

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: Brenda M. Diaz

Submitted By: Brenda M. Diaz Date: April 18, 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?

I will heed MCPS' ["Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity,"](#) in particular standing in my commitment to "promot[e] respect and appreciation for the religions, beliefs, and customs of our diverse student population." I believe that multiculturalism is Montgomery County's greatest strengths enriching our community and therefore, those same virtues strengthen our schools. I will ensure that MCPS returns to its "core value" of respect in order to "foster a culture where all families feel respected...." I strongly believe that respect is of utmost importance.

In that spirit, I will remind administrators and teachers that schools are meant to be centers of learning, exploration, discovery, and knowledge, not political controversy. I will do so by regularly visiting schools and communicating this message to all of our faculty and staff. Teachers and administrators must remain neutral in the political and cultural wars of our time, especially in their instruction.

I will revisit the contract to examine the disciplinary procedures for teachers who engage in hate speech, including making Islamophobic comments on public platforms.

I will reinforce the founding ideals of our country in our Social Studies curriculum, especially religious freedoms, in order to secure that all of our students, including Muslim students, are safe no matter their background, heritage, or religion.

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

I am an esteemed educator with over two decades of experience teaching children across various educational settings, from pre-K to high school, ESOL to AP. My journey in education began as a Spanish teacher at a progressive private school in Washington, D.C., where I played a pivotal role as Curriculum Coordinator in designing innovative curriculum frameworks for grades three to six and presenting at [regional foreign language conferences](#). My dedication to enriching educational experiences has been unwavering throughout my career.

I am a [James Madison Memorial Fellow](#) and [Buchwald Fellow](#), was selected two years in a row as a participant in the competitive [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) Landmark seminars, and was trained by [Harvard Business School's Case Method Project](#) to deepen students' understanding of American democracy.

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My professional career has taken her through various educational communities, including nursery schools, parent-led cooperative schools, my own farm and forest program, and public and private schools across the District of Columbia and Maryland region. Through these experiences, I've gained valuable insights into the multifaceted landscape of education and emerged as a champion for academic excellence.

I am the Founder and Director of [Heart of Joy Learning](#), a farm and forest program for homeschooled elementary school-age children. I am also a Middle and High School Social Studies teacher at Fusion Global Academy.

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?

1. **Rebuilding the Foundation of Academic Excellence:** We will reinstate access to grade-appropriate assignments, reinforce strong instruction, and encourage deep engagement with teachers who hold our students to high expectations, every day, in every class—without regard to their race, ethnicity, or any other part of their identity. We will continually investigate the extent to which our students receive this access and ask the Superintendent to regularly report on our progress. We will ensure parental input on curriculum is respected and included.
2. **Prioritize Safety:** We will bring back our School Resource Officers, supporting administrators across MCPS who unequivocally sought to retain the program in a letter directed to the Board of Education on December 1, 2020. Our School Resource Officers build relationships with students, parents, teachers, and the greater community. We want them to continue the important work of creating a safe environment for our students, teachers, and administrators. We will also revise the Student Code of Conduct to ensure the protection of our students.
3. **Responsible Resource Allocation through Diligent Oversight:** We will collaborate with other members of the Board of Education to create a thriving environment for all of MCPS. This means, for example, eliminating redundancies in MCPS's budget in order to focus on our mission to deliver a quality education to our students. The Beidelman debacle, of emails and reports ignored and dismissed, will not be repeated under my tenure. I will also call for the creation of an Office of Inspector General within MCPS. If we want fully-staffed, fully-equipped schools, we must pull out the rot from a top-heavy Central Office and transfer our precious resources back to our teachers and students.

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?

Yes, I support allowing parents to opt out of classroom materials based on sincerely-held religious beliefs, even if these beliefs are unpopular. I am firm on standing up for the religious freedoms of families and other members of our community as is listed in our nation's Bill of Rights and in the State of Maryland's Constitution.

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?

Parents are the bedrock of society and the cornerstone of our MCPS community, shaping the future through their dedication to their children's development. With parental support, we will

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meet our main goal as a public school system to provide rigorous academic instruction. It will be my priority to regularly reach out to parents to gather their input so as to avoid implementing policies that would hurt our students. To ensure this, I will respect the inherent right of parents to guide their children's moral compass and cultural beliefs. I will host Board of Education meetings in various schools around the county in order to make them accessible to as many families as possible. I will change the hours of Board of Education meetings so that members of our community can more easily attend.

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?

I would support closing schools on major Islamic holidays like Eid al-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha to accommodate Muslim students and staff for religious observances.

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?

I will reintroduce rigor in all of our programs, from elementary to high school. Children will read whole books, learn how to read by using phonics and other proven, time-tested whole literacy techniques, and complete homework assignments to reinforce concepts and facts learned in class.

I will call for the creation of an Office of Inspector General to investigate alleged fraudulent activity involving travel, time and attendance, workers' compensation, or ethics violations.

I will return highly qualified Central Office staff to the classroom as teachers, subs, or test administrators in schools that report gaps in faculty. I will reinstate access to grade-appropriate assignments, reinforce strong instruction, with teachers who hold our students to high expectations, every day, in every class.

I will revise the Student Code of Conduct to reinstitute consequences. Consequences communicate to students that they have the power to succeed or fail, the agency to choose right and wrong, and that they can better themselves and rise above their consequences. Holding a child to account is an empowering act. Therefore, I will support teachers and administrators who enforce the student code of conduct.

I will boost morale amongst our teachers in an effort to retain and recruit the very best by providing the tools they need to be successful in the classroom. From functioning copiers to bringing back GoGuardian—our teachers deserve to have fully equipped schools. I will hold open forums, host candid one-on-one meetings with faculty, and visit classrooms to hear directly from them.

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?

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During these intense times, it is necessary for teachers and all members of MCPS staff to remain neutral on political issues. Due to the nature of our diverse community, the Employee Code of Conduct must be enforced to ensure neutrality. The following items must be heeded by all staff and as a standard matter of MCPS policy:

1. Do not engage in conduct that endangers or threatens the safety of students, employees, parents/guardians, or the public.
2. Do not discriminate against students, parents/guardians, coworkers, supervisors, or other citizens based on race, ethnicity, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, immigration status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family/parental status, marital status, age, physical or mental disability, poverty and socioeconomic status, language, or other legally or constitutionally protected attributes or affiliations.
3. Do not bully, harass, or intimidate students, parents/guardians, coworkers, or other adults.