

Question 7 – All Candidates

Please explain your views on additional charter schools given the success of Nuestro Mundo here in Madison and several offerings in Appleton just to name a few?

Overall, I think it is imperative that the school board of Madison take a close look at the trend of opening charter schools in our state. In general, charter schools can provide an alternative learning environment, allow flexibility for teachers and students, and bring innovative ideas to the school district. These charter schools are still public schools, with teachers who are part of the union and are under the oversight of the school board.

A long-term benefit for our district is that charter schools can bring more students into our district, which in turn will bring in more revenue, as the state allocates money to districts on a per pupil basis.

To date, the studies of charter school effectiveness are mixed. I believe that we need to have honest conversations with the charter schools in our district and then look elsewhere (like Appleton) to get further input and perspectives on both the planning process and the expected outcomes.

As board members, I would like to see us move to a model of education where we collaborate with post-secondary educators/employers while balancing the needs of the community. Charter or magnet schools can be a place where we can “stretch our wings” a bit with our educational model.

We have some existing charter schools, specifically Nuestro Mundo and Wright Middle School, and we need to look at what these schools do well for families, kids and teachers. Then the board can move forward and begin to write policy that can bring this movement to a larger scale.

I did not study the Studio School proposal in detail, but I found the ideas innovative and exciting for those involved. One of our long-term goals is to find ways to bring families back to the school district. In the long term, providing diverse learning opportunities may bring new resources and revenues into the district.

Let’s remember that charter schools are supported by our State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Elizabeth Burmaster. The latest data I know of shows that in

the state of Wisconsin we had 183 schools operating in 2005-06 with approximately 21,032 students out of the state total of 874,098. The average school size of a charter is 115 students versus the average public school population of 423.

Another important aspect of this conversation that I would further address in another forum is the tension that has existed between teachers' unions and charter school advocates.

A good place to learn more and begin this conversation is the National Charter School Research Project report (http://www.ncsrp.org/cs/csr/view/csr_pubs/8), which covered the NCSR and the Progressive Policy Institute's meeting in 2006 between union and charter school leaders.

Question 8 – All Candidates

How can the school district provide for second languages to be taught to all students starting in Kindergarten and continuing through all grades?

I have not looked at the budget closely enough but I can tell you from both a personal perspective and from the latest research that we should be embracing the learning of languages in the early grades and consistently through high school.

This conversation should be part of our high school reform. We need to have discussions with local leaders in post-secondary education and future employers about the growing need for knowing another language. Given the fact that our demographics are changing, it would help the entire community to become more bilingual.

Question 9 – All Candidates

The board will be hiring a new superintendent. Please discuss what you believe is the top 3 criteria for a superintendent. You are free to ignore my request to address communication between Board and Administration/Superintendent, Boards communication with public, Superintendent and Public.

This is an excellent question and one that has not been asked enough. A key task of the board of education is to hire, oversee, support, and evaluate the work of the superintendent. The superintendent oversees personnel matters, budget, and financial matters, with accountability to the board for implementation.

As a rule, the superintendent recommends, the board members deliberate with one another and the superintendent, and then the board reaches a decision.

The top three characteristics I would look for are (1) community-mindedness and comfort with an urban school district; (2) openness and fluency with active communication; and (3) long-term vision.

I am a strong proponent of the process in selecting the superintendent being one in which the community and the staff have a good idea of how we came to the selection. Some things I would want to know about the candidate include an understanding of: (1) their philosophy of education and of leadership; (2) their vision for learning; (3) how they view the professional relationship between the superintendent and the teachers; (4) their experience with an urban school district; (5) their collaborative experience with alternative learning, university research and data-influenced decision making; (6) their overall vision for MMSD; and (7) their philosophy on curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional growth for all staff.

Question 10 – All Candidates

What role should School Board, Parents and Educators play in changing state law, which adversely affect our schools?

I think a very good place to start is the Wisconsin Association for Excellent Schools (<http://www.excellentschools.org/index.html>).

Question 11 - Rick and Maya

What accountability mechanisms do you envision?

Successful organizations are continually searching for new ideas, methods, and processes to catapult them to improved performance. These organizations actively

examine themselves as well as other organizations to learn from and employ successful practices.

One method of measurement is a process called benchmarking. It is used in many school districts to evaluate current practices and achieve superior performance. Our district incorporates some aspects of a data-driven process. Benchmarking provides the next step by asking the question.

What I like about benchmarking is that it assumes that all schools are capable of continuous improvement. Everyone, from staff to board members, works together using quality improvement methods. The goal is to raise the bar, to continuously improve every single process in the district - learning, teaching, discipline, food service, assessment, and professional development.

Question 12 – All Candidates

What is your position on the health insurance issue for teachers, that is the WPS option versus HMO's?

My basic position is that as a board member, representing the entire community, it is my role to make sure the public understands how we are governing. I believe in an open, transparent government. In the latest board vote regarding a health insurance discussion, a vote was cast in executive session with no debate before the public. A majority, but not a consensus of the board, decided to take the health insurance package off the table in the event, if ever, the district and the teachers' union had to go to arbitration.

After this action was brought to light by the local media, many in the community formed an opinion that the Board was advocating on behalf of the teacher's union and not on behalf of the community. In fact, other unions represented in the district, like AFSCME and the school administrators, negotiated a different health insurance package and dropped WPS with the cost savings going to higher salaries.

To get a better understanding of the complexities of this issue, I would suggest you read the Isthmus article on this topic at:

<http://www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=5699>