



2024 Local Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Muri Lynn Dueppen

OFFICE SOUGHT: Carroll County Public Schools- Board of Education

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I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that CCEA intends to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE:  DATE SUBMITTED: 12/8/2023

Candidates: To be considered for a recommendation, you must respond to each of the questions below. Clarifications, explanations, and other information may be attached, but please be certain to clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer.

Please return your completed and signed questionnaire no later than Dec. 8th, 2023 to Nathan Curtis at ncurtis@mseanea.org or to our office at 60 Aileron Court, Suite 6, Westminster, MD 21157.

Getting to Know You

1. Please share a brief bio for us to know you better. Be sure to include how long you've lived in Carroll County, whether you have/had kids in Carroll County Public Schools (CCPS), and other ways in which you are involved in our community.

I grew up in a Navy family that relocated often. My husband and I chose Mount Airy to put down roots in 2004, where we raised our two children who are now grown. They both attended CCPS from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Since January 2022 I have been employed full-time at the National Aquarium on their Philanthropy team. Currently I am the Corporate Relations Officer primarily managing the Corporate Membership and Sponsorship programs. I have a lifelong interest in wildlife conservation and worked for three years right out of college as an informal experiential educator, which included providing presentations with live animals about the tropical rainforest, animal adaptations, and other topics to audiences of all ages in the D.C. Metro area. In 1991 I earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of William & Mary in Virginia. I have also taken graduate level coursework in Integrated Marketing through the University of Maryland Global Campus.

I have been a local education advocate since 2014. Before returning to work full-time after one of my stay-at-home-mom stretches, I also co-founded and co-led the grassroots group VOCAL Carroll County to encourage more civic engagement at the local level. I am nearing completion of one year on the Carroll County Democratic Central Committee, am the current Secretary, and will step down in January to prioritize the nonpartisanship of the election. I have also volunteered for Carroll Values Education and was honored to receive the Friend of Education Award from CCEA earlier this year.

Student Supports

2. How will you address increasing needs for mental health supports for students and staff?

As someone who has been the de facto case manager for loved ones with chronic, serious mental illnesses, I know that one of the most important things that can help individuals in need of treatment and other supports is to work diligently to destigmatize these disorders and normalize proven wellness practices. For staff, it is important to acknowledge and mitigate workplace conditions (which includes workload) that create or exacerbate unhealthy stressors, provide sufficient mental health services, and ensure that available resources are known to and easily accessible by employees. It is noteworthy that the Successful Workforce pillar in the current and draft CCPS Strategic Plans excludes any focus on the wellbeing of staff; I would seek to address that gap. The Safe and Secure Environment pillar in the current and draft strategic plans is also lacking in this regard.

Following the advice of experts and proven best practices in the realm of mental health is essential. As a Board of Education member I would push for a review of practices and development of an action plan using the CDC's [Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools](#) guide along with other professional resources. In addition, I would push for a staffing model that includes a sufficient number of school counselors to ensure that their time is not consumed by other ancillary responsibilities beyond their core competencies. It is my understanding that the current counselor to student ratio in CCPS is out of alignment with best practice and this is unacceptable.

3. How will you support diversity, equity, and inclusion for ALL students throughout the county? What specific policies do you endorse, whose goals are focused on providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

Robust DEI policies and practices with built-in accountability are vitally important to ensure the success of every student and to ensure the school system serves every CCPS family. Diversity ensures healthy and thriving ecosystems of all sorts and should be celebrated. I would model this commitment as a community leader on the Board and assess all policies from this perspective. For one specific example, I believe the selection process for Board-level committees should be scrutinized through this lens, committee members from the community should probably receive relevant DEI training, and committee members should be held accountable to the anti-discrimination policy.

Staff Supports

4. Educators across the country have felt the pressure to help correct all of society's woes, but also run the risk of "usurping parental rights" (Examples: more elementary educators are expected to change diapers of general education students than ever before, more educators are taking physical, verbal, and emotional abuse from students on a much more regular basis, educators are increasingly afraid to speak about anything divisive for fear that they'll face discipline, etc.).

What steps (short term and long term) would you take to help support educators as their jobs become increasingly difficult to navigate?

There are two key shifts that must occur in order to begin to tackle these destructive trends. First, the natural and obligatory partner of "rights" is "responsibilities" and parents must agree to partner with educators to address the needs of their children that should be met at home. Second, the Board of Education and CCPS Administration should implement practices whereby educators are empowered and their input in solving these problems is prioritized.

5. Some CCPS staff go through a tremendous amount of training to be able to appropriately address (sometimes restrain) a student who may pose a physical threat to self, peers, and/or staff. What would you do, as a Board member, to ensure the safety of staff who are placed in these dangerous situations?

In addition to providing appropriate training that includes de-escalation techniques, each school should provide it to more personnel and have a crisis response plan – developed collaboratively by administrators and educators - that includes rapid deployment of backup personnel (possibly involving an appropriately trained SRO) to ensure that no educator is handling these situations alone.

6. What plans do you have to address the untenable workload for staff, where expectations/responsibilities are increased but nothing is ever removed or compensated for?

Quite simply, what is expected is unsustainable and in addition to more competitive compensation, for our educators and students to thrive there must be some changes related to workload. I believe that the single most important thing that school systems can do to improve the efficacy of instruction, educator satisfaction, and school performance is to elevate the voices of and empower educators as the core, crucial thought leaders they can and should be. They are second only to students as key internal stakeholders. I would advocate for a much more frequent, formal platform outside of negotiations for learning from them the best way to overcome barriers like this and continuously improve. Over the years I have gotten to know dozens of amazing classroom teachers and other educators. Their commitment, expertise, creativity, and resilience should be lauded. Their ideas must play a more significant role in how CCPS designs and delivers instruction, and makes the important decisions that will keep our school system strong.

7. Our Support Staff Professionals (CASE bargaining unit members) are underpaid and underappreciated. What would you do to ensure that our education support professionals (ESPs) receive adequate and appropriate benefits, training, safe working conditions, and a living wage?

I would listen and learn from them about which components of the ESP Bill of Rights, remedies, and other actions are the most important and actionable - then do everything in my power as a Board member to implement those changes. There is too much re-arrangement of task beyond the assigned classroom(s) and inadequate hourly wages.

Will you support the ESP Bill of Rights (attached)?

Yes.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future

8. What do you see as the benefits of The Blueprint for CCPS students, employees, and the greater community?

The Blueprint aims to take Maryland to the next and ever higher level(s) of the promise(s) of a public education by providing multiple pathways of success for every student in the state. That includes expansion of formalized pre- and post- K through 12 transitions that are so vital. It is intended to similarly promote the professionalism and effectiveness of the teaching vocation through increases in compensation, capacity, and growth opportunities.

9. What concerns or obstacles do you foresee with the implementation of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future in CCPS?

The Blueprint is ambitious, unwieldy, and expensive. Its mandates do not adequately account for the unique situations in every county. It should and is likely to evolve. That said, there are some narratives around it in Carroll County that concern me as I think they could ultimately be counter-productive, despite being well-intentioned. I believe any calls for its abolition are naïve at best. I expect it is here to stay and so the most productive path forward for CCPS leaders is to positively partner with decision makers at the state level and respectfully and optimistically engage with lawmakers rather than adopt a combative posture. In addition, many complaints about the funding predicament at the county level fail to acknowledge that our school system would be much better positioned to reallocate resources if it had not been forced to operate under austerity conditions for a decade.

Privatization and Use of Public Monies

10. As a potential Board Member, what is your position on allocating public funding to home and privately schooled students?

I oppose it.

11. As a potential Board Member, what is your position in the contracting out of services rather than have those services provided by Board of Education employees (i.e. Speech and Language Providers, custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance work, to name a few)?

I do not have a one-size-fits-all view. When it comes to core educational competencies like the positions represented by CCEA and CASE, I oppose contracting those services. However, for a wide variety of reasons it is probably not practical to insist on purity of that practice for all aspects of a very complicated operation.

Honesty in Education

12. CCEA supports honesty in education across all subject areas and in all areas of the CCPS approved curriculum. To encourage critical thinking, we believe educators should have professional autonomy and should be afforded the deference to teach truth in their classrooms, schools, and districts. How would you ensure honesty in education? How would you support our educators in implementing the approved county curriculum, even when it may be contentious?

For example, if a CCPS Social Studies teacher, keeping with the approved CCPS curriculum, taught the true story of Townsend Cook, who was lynched in Westminster in 1885, and as a result some parents became upset because they saw the lesson's material as divisive and controversial. How would you, as a Board of Education member, defend that teacher's rights to teach students this true story as part of the curriculum?

My opinion aligns with CCEA. In response to the scenario posited, my defense of that teacher would emphatically highlight that it is not only that teacher's right but their responsibility to entrust and empower students with the truth.

13. What is your position on books and other instructional materials (whether supplemental or as part of the approved curriculum) that tackle difficult, and often, divisive issues? Please know that CCEA does not condone materials that are sexually gratuitous in nature.

As an institution of learning with a mission of preparing lifelong learners for life, the last thing CCPS should do is prop up an effort by outside political groups to dramatically reduce the number of books available for eager readers. Material that is challenging is also essential for achieving excellence. I agree that "sexually gratuitous" material is not only unnecessary, but potentially harmful. I value the review process as it was intended to operate. However, given the reality of what many children access on their phones daily – often at school – it seems more important than ever to be realistic about the world that are already navigating. Sanitizing instructional materials to point of little similarity to the real world would be a disservice to students.

Rebuilding Trust and Faith in Public Education

14. What is the role of the Board of Education in rebuilding the public's trust in CCPS and, more specifically, the CCPS Board of Education? What steps might you take to do this, if elected?

The brevity of this response is not reflective of the severity or seriousness of this issue but, quite simply, I would be a vocal proponent of public education, opponent of culture wars being played out in classrooms, and passionate advocate for returning our focus to student success. I would strive to show that there should be no doubt about my commitment to every single student and family in our school community. I would reject divisiveness and celebrate our community's shared values and what unites us.

15. CCEA has had ongoing (and increasing) concerns about how some Board of Education members have used their official non-partisan position in ways that we consider divisive. What precautions would you take to avoid potential conflicts of interest and what assurances would you make about how you would communicate with various stakeholders?

I share these concerns. There are several things that I would do (or not do) to try to address and prevent divisiveness. One key element of this is in the social media sphere. I believe that a new or revised social medial policy should be implemented that requires Board Members to comply with a code of conduct that helps them model good digital citizenship for the community in general and students in particular. That includes being very disciplined in engaging so that it is always abundantly clear whether I am speaking as a private citizen or an elected official / representative of the Board of Education. In fact, I would aim to be ever-mindful of the fact that most people who are not my personal friends, family, or neighbors who reside in Carroll County and choose to engage with me outside of official channels are viewing me in that moment as a

Board of Education member. In addition, I would seek to embody a view of Ethics that goes beyond the letter of the law (which almost exclusively deals with potential financial conflicts of interest) to the spirit of non-partisanship and mutual respect.

16. What is one thing that you would like our members to know about your candidacy that wasn't addressed in a previous question and answer?

I have aligned with Dr. Amanda Jozkowski, who is also a Board of Education candidate in this election. We have formed an official campaign finance entity called a slate so that we can jointly fundraise and are coordinating our campaigns on multiple levels. While we each have different strengths, areas of expertise, and pet passions related to CCPS and public education generally, we are also developing a joint set of principles, priorities, and platform/policy proposals that will be solidified early in 2024. These already include being focused first and foremost on student success plus elevating and empowering educators in furtherance of strong public schools. As part of that effort, we are surveying the community for their input on the state of the system. An early, qualitative review of that information that pays particular attention to educators' answers has informed my responses to this questionnaire, and likely hers as well.

Thank you for taking the time to address the questions above.