

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: Rebecca Smondrowski
Town or City of Residency: Gaithersburg
Education:
Professional Background:
Political Background:

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: *Rebecca Smondrowski* Date: 1/31/2020

Part 1

1. Why do you want to serve on BOE?

I would like to continue serving on the BOE in order to be a strong voice for the Montgomery County residents that I am so proud to represent and to see through the implementation of the work that is ongoing to provide the best school experience for each and every child.

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

I have passionately worked as a member of the BOE since elected in 2012. Along with my dedication to the students, staff, and families in MCPS, I believe that my actions reflect my commitment toward improving Montgomery County for all residents. My experience on the BOE allows me to provide historical insight while also acting with a forward-thinking approach.

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

We have worked hard over the last 3 years gathering and analyzing data related to both individual and school performance; I want to further this initiative, utilizing this data to maximize our student potential while optimizing our resources. This includes being especially mindful of how we spend our budget dollars.

Hiring and retention of the highest quality staff is of utmost importance. To do so, we must provide a school climate that incentivizes the staff, allowing them to create the optimal learning experience for the students so that every child and staff member takes pride in their school.

It is very important to me that we continue to not just expand but to also promote both academic and career opportunities for all students, regardless of zip code, in order for them to find their own successful pathways.

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?

As a current BOE member, I wish we had more time and opportunity to discuss and collaborate with the community at large, as well as more time to deliberate with our fellow members, so that we can all

understand the different perspectives of the stakeholders of any given issue, before voting on a decision.

5. Operating Budget

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

While I am very concerned about the FY2021 budget being fully funded, it is imperative that we spend each dollar with the intentionality of supporting student learning.

6. Curriculum

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

I think there need to be opportunities within the curriculum for each student to maximize his or her learning potential. I think our new curriculum provides an excellent foundation and I look forward to seeing it expanded to all areas of study.

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?

I personally believe that all four factories should be weighted equally. Taking into consideration that Montgomery County is one of the most diverse areas in the country, I feel that geographic proximity to schools is a key factor in building strong communities. Neighborhood schools allow students to access the school resources more readily, which is essential for our MCPS families.

I am fully supportive of a countywide boundary analysis in order to look at facility utilization in all schools to have a better idea of where we may be able to alleviate capacity issues.

As future studies arise, I would hope that we will use the results of the countywide analysis to make informed decisions that take into account all four factors of the FAA policy.

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?

I actively advocated for and personally participated in the recent restructuring of how we evaluate, prioritize, and address our capital improvement projects. Now we need to continue to advocate for full funding as there are more projects needed than dollars available.

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?

I believe that every student should have access to the most rigorous curriculum and instruction needed to reach his or her highest potential. Many do not have the outside resources that support identifying advanced opportunities. I believe that it is our system's responsibility to identify the best opportunities for every child to be put in the highest level learning environments. I have continuously advocated for expanding programs across the county to ensure that such opportunities are available

to everyone. I have worked closely with the Superintendent's staff to expand access and opportunities for all students in all areas of the county.

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?

I believe that our Performance Matters data is an excellent indicator of how our students and schools are achieving. One of the things that I am looking forward to in the next term is utilizing this data to target specific areas in need of improvement which could have the potential to reduce achievement gaps, and we have made great strides in opening programs and offering supporting services to help every child excel by reducing opportunity gaps. However, there is more work to be done. Some of the initiatives that I have begun to implement with MCPS include a text messaging communication system that notifies parents of specific opportunities and timelines, advocating for an Upcounty college and career center in the new Seneca Valley HS, expanding IB programs to enable more access throughout the county, and engaging with families to find out what more we can do and modify programs that are less effective.

11. Kirwan Commission

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

To touch on a few key points of Kirwin, I believe with all of my heart that the greatest influencer in student achievement is early childhood learning and I strongly support Kirwin's initiative to expand Pre-Kindergarten access for all students. Additionally, I agree that being a teacher should be a highly respected and well-compensated career. I also believe that the key aspect to the success of our students and schools is our support staff, who should be funded accordingly. I do support the recommendations of the commission overall, but believe that any mandates should include funding.