

Whole Child Coalition* Questionnaire for Board of Education Candidates Montgomery County Public Schools 2014

At-Large Candidates (this race will take place during a non-partisan primary, early voting begins June 12, election day June 24)

[Edward Amatetti](#)
[Merry Eisner-Heidorn](#)
[Shebra Evans](#)
[Jill Ortman-Fouse](#)

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Edward Amatetti
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No response.

Merry Eisner-Heidorn
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Q1: What would be your top 2 or 3 priorities if you were to be elected to the Board of Education?

My priorities call for enhancing the Board of Education's relationship with MCPS and Dr. Starr and expanding their relationship with their stakeholders. To do so, I believe that we should focus on three critical areas: time, talk and transparency. The Board of Education can use existing processes, including the Baldrige Process of Continuous Improvement, to monitor progress. "Time" includes a number of factors. First, the Board of Education must devote more time to engaging all stakeholders. For example, where currently there are one or two budget forums enabling stakeholders to provide input on the budget, there should be five or six – held throughout the county in school and non-school locations. Secondly, the Board needs to verify that MCPS is taking the time to properly roll out new initiatives. When new curricula or programs are rushed into schools without the appropriate opportunity

for principal or teacher training, it can hardly be surprising that they don't live up to their expectations. This is critical as we continue to expand Curriculum 2.0. Finally, time includes when MCPS delivers its programs. Changing school bell times, considering calendar flexibility, pursuing opportunities for those in need to have something close to year-round schooling, all deserve consideration if they can help MCPS better meet the needs of its students and close the achievement gap. "Talk" focuses solely on the Board's need for more community engagement. While the Board holds triennial events with each cluster, most board members, and board meetings, are inside our schools. Not all parents feel comfortable coming into schools, so it's incumbent upon the Board of Education to go where their stakeholders are comfortable. I also believe that any significant move made by the Board of Education should involve stakeholder engagement across the full spectrum of stakeholders – MCEA, SEIU, MCAAP, parents, teachers, principals, the business community, non-profit organizations that can provide additional services, recreation-service providers, leaders from our local higher education institutions, etc. Becoming more "transparent" means that the Board of Education will insist that MCPS provide any and all information in a user-friendly, easily accessed manner on its website. For example, the budget should be presented as a series of spreadsheets that anyone can manipulate. If the Board has successfully engaged in the full spectrum of stakeholder engagement, then Board policies and the transparent budget should reflect what they've heard. If all of these recommendations are put into place, more stakeholders will be able to participate in and support the continuous improvement mandated by the Baldrige process. That's because the Board of Education will incorporate their conversations into policy, MCPS will move from policy to programs, their cost and the budget, and stakeholders will be able to follow along with the process. Montgomery County citizens should truly have an understanding of how our budget dollars are being invested towards the successful education of our children.

Q2: Many parents and community members feel their concerns are not being heard by the Board of Education. Describe what you would do to change this dynamic.

I am one of the parents that feels their concerns are not being heard by the Board of Education. And I've been advocating to the Board of Education, the Montgomery County Council, our delegation in Annapolis, all of our state representatives and the federal government regarding concerns I've heard for years. The priorities I described above are specifically designed to change this dynamic. As a system, we tend to identify specific targets and goals. We talk about how we're failing our gap children, limiting the opportunities for our gifted and talented children, denying education to our special needs children. But we need to recognize that they are ALL our children. They are ALL our future. And in today's diverse schools and heterogeneous classrooms, failure to meet the needs of any one child impacts the entire classroom. Thus it's incumbent us to meet the needs of ALL of them. That requires real collaboration - between the teacher and the children, between the teacher and their staff support specialist(s), between the teacher and their principal(s), between the school and the community, between the school and the system that provides its teaching materials, between the community and all the social services that maintain it. Every voice matters. The tools provided by time, talk and transparency also provide the Board of Education with a new method for guiding MCPS and Dr. Starr in decision-making. Currently, all recommendations are initiated by Dr. Starr and then approved (or not) by the Board of Ed. However, the role of the board is to create policy - policy based on community input. In my view, the Board of Education should be able to initiate programs - or drive their prioritization (based on cost or order of operation). It's time for the Montgomery County Board of Education to represent.

Q3: Describe what you consider the appropriate relationship between the Superintendent and the Board of Education. What, if anything would you change about the BOE's role in providing oversight of the Superintendent's performance?

Unfortunately, every conversation I've ever had with our Board of Education regarding oversight of the Superintendent ends up in long-drawn out conversation about the role they've defined for themselves. They've told me that their job is "policy; they make the policy that guides his decisions. In other words, so long as his actions fall within their policy guidelines, they'll agree with what he does. I'm not certain that qualifies as oversight. Especially when it's combined with policy formation that doesn't include the voices of all stakeholders (see my previous two answers). So, my recommendation would be to take advantage of the Office of Shared Accountability, staffed with people ready to assess the many programs implemented by MCPS over the years. After ensuring that Board of Education policy is based on ALL of the voices within Montgomery County, we should ensure that any and all MCPS programs derived from those policies, including any and spending and budgets,

have specific measurable goals. Then we should ask the Office of Shared Accountability to regularly report on how we're doing, program by program, on achieving those goals.

Q4: As a BOE representative, would you be willing to support and vote for an issue or program, even if the Superintendent did not support it? Please give an example of a current issue that falls into this category.

As Legislative Director of Start School Later, Inc., I believe that Dr. Starr has completely bungled the plan for altering our bell time schedule. And as a long-time education advocate in Montgomery County, that's the just the latest in a long line of issues where I have disagreed with the Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools. To make matters simplest, I'll focus this answer on my current efforts to alter the bell times in Montgomery County Public Schools. I believe it dovetails nicely with the work I've been doing since 2009 on enhancing our math - and math assessments, as a member of the Math Workgroup, then the Math Work Group Steering Committee, and currently the Math Assessment Work Group in MCPS. Science now shows that our adolescents would benefit substantially from attending school after they've received the number of hours of sleep they need (or something more closely approximating it). Students, particularly those in the gap, see marked gains in academic achievement, when they're well rested. Additionally, I believe that our younger students are more likely to benefit from a school schedule that contains elements from across the spectrum - reading, mathematics, physical exercise, and the arts - activities that are limited within their shorter day. Our system talks about educating the "whole child," but our curriculum focuses like a laser on reading and math. But the timing proposed by Dr. Starr, and the manner in which he engaged the community, made limited sense. I have continuously, and publicly, stated this fact. I will be testifying to this on June 17th when Dr. Starr makes his recommendation on how we will handle bell times going forward. Don't get me wrong. I think MCPS would benefit from a longer elementary school day. But we shouldn't have gone out for stakeholder input with "Let's add 30 minutes. What do you think?" We should have had a plan in place for the 30 minutes that gave the teachers the planning and collaboration time they needed and the children the time they needed for arts and music and physical exercise and perhaps a foreign-language rotation. And we should have recognized that little kids should be in school first, because they wake up bright-eyed and ready to learn. That's smarter than Dr. Starr's plan, which has middle school students start school too early; clearly he's forgotten that they're adolescents too. So, to answer your question: yes, I can vote for a program that Dr. Starr doesn't support, or vote against one he doesn't. In fact, I believe that the Board of Education has a role outside of our superintendent. Dr. Starr has some great ideas. It's time that we let him test his ideas, but insisted on metrics for each one of them, so that our Board of Education can hold him accountable and ensure that Montgomery County is well served.

Q5: Given the concern that BOE members are hampered by having no staff, would you support moving/assigning MCPS staff, from the office of Shared Accountability or elsewhere, to support BOE members. Would you support serving on the BOE becoming a full-time job?

The Board of Education has staff. If you go to: <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/about/contact.aspx>, you will see the names, titles, and contact information for the seven staffers assigned to the Board of Education members. And as long as the Board of Education continues to define their role as they do currently, this staff is sufficient. Should the Board of Education or MCPS pay for an independent auditor? No. That position is fully funded at the county and state level. Additionally, since its independence is valued, having it funded by the school system reduces its credibility, and diverts public education funding from public education. Should the Office of Shared Accountability report to the Board of Education or to MCPS? I have been trying to move this department to the Board of Education since 2009. As recently as September 2013, I talked to Phil Kauffman about it, and he said that the "timing wasn't quite right." I disagree with the idea of selecting staff from the department and moving them. Rather, I believe that the entire department, and their work -- reporting on the success and/or failure of MCPS and its programs -- is the responsibility of the Board of Education. That's how we ensure that we are fulfilling the policies that the board creates. Should the BOE be a full-time job? If you want the BOE to be a full-time job, then you'd have to pay the members as if they were full-time, and I'm not certain what we'd gain. All of our state legislators are part-time and the Board of Education is a state-agency, whose compensation is controlled by the state legislature. What I believe is that we need our Board of Education members to do a better job of collaborating with their full-time peers on the County Council. I continue to wonder why the Board of Ed was against having the same boundaries for both councilmanic and board of education districts. Regardless of that, I believe that by working together with their peers on the council, who manage the balance of the funds in this county, we can not only do a great deal more for both the public school students in Montgomery County, we can

do more for all of our citizens. Integrated funding in response to community concerns is the best method of managing taxpayer resources there is. And that doesn't require that our Board of Education members become full-time. That just requires that they improve and extend their listening skills with the time they have.

Q6: Many parents and community members are concerned about the lack of BOE transparency and involvement in the MCPS budget. If you would change the current budget process, what would you do?

I have a multi-step process in mind. 1) MCCPTA has to walk away from the budget table. They may believe that they're part of the budget process. In fact, once the budget has been set, they have limited ability to do anything but voice support for full funding. 2) The current system meetings between MCPS and its unions can continue, starting in September. 3) Simultaneous to the MCPS meetings, the Board of Education should be having a series of meetings with all of its stakeholders to determine budget priorities for the coming year. The meetings should include the following: a) MCEA, SEAU, MCAAP, Retired Teachers, etc.; b) MCCPTA; c) Two to three parents meetings at schools around the county; d) Two to three parent/community meetings outside schools around the county; e) Meetings with Montgomery College and the Universities of Shady Grove (What are the kids graduating doing well? What skills are they missing?); f) Business organizations from around the county; g) Volunteer, faith-based and non-profit organizations that provide services in collaboration with public education; and h) The county council. 4) Once all external stakeholder feedback has been gathered, and internal budget documents have been prepared, they should be supplied in easy-to-understand spreadsheets, posted to the MCPS web-site, and reviewed publicly in work-sessions, announced well-in advance, in the context of the stakeholder input that was heard. If the budget documents are provided in simple form, everyone in Montgomery County who wants to, as well as the Board of Education, can manipulate the documents - and understand how policy translates to spending. 5) Once the budget is "frozen," based on what the Board of Education and Dr. Starr believes is the best compromise - meeting the needs of all the various stakeholder concerns, then everyone can come in and testify. But I believe the testimony will be much better informed, given that the budget documents will be easier to understand, and those who have kept themselves informed will have ideas on alternative compromises. 6) The board and Dr. Starr meet again and consider community testimony. They vote on a final budget and send that to the county council. The budget is supplied to the council in a manner that will enable the council to integrate their funding easily to maximize all public investments.

Q7: How would you prioritize available resources to upgrade or replace aging school facilities?

Montgomery County needs to start thinking out of the box in the manner in which we utilize our Capital Improvement funds. We need to: 1) Recognize that boundary changes are going to be a part of the solution that will get children into buildings. This may be required once each decade. 2) Alter the balance of funding spent on county-wide general funds, such as HVAC and technology, areas which require critical regular maintenance and constant upgrades, rather than on individual building projects. The needs of the many should always be considered ahead of the needs of the few. 3) Establish new standards for what happens in an addition and in a modernization. If we will NOT return to a building to fix anything or to do any upgrades as if we'd done an addition, then we should be certain that the building has everything it needs when we do an addition. The same standards should apply in both cases. 4) As we set those standards, we should consider our building practices. How much \$/square foot should we be spending? Can we do more with less? 5) Are there alternatives to the things we're adding to our schools, like astroturf? Perhaps it would be smarter for MCPS to ensure that every high school had a decent grass field, lights, and a functional score board rather than astroturf. Perhaps we could turn the placement of astroturf fields around the county to Park and Planning, and allow them to collaborate with the limited number of soccer clubs in the county to distribute turf so that all kids have access.

Q8: Should students be allowed to transfer out of underperforming neighborhood schools? If so, what rules should govern the transfer?

First, I believe that if you're an elected official or work at the Carver Educational Services Center, your children should attend their home school. I believe that one sure way we're going to get improvement at our underperforming schools is if people have a personal stake in their improvement. Secondly, I'm actually against transferring students because a school is underperforming. The vast majority of our schools are over-crowded, and there aren't many places to put children from underperforming schools. What our underperforming schools need are attention - not to have their resources drained by the flight of children from their neighborhoods heading to other schools. What the school needs is a better principal. Then the principal needs great teachers. The teachers need all the support they can muster from the community - including parents, local businesses, non-

profits, faith-based organizations, etc. I believe that the solution to a failing school is not let children out, but to bring everyone in. The only exceptions I would make to this are for children with IEP's. If a special needs child has needs that can not be met while a school is working towards getting its act together, I would recommend finding a nearby school that can provide the child with the services he/she needs.

Q9: How would you re-allocate existing funds to address the achievement gap and low-performing schools?

It is my understanding that federal and state funds currently direct more funds to schools in low-income neighborhoods than to those with higher socio-economic status. Thus, to some extent, our school system is already diverting more funding to schools in neighborhoods where children enter the school system with less exposure to pre-school than their same-aged peers from wealthier households or from non-English speaking households. In addition, I would support the following investments: 1) Extension of the Minority Scholars Program to every high school - even those high schools that are majority minority. It's essential that we have a scholarship program where our diverse student leaders are rewarded for academic achievement, not athletic achievement. 2) Mandatory participation in our Study Circles program. This has two variations - a community-based program and a teacher-based program. Both the communities around our schools and EVERY teacher should be required to participate to ensure that all students enter our schools and encouraged to believe that they can become whatever they want to be. 3) Expansion of our efforts on hiring of minority principals and teachers. We need to do a much better job of having our staff reflect the diversity of our student population. 4) We need to establish higher standards for building leaders and teachers, and allow only the best into our low-performing schools. Rewarding those who meet these standards is perfectly acceptable (that is, use the extra federal and state dollars for extra compensation for the best principals and teachers). Great teachers set high standards and children rise to meet them, regardless of who they are and where they come from. 5) Additionally, we need to establish our elementary schools as centers for all social services in their community, to bring in parents who may need to learn the English language, access to health care, or may benefit from classes that give them job skills. If our schools become the hub of their community, parents will also be afforded the chance to participate with their children in their education. This is the benefit of close collaboration with the county council.

Q10: Studies show that a diverse range of learning experiences leads to success in higher education. How would you ensure that reading and math are balanced with arts, outdoor education, social studies, and other subjects that have been minimized due to testing in our schools?

First, I would have less testing. When I participated in the Math Workgroup, we talked about reducing the number of tests in MCPS. We talked about the need to shift from a high number of summative assessments to a better mix of summative assessments and formative assessments - assessments which could take a wide variety of forms, and could be used by teachers to modify their instruction based on where the children were in understanding the subject being taught. Secondly, I would ensure that we looked across our curriculum for opportunities where "reading" could be accomplished via "social studies" and where "science" could be accomplished via "outdoor education." This work needs to be done on a grade by grade basis with our new Curriculum 2.0. Rigor doesn't mean sitting still in a classroom tied to a desk. Rigor means challenging oneself to new ideas - and that might happen outside when confronted with all the different kinds of grass in a field, or in art, when challenged to explain the many different ways that humans have been portrayed in art. If the system does choose to add 30 minutes to the elementary school day, I believe that the only effective use of this time is to add more physical exercise, arts, tech time, music and language arts to what's currently offered. This would provide our elementary classroom teachers planning time, collaborating time, the time to work on teacher development (improving their teaching and testing skills), and integrating the curriculum across the subject areas. The result should be a balanced, and more engaging, curriculum.

Q11: How would you address the issue of gangs, bullying, class-disruption and truancy in schools?

First, I would hope that some of this would be addressed by the mandatory study circle participation that I recommended in question 9 of the previous survey. I fear that some of the behavior that leads to class-disruption is caused by children expressing their desire for recognition. We need all of our students believing that if they work, they can earn an "A" in any and every class, and be recognized for their scholarship by every teacher. Secondly, I believe that our school system needs to do more for our special needs students. Some of the behavior that might be considered to fall into this category (or be victims of gangs and bullies) are these students.

The more we can do to insure that their needs are fully met (rather than met at the minimum, or barely adequate level), the better off they, and all their peers in their heterogeneous classrooms will be. Thirdly, I think we were on the right path with the PBIS program we started a few years ago. Positive Behavior Interventions can be wonderful. We need continuous follow-through. We need to make certain that we're providing real opportunities for students who are struggling to advance, so that they believe that if they work hard, they have a chance to succeed. Finally, we need to identify quickly those students who are missing school, and reach out to them and bring them back into the classroom. We need to support them as they catch up on the material they have missed, and support them while they re-engage in their studies. The systems goal should be to remind students continuously that they can all succeed so long as they remain committed to the education process themselves.

Q12: How would you deal with alcohol and drug use among our students in schools?

We need to expand the definition of alcohol and drug "abuse" to include use of anything that simulates emotions or physical responses that a body can create naturally. The goal would be to ensure that children are aware that using someone else's prescription medication is as bad as using illegal drugs or alcohol. Additionally, we need to focus on encouraging positive behaviors that lead to natural highs - exercise, healthy eating, and camaraderie, rather than emphasizing the damage that comes from short and/or long-term abuse of drugs. Our children are significantly more responsive to positive messages than negative messages, and to positive role models than to negative models - we should seize every opportunity to present them. Modeling appropriate behavior should be either an assembly or part of every student's curriculum from 6th grade until graduation. School counselors and school resource officers should be on the look-out for students who may be abusing alcohol or drugs, and ensure that they have opportunities to be put in touch with better role-models.

Q13: How would you use existing community resources to supplement education, support services and improve the physical and mental health of our students?

As I mentioned in Question 9 of the previous survey, I recommend using our elementary schools as the "hub" of our communities. Our schools can be the center of services, managed by our County Council (which is why we need budget transparency at the school level). Rather than just have a nurse available for the children during the school day, there could be a community nurse for all of the families. There could also be a dentist. There could also be someone from DDA coordinating the care of the special needs students. In certain communities, we could have Adult ESL coordinating with the ESL lessons taught to the children during the day, so the parents and children could work together at night. There could be community events, celebrating the cultural diversity of the neighborhood, with opportunities for the children to demonstrate some of the skills, or art, or music they've learned in school, combined with opportunities for the parents to participate in some small way as well. Neighboring businesses and/or faith-based organizations could also participate in celebrating the local school. All of this requires strong building leadership - a principal capable of working with outside participants and managing teachers, counselors and support staff effectively.

Q14: How would you prioritize outdoor experiential educational opportunities such as school gardens, and the proposed Brickyard Educational Farm?

We need to add school gardens to the list of required items on both the "additions" and modernizations list. We also need to find a way to fund their addition to any and every school that doesn't have one. We need to communicate to our principals and encourage "garden clubs" at every middle and high school to remind our county's children of the history of our county, and re-connect them to the earth. Celebrating our planet should be more than a once a year "Earth Day" event. Montgomery County was once a rural, agricultural county. The children can only understand what that means if they experience it for themselves. To understand that, they can garden during the science classes that talk about plant growth in elementary, middle and high school AND they can take at least one field trip to the Brickyard Educational Farm and see what that looks like. Nothing compares to putting your hands in the dirt, tilling the soil, and tending a plant.

Q15: What changes to the MCPS wellness policy in relation to school food are you committed to advocate and vote for as a member of the Board of Education?

When the school board added health to the strategic plan, it opened the door to any number of improvements. School lunches have been steadily evolving since the federal government improved standards several years ago. However, we can do much more to encourage our children to eat the right foods - especially those children whose

parents lack the means to feed them healthy foods at home. I will always push for fresh over pre-packaged, local produce over long-distance shipments, and educating our children about what they eat over taking the easy way out. This isn't about money, our children are an investment in the future.

Q16: What is your position on student-led initiatives and pilot projects such as the Young Activist Club's dishwasher project?

I think student-led initiatives are the best. In fact, Start School Later has benefited from student-led initiatives in several school districts across the country. And when I organize testimony, whether it's at the county, state or federal level, student voices are critical. It's what makes a hearing about any education issue compelling. When children recognize that change is essential, we need to support them. When they embrace a cause that they believe will make a difference in the future, we need to find a way to fund it. Because by their very nature, children seek the safety and security of the status quo. So if they're willing to test something new, we need to go with them. The future is theirs.

Q17: Many parents have expressed concern about the risks to children of synthetic and artificial turf (AT) surfaces, which are replacing some natural grass surfaces in our county, including fields the MCPS has approved for a number of school's athletic fields. What is your position on the topic, and would you advocate for or against artificial turf playing fields for our children?

I am against artificial turf. I am against decision-making that appears, once again, to put our children at risk, rather than wait for the science to verify that something is safe. The number of mistakes we're making in this process are staggering. Only so many schools can afford these fields. There are only so many soccer clubs in the county willing to contribute - and we're picking the winners and losers. Only so many children can afford to join the clubs that will be privileged to play on the fields - even in the communities that are always being fully informed of the implications of installing the fields. We're creating inequities left and right. My recommendations in this area include: 1) No Astroturf on Montgomery County Public School Fields. Rather establish a minimum standard for all high school fields for grass, lights and score boards. 2) Work with Park & Planning and have them identify three additional areas, that balance with the Germantown Recreational Park to add soccer fields that could contain a mix of grass and Astroturf fields and talk to the soccer clubs about developing those areas. In other words, if the county wants to get into Astroturf, let the county do the homework and ensure that it's an acceptable thing. Until the county and state have done more due diligence on this, I don't want to see public education funds spent on it.

Q18: Additional comments

Montgomery County needs a Board of Education that: 1) listens; 2) represents; 3) engages ALL stakeholders; 4) uses that to build its policy; 5) turns policy into accountable action plans with metrics; 6) has a department that it manages to monitor the plans and the metrics; 7) collaborates with the Superintendent (not "rubber stamps" or waits for recommendations from); and 8) is completely transparent. My Board of Education also doesn't need credit cards - because we're doing this for the kids. We can meet with parents, business leaders, the county council and each other without food where possible. We need to take a hard look at the BOE expense reimbursement policy so that taxpayer waste (and fraud) can be eliminated.

Shebra Evans

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No response.

Jill Ortman-Fouse

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Q1: What would be your top 2 or 3 priorities if you were to be elected to the Board of Education?

1) Work for a system that is responsive, collaborative and accountable. Our county has a bountiful resource of knowledgeable, talented residents who want to make a difference. Welcome the partnerships. Increase transparency at all levels. 2) Attack the gap. Every staff member must believe in the potential for all students. Bolster that expectation. Provide licensed, certified, developmentally-appropriate day care for ages 1-4, free starting with most vulnerable children. Accelerate highly impacted kids from k-3. Engage pre-teen through high school students with project-based curriculum and experiential learning. Listen to our teachers and principals and give them the support they need to help all of our students reach their potential. Expand wrap-around services. 3) Support the whole child--emotional, social, physical, mental. Enrichment opportunities, arts, field trips, etc. Support the learning needs of the child beyond academics.

Q2: Many parents and community members feel their concerns are not being heard by the Board of Education. Describe what you would do to change this dynamic.

Pay attention to the sparks. The public outcries are not difficult to hear if you pay attention. As a responsive board member, I would look forward to residents sharing concerns with me so we could address flames adequately before they turn into fires. We must respect the public voice that funds the system. The purpose of community meetings should be to receive feedback, not just to promote the system's efforts. Monitor the feedback the community provides and look for patterns that need to be addressed.

Q3: Describe what you consider the appropriate relationship between the Superintendent and the Board of Education. What, if anything would you change about the BOE's role in providing oversight of the Superintendent's performance?

The Board of Education provides oversight for the Superintendent and the school system. I would add staff to the Board the Education so that they can more reasonably analyze initiatives and budget requests. Staff could be moved from central administration, i.e. Office of Shared Accountability, or added. Part-time board members with little staffing can't be expected to provide independent oversight to a 2.3 billion dollar budget, 201 schools and 151,000 students.

Q4: As a BOE representative, would you be willing to support and vote for an issue or program, even if the Superintendent did not support it? Please give an example of a current issue that falls into this category.

Yes. A few examples: I supported the elimination of Styrofoam trays when the school system did not. I support open process, transparency and community input which was ignored in the Brickyard Farm transaction. I support letting schools choose the option of schedule that best supports their students and whole child learning.

Q5: Given the concern that BOE members are hampered by having no staff, would you support moving/assigning MCPS staff, from the office of Shared Accountability or elsewhere, to support BOE members. Would you support serving on the BOE becoming a full-time job?

Yes and yes.

Q6: Many parents and community members are concerned about the lack of BOE transparency and involvement in the MCPS budget. If you would change the current budget process, what would you do?

Collaborate with the community, which is filled with experts who could be very helpful in this process, and asking them their suggestions. Open meetings, understandable language, clear objectives with detailed plans for action.

Q7: How would you prioritize available resources to upgrade or replace aging school facilities?

Get our fair share of state money re strategy with new governor, general assembly leadership and our MoCo delegation. Develop better communication with county planners and municipalities regarding new facility location and additions. Carefully examine our current formula for addressing facility needs. Through comprehensive external audit, move funds better targeted to facility needs. Research and use environmentally friendly, cost-saving building plans.

Q8: Should students be allowed to transfer out of underperforming neighborhood schools? If so, what rules should govern the transfer?

We need to survey our schools for those that are performing well and those that are underperforming. If there is a desire for community migration out of school, that should be a serious wake-up call to our system. Our school administration should be alert to any issues before we get to that level, and those issues must be addressed. Our priority should be to provide the support necessary for all our schools to be high-performing. I believe with the right strategies and partnerships we can do it. We have the resources locally and regionally to make that happen. We have schools that are highly attractive to the community from across the spectrum; from high-income, homogeneous areas to highly diverse, more impacted by poverty areas. We need to provide the program options our market desires -- we have huge competition for bilingual immersion programs; arts, communications and math magnets. Offering these programs and related opportunities bring the investment of the community. This is one strategy to raise the performance of our schools.

Q9: How would you re-allocate existing funds to address the achievement gap and low-performing schools?

I believe Montgomery County could and should be a model for the nation, and yet so many of our disadvantaged kids and children of color are failing. For example, 40% of our African-American high school students do not have the credits they need to matriculate to the next grade. We know what many of the barriers to success are in Montgomery County and have been talking about them for years. I was appointed to the MCPS Parent Advisory Council in 2008 and served as a member and an alumni until 2012. We hosted myriad workshops with recommendations regarding language (jargon and non-native), service, expectations, and policies to help decrease these barriers. Still those barriers persist. We know small class sizes; healthy, adequate school facilities; tailored instruction; and keeping experienced teachers in our highest needs schools all play a role in closing the achievement gap. But we are not meeting those goals. More than 30 years of research says family engagement leads to better educational outcomes for children. But at the largest high school in the county with the largest cohort of Hispanic students, no one in the front office speaks Spanish. We have a middle school actually successfully narrowing the achievement gap with a modified 8-period schedule (rotating classes that do not increase the length of the school day), which allows for additional class time for reading and math for the highest-risk students and much needed additional planning time for teachers, yet MCPS wants all schools to follow the same 7-period schedule. Teachers responding to MCPS's own task force on Alternative Programs for students mostly likely to fail declared that 7 periods does not work for all. I believe we must listen to parents, teachers and administrators in our schools. We must respond based on the unique needs, population, environment and history of each school. Without that flexibility we cannot adequately serve the wide spectrum of learning levels present in so many of our classrooms. We need to find more ways for our school system to say yes. Finally, we must make the achievement gap a budget priority. Recently, MCPS proposed that the County Executive's budget did not include the full supplemental funding for MCPS. MCPS responded that this shortfall would jeopardize initiatives to attack the gap. If the gap is indeed a priority, funds would be shifted to attack the gap first -- not be the first to go. The school system budget must stand behind the values it purports -- which include "equity."

Q10: Studies show that a diverse range of learning experiences leads to success in higher education. How would you ensure that reading and math are balanced with arts, outdoor education, social studies, and other subjects that have been minimized due to testing in our schools?

Our children can not be defined by math and reading scores on a standardized test. We must make whole child education a priority for our county. Flexible scheduling for schools to allow more minutes for these activities is a start. Standing up for these priorities on the state and federal level is imperative, a

Q11: How would you address the issue of gangs, bullying, class-disruption and truancy in schools?

1) Most importantly, instances of bullying should always be recorded on a report and taken seriously. In addition to potential devastating effects on the victim, they can be signs of some serious issues going on in the life of the person committing the acts. 2) I support a comprehensive strategy of engagement for gang prevention, including collaborating with Montgomery County's Youth Violence Task Force, and School Resource Officers (SROs) at every high school who role model and support students. 3) Class disruption: I support a restorative-practice education model with training for all staff-- resource teachers, administrators, teachers and school resource officers. 4) Increasing counselors, school psychologists and licensed social workers to the appropriate

ratio. 5) Increasing mentoring partnerships, engaging curriculum, electives, and after school activities. 6) Expanding partnerships with local industry, businesses, organizations, and technical schools to provide exposure to the full spectrum of career paths. 7) Increase partnerships with HHS and Dept of Rec to expand programs which are working well connecting school to home. 8) For the most severe instances of truancy (more than 20% absenteeism for students aged 5-16) State law allows the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) to petition the courts to declare truant students to be Children in Need of Supervision (CINS). However, CINS petitions for truancy are not filed by DJS in Montgomery County and are utilized infrequently across the state. This is policy that we need to reexamine. The focus of restorative policy is on building relationships of understanding, de-escalation skills, and inclusion as opposed to exclusion. It has proven to be a more evolved, effective method for keeping at-risk kids in school and out of trouble. By training all staff members who have contact with students, conflict is met consistently by a team who cares and can model appropriate social-emotional behavior. We must increase emotional and mental health staff to in order to best support our educational staff. Conflict in school can be related to family systems issues best addressed by MSWs, frustration caused by different learning issues; family trauma related to unemployment, safe housing or food insecurity, etc. Engagement and opportunity are key to students who live on the margin choosing a positive path. The ACES program coaches students low-income students for college. Linkages to Learning connects community, school and critical services. Dept of Rec programs like Excel Beyond the Bell and the Sports Academies provide academic support and connection with caring adults. Mentoring programs (like Young Black Men of Promise) help provide the scaffolding for students to reach their potential. Relationship building between School Resource Officers (SROs) and the student population fosters accountability. With so many students highly impacted by poverty now in our district, it is imperative that we all work together hand in hand for solutions.

Q12: How would you deal with alcohol and drug use among our students in schools?

We must have personnel available to the schools who are trained in identification of abuse and can provide support for students struggling with addiction. We need to increase the number of counselors in our schools towards an optimum ratio. We need to provide training for our counselors in identification so that they can train school staff. Currently we have a Pupil Personnel Worker model for our system to act as consultant and liaison on resources. I would like to add more licensed social workers to that staff who are trained to work with abuse and addiction issues.

Q13: How would you use existing community resources to supplement education, support services and improve the physical and mental health of our students?

I would expand the relationship with Health and Human Services and the Dept of Rec. They already have programs in place that are proving effective for community health for our students and our families, but there are waiting lists. I would supplement those programs with partnerships with local and regional non-profits who receive grants for mental and physical health education and support services.

Q14: How would you prioritize outdoor experiential educational opportunities such as school gardens, and the proposed Brickyard Educational Farm?

I believe experiential learning is critical to whole child education and will support and expand those opportunities whenever possible.

Q15: What changes to the MCPS wellness policy in relation to school food are you committed to advocate and vote for as a member of the Board of Education?

I agree with the mission and goals of the Real Food for Kids goals and mission. I would invite them to be a part of a work group, and start with enacting their suggestions which are low-hanging fruit. For example, having children bring water bottles to school that they can refill during the day from safe water sources. Growing salad bars and farm to table efforts. Working with the innovative ag reserve hub idea, etc.

Q16: What is your position on student-led initiatives and pilot projects such as the Young Activist Club's dishwasher project?

I fully support and encourage our children's advocacy efforts and hope they continue their courageous battles to protect our world and future. The pilot project for the recyclable trays being launched at a school besides Piney

Branch was a slap in the face to the community. Again, we should be on the cutting edge of such efforts. As it is, we are behind all the counties that surround us, as well as the other large school systems.

Q17: Many parents have expressed concern about the risks to children of synthetic and artificial turf (AT) surfaces, which are replacing some natural grass surfaces in our county, including fields the MCPS has approved for a number of school's athletic fields. What is your position on the topic, and would you advocate for or against artificial turf playing fields for our children?

I would advocate against installing any more artificial turf fields. There are too many questions about the safety, let alone the ongoing cost. With a background in children's environmental health, I'm all too familiar with our history of choosing to ignore data when it comes to cancer risks. The risk of these fields is being studied nationally, which also is a red flag that the concern is widespread. In the face of rising cancer rates in children, why would we choose a questionable option when other safe field options exist? As an environmentally conscious county, we should be leading the way in such efforts as organic fields, coconut fiber fields and other non-toxic options. We know that car tire burning creates toxic fumes, and that the tires themselves contain phthalates and cancer-causing chemicals. It's not much of a leap that the granules and the runoff from the fields could be harmful to children's bodies -- which are much more vulnerable than adults.

Q18: Additional comments

I believe I have fully expressed my passion and ideas the Whole Child coalition. Thanks for this opportunity!

District 1 Candidates

[Judith Docca](#)

[Kristin Tribble](#)

Judith Docca

<https://www.facebook.com/judydocca>

No response.

Kristin Tribble

<http://www.kristintribble.com/>

Q1: What would be your top 2 or 3 priorities if you were to be elected to the Board of Education?

The Board of Education must be accountable and, more importantly, responsive to community concerns and priorities to include the effective, prudent use of limited resources. Further, the Board must hold the Superintendent accountable for following established policy and implementing effective programs. That said, four actions I will take when elected are: 1) Improve communications and active outreach by the Board of Education

so that stakeholders are aware of issues impacting them and are encouraged to provide both input and feedback; 2) Focus on improving support to our teachers grappling with a new curriculum, new technology, and changing demographics; 3) Focus on leadership teams in each school that encourage a cultural shift while improving instructional effectiveness and responsiveness to our students and families; 4) Actively seek state funding to keep our school additions and revitalizations/expansions on track to address the inequity we see among our buildings.

Q2: Many parents and community members feel their concerns are not being heard by the Board of Education. Describe what you would do to change this dynamic.

As one of my priorities mentioned above, I will focus on how we can improve our communications with all stakeholders. A concerted outreach effort must be made to connect with those who are impacted by our decisions. The Board cannot rely on passive communications (posting on a website, etc.) but must actively seek out the opinions and understand the concerns of our constituents. The next step is responding to those concerns. I have stated that I hate black holes. A process must be implemented to reassure community members that their concerns are acknowledged, understood, and thoughtfully considered. Realistically, not all concerns can be accommodated by our school system but our process as a Board cannot be considered complete until the Board's rationale is shared with our stakeholders. Just as we encourage our schools to have a welcoming environment, so too should the Board of Education.

Q3: Describe what you consider the appropriate relationship between the Superintendent and the Board of Education. What, if anything would you change about the BOE's role in providing oversight of the Superintendent's performance?

The Superintendent reports to the Board of Education, in essence, his immediate supervisor. The Board in turn must hold the Superintendent accountable for following established policy and implementing effective programs which meet the goals as set by the Board. I would not necessarily change the Board's role per se; however, I would be proactively engaged in expecting comprehensive reports from our Superintendent and his staff.

Q4: As a BOE representative, would you be willing to support and vote for an issue or program, even if the Superintendent did not support it? Please give an example of a current issue that falls into this category.

During Superintendent Starr's first year and in my role as MCCPTA President, I opposed his CIP recommendation that delayed school modernizations. We also disagree on proposed state legislation regarding the burden of proof in special education disputes. Dr. Starr and I have discussed our opposing views respectfully and in depth. I will continue to hold those positions as well as voice my opposition to future issues on which I'm sure Dr. Starr and I will disagree. The point is that we each have a role to play due to our differing perspectives and objectives. The resulting disagreement is important to voice in order to have a discussion that can generate a well-considered solution.

Q5: Given the concern that BOE members are hampered by having no staff, would you support moving/assigning MCPS staff, from the office of Shared Accountability or elsewhere, to support BOE members. Would you support serving on the BOE becoming a full-time job?

The first year I participated in the MCPS Operating Budget workgroup, I supported the Board of Education expanding their staff to include a budget analyst. By the second year of my participation, I appreciated that the Superintendent and his subordinates are, in fact, "staff" to the Board of Education. The Board of Education already has a staff of 7. In my opinion, it would be a waste of valuable resources to fund another budget analyst dedicated to the Board of Education. Instead, Board of Education members need to hold the Superintendent accountable for providing the information and answers they require to perform their responsibilities. OSA staff should already be available to provide the needed analysis and respond to Board member questions. Again, making the Board of Education a full-time position would drain much needed resources. That said, the fact that it is a low-paying position with the expectation of many hours was a consideration in my decision to run and I am certain deters other qualified candidates.

Q6: Many parents and community members are concerned about the lack of BOE transparency and involvement in the MCPS budget. If you would change the current budget process, what would you do?

This issue needs to be addressed as quickly as possible. There are pieces falling into place that will help in the effort to change and improve the budget process. An immediate action that should be implemented is making our MCPS online budget searchable. The next step will be looking at various ways to reorganize the budget in order to accurately and easily represent the resources expended on our various programs. It will require input from our community members in order to capture their needs and preferences.

Q7: How would you prioritize available resources to upgrade or replace aging school facilities?

I served on the workgroup charged with reviewing how our facilities are assessed for replacement (revitalizations/expansions) and it is a fair, though lengthy, process. The overwhelming issue with our aging school facilities is the inequity that arises. Some of our aging schools cannot provide the same programmatic resources and supports as our newer school buildings. And, we have overcrowded schools that have little to no flexibility in how they plan their school day activities. We need a review of how the state of our facilities impacts programming in our schools. This will provide a road map for prioritizing existing resources while, at the same time, we advocate for state funding to keep our much-needed revitalizations/expansions on track.

Q8: Should students be allowed to transfer out of underperforming neighborhood schools? If so, what rules should govern the transfer?

While I wish family wishes could so easily be accommodated, I do not support such a policy. Our focus must be on improving each and every school in our system through effective leadership in the school building, teacher training, and community engagement.

Q9: How would you re-allocate existing funds to address the achievement gap and low-performing schools?

This is where the Superintendent needs to be held accountable. When we see lower performing schools, we need to review the culture within that school and identify the supports needed to improve achievement. We currently have Innovation and Intervention schools that receive additional focused support and I am hopeful that all schools will benefit from best practices identified in this effort. Smaller class sizes are also implemented in certain schools. At the end of the day, we must ask the right questions to ensure we spend our limited resources on effective interventions and supports that will impact achievement.

Q10: Studies show that a diverse range of learning experiences leads to success in higher education. How would you ensure that reading and math are balanced with arts, outdoor education, social studies, and other subjects that have been minimized due to testing in our schools?

Here is where Dr. Starr and his staff are on the right track. The integrated curriculum and the emphasis on social-emotional learning encourage a combined learning in all subjects. This provides our teachers with opportunities to blend art with math, music with reading, etc. Further, he is de-emphasizing the high stakes testing. As a Board member, I will continue to support the importance of teaching the "whole child" as a way to encourage creativity and applaud our children's unique strengths.

No responses to the remaining questions.

District 3 Candidates

[Laurie Halverson](#)

[Pat O'Neill](#)

Laurie Halverson

<http://www.lauriehalverson.com/>

Q1: What would be your top 2 or 3 priorities if you were to be elected to the Board of Education?

Priority #1: Building an environment of collaboration and transparency. There are many competing needs county-wide and it is vital for our Board of Education members, County Council, and state delegates to work in tandem. I think we can all agree that education is the #1 asset and priority in Montgomery County. Yet, even though the goal is clear, competing needs are growing and threaten the stronghold we have on education. There are times when public input and transparency have been ignored or perhaps forgotten as political leaders grapple with the needs of the county. It is important for everyone to work together to provide the checks and balances and keep all parties accountable and open on public issues. As a School Board member, I would work with our County Council members, County Executive, state delegates, parents, teachers, administrators and community members to make the best use of county resources. I would commit to greater transparency of the MCPS budget so stakeholders can have a clear picture of how the \$2+ billion is being spent. I would also adhere to policies and work to change the policies as necessary with public input. Priority #2: Focus on learning with less emphasis on test taking. While state tests are an important tool to use in evaluating student performance and teacher effectiveness, it isn't the panacea for education. Great teachers who can reach each child are far more important than any test. The School Board mission should emphasize that MCPS work toward attracting and cultivating the best teachers in the world to raise MCPS as a top international school system. I believe the all encompassing goal of "closing the gap" can be reached when students are learning from teachers who are well qualified and supported with challenging curriculum and a mentoring atmosphere, and when schools are led by visionary principals who know and can advocate for the needs of each child in the school. Priority #3: Revitalization/ Expansion. If we don't keep up with the district's plan to revitalize our school buildings and expand the footprint of current buildings to keep up with the 2,500+ annual enrollment increases, our schools will decline to a state not conducive to learning. It is vital to keep all projects on time and on track. I would be an activist in collaborating with elected officials to obtain the funds to make this happen.

Q2: Many parents and community members feel their concerns are not being heard by the Board of Education. Describe what you would do to change this dynamic.

Dr. Starr has provided opportunities for the public to provide input, however, the comments that they collect seem to be going into a black hole. People don't feel their comments are truly being heard. As an individual Board member, I think emails should get responses and comments should be followed up in a format where those who give input feel their comments got attention. I have talked to Board members and have heard that they get flooded with emails and don't have time to respond to all emails, so I would support a study (at minimum expense) to look at the time Board members spend on emails and other tasks and report back with a recommendation. I support the continuation of meetings that Board members have with the area schools, but we need to encourage all schools to advertise them on their listserves and websites to make parents and the community aware of these meetings. Businesses and community members should also be invited through local media and social networking. If possible, I would also like to see a public listing of topics raised in emails to the BOE so you can see how many people (without showing the names) sent emails in favor of improving school nutrition and how many emails are about bullying for example. This wouldn't necessarily mean that the number of emails is a certainty for prioritizing issues, but it adds to the transparency and shows the public that their comments count.

Q3: Describe what you consider the appropriate relationship between the Superintendent and the Board of Education. What, if anything would you change about the BOE's role in providing oversight of the Superintendent's performance?

The superintendent is an expert educator, leader, and driver of the mission. The Board of Ed is the overseer of the mission and the budget. Tough decisions are made on how to allocate the funds after hearing the superintendent's recommendation and the public's input through testimonies and conversations at the Board table. The Board of Ed can intervene in county-wide issues and help to resolve public concerns. The Board of Ed sets the policies and revises policies after listening to public input. The Board of Ed is the watchdog for the public and asks probing questions and makes sure the superintendent is held accountable. They all work as a team to do their best to meet the needs of all students. I'm not sure what I would change about providing oversight of the

Superintendent's performance. If there are no measurable objectives currently, then I would include that as an important tool in oversight that should be shared with the public.

Q4: As a BOE representative, would you be willing to support and vote for an issue or program, even if the Superintendent did not support it? Please give an example of a current issue that falls into this category.

I would not run for the Board of Education if I was a rubber stamp for the Superintendent. I do respect Dr. Starr for his skills and leadership role and value his input, but feel comfortable disagreeing with him. I think I'm more tuned into issues of transparency, policies and communicating with parents and the public and can add that perspective at the board table. Here are a couple areas I may have disagreed with the Superintendent's recommendations: I think Dr. Starr surprised the BOE with the focus schools concept and I would have mentioned my concern at a public BOE meeting instead of being captured on a YouTube video. I would have voted to continue a flyer distribution policy for secondary schools so that all children can be reached by nonprofit groups and would have voted for a policy change on determining what flyers are appropriate for distribution. I would have opposed the resolution to adopt the Brickyard site as a lease for ball field use and would have insisted on public input (during Dr. Weast's term.)

Q5: Given the concern that BOE members are hampered by having no staff, would you support moving/assigning MCPS staff, from the office of Shared Accountability or elsewhere, to support BOE members. Would you support serving on the BOE becoming a full-time job?

Yes, I would support a study that measures current BOE work and analyzes the time needed to understand the complexities of the budget and would base my decision on the study and on input from the community. I have spoken to a BOE member who says the work load is great and the time commitment is much more than a part-time job. As a volunteer, I have passionately devoted my time on a full time basis to educational and health/safety issues for children, so I would not change in my full time commitment as a Board of Education Member.

Q6: Many parents and community members are concerned about the lack of BOE transparency and involvement in the MCPS budget. If you would change the current budget process, what would you do?

I would push for more transparency in the budget process. There used to be more information on the website for the local school budgets and I would push for a return of that information. I would push for more clarity such as breaking down a \$40 million plus special education miscellaneous expense. I would encourage LEED certified and green buildings to save money in the future and would push for better quality portable classrooms with bathrooms for improved safety if portables must be an option for now. I would expect more detailed responses to BOE questions after testimonies and if the answers provided by MCPS staff were vague, I would insist for more clarity. I would like regular updates on the budget discussions so I could ask questions along the way before the budget gets to the proposal stage. I would expect to be informed of MCPS negotiations with unions so BOE members can provide input before the contracts are signed.

Q7: How would you prioritize available resources to upgrade or replace aging school facilities?

#1 priority is to have a quality maintenance staff who can work toward closing the backlog of orders and start being proactive about keeping our facilities in working order. Our LEED certified buildings won't be energy efficient if they aren't maintained properly. So much money can be saved if MCPS maintained our current facilities. #2 priority is to keep all current revitalization/ expansion projects on time and on track using the current schedule that was recently revised. It will be key to advocate in Annapolis with our county Executive, County Council Members and fellow Board members to make this a priority. Unfortunately, projects were delayed this year and Baltimore City got a \$1.1 billion deal that all of our county delegates voted for. Equally important is to get children out of portable classrooms as much as possible with school additions, and also working with the Planning Board and County Council to improve zoning so that new schools and/or boundary studies are in place as new residential housing is being planned.

Q8: Should students be allowed to transfer out of underperforming neighborhood schools? If so, what rules should govern the transfer?

I support school choice. I do think that it would be optimal if most students attend their local school because parents are closer in proximity to their child's school and evidence is clear that parent participation in their child's

school is directly related to student achievement. However, parents should not be locked into their own local schools if their school is underperforming. We are fortunate to live in a large county with a wide range of options and resources that already exist so it seems that many of the resources are already in place to make this a possibility. If an underperforming school loses students because parents opt out of their local school, it gives MCPS and the surrounding community more of an incentive to combine resources and fix the broken school. If parents are not happy with a school due to poor performance on state tests, AP exams, SATs, etc., they should have a right to choose another school at MCPS. A stakeholder group that includes parent representatives, community members and local businesses as well as MCPS staff could suggest the rules for governing this process, send out recommendations for public comment and then the BOE can make a decision on this issue.

Q9: How would you re-allocate existing funds to address the achievement gap and low-performing schools?

1. More transparency and coordination with resources: Every parent wants their child to succeed and wants to do what it takes to help their child. Just providing a list of resources online is not helpful to many families-the Department of Family and Community Resources needs to SHOW parents how resources can help their children. The BOE should coordinate better with nonprofit and other county resources so that parents have better transparency on resources that are available for their child. 2. Improve the effectiveness of professional development. Teachers have complained to me that their training was worthless. Much training lately is how to adapt to the new curriculum, but not how to improve quality of teaching and how to improve content knowledge. MCPS can do better at targeted professional development. Teachers and para-educators also need targeted multicultural training as well. Many children act out in school for reasons other than just being defiant-some are hungry, some need adjustments in their medication, some just didn't hear the teacher, some are conditioned at home to react in certain ways for example. Some teachers and para-educators need help with classroom management training. 3. Quality (emphasis on quality) preschools for children of poverty. 4. Expectations needs to be high for children at all MCPS schools. Teachers of high performing schools should spend time in classrooms of teachers with low performing schools, and vice versa. Principals should visit classrooms of other schools and share and learn from findings. MCPS schools have so many resources, yet seem to isolate themselves like a ship at sea with one captain. 5. Consider adding foreign language at the elementary level, even preschool level.

Q10: Studies show that a diverse range of learning experiences leads to success in higher education. How would you ensure that reading and math are balanced with arts, outdoor education, social studies, and other subjects that have been minimized due to testing in our schools?

Less time on testing preparation and more focus on teaching. MCPS is trying to do this with the integrated curriculum. The arts have been harmed lately because of the pressure to perform on state tests and I don't see that changing much with Curriculum 2.0. Dr. Starr needs to set the tone and have it trickle down to the principals that a well rounded education is the goal. I believe that with more emphasis on teaching a well rounded education will result in higher achievement on tests.

Q11: How would you address the issue of gangs, bullying, class-disruption and truancy in schools?

There should be an environment at the school of mutual respect between students and teachers. In 2011, I was awarded a "White House Champion of Change" by the Obama Administration for my advocacy work on bullying. I co-chaired the MCPS committee that incorporated the state directive on the Policy on Bullying Prevention. To help to address the gap from Latino and African American children and white and asian children, schools should have goals in their School Improvement Plans. Targeted classroom management training for teachers and para-educators as well as multicultural training can help. Effective teachers who work well with at-risk youth could provide strategies to teachers who are having difficulty. The Principal should set clear boundaries so there is a clear understanding by students about what is acceptable behavior in school. Principals set the tone in the school. Students should feel safe at school. Students who are repeat offenders should not be ignored and should receive extensive help to improve their behavior and should not be in the classroom with other students if they threaten the safety of other children. Bullying incidents should be investigated and victims should not fear retaliation if they talk to an adult. Schools should follow the MCPS policy and make sure students and families know about the availability of the Bully Reporting form and teachers should be encouraged to file reports when they witness bullying in their school.

Q12: How would you deal with alcohol and drug use among our students in schools?

This is a huge area of concern for me and I have to admit I don't have easy answers for this question: As a MCCPTA Health/ Safety Chair for 2 years, I have been involved on a School Health Council and I worked closely with Meg Baker of "Under 21" for several years before the federal funding was cut. Evidence is clear that underage drinking harms the brain especially as it is still developing. Here are my suggestions based on what I know now on this subject: Make sure there is a plan of educating children about the dangers of alcohol and drug use, using available programs. The principal and the School Resource Officer should have a good relationship. The SRO can be a resource in prevention as an adult who develops relationships with the students. Encourage PTAs to provide opportunities for education at evening events for parents and students. The Health curriculum should incorporate effective drug/ alcohol abuse awareness. My younger son says that he never thought drugs were "cool" until he learned that concept in health class in middle school. So, that concerns me! Some parents of high schoolers host parties for their children with alcohol. I would like a message at Back to School Night and regular messages from the principals and PTAs to discourage this.

Q13: How would you use existing community resources to supplement education, support services and improve the physical and mental health of our students?

There are many non-profit groups that already do a great deal to assist with educating students. Linkages to Learning is one of the biggest groups. Big Learning is a nonprofit that helps with after school programs. There are other groups that help to provide food such as MANNNA. It would be helpful to have better coordination of all the services and to provide better transparency to parents so resources are easily accessible. As a MCCPTA leader it is rewarding to receive a "thank you" when I helped parents locate the resource they needed, but there are many parents who didn't get that kind of help. Parents shouldn't have to know somebody with "inside information" to get the help they need.

Q14: How would you prioritize outdoor experiential educational opportunities such as school gardens, and the proposed Brickyard Educational Farm?

I am a huge proponent of outdoor education, especially for boys since many have difficulty sitting still in school. Middle School Outdoor Education should be continued. School gardening can teach life skills about healthy eating and how to grow your own vegetables, so I support this effort. I support educational farms and would love to see the vegetables used at lunch time if there is a way that can work. I would encourage schools to incorporate school gardens as part of their curriculum. There should be more flexibility for that now compared to years past. Teachers are able to share lesson plans online now and the ideas could be teacher-led where best practices could be shared on how to incorporate lessons on gardening into the curriculum.

Q15: What changes to the MCPS wellness policy in relation to school food are you committed to advocate and vote for as a member of the Board of Education?

Healthy snack options for a la carte items. Salad bars. Apples or a healthy snack before or after lunch Automatic emails to be sent to parents on items purchased, which parents could choose to opt out of.

Q16: What is your position on student-led initiatives and pilot projects such as the Young Activist Club's dishwasher project?

Yes-fine with me. I encourage parents to advocate for what they think will improve their school.

Q17: Many parents have expressed concern about the risks to children of synthetic and artificial turf (AT) surfaces, which are replacing some natural grass surfaces in our county, including fields the MCPS has approved for a number of school's athletic fields. What is your position on the topic, and would you advocate for or against artificial turf playing fields for our children?

As Health/ Safety Chair of MCCPTA, I held a forum on this topic and included experts for artificial turf and for natural turf fields. As a citizen, I wrote public testimony to the County Council and spent numerous hours studying the topic. I disagreed with the projected costs in the report presented to the County Council. I provided a comparison of my own and cited a California cost comparison that artificial turf fields were much more expensive than what was reported to the County Council. I warned of the health risks associated with the chemicals in the tires, the heat issues, the water run off issues, etc. There are many concerns with AT fields. Personally I am against AT fields. I am also against the process MCPS uses to approve the fields, with no input from the community other than the few Booster Club members of a school. I want to push for a policy that includes

community input since the community is affected for many years once an AT field is installed. If there was community input and they recommended an AT field, I would insist that organic infill be used instead of rubber tires. I would ask for a pilot of a field using natural turf that is well maintained (although I think Churchill's natural field has already proven that a field can look nice if it is maintained and not heavily used.) I am hoping this is a fad that will end soon as methods of cultivating hardier natural turf and proper maintenance proves as the natural and effective option. It frankly surprises me that our County Council members have been in favor of AT fields given their attentiveness to "green" issues and focus on the environment. Isn't the County Council being contradictory when they say "don't use plastic bags" and then support plastic fields?

Q18: Additional comments

Thanks so much for the opportunity to provide my views on issues that concern your group! My website is LaurieHalverson.com and I tweet @HalversonLaurie. I also have a campaign Facebook Page: LaurieHalverson4BOE My qualifications to serve on the Board of Education: Depth of Experience, over 10 years as a PTA leader: (MCCPTA Vice President of Educational Issues for 2 years, Health/ Safety Chair for 2 years, Curriculum Co-Chair for 1 year, Churchill Cluster Coordinator for 3 years, Bells Mill PTA President) A Doer with Results: -Awarded "White House Champion of Change" by the Obama Administration for my work on bullying prevention. -During a complete overhaul of MCPS curriculum, I collaborated with MCPS Executives and kept PTA leaders informed about Common Core State standards and the new Curriculum 2.0 and encouraged --PTAs to advocate for a more parent-friendly report card. -a key player at Bells Mill ES in advocating for and receiving 8 portable classrooms to replace moldy ones that were causing children and teachers to have allergic symptoms and headaches. Positive Relationships already built: I have already built positive relationships over the past 10 with MCPS executive staff, County Council Members and Board of Education Members and have gained new relationships county-wide through Leadership Montgomery Already familiar with MCPS Policies: I have already served as a PTA representative on various MCPS Policy Committees on topics such as bullying prevention, charter school policies, and discipline in schools, so I am familiar with policies and the process of changing them. Human Resources and Analytical Skills: I also bring my career experience in human resources and benefits. I have working knowledge of human resources issues and analytical knowledge as a senior analyst.

Pat O'Neill

<http://www.patoneill.org/>

No response.

District 5 Candidates

[Michael A. Durso](#)

[Larry E. Edmonds](#)

Michael A. Durso

[**https://www.facebook.com/durso4boe**](https://www.facebook.com/durso4boe)

Q1: What would be your top 2 or 3 priorities if you were to be elected to the Board of Education?

If re-elected to the MCPS Board of Education, my priorities will be as follows..... #1 - improvement of relations with the County Council and County Executive offices - staffs. #2 - closer scrutiny of MCPS budget by the BOE. It might be (past ?) time for additional staffing to look at financial priorities and expenditures. #3 - a review of staffing - programs that impact all of our students and communities.

Q2: Many parents and community members feel their concerns are not being heard by the Board of Education. Describe what you would do to change this dynamic.

In the past, I have made myself available to PTA's, Community Organizations, and Homeowner Associations, and I see that continuing if reelected in November, That being said, I do understand the disconnect at times between the Board and parents-community. I suggest that individuals feel free to contact me on issues, and bring to my attention any concerns. Having worked in MCPS for 13 years prior to retirement in 2009, I think I have some clear insights that can be helpful to the community at large. I look forward to individual and collective input.

Q3: Describe what you consider the appropriate relationship between the Superintendent and the Board of Education. What, if anything would you change about the BOE's role in providing oversight of the Superintendent's performance?

In my career, I have worked for about 10-12 Superintendents in three different jurisdictions. I have witnessed some very effective leaders, and some less effective. Ideally, there is mutual respect and trust between the BOE and Superintendent with appropriate oversight. That " appropriate oversight " can be formalized by conversations, meetings, and the evaluation process. Our committee structure, MCCPTA, employee organizations, MCPSRA (retirees), and input from the community are all crucial. In many instances, a candid and open communication system with the BOE, BOE Officers, and Superintendent can assure a more candid and honest oversight that is necessary.

Q4: As a BOE representative, would you be willing to support and vote for an issue or program, even if the Superintendent did not support it? Please give an example of a current issue that falls into this category.

I am (and have been) willing to support or oppose a program that was not in agreement with the Superintendent - MCPS. Some examples include not voting for the approval of our only charter school, which is closing this school year, and the Pearson contract of 2-3 years ago. Some areas that I also feel strongly about include secondary literacy programs, inclusion of athletic trainers in HS, increase in SRO officers, and a stronger commitment for diversity in our workforce. Several of these issues have not always had strong Superintendent support.

Q5: Given the concern that BOE members are hampered by having no staff, would you support moving/assigning MCPS staff, from the office of Shared Accountability or elsewhere, to support BOE members. Would you support serving on the BOE becoming a full-time job?

I am torn on the issue of full time BOE service. I think if it became a " job " we might cut off opportunities for a wider commitment and involvement by parents who are employed elsewhere. On the other hand, we do need additional staff, whether it might come from OSA as you suggest, or newly defined positions that would become part of our permanent BOE staff. It is a misnomer that we have " no staff ", but that existing staff could easily be expanded. This is an area where we are constantly criticized by the County Council- Executive.

Q6: Many parents and community members are concerned about the lack of BOE transparency and involvement in the MCPS budget. If you would change the current budget process, what would you do?

I think the budget process could be more open by a bit of restructuring. Local input prior to hearings could be helpful, as opposed to waiting for recommendations to come out, and then we react to it later. Community forums where the BOE - Superintendent come to the community (vs the community coming to us) might help somewhat.

Q7: How would you prioritize available resources to upgrade or replace aging school facilities?

Though the current process does not seem to satisfy all, I must say I don't know of another one better that could replace the process we use now. Communities get understandably frustrated when their school does not come up ASAP for renovation. I am open to another process if identified, but I think our current process is equitable.

Q8: Should students be allowed to transfer out of underperforming neighborhood schools? If so, what rules should govern the transfer?

Having been an educator for 44 years prior to my BOE experience, I have seen a variety of policies and practices that deal with issues of underperformance. 32 of those years were as a school principal. Ideally, we set up schools that adequately serve our communities eliminating the need for massive transfers. Conversely, there will always be extenuating circumstances that might dictate a transfer. The current review of our COSA process through the Policy Committee will hopefully address this issue of transfers. I believe a strong neighborhood system is preferable to removing students from their communities.

Q9: How would you re-allocate existing funds to address the achievement gap and low-performing schools?

It may not be as much a re-allocation issue, but a better oversight of local school budgets, hiring responsibilities. Do we really have a good understanding of what works, what does not work, and how effective are our current staffing models. Are there in-house MCPS practices worth replicating? Why are some schools successful, and others not (especially when they might serve similar demographics)?

Q10: Studies show that a diverse range of learning experiences leads to success in higher education. How would you ensure that reading and math are balanced with arts, outdoor education, social studies, and other subjects that have been minimized due to testing in our schools?

We will need a concentrated look (outside review?) @ current practices, especially in our elementary schools. As our budgets might become a bit more "healthy", we must make sure that the areas you mention are returned and expanded in our schools. I think we will notice a bit of a shift in community - parental attitudes towards testing as we are already seeing with some Common Core backlash. That development can pave the way to broader learning experiences for our students.

Q11: How would you address the issue of gangs, bullying, class-disruption and truancy in schools?

I mentioned in the previous questionnaire of having been a secondary principal for 32 of my 44-year public education career. In that time (both Middle-High School), I think I faced every possible type and category of disciplinary challenges. When expectations are clear and concise, and adequate staff and resources are in place, then the issues mentioned can be kept to a minimum. There needs to be candor in dealing with these issues, appropriate consequences in place, and a will of the community and school system to address these issues. In all instances, a strong relationship between home - school, student - staff, and community - student can go a long way in effectively addressing these problems.

Q12: How would you deal with alcohol and drug use among our students in schools?

We need to be candid in dealing with these issues, especially with our pre-teens and teens, who get so many mixed messages from adults. Frequently this use might be symptomatic of other issues going on with our students. Our Health - Physical Education Curriculum, Counseling Services, PTSA, and others can all play a part in this long time, and continuing challenge. The new marijuana regulations effective in October will also cause us to be more aware of and communicate with our students on the dangers of drugs-alcohol.

Q13: How would you use existing community resources to supplement education, support services and improve the physical and mental health of our students?

Some of this is already in place with outreach to the Recreation Department, Police Department, and other community agencies that can assist. The schools cannot handle this alone. Wider use of public school facilities might enhance the "community concept" of our neighborhoods, insuring a sense of family and belonging that enhances a positive experience for all youth.

Q14: How would you prioritize outdoor experiential educational opportunities such as school gardens, and the proposed Brickyard Educational Farm?

Having addressed this through the Brickyard Coalition questionnaire, I feel that this issue might be one to appropriately come before both the County Council and the Board of Education. There are financial implications, but more important some communication challenges that took place in the past, and need to be resolved in

moving forward. There are issues of access, resources, curriculum, and staffing that are all appropriate for this needed dialogue. In short, school gardens and the Brickyard Educational Farm are important discussion items, but resources will be a crucial factor.

Q15: What changes to the MCPS wellness policy in relation to school food are you committed to advocate and vote for as a member of the Board of Education?

Some adjustments have already taken place and under study. I feel comfortable in advocating adjustments that will improve our school food offerings, aware also that there are local (fiscal) constraints, and state - federal guidelines that impact change. Nonetheless, the County Council has addressed this and MCPS is well aware of the concerns on this topic. The scope of change will be determined by what is practical and financially feasible.

Q16: What is your position on student-led initiatives and pilot projects such as the Young Activist Club's dishwasher project?

I think each initiative stands on its own merits. Where a student led initiative has merit and support, I think a pilot is appropriate. Frequently there are employee, regulatory, and financial (there always seems to be a price tag) factors that dictate if a pilot project can work or not. It might be time to revisit the dishwasher project in 2014-2015.

Q17: Many parents have expressed concern about the risks to children of synthetic and artificial turf (AT) surfaces, which are replacing some natural grass surfaces in our county, including fields the MCPS has approved for a number of school's athletic fields. What is your position on the topic, and would you advocate for or against artificial turf playing fields for our children?

I have seen both sides of this issue in my career as a HS Principal, and recently discussed this with the Sierra Club. I can share with you the perils of natural turf being used constantly, expensive to maintain, and by the spring of the school year, many fields are like parking lots. Conversely, I am aware of the health - environmental concerns of turf field users and opponents, and those concerns are not to be taken lightly. As we now have a mix of these fields in our high schools, it seems there is a great opportunity for a comparative study in terms of usage, cost, availability, injuries etc.

Q18: Additional comments

I have no additional comments beyond that I seek your endorsement. I think my prior experiences in the classroom, school house, and board room allow for a unique approach that allows me to view the myriad of challenges facing MCPS in a more deliberative and constructive manner. Feel free to follow up with me as needed. Thank you.....Mike Durso

Larry E. Edmonds

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Larry-Edmonds-for-Board-of-Education-District-5/389020714546495>

No response.

***Members of the Whole Child Coalition include:**

Annita Seckinger, President, Watts Branch Watershed Alliance
Carissa Lovelace, Executive Director, Chesapeake Institute for Local Sustainable Food and Agriculture
Carrie Smedira, Board Member, Chesapeake Institute for Local Sustainable Food and Agriculture
Carrie Witkop, PTA Member
Chris Bradbury, MCDCC At-Large Member
Daryl Davis, Lyrad Productions, Musician and Activist
Kathleen Indart, One Montgomery
Linda Schade, Community Activist
Lindsey Parsons, Co-Director, Real Food for Kids – Montgomery

Mike Tabor, Member, Progressive Neighbors
Nadine Bloch, Parent Activist, Co-facilitator of Takoma Park Young Activist Club
Naomi Bloch, Founder, Montgomery County Sustainability Network
Philip Piety, Ed Info Connections
Sophia Maravell, Education Director, Brickyard Educational Farm
Susan Katz Miller, Community Activist
Tamara Meyer, President, Work Well LLC