



— THE — Equity Taskforce

2024 Mason, MI School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Congratulations on your candidacy for the Mason School Board! To facilitate informed voting within our community, the Equity Taskforce has created a candidate questionnaire. We encourage you to share your insights by answering each question to the best of your ability by October 11. All candidates are welcome to participate, and we plan to publish the responses on our web pages. Thank you for your commitment and time!

* Indicates required question

Email*

mchlk@tutanota.com

Name*

Michael Kelly

Do you have a candidacy website or social media page? If so, please provide.

vote4michael.com

Describe your Career and/or Educational Background.

I have an educational background in Community and Resource Development and computer programming. For more than 35 years, I have worked directly with schools, community groups, and industry to access funding resources and solve problems. I established a network to promote the educational and research principles of our Land-Grant colleges and universities; managed drug prevention, education, and law enforcement programs for the State of Michigan; provided consulting services to schools, non-profit organizations, and community groups in urban and rural communities throughout the state; was involved in the early development of online learning standards and agile learning systems; created online work habit and evaluation tools for students and educators; developed innovative online learning programs and curriculum for secondary and post-secondary schools in nearly every state; and implemented cutting-edge training tools for small and large manufacturers in various industries around the country, including defense industries, military armories, and U.S. Department of Energy National Laboratories.

Do you currently have children enrolled in Mason Public Schools?

No.

Why do you want to be a member of the Mason Public School's Board of Education?

Mason Public Schools is exceptional in many ways. It has diversity, stability, resources, and support that continues to make our community an attractive and successful district for families. However, this can lead to missed opportunities for growth and improvement. Our District needs to take a more active role in engaging the community, listening to teachers and parents, anticipating future needs, and raising standards for our Board, administration, staff, students, and parents. The knowledge and insight cultivated and shared by the Board and our community partners enables us to provide direction and establish policies and practices that meet the current and future needs of our students and the community. We must provide experiences that drive our students and help them maintain a positive, outward focus. There are amazing opportunities in work, education, and life for every one of our students.

What skills or experiences do you have that contribute to the success of Mason Public Schools?

Mason is a wonderful and caring place to raise and educate children. Colleen and I moved to Mason more than 20 years ago and have raised two children here. We both come from large families that value the importance of education. In addition to my work experiences and Colleen's many years of scientific work at Michigan State University, our involvement in athletics, band, Scouting, volunteering, and other community activities have reinforced the importance of parents as role models and active partners in the education of children.

I have served 6 years on the Mason School Board, worked with two District administrations, and witnessed the most educationally disruptive and impactful events this community and our families have ever experienced. I will continue to prioritize and respect the needs of every student and every family.

What do you consider the number one challenge facing Mason Public Schools and what is your approach to solving it?

Parents are the primary teacher in the education of their child, but our practices do not always reflect this goal. Establishing a culture where parents recognize and fulfill that responsibility is a difficult task that takes time, consistency, and commitment. As educators, it is essential that we value and welcome parents by keeping them well-informed and creating and maintaining opportunities to help them become genuine and productive partners. We can start down this path by engaging policy as it was intended - as the primary means of communicating and directing goals and practices that reflect the needs of our students and the values of our community. Our community values choice in education, and objective standards of behavior, such as kindness, caring, consideration, and respect.

What do you envision as Mason Public School's top three priorities?

There are many priority issues in Mason Public Schools that may not be reflected in our strategic plans or how we allocate and apply our resources.

As in most communities, it is more likely than not that a student in Mason is below grade level in math and/or reading. This is a challenging problem that extends beyond curriculum and instruction, and deserves more focus from the Board and the community. Academic and behavioral outcomes are rarely discussed by our Board.

Issues associated with with student behavior and a lack of resources has made classroom management more challenging for our teachers. We need to apply additional resources, including teaching assistants and paraprofessionals, in our classrooms to help our teachers succeed.

Many behavioral and cultural problems show up as bullying in our schools. We must do better at identifying and promptly responding to bullying in all its forms and levels. Our responses must involve immediate, measured, and cooperative intervention to ensure that the victims and witnesses of violence are not inhibited or discouraged from accessing and benefiting from educational resources to which they are entitled. This includes implementing responses that do not continue to expose students or staff to unresolved sources of bullying, violence, or intimidation.

Additional priorities include adopting practices that offer full and ready access to curriculum, learning material, resources, and methods of instruction to help parents to become a more informed and meaningful part of their child's education and development, and re-evaluating how we use online learning and resources - particularly how it may contribute to student mental health and safety.

Opinions and preferences among parents, students, and schools can be diverse and often at odds with each other; provide an example of a time you had to consider opinions from all sides before making a decision.

Every decision I make begins with a genuine effort to understand, study, and find common ground when diverse viewpoints and opinions prevail.

Currently, the unique, independent, and diverse nature of sex education and reproductive health instruction in Michigan and in Mason may be changing. For decades, Michigan's sex education process has allowed school communities to define, review, select, and implement options that best meet the needs of their students and families. Through the broad and representative membership of Sex Education Advisory Boards (SEABs), Michigan communities have a unique and direct voice to their school boards that is appropriately separate from traditional curriculum processes. If not done carefully, changes to this process can limit the information and options our SEAB considers and will impact the integrity of the advice the Board receives. An essential but little-known aspect of the advisory process is the opportunity for the Board to adopt multiple programming options - at varying grade levels and with appropriate content - to meet the diverse needs of the community.

I am one of just two candidates and Board members who seek to protect choices in our Sex Education program. I have offered detailed and workable suggestions designed to ensure that our sex education processes remain open to as many parents and residents as possible, and that we can offer choices that reflect the diverse preferences and needs of parents and students in our community. My decision was easy - I recognized the common ground, and found a solution at this stage that respects varying opinions and values around a potentially controversial topic.

How do you ensure you're representing all voices in the community, particularly those that are marginalized?

I do not expect that any Board member can represent all voices in the community all the time. This is the nature - and value - of diversity, as it drives us to listen to, understand, and respect all voices. My focus has always been and will continue to be on the needs of each student. And to understand and address those needs, we must always start with their parents.