

2024 - MDMEA Board Member Candidate Questionnaire

The Mason Teachers Union (MDMEA) is planning to endorse two candidates running for the Mason Board of Education. With a short timeline, we are offering you the opportunity to interview electronically. Please take a moment to answer the four questions below. To be considered for our endorsement, please answer and submit by 6pm on Friday, October 4.

* Indicates required question

*** In your view, what role/roles should the Board of Education play within the district?**

Mason has a supportive community and continues to be an attractive and successful district for families. However, this can lead to missed opportunities for growth and improvement. Board members should take a more active role in engaging the community, listening to teachers and parents, anticipating future needs, and raising standards for our administration, staff, students, parents, and ourselves. The knowledge and insight cultivated and shared by the Board enables us to provide direction and establish policies and practices that meet the current and future needs of our students and the community.

*** How do you plan to promote diversity, equity and inclusion within the school district, in terms of curriculum, the hiring of staff, and the student experience?**

Mason has established principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout its strategic plans, administrative and staff evaluation, staffing, professional development, curriculum, classroom, MTSS, behavioral, and other practices and policies. The most effective method of supporting (including promoting) these activities is to ensure we are confidently and transparently communicating these practices with parents and the community, and we are properly avoiding and/or navigating controversial issues in accordance with our policies and with common sense and respect.

*** Below are some specific topics that our Board of Education is currently reviewing or is expected to be reviewing in the near future. What is your stance on one or more of the following topics?**

***Censorship**

Parents and educators make decisions every day about the information and activities that are provided for their children and students. These responsibilities include ensuring that the experiences we provide for our students are age-appropriate, necessary, and transparent. Parental responsibilities are often mistaken or misrepresented as censorship. Educators are the primary gatekeepers of learning material in our schools, and their decisions to include or exclude information and viewpoints present the most significant responsibility regarding censorship. The risks of censorship can be mitigated by recognizing our responsibility as co-educators, and by maintaining access and communication for parents.

***Sexual Education**

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 and preferences of students and parents.

***Facility updates (including HVAC)**

Fundamental facilities maintenance and improvements will continue to be supported by our community. However, any investments must be communicated genuinely and as part of an inclusive and larger vision. Capital improvements must consider the differences in funding mechanisms and must be coordinated with evolving educational needs. We must consider not only classroom improvements, but also broader and practical considerations of what we teach and how we are preparing our children for their future - in the work place and higher education.

***Curriculum Recommendations from a variety of levels and disciplines**

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, of course, a complex and difficult 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, and the development and review of clear and measurable goals in this regard are even less frequent.

Mason has many unique and wonderful initiatives for and with its staff, particularly for the benefit of young teachers. However, there are additional fundamental and simple actions we can take that are essential to help our teachers and parents succeed. It starts by valuing and cultivating opportunities for parents to understand and fulfill their responsibilities to become a more meaningful part of their child's education and development. This includes, but is certainly not limited to:

- ✓ full and ready access to curriculum, learning material, resources, and methods of instruction;
- ✓ re-evaluating how we use online learning and resources (particularly how it may contribute to student mental health and safety);
- ✓ establishing and promoting objective standards of behavior, such as kindness, caring, consideration, and respect;
- ✓ identifying and promptly responding to bullying in all its forms and levels; and
- ✓ focusing on and supporting classroom resources for our teachers, including teaching assistants.

***Student violence (including towards staff members)**

Responses to violence - including bullying - 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.

*** When the leadership of Mason Public Schools is making decisions as to how to allocate its Fund Balance, what are your top priorities if there is a budget surplus?**

Teaching assistants and special education paraprofessionals should be a priority for how we use unallocated resources from our Fund Balance.

Is there anything else you would like us to know? Please share below!

Our policies recognize - but our practices do not always reflect - that parents are the primary teacher in the education of their child. Establishing a culture where parents recognize and fulfill that responsibility is a difficult task that takes time, consistency, and commitment. It also may force us to look at education in unfamiliar ways.

Parent engagement cannot be turned on with a switch when we need it as part of a solution, such as assisting us with classroom management issues associated with student behavior. 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.