

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: Steve Solomon

Town or City of Residency: Silver Spring

Education: Bachelors in Economics - University of Maryland College Park

Professional Background: Radio producer/host

Political Background: I ran for County Council in 2018, volunteered for several local campaigns

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: Stephen H. Solomon

Date: 1-29-20

Part 1

1. Why do you want to serve on BOE?

To make positive changes for our county - benefiting students and parents.

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

Although I don't have any direct experience in education, I feel I have what it takes to be on the BOE. Board members need to be hard working, smart, and listen to the concerns of the community.

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

1) Keep our schools local 2) Institute a cost/benefit analysis of the MCPS budget to make sure we're spending our money correctly 3) Increase the amount of technological and vocational programs offered in the county schools

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?

The BOE needs more transparency. They conduct too many meetings in private.

5. Operating Budget

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

The BOE counts on a full budget from the County Council. They need to look forward more. Growth in population leads to overcrowded schools, and growth in inflation doesn't allow the budget to grow proportionally. Also, if the Montgomery County Inspector General was also allowed to oversee MCPS, spending could be smarter.

6. Curriculum

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

The curriculum is as rigorous as a student or parent wants it to be. MCPS offers various special programs to allow students opportunities beyond the regular curriculum. I would look to expand the vocational programs to more schools.

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?

No, I don't believe in the order of factors that are being proposed. Geography should be the top factor. I don't believe a boundary analysis is needed if demographics of student population are the real goal they are trying to change.

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?

Schools should all be safe and modern. Age and state of disrepair should be the priorities of school repair. Many schools need a refresh to adapt to modern times.

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?

MCPS does a good job of offering special programs and AEI for all school levels. I'm not familiar with how the GT programs were run in the past.

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 opportunity gap has always been an issue that every candidate wants to fix, but there are no direct solutions to fix it. All that BOE/MCPS can do is create an environment where every student has the chance to succeed - that includes having the best teachers, best schools, a strong curriculum. But those aren't always enough.

11. Kirwan Commission

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

The recommendations by the Commission are admirable. We'd all like to see teachers pay rise, more staff hired, and public pre-K, but the question is how to pay for it. That is where the state and county's economic development comes into focus. Are we bringing in more jobs and business to Maryland and specifically Montgomery County that would grow our economy and lead to more money to pay for these recommendations, or are we just going to raise taxes?