



## BOE Forum Candidate Responses

### QUESTIONS

1. The MCPS has a substantial \$2.7B budget. Assuming the MCPS budget will need to be slightly reduced for the 2020-21 school year, what programs and needs would you prioritize? What changes would you bring about in the budget allocation process?
2. Do you think Islamophobia exists in our county, and specifically at MCPS? How do you plan to address this bias?
3. What metrics would you use to measure the opportunity gap among students? What specific ideas or proposals do you have to close the opportunity gap?
4. How will you solicit and incorporate community, student and parent views in your Board decisions?
5. The current pandemic has shown that digital learning is here to stay and the digital divide needs to close. What changes would you make for MCPS to better invest and utilize self-learning in its curriculum?
6. Have you read the MCPS curriculum? If so, which elements do you agree with and which elements would you change?
7. What is your opinion of the current countywide boundary analysis?

### DR. MITRA AHADPOUR

1. As I look at the latest MCPS budget, I am struck by how much there is in the pie chart called "Other" expenditures. I would be curious to know more about what items and services fit into this category, particularly as this year's "Other" total reflects \$117 million. I see an opportunity for fiscally responsible spending by more effective management. We can maintain a balanced budget while supporting academic excellence and expanding resources for our students. The planning of education resources should be informed by research and evaluation results as well as strategic objectives to guide the planning process. There is need to use data and evaluation results in the budgeting process and to adopt efficient ways to support the achievement of equity objectives through school funding mechanisms. 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.
2. Sadly, I have heard of hate crimes towards Muslims, African Americans, Asian Americans and Jewish Americans. There should be zero tolerance for any such incidents. Fostering a climate of cultural sensitivity and tolerance and respect refers in part to the presence of diversity in our school populations. Diversity often refers to raw demographics; inclusion refers to how well an organizational culture responds, adapts and continuously grows with those demographic differences present. If students feel they belong, are respected, have a safe school environment and that there are high expectations of them, studies show that they achieve more. We need a much stronger level of administrative oversight of all of our schools.



Ultimately, principals need to be held accountable for how well they lead their schools with foresight, creativity, enthusiasm, intellectual engagement, clarity, long-range goals, fairness, equity, compassion and commitment. A few strategies with impact include increasing cultural competence among all staff, students and parents that includes awareness on unconscious bias; and recruiting and developing diverse and highly qualified teachers, staff, principals and guidance counselors. We need a process to address incidences of racism, hate and bullying.

3. Providing clear, open, transparent information about our students' successes is critical. We know from much research that standardized test scores do not adequately gauge a child's success in later life. In addition to the raw data generated to assess the success of the current equity accountability model, we also need to see metrics about the efficacy of our overall teaching system and school environment and climate to ensure that we have the best data-driven decision-making information before us in order to close the opportunity gap and ensure what the federal government is legally obligated to provide for all students – an appropriate education. A few evidence-based practices to close the opportunity gap are:

- Early childhood expansion.
- Safe school climate that enables learning and well-being.
- Expansion of the ESOL programs.
- Our higher-need schools have lower average teacher compensation and a higher percent novice teachers than in lower- need school – we need to improve compensation across the board and ensure that experienced teachers and administrators are consistently placed throughout the county.
- Removing language or other cultural barriers to engage and involve our parents.
- Have a sound method for recruitment and retention of the best possible teachers and the highest quality administrators.
- Well-designed magnet, immersion, IB and career programs in every school.

4. I was recently at the Blair Cluster meeting - the parents and teachers told the Board of Education to come more often. The last time the Board had gone to their community was four years ago. Board meetings and public forums are also held during the daytime, not during a time when many working parents can attend meetings. We need an overhaul about how we interact with one another. We also need to be sure that BOE members visit each MCPS school during each school year. Perhaps each member is assigned a suite of schools to visit, and they are apportioned out for oversight. Complaints abound that board members are not present in schools throughout the year, and are out of touch with community needs until forums are held in the formalized, stilted way that the current process provides for. We need far more open conversations with school communities, and far more responsiveness from MCPS as well. We are hardly going to agree on all initiatives, all allocations of resources, all programs, and all methodologies. But we certainly need to do much better simply responding to questions that community members ask of MCPS and BOE officials.

5. The Coronavirus pandemic has resulted in learning loss, affected the emotional well-being of our children and economic burden on our families. The distance learning rolled out by MCPS was ineffective. Many students were without internet access, there was lack of instructions with many different online platforms used that confused and frustrated the students. We need to better prepare our teachers, have one platform and look at opportunities to lessen the loss of learning by starting school in the summer. It is critical that we have greater community participation as we strive to make changes within our school systems. We need community-driven strategies and strong community-based partnerships.



6. There is room for improvement. One curriculum is the one used for the gifted and talented program. All students are capable. I challenge us to re-think the Gifted and Talented programs by having rigorous curriculum available to all students, which would reduce under-representation of diverse learners. We need to implement evidence-based practices to prepare our children with the knowledge and skills to be successful in school and life. In today's workplace, the skills that are in high demand are problem solving; creativity; collaboration; emotional intelligence; cultural competence; science, technology, engineering, arts and math. We need a leader at the helm who believes strongly in these goals and pursues them vigorously.

7. Fostering inclusion, diversity, equity and civility benefits all students. 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 roll-out 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. There are many evidence-based approaches that will close the opportunity gap. We know that providing safe and stable school environments, addressing the unmet mental health needs and substance use in our children, promoting and assisting parent engagement, and supporting our teachers and staff are just a few strategies that will improve educational attainment for all students. We can do better than we are now. There are many creative approaches we can take. Having a "whole student" approach with students at the center of all of our decisions is key. We obviously need to understand where our facilities are overused and underused and offer families a wider variety of options in trying to balance our facility use. But imposing boundary changes on unwilling communities is not the answer.

## **STEPHEN AUSTIN**

1. I would prioritize the programs that address our students and families in need. During a recession, the devastation is most felt there, and we have to make sure those students are prepared to learn. I place a very high priority on protecting teacher pay and positions. For savings, I would look to have an audit firm analyze the service level contracts of MCPS and look for savings from renegotiation/terminating unnecessary contracts. There are also potential savings to be had in looking at negotiated prescription rates in benefits packages that were incorrectly priced. Beyond that, I would push for an operational audit of the entire MCPS system and look at optimizing the real estate portfolio. I believe we could generate millions of dollars in savings from these activities. I have nearly 20 years of professional finance experience to help lead these efforts.

2. Unfortunately, yes. It saddens me that it is the case. I believe we need to embrace diverse cultures more at MCPS, and celebrate the differences because this is what makes us strong. I also believe we need to ensure the channels for reporting hate/bias incidents are prioritized and that victims are protected. I would like to have the MCMC presentation shared more in MCPS.

3. The ERS report documents a number of observed disparities - mostly around teacher experience, availability of advanced classes, and lower PTA fundraising at higher FARMS schools.





For teacher experience, I would work harder with the unions to empower effective teachers and principals at those schools to create more focused programs, and compensate those teachers for their extra efforts. This was done at JoAnn Leleck at Broad Acres with amazing success.

For availability of advanced classes, I would actually look to technology. One positive to come out of this quarantine is that I believe better products will be developed for distance learning. I think MCPS could lead this 21st Century approach, with its size and budget. I envision a future where students can go to a lab at their local school and participate in any AP, IB, GT class they like. This would cost significantly less than a 20th Century solution of moving the students around.

For the PTA fundraising, I would look to coordinate more with the PTAs in the affluent areas and beef up their sister PTA programs. Make it more available on social media and make it more like a crowdsourcing process.

4. I started a facebook group in November 2019 to express the desires of the parent community to the BOE. That group now has 8000 members and had a direct effect on the Boundary Analysis process. I have experience with leveraging technology to bring people together for a common cause. I would bring this skill to the BOE to engage with parents and students. The current channels are too static and the BOE communicates in a very one-way fashion. I think we can improve on this.

5. I touched a little on this in question 3. I would look to engage the top developers in the space that are working on the next generation learning/meeting software, and use MCPS' position as the 14th largest school district in the country to drive that change forward. I think we need more engaging content, more accountability features for students, overall something that more emulates the human presence. This may take longer than the pandemic, but we could definitely make incremental improvements in that direction in the next year or so. This product could become a permanent tool for MCPS and even allow us to address some equity concerns.

6. I have not read it all. I believe we need to keep rigor in the forefront overall. The best way out of poverty is still a rigorous education. That said, I think we need to add more emphasis for the trades. College has become incredibly expensive, and it's not for everyone. This country currently has a shortage of skilled trades, and we may have a wave of onshoring of labor coming after this virus. These are rewarding careers, and even could help students pay their way through college if they choose to do both. I believe we need more widespread availability of programs and more effort to market them to students.

7. I believe the process that established it was a disaster. Policy FAA, which has four factors that must be considered in boundary changes was altered in a questionable way - the community was only given 11 days to provide feedback, and only received less than 100 responses. Most of those responses were from social media friends of the Board member pushing for the change. While diversity is an important consideration, it was elevated above proximity, capacity and stability (they were equally weighted before). Then a firm that specializes in shuffling populations to balance out demographics was hired for the analysis. The proponents of the analysis have recently shifted from talking about the equity component to stressing capacity balancing. I support the latter, but if that's our goal, we hired the wrong firm. I believe the entire discussion needs a reset, and we need to firmly define our end goal. If it is to balance capacity, we need to have realistic conversations of what that could look like. A popular point is that we have 10k+ students in crowded schools and 10k open seats in other schools. The problem with that is those open seats are often quite far from the overcrowded schools, so that would be very disruptive for many families. I think we should look at relatively easy balancing, but we will still need to build space for the rest.



## ANIL CHAUDHRY

1. I would champion a zero based budgeting approach to resource allocation in MCPS to identify the "white elephants". In this climate of uncertainty in funding, MCPS needs to identify and prioritize core educational functions and divest of all other activities. Just like I would not expect the parks department to design and deliver a mathematics lecture, I think we should expect MCPS to get out of the building construction, renovation, and maintenance business.

2. Yes, there are many phobias that exist in this country to include Islamophobia. Islamophobia also exists in a county as diverse as ours and we have seen sectarian divides increase in the last few years. I would support student based community outreach and engagement programs that are actively and equitably supported by MCPS. .

3. As someone with practical and leadership experience in field of Operational Research and Statistical Analysis, I would like to start by saying we have 3 types of gaps in education: opportunity / input gaps, learning / process gaps, and achievement / outcome gaps. Opportunity gaps exist because of lack of accountability and transparency at the classroom level. In other words, MCPS is not sharing data on the effectiveness of learning in individual classrooms within each school and cluster. Opportunity gaps also exist is because of a lack of focus on the fundamentals (age appropriate reading, writing, and applied mathematics) to get students ready for transition to adulthood or what I call "life ready". I support cognitive assessments twice a year in October and May to measure student outcomes as related to fundamentals. I also support educator bonus based on the specific improvement in cognitive outcomes as opposed to hitting predetermined benchmarks i.e. I would rather reward a teacher whose class shows a 30 point increase in outcomes (going from 30 - 60) as opposed to a teacher with a class that shows two point increase in outcomes (90 to 92).

4. Ensure transparency in word, deed, and intent. Every proposal should have a 90 -120 day open and transparent comment period with the ability to comment in multiple ways (using a mobile device, email, phone, text, letter, post). In addition, the Board should implement on-line voting for draft proposals to gauge community interests on future proposals that should be staffed by MCPS administration. Parents, community stakeholders, should be able to go to a community engagement portal to directly interact with members of the board. All Board meetings should be held in high schools in the evening on a rotating schedule. You cannot solicit feedback if you hide on Hungerford.

5. This pandemic is a once in a lifetime opportunity to democratize access to rigorous curriculum across the county.

Here is what I would focus on as a Board member -

1. ensuring a common technical foundation for all education delivery. We can't have zoom, blackboard, google email, evite, slack, youtube etc. all at the same time. We need to stick with a core set of products for educational purposes to ensure that we can provide an equitable education.
2. ensure ALL students have the same equipment (chromebooks) that they keep for themselves the entire time.
3. ensure we have a separate site for parents where the parents can view videos put together by individual lesson section in their native language so that they can co-learn with their children
4. ensure we can do both live and asymmetric learning (videos that students can watch on their own time and at their own pace)



5. ensure daily digital check in's using video tools and physical follow up by MCPS staff for students who have not checked in for 3 day
6. ensure we can use USPS to send and receive assignments on a weekly basis for children who do not have dedicated broadband (a locked down usb device to transfer lessons and assignments between students and teachers)
7. ensure we can use technical tools for universal screening on a quarterly basis to track and establish early intervention programs for students who have fallen behind

6. Every child is different and a cookie cutter approach to education does not serve our children well. I support an objective curriculum that is focused on the fundamentals (age appropriate reading, writing, and applied mathematics) to get students "life ready". I would focus on using technology to create and increase customized learning paths for all students such as CTE education tracks, language tracks, humanities tracks, and independent studies etc.

7. I support a periodic boundary analysis to support and validate planning projections. I also support periodic boundary analysis to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the MCPS infrastructure. I do not support a boundary analysis that is designed to allocate resources on race or race based proxies. It is clear that current county wide boundary analysis failed because the Board actively chose to disregard community input to roll out the process in a transparent manner. Shortcuts were taken and the record indicates that some of the Board members were focused on retributive justice instead of ensuring that every race and ethnicity across the county was equitably represented. In short, this process has become so toxic that we need to start fresh after the 2020 census results are published. When we restart the process, I as a Board member, will ensure that all races, ethnicity, religions, and socio-economic groups are properly represented and included in the process.

## **SUNIL DASGUPTA**

1. I would prioritize what we need for students in the classroom, including services that students need to continue learning at this time. Therefore, my focus will be hold back on new and expanding programs—perhaps dual-language schools or new vocational education—and then we can also save money by looking at filling empty seats in schools. We save portable rents, but eventually stretch our capital budgets so we can get to long-neglected projects and over time manage school construction better.

2. Islamophobia is a problem in the country and Montgomery County or MCPS are not exempt. At the highest level we embrace our Muslim families and students. We work diligently to make sure that hate incidents are reported and there is action. Also, maybe time for a committee (such as those for Asian, Latino, and African American achievement) that includes community and school leaders so that there is a formal process of information sharing and if things are not dealt with appropriately at a school, we hear about it quickly.

3. These metrics for measuring the opportunity gap are already there. A December County Council OLO report, for example, found that MCPS was had cut funding to English language learners at a time when this population was growing. The ERS report identified that African-American and Latinx children were tracked to less rigorous courses and taught by less experienced teachers. We also see that some schools are under threat of staff and program cuts due to low enrollment, which then manifests as opportunity gaps. One of my central proposals to develop a policy of regular systemwide boundary review and adjustment that





allows for rebalancing resource allocation precisely to mitigate opportunity gaps. We should also address opportunity gaps by addressing the particular needs of our most impacted groups, English language learners, special education, and minority and low-income students.

4. I hope to be meet regularly with students, families, and community leaders. Rather than expect families to take time off work to come to Board meetings, I hope to come to communities themselves. I hope to remain in close touch with MCMC and other community organizations. Where possible, we should have joint community-school committees that meet regularly and report to the Board on issues. This will be a proactive approach to community, family, and student input into policy.

5. While digital learning is here to stay, it is still hard to predict the balance of digital and in-person learning. This balance varies by subject matter, age, student needs, and teacher training/preferences. Seriously adopting online education (as opposed to the emergency remote teaching we are doing) we need, first, to constitute a high-level commission to investigate and report back in 6 weeks what has worked and what has not. Second, to undertake a massive retraining of teachers. This training can be done during the summer but the question is whether it is standalone or done as part of summer school (that is, with students present). Third, my experience with online education has shown that face to face education and online education are vastly different, and to the extent that this is true we have to reconsider what we teach and how we teach it. One example is that lessons will have to become much more project-based than socratic. These changes are transformational and will take time to become reality.

6. I have read significant but not all of MCPS curriculum. Aside from distance learning, there are some very good things about the curriculum. Elementary school math teaching has improved. It is still not equitable, but it seems better. Generally, my big concern especially with K-8 curriculum is the focus on math and language literacy over content learning. To me content is what connects students to learning. A child decides to study botany because they love plants and trees. That love of plants and trees then is crucial to enabling learning. There is much more content education at the high school level, but there we need more vocational choices. With Covid and distance learning, we will now also have to recast the curriculum to have more project-based lesson plans.

7. I support the countywide boundary analysis and would like to see it followed up with a policy of regular systemwide boundary review and adjustment that allows MCPS to remain abreast with population and demographic shifts in the county. This will help MCPS balance its enrollment ensuring inclusion and more efficient resource allocation in its schools. For such a policy to be adopted, we need strong leadership on the BOE to bring the county together.

## **SHEBRA EVANS**

1. As a current board member, the commitment to ensure every student has access, opportunity and support is a huge priority for me. The recent pandemic demands us to reprioritize our work to prevent learning loss and new disparities in academic outcomes. I believe we need to focus on building a more sustainable technology infrastructure, provide more social-emotional supports for students and staff, and make plans for summer recovery and returning to schools.





2. Yes it exists and the reason the school system puts measurements in place to ensure the safety and security of every student and staff member. There is policy ACA, Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency. This policy is our way to assert that educational outcomes should never be predictable by perceived or personal characteristics and that discrimination of any form will not be tolerated. Also, requiring all employees of MCPS to take mandatory cultural competency training is a definite step in the right direction.

3. Since I have served on the board we have implemented successful programs and initiatives to close the opportunity gap. Listed below are a few: Dual/Two-Way Immersion, Investment in smaller classes, universal screening and expanded access to enrichment, innovative school calendar year schools, expanded access to prekindergarten, expanded access to summer programs (ELO SAIL, ELO STEP, BELL, etc.), Equal Opportunity Schools, Expanded Access to IB, Free SAT/ACT or Licensure tests, dual-enrollment w/ Montgomery College, Minority Scholars Program, expanded career readiness options, Evidence of Learning, Equity Accountability Model, continued recruitment of diverse workforce and so on. We need investments to remain focused on students, classrooms and schools. We need to always examine how well the system and schools are allocating resources.

4. I will continue to meet with staff, visit schools to speak with students and staff, and be informed through the lens of being a parent of two MCPS students. My goal is to always think of ways to reimagine how the board engages the communities, in particular communities that are harder to reach.

5. MCPS has done a tremendous job setting up distance learning during a pandemic. Evaluating what worked and what can be done differently will help as the digital learning infrastructure is being enhanced. It will be essential to include the feedback from students, staff and families.

6. MCPS is currently rolling out a new curriculum for elementary and middle schools in English Language Arts and Math to maintain the rigor and challenge needed for college and career readiness. The English Language Arts findings were the following: stronger alignment to Common Core, regular use of grade-level complex text, explicit foundational skills instruction, supports for English Learners, quality professional development, read-aloud texts that are two to three years above grade-level and a system of writing instruction embedded in lessons and task. In the area of Math the findings were the following: stronger alignment to Common Core, sufficient developmental or conceptual understanding, supports for a variety of learners, focus on major work of the grade and increased use of modeling and application and much more. Both offer resources for parents and we will have books and online tools for students.

7. Every factor is being considered as we consider school and cluster boundaries. It is a fiscally responsible approach to have the board review the entire district when considering new schools and additions. Our student enrollment has grown by more than 25K students since 2010 and we expect anywhere from 7K to 11K more students over the next six years. We receive funding from the local government and get increases in state aid and our overall need for facility projects exceed available funding. This boundary analysis will give us a better overview and inform our decisions in future boundary studies. Adjacency will be key in this analysis. Students will not be bused across the county. We will take every measure to maintain our walkers







## MICHAEL FRYAR

1. While the budget is substantial, it is not quite enough to meet the needs of our students. The fact that there is a consideration to reduce the budget in the face of this need is directly related to a lack of communication and education between the board and principals at the state and county. One of the people I admire most politically is Chief Justice Sullivan of the Connecticut Supreme Court. He maintained constant contact with the legislators through lunches, meetings, appointments, and outings. He was constantly educating them on the needs and the achievements of the judicial system. Because of this constant, regular communication he never had a budget cut and saw a request go unfilled. I would follow in his footsteps to make sure that every decision maker understood why every dollar is important in the budget to prevent reductions and encourage increases to meet student needs.

2. I know Islamophobia exists through the reaction I get when I talk about travelling to Palestine. While most Americans can rattle off news reports about the vile acts of a bad actor here or there, it is a depressing few that are aware of modern great leaders and accomplishments such as Malala Yousafzai, Mohamed ElBaradei, and of course King Abdullah II of Jordan, whose peaceful contributions are vast and include protection, funding, and assistance provided to historic Christian and Jewish sites in Jerusalem. We have to mitigate this ignorance through education and exposure to the history and positive aspects of Islam and the Muslim world.

3. The equity accountability model shows what we have known intuitively all along, that poverty directly impacts learning. No school should have a population of FARMS students greater than 50%. We need to directly address poverty to ensure children break the cycle through education and opportunity. A lot of materials and propaganda put forth seems to equate the amount of melanin in the skin to academic achievement, which is a vile thought. What is true is that a disproportionate number of black and brown Montgomery County residents live in poverty. We need to implement a boundary analysis, followed by proper apportionment of neighborhood schools, and the construction of regional schools to provide choices to students and parents to break the cycle of poverty.

4. As an attorney working with impoverished clients I have to make accommodations to see them in the community on their schedule. These are people working 2 or 3 jobs and raising families. Their time is the most valuable asset they have and it must be respected. As a classroom teacher I would conduct student meetings at school, and then arrange to meet with parents and families in their homes for those who were not available during the very limited time that the school provided for parent conferences. I plan on taking the same approach to meeting with people and groups to hear concerns, issues and grievances. While there is a population of active people who attend meetings and events, there is a greater population that cannot due to a myriad of reasons. Their voices are equally important.

5. I have a significant background in digital content delivery, online curriculum design, and distance education. What I don't have is access to meetings, planners and content drivers as a parent. I have to sit by and wait to see what they are doing, wince at the avoidable mistakes, and wonder what comes next. If this is a temporary fix, then it is what it is and will limp on to its conclusion as we return to classrooms. If this is long term, or recurring, then we need a better content plan, more effective and efficient means, and more comprehensive roll-out. Having worked as an executive for an education company that was moving content to online delivery I speak the language and understand what needs to be done.





6. We are moving toward a homogenous “one size fits all” purchased curriculum that removes the creativity and motivation from teachers and turns them into moderators of content. Teachers become teachers to teach, not to read from workbooks and pass out worksheets while proctoring assessment tests every 2 weeks. Montgomery County is successfully creating the “McDonalds” of education. It’s fast, its efficient, and its consistent across the board. What it is not is personalized, accommodating or flexible. It is not a Michelin Star approach, to continue the restaurant comparison, where we strive to provide the best for students. The education focus is on “corporate” to be able to monitor every aspect of the process.

7. Currently more than 50% of students do not attend the school closest to them. It is important for MCPS to understand where our student populations are, where they have increased or shifted over time, in order to properly allocate resources and facilities. We should not make boundary changes frequently or unnecessarily; but, we do to have to consider boundaries to ensure that our resources and facilities are being equitably utilized.

## **PAUL GELLER**

1. Academics is key. Our top priority must be making sure all 166,300 of our students are receiving the best education possible. Each one of them must be college or career ready by graduation, and all our efforts should be focused on this goal. Did you know that 67.4% of Montgomery College students require a remedial reading, writing, or math class? Most of these students are MCPS graduates. We have to focus on the basics. We need early childhood education programs (nursery school, preschool) for our kids ages 2-5. This is one of the best ways to attack the opportunity gap when it starts. We also must focus on basic reading and writing skills at every level, in every grade. And, just as importantly, focus on the importance of lifetime math skills such as household budgeting, basic business accounting, and the importance of saving and investing.

2. Sadly, Islamophobia exists in our county and MCPS. As a past MCCPTA President, and long time advocate for MCPS, I have travelled across Montgomery County talking to everyone interested in our schools. People share the problems they believe MCPS is facing, and who they blame. You name the group, and I have heard them blamed for something. This is outrageous. MCPS and the BOE must educate the community. We are all human beings and want our children to do well. And we are in a wonderfully diverse community that provides us with many opportunities to get to know and learn from one another.

I am championing an effort I call My Story on MCPS-TV. This series of programs will feature students and MCPS employees sharing their experiences of discrimination and bias with viewers. Hearing these stories will help people realize their biases gravely affect others, and encourage them to improve.

3. Unfortunately, no one in the country has been able to figure out a systematic way to eliminate the opportunity gap on a large scale. That said, I am a strong supporter and proud member of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence. The concepts put forth by the Coalition are achievable by MCPS, and have received the critical support of many education leaders. There are three main requests: 1) making sure more experienced teachers work with students who are most affected by the opportunity gap; 2) placing experienced Principals in elementary and middle schools in more financially challenged neighborhoods; and 3) greater access to the most rigorous curriculum for students most affected by the opportunity gap. And I will add two items: 1) the need for high quality





educational opportunities for kids ages 2-5; and 2) the need for strong extracurricular activities and wraparound services.

4. Since 2012, I have been a full-time volunteer and advocate for MCPS. I make a point of constantly traveling throughout the community, meeting people where they are, and listening. When teachers shared the need for students to have upgraded technology, I researched the issue thoroughly and responded. My efforts led to getting Promethean boards in every elementary school that lacked one, WiFi in all our schools, and putting Chromebooks in the hands of all our kids. When class sizes were getting unmanageable and more teachers were needed, I listened and fought for four months to get the Education First Budget of 2016 passed. Combined with my other efforts, this has netted MCPS an additional \$462,000,000 in their Operating Budget, funding used to hire more than 600 additional teachers, provide pathways for SEIU Local 500 employees to become teachers, and fund many new initiatives proposed by our Superintendent, Dr. Jack Smith.

5. Right now, MCPS has a tremendous asset it can learn from in order to more effectively roll out online learning: Interim Instructional Services (IIS). This online learning program is available to students who cannot attend classes in person due to physical and/or emotional conditions. Aside from offering an entire curriculum for certain subjects online, the teachers in this program have a tremendous ability to reach out to students who may have become discouraged or disengaged from learning, and get them back on board. We need to replicate this program districtwide. As of two weeks ago, we have several thousand students who have not logged on to get their school assignments. The pros at IIS can help with ideas about how to get these kids re-engaged. MCPS should tap their expertise. We also need to make it easier for students to access Chromebooks and WiFi from their homes.

6. I receive many comments about the MCPS curriculum. Some teachers love it, others do not. Parents have questions about it. Having read through it, there is much room for improvement. We need to focus on the basics, not eduspeak – the MCPS high level vocabulary of concepts and strategies that, while sounding impressive and doctoral, confuses many and does not tackle the main issue: too many of our kids leave MCPS with serious reading, writing and math deficiencies. So, how can we do better? First, we should invite our best teachers to help design the new curriculum over the summer, and get paid for doing so. They know what works best. Second, we must stop the needless standardized testing we subject our students to. Two standardized tests a year should suffice. And third, all students should be encouraged to take the most rigorous coursework possible.

7. MCPS could have done a significantly better job of communicating the purpose of the boundary analysis from the beginning. Since 2016, I have proposed having a community meeting where school construction issues (Capital Improvements Program) are frankly discussed. There are three ways to handle both the school overcrowding issue and the seemingly endless backlog of construction projects. First, it would cost \$6,000,000,000 to build our way out of this. If every person in the county is willing to write a check for \$6,000, a total impossibility, the problem would be solved. Second, we could change school boundaries. However, many families move to a specific neighborhood so their kids can attend a particular school. Or third, we can figure out a better way to accomplish our goals through low cost, high quality renovations of existing buildings, and giving students the option of attending less crowded schools nearby without changing boundaries.



## STEVE SOLOMON

1. There are many ways to save money. We need to look at the specifics of the budget and see what can be cut without a severe impact on education. Unfortunately, the state money that would be coming in from the Kirwan plan is on hold. MCPS spends tens of millions of dollars on administrative costs as well (30% higher this year than last year) That needs to be reduced. We also need to generate revenue. MCPS owns a tremendous amount of land where the 208 schools are, and we make very little money from it. We can use the schools for all sorts of community events to generate revenue.

2. Yes, it exists here just like it does in many areas around the country. We need to abide by the student code of conduct. Many other behavioral incidents recently in Montgomery County have had a slow response from the school and the administration. Students and parents should know that Islamophobia will not be tolerated by MCPS, and punishment will be doled out if needed. Also, are there any programs or groups that encourage more Muslims to become MCPS teachers? This might be a program worth looking at.

3. The approach to addressing the opportunity gap needs to be multi level. First we need all schools to be places where students have the chance to succeed. This comes from a variety of programs being offered. Also, schools that are dilapidated or need basic repairs go hand in hand with the level of student performance. Finally, we need to retain the best teachers in MCPS. Nearly half of teachers in MCPS leave by the end of their 3rd year.

4. The board has two meetings a month to receive public commentary. They also have public forums at different clusters, but since there are over 200 schools, it's hard to go see everyone in person. All Board of Education members should be accessible to the public. If elected, I'll be available by phone or email anytime. Also, we need to vary the public meeting times. Daytime meetings are difficult for most working parents to attend.

5. I believe that MCPS has done a good job transitioning to digital learning. We are far ahead of many other counties. The amount of Chromebooks and internet access that students now have that didn't have it before has been tremendous. But this is also a time that parents need more involvement. Students have to be more focused and will be doing more work at home with distance learning. The curriculum is one that can now be adjusted if distance learning continues. This pandemic happened mid semester with no prep time for MCPS.

6. I have not read the entire MCPS curriculum but I am familiar with it. We do a good job of offering many choices to students at all levels of education. We identify those who might benefit from special programs, different consortia schools, magnet, etc. I have been an advocate of more technical and vocational programs in schools. We have a great program at Edison High School that teaches plumbing, electrics, carpentry, and auto repair. These are great programs that can prepare students to get a good job right out of high school, and keep them right here in Montgomery County. We need to expand our vocational programs.

7. I believe that students should go to school primarily based on geography. Parents should know the path their child is going to take from elementary to middle to high school. We can make slight boundary adjustments so that over and under crowding is addressed and schools are as close to 100% capacity as possible. Also, there is enough traffic every morning and afternoon in Montgomery County. Getting to and from school should not be a burden on a parent or the child. If a student does not go to the school closest to them, they will have to leave home earlier and get home later every night. They may be separated from a sibling who is



also in MCPS, miss out on after school activities, and they will definitely be separated from their current friends.

## **LUMPOANGE THOMAS**

1. I believe that it's still too early to predict what MCPS's budget deficit will look like for the 2020-2021 school year and subsequent years. We are truly in an unprecedented era. However, it's fair to say that we can expect extensive decreases in funding levels from the federal, state, and the county governments.

I believe that we need to assess and measure each school program and initiative to determine which programs are meeting its intended purpose and helping raise student achievement. MCPS should use comprehensive information systems to develop data-driven budgets that link school spending to desired educational outcomes

We can visualize scenarios involving different levels of funding cuts and reductions. However, it's all just speculation until we learn the actual numbers involved. Regardless of how the school budget looks for the next school year and beyond, we need to have a more strategic and purposeful approach in the budget process. Studies that I've read regarding successful school budget processes include setting goals, analyzing spending patterns, building consensus on an effective approach, choosing the right budget model, and tracking costs. I agree with this approach and would implement such processes.

2. I do believe that Islamophobia, along with prejudices and biases against other minorities and ethnic groups, exist everywhere, including in pockets of Montgomery County. I believe that prejudices and biases are a learned behavior and through education, we can address and prevent it in our schools and society.

I would promote awareness in self-identification and mindfulness. We must understand how our identification within a particular group gives us privilege in certain spaces and be open to actively listening to marginalized groups who experience life differently because of their social groupings.

I believe we must also invest in professional development opportunities of our educators that increases their cultural understanding of different groups. We can allow our classroom teachers more flexibility to create learning opportunities that acknowledge race and ethnicity through culturally relevant teachings. Culturally relevant teaching emphasizes academic excellence, cultural competence, and social and political analysis.

We need to address how our racial biases impacts discipline. We should implement restorative practices to provide a restorative, rather than a punitive, approach to school discipline, in low risk matters.

3. I've researched and read many published policy recommendations that delineate the best methods to close the opportunity gap. The policies that I favor to reduce the opportunity gap recognizes our need to address the child's individual needs, identifying in-school resources and opportunities, and promoting engaging and enriching learning opportunities outside of school.

Recognizing individual student's needs must include addressing health and access to pre-school / early childhood education. Our nation's high level of childhood poverty, coupled with low level of social supports for low-income children's health and welfare, create daunting obstacles for learning.

Identifying in-school resources and opportunities mean that we have multiple access points for children to enroll in advanced and rigorous coursework. We should have an array of high-quality curriculum that includes not only traditional STEM courses, but also art, music,





and physical education. The one constant I've insisted my son adhere to while distant learning, is to get outdoors every day, whether for a bike ride, run, or hike.

Lastly, I believe promoting supplemental and enriching learning opportunities outside of school – before, after, and during summer break – is the most important factor in closing the opportunity gap. It's well established that learning occurs both in school and out of school. We need to have supplemental learning initiatives in place that provide enrichment and learning when our children are not in school. Such initiatives can include access to laptops and internet, before and after school tutoring programs.

4. Studies have shown and research demonstrates a positive link between family engagement and student achievement. Parents who participate and contribute to their child's education, has a positive impact with their child earning higher grades, test scores, and better behavior. Therefore, investing in creative measures to involve parents and students often pays off. I think most parents want to be involved with their child's education. However, due to various factors, that may be impossible. MCPS currently reaches out to parents via social media, phone calls, and its website. If elected to the Board, I would implement monthly conversations, similar to a family night, with parents and students to better learn and understand immediate needs and concerns.

All decisions that are presented to the Board of Education should always be presented to all MCPS families and stakeholders for engagement and decision.

5. I believe that MCPS has done a good job, given the extraordinary times we are in. However, I believe we can do better once we're able to conduct an after action report and learn in what areas we can improve upon.

I would begin by ensuring from the outset of the beginning of the school year, that every student had the tools (laptops, text books, internet connectivity), resources, and support necessary for successful online learning. I would ask that educators and classroom teachers reach out to parents, to learn if there are any other obstacles at home that would prevent their child from meaningful distance learning.

Despite being amid a pandemic, I believe that we now have a great opportunity to reimagine our school system to better address future learning. This may be examining whether changes to what the traditional school day and school year look like. However, we must be mindful that any proposed modifications include engagement from all community members - parents, students, educators, and administrators. This aligns with my priority of supporting and implementing transparent processes and practices in BoE deliberations and policy making decisions.

6. I believe that MCPS offers a broad, enriching, varied and rigorous curriculum. The one aspect I would not necessarily change but implement, would be access to advanced and rigorous coursework by underrepresented students, often times minorities. I think that we need to have multiple access points at various stages during a child's educational journey, which allows them to take advanced courses. I think we ought to provide teacher's flexibility in identifying and recommending student placement into magnet programs, when students demonstrate the requisite ability and potential for success in such programs and courses.

7. I believe the current countywide boundary analysis was flawed from the beginning, as the Board of Education provided the data to be used in WXY's response. I recognize the need for a true boundary analysis to address over capacity and underutilization of some schools throughout MCPS. However, I believe we need to begin from scratch with a new boundary analysis, conducted by a different firm.

