

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: Ehren Reynolds, www.openseatlotteryoption.com
Town or City of Residency: Wheaton, MD
Education: JD (NYU); BA (Yale)
Professional Background: public-sector attorney
Political Background: registered voter

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: *s/Ehren Reynolds*

Date: 2/3/20

Part 1

1. Why do you want to serve on BOE?

I would like to address MCPS' current capacity and equity challenges while ensuring that no one is forced to leave a neighborhood school they like by implementing an **Open Seat Lottery Option**. The way this would work is that students at an overcapacity school would be given the option to enter a lottery for seats at the nearest undercapacity school (the number of lottery spots would be equal to the number of empty seats at the undercapacity school). That way, students at overcapacity schools would have the option to enter a lottery for another nearby school, but no one has to leave a school they like. Solutions that **empower parents and students** by giving them options, rather than forcing outcomes, tend to be far more sustainable because they invite buy-in from the broadest range of community stakeholders (and thereby tend to avoid litigation). For example, check out Metco in Boston (<https://metcoinc.org/>), a voluntary desegregation program that has endured for 54 years (following significant unrest there in the years prior). To be clear, the Open Seat Lottery Option I am proposing is far simpler than Metco, which involves multiple counties; the point is that optional lottery solutions that get everyone on board tend to work.

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

I am a parent of two small kids. My eldest is due to start at an MCPS elementary school in July (it's a Title I school with a year-round school calendar). My wife Asha, my brain trust, is an education professional who has worked in the fields of both sexual assault/harassment and diversity/inclusion for years, and would be an invaluable resource to me in these areas if elected. I am also devoted to public service, having been a public sector attorney focused on identity theft and fraud for more than a decade, and as a US Air Force officer with the National Guard. I look forward to discussing my ideas with the other two individuals running in the District 4 election, Ms. Evans and Mr. Solomon.

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

1) As described above, I would empower parents and students by implementing an **Open Seat Lottery Option**, to address both capacity and equity concerns, as well as ensure that no one is forced to leave a neighborhood school.

2) I would create **more magnet and immersion program options**; parents in DC have something like 12 elementary schools to rank, while my wife and I here in Montgomery County have only one. On that point, we have tremendous language diversity within our school systems, to include Spanish-, Chinese- and Amharic- dominant student populations (to name only a few languages). We should find innovative ways to take advantage of students' own language diversity in creating immersion

programs so that students of all linguistic backgrounds can learn from each other as well as the faculty. There are currently only five out of 135 elementary schools that offer Two-Way Language Immersion; there should be far more.

3) We should enhance ***tech accessibility*** where possible, particularly for English-language learners and their families. For example, in some Arlington schools, 3rd graders all have iPads or other tablets; we should make sure that all students have a high level of tech literacy at an early age and throughout their educational experience at MCPS. There are myriad public/private partnerships that provide financial support to tech accessibility initiatives, and I would seek to engage the private sector in these efforts wherever possible to be solicitous of budget concerns.

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?

With its stewardship of a \$2.8 billion budget, the Board of Education needs the public's trust in its decision-making. To that end, the BoE must promote ***transparency*** (so that stakeholders can see what the Board is doing) and ***accountability*** (so that the Board's actions reflect the will of the voters). This past year, the BoE has fallen short of these goals, with inconsistent messaging around the purpose of WXY's boundary analysis, an abbreviated comment period for the adoption of Policy FAA, and other issues. The BoE must do better, and this election is an opportunity for voters to express their concerns.

5. Operating Budget

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

I would support an independent third-party audit of the budget, as well as review by one or more Inspectors General as a matter of course. Beyond that, I would want to ensure sufficient funding to promote additional educational options for parents, to include magnets and immersion programs, as well as tech accessibility.

6. Curriculum

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

Montgomery County is famous for its high-quality schools. An essential element of that quality is the ability of the system to help students of all skill levels succeed. I would want to ensure that MCPS continues to tailor learning to the individualized needs of all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

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?

On an issue this important, ***the voters deserve a straight answer from the current members of the Board of Education*** as to why Policy FAA was revised as it was, with an abbreviated comment period, and whether or not all factors will be treated equally, or certain factors prioritized over others. As a practical matter, the Open Seat Lottery Option I have proposed above will effectively address the capacity and equity concerns that prompted the boundary analysis, but without forcing anyone to leave a neighborhood school they like. Given the rapid growth of Montgomery County, from 600,000 residents a generation ago to 1.2 million today, it is plain that any resource allocation decisions by the BoE need to be highly data-driven. That said, much, if not all, of the information used in the current boundary analysis

has long been publicly available, so one would hope that the BoE would draw upon data regarding capacity, utilization, demographics, and stability in all of its decision-making prospectively, not just this particular boundary analysis.

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?

Given that we have 10,000 students in overcapacity schools, and 10,000 empty seats, I would prioritize capital improvement to deal with capacity issues. Significantly, the Open Seat Lottery Option would create helpful efficiencies in this regard. To address capacity issues, MCPS would have the latitude to add seats wherever the capital project can be done most efficiently, so long as it is reasonably close to the overcapacity school, rather than being limited to adding seats at the overcapacity school itself, given that students at the overcapacity school will have the option to enter a lottery for the number of extra seats at nearby schools.

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?

GT programs can be essential in meeting the educational needs of high-aptitude and high-potential learners, and the BoE should ensure that all students have meaningful access to such programs, regardless of the student's catchment area. We should create sufficient GT opportunities for students to be considered based upon both academic metrics as well as a holistic assessment.

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?

The MCPS educational paradigm needs to be sufficiently versatile to meet students where they are, both academically and socially. Some students may be best served by GT programs at their own school or magnet schools, and others by specialized supplemental programs to ensure equity in opportunity. No single metric, such as test scores, can necessarily measure student outcomes, but we can strive to ensure a resource investment model that promotes equity in opportunity. To that end, smaller class sizes in high-need schools, to include assistance for English language learners, is critical.

11. Kirwan Commission

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

I am generally supportive of the recommendations, particularly with respect to expansion of resources focused on pre-kindergarten and special needs students. Our neighbors to the south in DC have universal pre-K for three- and four-year-olds; the benefits of early childhood education are well-documented. I would also support the Commission's proposals for enhanced oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with the recommendations.