

## CAPA-MC Survey Responses for Julie Reiley, Board of Education At-Large Candidate

### 1. Vision for MCPS

#### A. What do you think is the goal of education in general? What should be the priorities of MCPS? Why?

A strong *public* educational system is essential to the prosperity, security, well-being, and advancement of any society. I emphasize public because it is the inclusive nature of a strong public school system that is essential to promote the prosperity, security, well-being and advancement of *all* the communities within that society.

Thus, MCPS must not only meet the potential of all its students, it must lift the potential of all its students. In order to do this, we need all board members to be committed, as I would, to working with all stakeholders to provide a high quality public school education for all MCPS students. Because *All Means All*, this includes our students with learning differences or special needs, our highly gifted students, our English language learners, our LGBTQ+ students, our students of color, and our students impacted by poverty, as well as traditional learners and students who do not fall into any of these groups.

Thus, some of my priorities, which I believe should be the priorities of MCPS, include: (1) making significant progress in closing the achievement gap; (2) working toward public Pre-K for all students, including expanding existing early childhood education programs; (3) increasing meaningful and effective educational opportunities and access for students with learning differences and/or special needs; (4) increasing career and technical education (CTE) opportunities; (5) differentiated instruction within classes and a continuum of academic opportunities overall so that we meet and lift all of our students' potential; and (6) working with the County Council and our Delegation in Annapolis to provide MCPS the funding it needs to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse enrollment.

<http://www.reiley4education.com/priorities/>

#### B. Where do you think MCPS needs to improve?

Differentiated instruction within classes and a continuum of academic opportunities overall so that we meet and lift all of our students' potential. Approximately 11% of our students have learning differences and, according to the Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County, one in five students need access to enriched curriculum (and many students are also GT/LD). These are just two examples reflecting the need for varied and diverse academic opportunities, as well as a variety of learning, social-emotional, and other supports necessary to lift the potential of all students.

As an MCPS parent, I have been an education advocate in Montgomery County, and Annapolis, for many years, serving on numerous committees, panels, local PTAs, MCCPTA, and workgroups (<http://www.reiley4education.com/meet-julie/>) While the context of my advocacy

has often been through the special education and GT/LD lens, at the heart of my advocacy and work is the belief that MCPS has an obligation to meet - and lift -- the potential of all our students, through differentiated instruction and diverse academic opportunities county wide. While, ideally, we should do so within the student's home school, specialized programs, such as GT/LD and Asperger's programs and highly gifted magnet programs, play an important role.

## **2. Meeting the Special Needs of Gifted and Talented (GT) Students.**

I am a public school graduate who was the first person in my family to graduate from college (eventually obtaining two graduate degrees). I mention this because I was able to achieve my desired path because I had access to GT classes in high school. We have an obligation to provide appropriate, suitably challenging instruction to all student, including our GT students. Accountability is key – the requirements of COMAR are essential, but accountability to parents and students so that the requirements are implemented fully, fairly, with fidelity, and in a manner calculated to reach all GT students, is critical. For example, while .02(F) states the school systems must “consider” implementing the identification processes listed, MCPS must mandate with fidelity across the county, in every school, each component of the identification process – and be accountable for that. Currently, GT programing participation underrepresents certain communities of students, which means we must review and address the process to ensure **all** students are appropriately and fairly evaluated, and if identified, provided access to GT programing, with fidelity and eliminating bias.

With regard to the elimination of the AEI Director, I have concerns about that. I understand that with regard to the FY19 operating budget, Dr. Smith wanted to move resources closer to classes, and so he cut some central office positions. However, I was concerned that some of these cuts were to essential central offices positions necessary to provide critical supports and resources to schools and teachers, and so I testified against some of these cuts (cluster supervisors).

While I did so in my capacity as a special education advocate, I appreciate the need for differentiated instruction and programing to be supported by strong central office resources. If elected I will study the effectiveness of central office resources with an eye toward inclusive and consistent GT identification, and suitably rigorous and accessible instruction and programing, and I would support reinstating the AEI Director position.

### **2a Transparency**

Substantial programing changes like this, which impact significant members of the student population, must be raised publically, openly, and with the opportunity for meaningful stakeholder feedback and an open mind toward that feedback. Proposed changes like the ones mentioned should be proactively publicized by MCPS, and not just on its website – we need multiple, multi-language announcements via email that are sufficiently detailed; we should also have automated telephone announcements that can direct parents to the information online. Paper flyers should be sent home in backpacks. With the details of the proposals presented in advance, MCPS should hold forums in the evening, open to parents and other stakeholders, to answer questions and address concerns. An online survey could also be conducted before or

after the forum. And it is imperative that MCPS listen to parent and other stakeholder feedback. I have been a parent advocate for a number of years, and we need advance notice of contemplated changes and clear information before a change is implemented.

On the general topic of transparency, MCPS needs to hold regular town hall type events, a certain number each year, open to parents and other stakeholders, in which parents have the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns. Some of the forums may be topic specific, such as safety, with a presentation on current information related to the topic (a status update), followed by an audience Q&A. Other forums could be open /no specific topic, again followed by a Q&A.

#### **4, Diversity**

As a Latina, I feel that I am committed to diversity in hiring and leadership positions in MCPS. We are a diverse county and our staffing should reflect our diversity. It is also important to have appropriate role models for students in leadership rolls so students feel included (and inspired). In order to achieve greater diversity, MCPS must ensure position advertisements are fair and inclusive and free of cultural bias, so they create a fair and diverse application pool. At all times, the law must be followed and discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated. If the lack of representation warrants it, an independent audit might be necessary to understand the cause of, and provide recommendations to address, the lack of Asian American representation, or indeed any community's lack of representation, in leadership roles within MCPS.

It is also important to include parent / stakeholder participation when filling leadership positions in MCPS. As a parent advocate and community member, I have participated on interview panels, and I would continue to encourage meaningful stakeholder participation.

#### **5. Capital Investment Planning**

As a parent of an MCPS student I am fully aware of the impact overcrowding has on students, in particular students with special needs and students impacted by poverty (currently, over 11% of students have a disability and 35% are eligible for FARMs).

When it comes to CIP, we need to ensure we gather and provide nuanced demographic data that reflects the growth and changes in our county, so we build the right schools in the right places, and so we do not end up being at or over capacity as soon as the doors to a new school (or new wing of an older school) are opened.

Equity is key when creating a CIP. We need to both better assess which schools will be over capacity when, and to what extent, and we also need to consider how long schools currently over capacity have been over capacity. It is important to unsure schools that have been overcapacity for a number of years, but whose future projections might be less acute, are also addressed so we do not end up with a *de facto* change in what constitutes over capacity and/or temporary solutions become permanent.

## **6. Advocacy for MCPS in Annapolis**

One of my listed priorities is working with our Delegation in Annapolis, and advocating in Annapolis, to provide MCPS the funding we need to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse enrollment, as well as to support equity in education and maintain a strong public-school system.

Most immediately, a close collaborative relationship working with our delegation and the other members of the Kirwan Commission will be key in this regard because the Kirwan Commission will be recommending new funding formulas, addressing the geographic coast of education for MCPS.

Long-term, we need to establish clearly in Annapolis the reality that Montgomery County is a minority-majority county with diverse and increasing needs, and our funding must reflect that. For example, approximately 35% of MCPS students receive FARMs, 17.5% are English language learners, and almost 12% of our students receive special education services – and while MCPS has reason to be proud of the fact that some families move here for MCPS’s special education services, this comes with additional costs that must be funded.

Efforts are underway now in the current legislation session to fix the Casino fund, which I fully support. When casinos were allowed in Maryland, it was with the understanding that the state revenue generated from the profits would go to education. However, instead of supplementing our educational funding as everyone understood the plan to be, that money is replacing prior funding. The law must be changed so that the casino revenue supplements education funding. Hopefully this will happen before the end of the current session; if not I fully support and would be an active participant in fixing it in the next legislative session.

Over the years, I have advocated extensively in Annapolis on behalf of students with special needs on educational issues. I am familiar with our delegation and have a good relationship with them. I understand that funding decisions are made in context, and I understand how to work with our representatives in Annapolis on prioritizing those resources while understanding the needs of families and the perspectives of parents. In my advocacy work I have also made it a point to reach out to other stakeholders, to listen to their perspective, and when appropriate, compromise on discrete issues in order to move forward for the greater good.

Funding advocacy should not be limited to Annapolis. MCPS is the single largest item in the county budget, and accounts for approximately half of the county budget. MCPS’s reputation draws businesses and jobs to our county because employers appreciate the benefit to their bottom line of a well educated work force. Thus, it is important that the County Council and the Board work together on a strategy for measured growth, to ensure revenue sources keep pace with anticipated growth, and that businesses recognize the benefits of an outstanding school system and *their* contribution to it.

## 6. Bullying, School Climate, and Student Social-Emotional Wellness

Promoting positive behavioral health is an extremely important matter. Teachers and certain staff are in positions especially suited to recognizing a child in crisis, both because of their daily / regular contact with a student and their ability to assess an individual student's behavior in the context of years of interactions with youth. The key, of course, is to provide teachers and staff with the tools to recognize the signs of mental illness, such as anxiety or depression or bi-polar disorder, or alcoholism or addiction, bullying, or an unknown crisis. For example, while the average onset age of schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder is mid-20's, that is an average, which means for some the onset occurs in high school (or younger). Also, while any teacher probably knows (or should know) that a change in attendance, such as frequent absenteeism, is a sign something is wrong, a teacher with training might better understand the cause with specific students. In any situation, proper professional development will provide teachers with the vocabulary to begin needed conversations and the tools to provide resources or connect students with the appropriate counselor or staff to take the support to the next level.

There are different approaches MCPS can take to improve the behavioral health of our students. Training teachers is critical, but it is not the only approach, because while teachers may be able to spot the signs, we need appropriate staff to provide real and meaningful support. We must adequately staff our schools in terms of counselors, and not make short-sighted budget decisions cutting counselors or mental health resources. I am concerned we do not have enough counselors, especially in high school. High school counselors have so many students to support in the college application process, which is itself very time consuming, they do not have sufficient time or resources to provide the social-emotional support needed by teens. Indeed, as I write this I am unsure if the answer is more counselors or perhaps adding physiologists who would be focused exclusively on social-emotional and mental health. Either way, we then need to ensure our counselors (or psychologists) consistently have appropriate evidence-based training, knowledge of community resources, knowledge of community events that may impact their students, and the ability to connect appropriate resources with students **and their families**.

Finally, we must make sure families know and understand that under IDEA students with a mental illness are entitled under law to appropriate special education supports and services. Then we must make sure those programs are sufficiently staffed with teachers and staff with appropriate training.

With regard to bullying, the anti-bullying regulation / form might be more effective if it listed more explicit examples of bullying behavior. Age appropriate anti-bullying lessons should be incorporated into the curriculum, and activities or programs to promote inclusion and a positive school climate should be implemented with fidelity across the school system.

On a related note, the 2017 Interim Safety Report (IRS) recommendations must also be implemented with fidelity. A number of these recommendations provide measures to promote a positive school climate. For example, engaging in restorative practices and restorative justice both combats the School to Prison pipeline and teaches students to confront, understand, and make amends for the impact of their actions (such as bullying) on other students. In addition, the IRS contains data-based systems and strategies, building on capital, technological, health

curriculum, and human resources to monitor / improve safety and promote a positive school climate. Examples include online school dashboards to report and monitor bullying, gang activity, and drug use.

## **7. Honoring Cultural Heritage**

As the granddaughter of three immigrants, I appreciate the vital role immigrants have played, and still play, in our society. And so, as our history is taught, we must fairly and accurately (1) teach the historical and cultural truth of all immigrants and their contribution to our nation's history and current society, and (2) ensure teaching materials reflect our cultural diversity as a county and nation, including Asian Americans. I am not aware if a curriculum audit has been conducted with regard to the (1) historical accuracy, or (2) cultural proficiency, or both, of the teaching materials, but if not, perhaps one is warranted (this is something I would have a better sense of with more stakeholder feedback). That said, Asian American history and culture can be better integrated into the curriculum by requiring it. For example, it is imperative that our students are taught the significant contributions of Chinese Americans in the westward expansion of the United States -- the railroads were built by Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants brought to the United States by the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroad companies. When teaching this we must ensure students are also taught about the discriminatory and at times life threatening treatment and conditions of the Chinese employees, and the subsequent Chinese Exclusion Act, as well as discrimination by American society as a whole. Likewise, no class taught about World War II may be taught without accurately and fully covering the deeply shameful fact of Japanese Internment Camps in western states. We must ensure the lives and contributions of Asian women are also taught. But it is more than just teaching students of main historical events. It is imperative we ensure the materials are rich and full, that they do not skip over important nuance and perspective.

In addition to history, it is important to teach Asian cultural contributions to the American story. So, for example, 20<sup>th</sup> Century American literature courses must reflect the multi-cultural fabric of our country, which means including Asian American writers along with, for example, Mexican-American / Hispanic American writers, Native American writers, African American writers and the Harlem Renaissance, as well as European American writers.

We should also provide opportunities for living history. People who lived through events and experiences could share their stories in person with our students, including having family members speak. To promote heritage more generally, students could combine video stories with family trees and photos and share their cultural / historical family stories at multi-cultural celebrations.

With regard to cultural proficiency and MCPS staff, we must ensure all our staff value diversity, understand their students' cultures, are culturally self-aware, are trained to appreciate what sorts of miscommunications can occur cross culturally and how to respond. Working with the Equity Initiatives Unit to better engage in culturally responsive teaching, and when needed, developing a formal plan for specific schools, with community input, is an approach. If we need to go beyond this, different outside organizations may provide appropriate cultural proficiency

professional development materials (MCPS can also look to school districts with larger Asian communities, such as Los Angeles or San Francisco for materials if needed).

Going beyond that, MCPS could offer incentives to hire front office (or other) staff who speak Spanish or Mandarin in schools with a significant Spanish speaking or Mandarin speaking parent community. It could also offer a scholarship program and pay the tuition for interested staff (e.g., front office, counselors, teachers) who would like to take language classes, such as Mandarin or Spanish, to become conversant with MCPS families.

## **8. School Boundary**

My four considerations when addressing possible boundary changes are: (1) school size/class size; (2) proximity to home/length of bus ride; (3) promoting racial/ethnic and socio-economic diversity; and (4) maintaining vertical boundaries from K-12.

School/class size is a consideration because I am concerned about large class sizes for students and for teachers. Larger class sizes make it harder for teachers to provide the differentiated instruction students need to achieve their potential. The larger the classes, the more likely a teacher will engage in a one size fits all approach.

One of the reasons I mention close proximity to home is some of the measures I support to address the achievement gap and positive social-emotional learning work better when the school is close to home. For example, community schools and Linkages to Learning are different programs that provide access to community services and so are more effective when they are closer to the homes of the families they serve, in the local community (especially when addressing the needs of communities for whom English is not the language spoken at home). Likewise, community childcare centers in MCPS schools are more helpful if they are closer to home. Similarly, expanding early childhood education programs is a top priority, and parents tend to prefer their pre-K students to be in school closer to home. Also, long bus rides are hard on students – high school students already have to wake up very early for school, and elementary school students are too young to commute long distances.

Diversity is important because it is vital to promoting inclusion and acceptance and combating xenophobia. We need to fight bias and bigotry – as a Latina growing up in Los Angeles in the 70's, I would not want any child in MCPS to hear the things I heard said about my heritage. Similarly, in order to combat the achievement gap, we need to ensure diversity in socio-economic terms.

Finally, my criteria assume the boundaries drawn would continue to maintain a vertical transition from ES to MS to HS (peers staying together throughout) consistent with the new OSSI vertical alignment. Maintaining vertical progression throughout K-12, without separating peer groups mid-way is beneficial to students and families. It allows students to develop peer relationships and keep them into high school. It promotes consistency in support from programs with central office or cluster supervisor support because they know the students and their families throughout the years.