

# Montgomery County Board of Education Equity Questionnaire

Montgomery County Public Schools are the largest school system in Maryland. We asked Board of Education candidates for their positions on issues related to school equity. The following are their responses.

## Contents

- The questionnaire we sent to each Board of Education candidate
- All candidates' responses to Yes/No questions
- Each candidate's response to short answer questions

## How to vote

The primary election will be Tuesday, June 2. You will receive a ballot to vote by mail, or you can vote in person. The deadline to register to vote is May 27. For more information, visit [www.777vote.org](http://www.777vote.org).

## Montgomery County Board of Education

There are three seats in this year's election: At-Large, District 2 (Gaithersburg), and District 4 (Silver Spring/Wheaton), and everyone votes for each seat regardless of where they live. The top two vote-getters in the primary will go on to the general election in November. District 2 will not appear on your ballot as there are only two candidates.

This questionnaire is sponsored by the following organizations. It does not represent an endorsement of any individual candidate.



# Montgomery County Board of Education Equity Questionnaire

## Yes/No Questions

Please answer these questions YES or NO.

1. Would you support altering existing school boundaries to address segregation and overcrowding in MCPS?
2. Do you support the BOE decision to consider diversity of schools when making decisions about school boundaries, while continuing to prioritize geography/walkability, stability of school assignment over time, and utilization, as stated in current policy?
3. School Resource Officers (SROs: armed police officers who are stationed in schools) in Montgomery County arrest students at rates far greater than the national average. Do you support ending the regular presence of SROs in schools? [Note: The Safe to Learn Act does not mandate physical presence of police in schools; it requires a report identifying “coverage” from local law enforcement.]
4. Would you commit to investing in more culturally competent counselors, nurses, and school psychologists in MCPS schools in place of SROs?
5. Do you support a system-wide requirement for all MCPS schools to use restorative justice practices in all disciplinary cases in which the victim consents?
6. Will you work to ensure county-wide comprehensive curricula changes for all ages that address systemic racism, sexism, cisheteronormativity, ableism, and other forms of oppression?
7. Do you support moving to a policy (beyond guidelines) of gender identity protections for our youth in MCPS?
8. Do you support hiring an out TBLGQIA+ (transgender, bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer, intersex, asexual/agender, +) liaison for MCPS?
9. Will you work to ensure MCPS teachers and staff more closely reflect the racial diversity of the student body?
10. Do you support incentives to recruit and retain experienced teachers and administrators at high need schools?
11. Do you support equitable assignment of effective teachers and administrators between and within schools?
12. Would you support expanding student influence as it relates to school policy?

Additional questions are on the following page.

Please fill out this questionnaire to the best of your abilities and return by Tuesday, May 12.

This questionnaire is sponsored by the following organizations:



# Montgomery County Board of Education Equity Questionnaire

## Short Answer Questions

*Please answer these questions with complete sentences.*

1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?
2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?
3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?



# Montgomery County Board of Education Equity Questionnaire

Issue (+ means YES)	At-Large								Dist. 2	Dist. 4
	Sunil Dasgupta	Jay Guan	Lynne Harris	Collins Odongo	Dalbin Osorio	Cameron Rhode	Darwin Romero	Pavel Sukhobok	Michael Fryar	Shebra Evans
Changing school boundaries to reduce segregation + overcrowding	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Using diversity when drawing school boundaries	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Removing SROs (armed police officers) from schools	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
Investing in culturally competent staff + faculty	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
Restorative justice practices in student disciplinary cases	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Curriculum that addresses systemic forms of oppression	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Supports gender identity protections for students	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Hiring an out TBLGQIA+ liaison for MCPS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Hiring staff + faculty that reflects our students' racial diversity	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
Recruit + retain experienced teachers at high-need schools	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Equitable assignment of effective teachers + administrators between and within schools	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Expanding student influence in making school policy	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>

Montgomery County Public Schools are the largest school system in Maryland. We asked candidates for their positions on 12 issues related to school equity, and here are their responses. Each candidate could only respond YES or NO.

You can vote by mail in Maryland's primary election through June 2. The top two in each race will advance to the general election in November.

### The following candidates declined to respond:

#### At-Large

Mitra Ahadpour  
Stephen Austin  
Anil Chaudhry  
Paul Geller  
Lumpoange Thomas

#### District 2

Rebecca Smondrowski

#### District 4

Ehren Park Reynolds  
Steve Solomon

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# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Sunil Dasgupta (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*The path to equity and integration long-term lies in policy of regular systemwide boundary review and adjustment that allows MCPS to move resources as population and demography shift. Further, we must create a real pipeline to recruit many more teachers of color; MCPS has been talking about this for several years, but few concrete steps have been taken. We need our curriculum to reflect our diverse population, and we need strong cultural competency training for staff aimed at addressing disproportionate discipline, which contributes to the school to prison pipeline. Third, we need expanded early childhood education, rigorous coursework available to all students, and experienced teachers in low-income schools. Lastly, no one Board member is going to be able to bring change by himself/herself. It takes 5 votes to bring about policy change. Actual change on the ground will require the BOE to ensure that staff follows through on policies. Based on my previous work and the electoral coalition I have brought together, I am particularly well-positioned to build these coalitions and to ensure staff follow-through.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*In the short-term, I will move to identify schools and programs that have the worst record in this regard, investigate causes, and make adjustments to program rules, staff, and content as necessary. I will seek to broaden lessons to the system as a whole. I will fight to add more mental health support, in particular counselors who can address trauma and its effects. Over the medium-term, we must invest in staff and teacher training, including cultural competency, restorative practices, and mental health first aid. Over the long-term, I will push to recruit and retain a more inclusive workforce and to build a trauma-sensitive school culture. Building trauma-sensitive schools requires retraining and reduced dependence on “security” thinking. I oppose having armed School Resource Officers in schools, and will push to hire more counselors and school psychologists. Lastly, there is an opportunity here for renewing the home and school partnership. Parents need to feel like schools are a place where they belong, and where their families are understood and valued.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*One particularly distressing notion is that the consequences of the pandemic are likely to exacerbate the gaps mentioned here unless MCPS moves quickly to address them. MCPS has two separate departments for special education and gifted learning, and honors classes and enrichment are usually school level decisions, but they all have the same shortcoming when it comes to Black and Latinx students. I take from this that we need to take action at the organization-level and within specific schools. On gifted education, for example, we should continue to expand universal screening by extending to high school programs. In special education, we need to train staff and teachers in cultural competence and recruit more teachers and counselors of color. The shortage of special education teachers is even worse than regular classroom teachers, so we have to push to both diversify and grow a well-trained workforce. Again, long-term, we have to make sure that resources are equitably allocated. Regular boundary review and adjustment should help. Lastly, we need to bring additional resources to the most needed, including adopting the Kirwan definition of community schools.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Jay Guan (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*Boundary changes are really a short term fix. The key lies in future land-use and planning. MCPS and the Planning Board need to work more closely together to ensure that past mistakes are not repeated.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*I think cultural competency training and diversification of the work force are two key aspects that we need to implement, in addition to the restorative justice practices. Our students need positive role models that reflect their identity. It provides a sense of normalcy and belonging.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*In general I would seek to re-wire the process identification and assessment to exclude implicit bias as possible. Furthermore, I would seek to re-wire the process such that onus is less on parents to “learn” how to access these services and rigorous courses. To these ends, I would seek to implement universal screening and automatic inclusion based on the objective criteria. I would also seek to host regular seminars, or utilize other effective methods to get information to hard-to-reach communities.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Lynne Harris (At-Large)

**1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

- *Use boundary analysis data to adjust boundaries & ensure all academic programs are placed to ensure access for ALL*
- *Fully fund compensatory & ESOL programs*
- *Use Blueprint grants to make highest poverty schools Community Schools*
- *Highly effective teachers & administrators in the most impacted schools*

**2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

- *Data transparency on disciplinary practices is key*
- *Scale up implicit bias, restorative justice, & de-escalation training for all staff & implement coordinated early intervention service plans*
- *Regular student School climate surveys*
- *Implement Trauma-informed practices in all schools.*

**3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

- *Academic supports to ensure all students meet academic benchmarks*
- *Objective criteria to automatically enroll students in advanced & honors classes*
- *Scale-up whole-school magnet & theme-based programs*
- *Train staff in implicit bias, continuously share data on access/enrollment/outcomes*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Collins Odongo (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*Use an all inclusive, consultative and participatory approach to decision making process*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*Through advocacay and also creating a policy friendly environment cdevoid of recial segregation .I will intridoduce programme that could encourage individuals with disability to be mainstreame into the society*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*I woud introduce a more inclusive strategy of recruitment and information dissemination to be able to mobilize the minority groups to take their rightful position.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Dalbin Osorio (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*By recruiting and retaining quality teachers with lived experience that look and sound like our students, and making sure that they are elevated to leadership positions where their experiences can be invested in long-term, and by using data to redraw our boundaries so resources are allocated in an equitable fashion.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*By hiring more culturally-competent administrative staff, including social workers, who can ensure that restorative justice practices are utilized, and by creating Parent Support Partnerships with local community-based organizations to ensure that our parents have the support they need to navigate a complex MCPS system.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*I'd utilize policy to mandate that students are automatically enrolled by all MCPS schools (with an option to opt out) into gifted and talented programs and advanced courses. I'd partner with community-based organizations to increase the club offerings in the communities we have schools. I'd fund initiatives to ensure that our counselors are empowered to assess students as needed and that they have the resources they need to implement the recommendations consistently.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Cameron Rhode (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*Throughout my entire campaign, I have been on the record as supporting the long-overdue boundary analysis. I appreciate that the consultant's analysis (per Board of Education policy) is considering linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in addition to proximity and capacity. The benefits of diverse schools are not superficial; they are tangible, concrete, and long-lasting. I have been reading the consultant's interim report, and if elected, I will take the interim and final reports very seriously as significant policymaking resources.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*Thinking of racism as some amorphous enemy is not enough. To better neutralize the effects of discrimination, we should be thoroughly familiar with the ways in which discrimination operates. (A great example is "Black Boys Viewed as Older, Less Innocent Than Whites, Research Finds": [www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older](http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older)) I support data-driven public policy that addresses root causes.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*I am in favor of expanding access to AP courses and magnet programs and encouraging more students to reach for these courses/programs. I left the Science, Math, Computer Science (SMCS) magnet program at Poolesville HS after one year; some of my peers left after one semester or even after three years. If the program isn't a good fit, that can be that student's discovery to make. But many students surprise themselves with their success in magnet programs. We should implicitly and explicitly instill confidence in students of color.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Darwin Romero (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*By hiring diverse teachers with different backgrounds and experiences; by allocating additional funds to schools with the highest needs students; by providing additional supports to students that are experiencing challenges in their learning; by supporting boundary studies every couple of years.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*By reviewing the data monthly and asking why we are seeing more suspensions and expulsions in this segment of the student body and address the issues found with restorative justice practices.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*I would implement a policy whereby both teachers and parents can nominate students to these programs or the student themselves can self-identify and apply to these programs.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Pavel Sukhobok (At-Large)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*I believe providing a high quality education is the only sustainable way of bridging the achievement gap. When the BOE waters down the curriculum, the higher income families go to tutoring centers to supplement their education, but what recourse do the lower income families have? Education should be the great equalizer, but instead it has only exacerbated the inequities.*

*In "Invisible Man," a book written by the the great Harlem Renaissance writer Ralph Ellison, discusses this idea of a "Great White Father" (unfortunately, not taught in schools, which is one of the biggest reasons why I am running). The Great White Father built black colleges and funded black churches. However, the Great White Father didn't really see minorities as individuals, but rather did all that for himself, so he can pride himself on helping minorities "advance." This type of racism is arguably even more pervasive and sinister because it is harder to spot and comes in the guise of doing good works. The Great White Fathers and Mothers are still out there, perhaps in greater numbers than ever. Their condescending tone and smiles give them away. After talking about helping minorities, they go back to their white friends and boast about what a difference they are making while drinking a glass of wine. Me? I don't have that problem. I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*Discrimination continues to pervade all aspects of our society. We need to be extra vigilant about any harmful stereotypes that we may be unknowingly perpetuating on a daily basis. Disciplinary action should only be enforced fairly and teachers/administrators should regularly take cultural sensitivity courses. Students and parents should have the right to appeal any disciplinary measures to a committee that is representative of the county's diversity to make sure that disciplinary actions are being fairly dispensed. Lastly, I am categorically against suspensions and expulsions from an education perspective. Telling students to stop going to school does nothing to address the underlying behavior issues that may have led up to the disciplinary action being taken and places an immense burden on the families*

*As someone who has spent the last 10 years running a nonprofit in Kenya to help underprivileged children escape the vicious cycle poverty, I believe in the power of education. Education can lift entire communities out of poverty. Unfortunately, in too many classrooms around the county there is very little learning that takes place because of classroom disruption. Studies comparing international educational systems consistently show that classroom behavior strongly correlated to academic performance, and a failure to consistently enforce classroom rules has a disproportionate impact on lower income families. I believe we can, nay, we must, fairly enforce classroom rules.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*While the recent college admissions scandal at the University of Southern California highlights how far some parents are willing to go to get their children into top colleges, there is a much more prevalent practice at play that has not received the same attention. Specifically, in order to gain an unfair advantage in the form of extra time on college admission tests like the ACT or the SAT, parents are paying exorbitant fees to have their children privately tested for learning differences and then pressuring the schools to grant them accommodations in the hopes of getting extended time on college entrance exams. However, having students apply for such services ties up funding for the students who truly need them. Moreover, school administrators are becoming increasingly suspicious of students who apply for 504 plans or IEPs in high school, oftentimes rejecting students who genuinely need assistance. The impact of this practice is disproportionately affecting lower income and immigrant families who typically don't have the resources to navigate through this complex process of acquiring accommodations. I believe all children in MCPS should be tested for learning differences at a young age by neutral psychoeducational testing professionals, and students' eligibility should hinge upon need, not affluence.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Michael Fryar (District 2)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*By first ensuring that no school has more than a 50% population of FARMS students. While every student has an equal ability to learn, impoverished students have additional issues that can overwhelm a system and create increased inequities.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*By analyzing issues and ensuring that additional necessary training is implemented to improve relations and eliminate issues based on perception and inequity.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*Increase staffing and opportunities while limiting advantages where testing and attention is increased due to privilege.*

# Montgomery County Board of Education

# Equity Questionnaire

## Shebra Evans (District 4)

- 1. Our schools are becoming increasingly segregated both economically and racially, and numerous studies have shown inequities between schools based on poverty rates. Studies show that students in Montgomery County and elsewhere perform better in diverse, integrated schools. How will you ensure racial and economic equity for MCPS students and better integrate our schools?**

*As a current board member, the Equitable Allocation of Resources was a charge I fully supported to have the school system conduct a resource study. An external consultant examined how well the system and schools were using staff, time and money as measured by student outcomes. I know MCPS has been a great place to learn for many of our students but not for all students. This was not acceptable and a step in the right direction to reduce the likelihood that student outcomes could be predictable by race or income.*

- 2. How will you ensure that Black, Latino/a/x, and disabled students are not continually disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in MCPS?**

*I support the work the school system is doing around restorative justice. Students, staff and community are being engaged through trainings, workshops, circles, etc. My belief is we have an opportunity to help students grow and feel connected to their community. The work continues to be successful if everyone is trained, given an explanation of why the work is necessary and provided the supports in every school to do the work.*

- 3. Studies have shown that students of color, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students, are not appropriately identified, assessed, and given access to special education services, nor are they accurately channeled into advanced, gifted, and honors classes as well as enrichment opportunities and clubs. What would you do to increase the accuracy and equity of these processes?**

*I believe access to high quality early childhood programs will give every student opportunities to develop school readiness skills from the start. It would also allow school districts to intervene early with any special services. In January of 2015, the Board of Education hired an external consultant to conduct a review of its choice programs. MCPS moved to universal screening to identify students that have traditionally been missed with the previous selection process. The changes have resulted in more students being identified. Also, individual schools have enough of a cohort to deliver accelerated instruction directly onsite. We see more students, particularly Black and Latino/a/x students having more opportunities and access to higher levels of instruction.*