

MCMC Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

2024 Primary Election Cycle

The Montgomery County Muslim Council (MCMC) invites you to answer this candidate questionnaire and return it to us by Friday, April 12, 2024. Please return responses to president@mcmcmd.org. Responses may be made public.

Candidate Name: Melissa Kim

Submitted By: Melissa Kim Date: April 12, 2024

1. Addressing Islamophobia and Ensuring Muslim Representation: How will you address Islamophobia within the school system, ensuring that the concerns of Muslim students and families are heard and addressed effectively?

As a candidate for the Board of Education, I am committed to fighting against all forms of discrimination, bigotry, and hatred, including Islamophobia. I believe that every student deserves a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment, where they can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. To address Islamophobia within the school system, I propose the following actions:

- Implement anti-bias and anti-racism training for all staff and students, with a focus on recognizing and challenging stereotypes, prejudices, and microaggressions that target marginalized groups including Muslims.
- Review and update the curriculum and materials to ensure that they reflect the diversity and contributions of Muslims and other cultures, and that they do not perpetuate harmful myths or misinformation about Islam or any other religion.
- Increase the representation and participation of Muslim students, families, and community members in decision-making processes, committees, and leadership roles within the school system, and solicit their feedback and suggestions on how to improve the educational outcomes and experiences of Muslim students.
- Provide adequate resources and support for Muslim students and families, such as access to counseling, accommodations for religious observances and practices, and opportunities for cultural and interfaith exchange and dialogue.

- Establish and enforce clear policies and procedures for reporting and addressing incidents of Islamophobia, harassment, bullying, or hate speech, and ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and that the victims are protected and empowered.

2. Unique Qualifications and Distinction: What unique qualifications do you possess that distinguish you from other candidates running for the Board of Education?

My qualifications for the Board of Education are both personal and professional. As a parent of two MCPS students, one in elementary and one in middle school, I have a direct stake in the quality of education in our district. I know the joys and challenges of supporting our children's learning and well-being, especially during these unprecedented times. As an educator and leader, I have served in various roles at different levels of the system - as an elementary teacher, middle school principal, chief academic officer and deputy superintendent. I have worked with a wide range of children and families of all races and socioeconomic levels with diverse linguistic and religious backgrounds to ensure that all kids have access to a challenging, enriching curriculum to open up life and opportunity choices. Through these roles I have developed a deep and broad knowledge of education policy and practice, and a proven track record of leading change and improving outcomes for students. I have the vision and the expertise to help our schools deliver high-quality and equitable education for all our students.

3. Non-Negotiable Issues: What are the top three issues for you that are non-negotiable, and what actions will you take to address them?

Improving student experiences, attracting and retaining the nation's best educators, and setting clear priorities and holding the superintendent accountable are the three issues that I will not budge on. I want to improve student experiences by ensuring that every student has access to a challenging and supportive curriculum that prepares them for college and career, and by increasing access to enriching and engaging experiences such as art, sports, music, leadership, and extracurriculars. I also want to attract and retain the nation's best educators by offering competitive pay, professional growth, and career opportunities for our teachers and staff. Additionally, I believe that the board should set and monitor clear priorities for the superintendent by working together with stakeholders to define success and track outcomes, and by giving the superintendent constructive feedback and support.

4. Parental Opt-Out and First Amendment: Do you support allowing parents to opt-out of classroom materials based on sincerely-held religious beliefs, even if these beliefs are unpopular?

Public education has the responsibility to balance the rights and interests of all stakeholders. I respect the expertise and professionalism of teachers and schools in designing and delivering a high-quality and relevant education, and also think that there is a need to consult and collaborate with parents and

community to provide reasonable alternatives when there are conflicts with religious beliefs. There should be clear and consistent policies and procedures for this option, to ensure that it does not compromise the academic standards and goals, create unfair burdens or disadvantages for teachers and students, or infringe on the rights of others.

5. Parental Input and Effective Communication: How do you prioritize parent input and feedback in shaping district policies, and what strategies will you implement to enhance communication between MCPS and parents?

As a parent, I absolutely believe that parent involvement is essential for the success of MCPS and our students. I believe that parents should have a voice in shaping our district policies that affect our children's education and well-being. As a board member, I would prioritize parent input and feedback by:

- Creating more opportunities for parents to participate in public hearings, surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees on various district issues and initiatives.
- Establishing regular communication channels with parent associations, such as PTAs, MCCPTA, and MCEA, to solicit their views and concerns and share relevant information and updates.
- Enhancing the transparency and accessibility of district decision-making processes and outcomes, by providing clear rationales, evidence, and data for board actions and policies, and making them available on the district website and social media platforms.
- Improving the responsiveness and accountability of district staff and board members to parent inquiries and complaints, by ensuring timely and respectful follow-up and resolution.
- Promoting a culture of collaboration and trust between MCPS and parents, by acknowledging and respecting diverse perspectives and experiences, and seeking common ground and mutual understanding.

6. Recognition of Islamic Holidays: Would you support closing schools on major Islamic holidays like Eid al-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha to accommodate Muslim students and staff for religious observances?

As a board member, I would seek to find a balance between accommodating the diverse needs of our vibrant community and ensuring that all students and staff have access to high-quality education and professional development. I believe that honoring the religious holidays of different faith groups is important, and it should be done in a way that does not advantage or disadvantage some over others. This may mean that we recreate the school calendar balancing these needs instead of creating a school calendar based on prior practice.

7. Academic Achievement and Return on Investment: What actions will you take to restore

MCPS to its previous high academic achievement and ranking, while maximizing taxpayer return on investment?

To restore MCPS to high academic achievement and ranking, while maximizing taxpayer return on investment, I would take the following actions:

Conduct a thorough and transparent audit of the MCPS budget and spending, identifying areas of waste, inefficiency, and mismanagement, and reallocating resources to the most urgent and effective educational needs.

Focus on improving the quality and equity of instruction across all schools, ensuring that every student has access to rigorous and relevant curriculum, highly qualified and diverse teachers, and individualized support and interventions.

Expand and enhance enrichment opportunities for students to pursue their interests and aspirations while creating more opportunities for students to create, problem-solve, communicate, and lead.

Invest in the professional development and retention of teachers and staff, offering competitive compensation, meaningful evaluation and feedback, and recognition and reward for excellence and innovation.

8. Political Neutrality and Free Speech: How would you ensure that MCPS remains neutral on political issues and upholds free speech rights, particularly concerning the recent rise in anti-Palestinian sentiments and the slanderous labeling of political speech as anti-Semitic?

MCPS should respect and protect the right of students, staff, and parents to express their opinions and beliefs in a respectful and civil manner, as long as they do not violate the rights or safety of others.

Political neutrality and free speech do not mean ignoring or silencing the voices of those who are marginalized or oppressed by systemic injustices. I recognize that the recent rise in both anti-Palestinian and anti-Semitic sentiments are serious challenges that affect our MCPS family. I condemn any form of hatred, bigotry, or discrimination based on one's ethnicity, religion, or national origin. I also reject any attempt to stifle or delegitimize the legitimate criticism of any government's policies or actions, whether it is Israel, Palestine, or any other country.

Therefore, I would support the efforts of MCPS to create a safe and inclusive environment where all students can learn and thrive, regardless of their background or identity. I would also encourage the implementation of culturally responsive and anti-bias curriculum that promotes critical thinking, global awareness, and social justice. I would advocate for more opportunities for dialogue and education among students, staff, and parents on issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as other complex and controversial topics, in a way that fosters mutual understanding and respect, rather than division and hostility. I believe that by taking care of all kids and opening the space for better understanding and dialogue, we can help MCPS become a model of political neutrality and free speech in action.