30+ years as a teacher, administrator, attorney and advocate for children and education. This is a position that allows me to utilize my experience, education, and skills for a positive outcome. It is critical at this time that we maintain our neighborhood schools, stop the “bussing” conversation, and seek alternatives to the issues facing our most vulnerable citizens.

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

I taught in the classroom and understand the daily demands, issues, and requirements to ensure that a classroom runs smoothly and efficiently. The teacher and classroom are the most important part of education and everything else supports it. I have moved from a school district that faced many of the same issues that Montgomery County currently faces and their solutions are far more practical and answer concerns in a holistic way.

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

- a) Bottom up examination for improvements by looking for efficiencies, and eliminating problems or issues, to improve the system with no additional cost to tax payers.
- b) Creating solutions to the issues of access to schools with thematic and magnet schools to provide choices for parents.
- c) To eliminate standardized testing within the limits of the law.

Part 2

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

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

It's always interesting as an attorney to watch people write/interpret policy. This is one of the reasons attorneys exist, to create the language necessary of the policy to ensure it serves its purpose clearly and succinctly, restricting mis-interpretation.

Interpretation of policy is also the realm of the attorney, particularly poorly written policies, which can be widely interpreted.

I bring to the table the ability to write clear policy and assist in interpretation to prevent issues.

5. Operating Budget

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

We need to properly address the issues of schools with a high percentage of FARMS and ESL students. A regional approach would allow us to provide the best solutions, while maintaining neighborhood schools while offering alternatives for families.

90% of the budget is salaries and benefits – this is the driving cost to education.

6. Curriculum

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

No. It seems we are moving in a “cookie cutter” direction for curriculum that serves as the basis for continued focus on testing. Teachers are being restricted in providing creative, tailored lessons and the focus is moving from education to test preparation.

7. 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?

The one statistic that is undeniable when it comes to school performance prediction is the percentage of students who are eligible for FARMS. All research points to an undeniable tie between the two. No other effort, no amount of money, no concentration of will and focus, will make a difference if the percentage is too high. This should be the top driving statistic in determining school balance.

School balance can be achieved through choice, not bussing and definitely not disruption of neighborhood schools.

8. 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?

Safety is the number one consideration – we can’t have students in unsafe environments. Next is need (population) and utilization. This may not be as simple as where everything is now, but would require some data and extrapolation for predictive trends.

9. 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?

TAG or GT education falls under Title IX and is regarded, federally and historically, as special education. That said, it’s one of the most neglected areas of our education system where we complete the bare minimum (test for exceptionalism) and then do not provide services or classes to meet the identified special education needs of the GT student.

Professionally, and as a former GT student myself, this requires its own approach, curriculum and, quite frankly, teachers in a classroom or school dedicated to the support of these students.

10. 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?

FARMS. To be very clear, just because a student is eligible for FARMS does not mean they are lacking or a poor student. The issues are when a community has a disproportionate population of FARMS eligible students and this is tied through study after study to poor performance of the school.

11. Kirwan Commission

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

No. It seems to want to solve the problem with money without having looked to the system itself to solve issues.

Private companies, such as restaurants, (should) regularly review performance, dishes, menu options and decor to ensure they are delivering a good, cost effective, product. This may mean taking lobster off the menu because it has a high Cost Per Plate and low sales and replacing it with a more cost effective, and attractive, dish. This is looking internally for efficiencies and improvements which small businesses have to do constantly to survive.

Government does not work like a small business. To carry the restaurant analogy, government is the only restaurant and you have to eat there. There is no incentive for government to look internally for improvements or efficiencies. When something arises, they can just throw more money at it and pass that along to taxpayers. So if Chez Maryland needs to increase revenue, they just start charging an admission fee at the door to get in. And no one can refuse because you have to eat there