



2016 Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed questionnaire to Nick List, nlist@mceanea.org by 5:00 pm on Monday, February 22, 2016.

Name: Jeanette Dixon

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Children	Age	School
Christopher Dixon	43	Graduated from Springbrook HS
Carolyn Dixon	37	Graduated from Paint Branch HS

Education and Training (list degrees, licenses, etc.):

Loyola College, M.ED - Educational Administration and Supervision	Social Studies Teacher, Parkland, White Oak and Springbrook
MCPS MEQ Planned Inservice Program	Assistant Principal, Walter Johnson and Banneker
American University, B.A. History	Principal, White Oak 1997-2001; Principal, Paint Branch HS 2001-2013

Occupation: Educational Advocate. Retired MCPS Principal (White Oak MS 1997-2001; Paint Branch HS 2001-2013) Work part-time as an MCPS Hearing Officer in the Appeals and Transfer Unit. Since I filed my candidacy on December 3, 2015 I have not taken on any more cases as a Hearing Officer in order to avoid any conflict of interest and will do so for the duration of this campaign.

Employer: Montgomery County Public Schools

Address : 850 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, MD

General Responsibilities: Hearing Officer Transfer Requests and other appeals

Union Membership (past or present): Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals
(MCAAP)

I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking county office and I understand that MCEA reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

Candidate Signature: Jeanette Dixon

Date: February 20th, 2016

Part I

1. Why are you running for this position? What personal attributes, characteristics, and experiences make you the right candidate for this position?

I am running for the At Large seat on the BOE because I love Montgomery County Public Schools. I rose from student teacher to principal in our system and retired after a 30 year career as a teacher and administrator. I want to continue to be of service to our students and believe I can make a positive difference in helping to ensure that we provide a world class education for ALL of our students. I also believe we are at an historic crossroads as we navigate the challenges of increasing enrollment along with cultural changes that have brought us more students who are impacted by poverty which is reflected in our FARMS data. **It is time for a change on the Board after 8 years to a more robust representation that will make a difference.** As the At Large Board Member I would work collaboratively with other Board members on behalf of all students, and always support our teachers who do an amazing job not only educating but nurturing, guiding and loving our students despite time constraints, the demands of testing and larger class sizes. I always felt as a principal that my job was to support my teachers (staff) and if there was something they needed to deliver the instructional program I obtained it. I knew them, their families and even their dogs by name. I would carry that same philosophy to the Board where it is the Board's job to obtain the resources our schools need. Personally, I operate in a completely transparent manner, am a hard working collaborative problem solver and I am responsive. My 30 years of experience as a teacher and principal, good judgment, ability to get things done, and belief in fairness make me the right candidate for this position at this time.

2. What is your view of personal and institutional change? Incremental or transformational? What change, if any, do you believe MCPS needs to undertake?

Personal change is a challenge to most people because we are used to doing things a certain way and you may not think you need to change however it is easier to accomplish personal change if one is committed to changing and you set goals to accomplish that change because you are dealing with one person---yourself. Institutional change is harder to accomplish because you are dealing with a lot of individuals and a way of operating that has been established over a long period of time. It is really trying to change the ideas and practices that govern an institution to create something that is desired. Incremental change is taking small steps to bring about change that is desired over a period of time. Most employees are more comfortable with this type of change because of its pace and is less disruptive to how they operate and what they are comfortable with. Transformational change is a complete change in the culture of an organization and takes time to accomplish. To my mind this is the most desirable type of change as it will last because the employees have been involved in identifying

the change needed and will be invested in it. *Change theory has essentially three parts the current state, a transition period and the future that you want to get to. How change is managed plays a big role in determining if it will be successful.*

I believe MCPS needs a transformational change in the culture of employees being afraid to speak their minds because they are afraid of losing their job. This fear has the effect of stifling creativity and does a disservice to our students who would be the natural beneficiaries of creative ideas from staff. The system would also benefit from operating with complete transparency.

3. In your opinion, what are the purpose and value of student assessments at the county, state and national levels? Given the current landscape what are the ramifications for students and educators?

I believe mandatory student assessments are needed to measure the achievement of our students but these assessments became excessive in our zeal to reform our educational system. I believe it is most important to measure student achievement in reading and math which are the keys to students achieving at the high level we expect. However, I also believe we should not impose so much testing that teachers have to spend so much instructional time “teaching to the test” as opposed to teaching critical thinking skills, being creative, and engaging students in their learning as they teach the curriculum. I support MCEA’s position that we should put a 2% cap on the amount of instructional time used for mandated student assessments. I would not have voted to get rid of all of the final exams for high school students as the Board did before teachers were able to weigh in on this. My understanding is MCEA surveyed teachers on this issue and 70% were opposed to getting rid of finals. In the area of assessments teacher voice is critical. I agree with cutting back on the amount of testing but we should have retained final exams in English and Mathematics. Preparing students for college where they will take exams is important so I would be in favor of reinstating a form of finals testing in English and Mathematics.

Additionally the Maryland State Education Association (MESA) Time To Learn (TTL) Committee surveyed teachers from Maryland School districts and teachers said 67% of the mandated tests they administer do not inform their instruction (Feb. 2016 Action Line p.4)

The new ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) is less onerous than No Child Left Behind and we no longer have AYP which is a good thing because it took so much in terms of time and resources from teaching.

Right now I would say testing remains a “mixed bag” with more work to be done to provide more time for instruction and that teachers need to be integrally involved in deciding how that will be done.

4. Specifically, what programs and initiatives are currently being implemented successfully by MCPS to close the achievement gap? What is still needed? What is not working?

Specifically, the Minority Scholars Program, Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) and George B. Thomas Saturday School programs are being successfully implemented in helping to eliminate the achievement gap but we can do more. The Achievement Gap is a complex issue that we have been working on since 1977 and is going to take time and a sustained community

effort to eliminate. This must be a BOE priority. I would support making this a standing item on the BOE monthly agenda to get an update on progress. Specifically I would support

- a) a system-wide Achievement Gap Convocation bringing together all stakeholders. Ask teachers, support staff, students, administrators, parents and elected officials what they would do and what resources (both human and material) are needed.
- b) fully funding the technology initiative. Our students need these skills to be competitive in the 21st century.
- c) mandatory summer remediation for elementary students who are not proficient in reading and math.
- d) placing daily classwork notes online at the end of the day (Edline) so that parents can help their student. They need to be greater partners if we are to make progress.
- e) training teachers in culturally responsive teaching practices where student culture informs teaching.
- f) implementing a Faith-Based Initiative where religious institutions would help mentor at risk students and their families.
- g) reducing class size.
- h) providing quality afterschool programs that combine sports, games and academic help like the Upper 90 Program I had at White Oak MS
- i) reaching out to Black and Latino students to take Honors and AP courses.
- j) providing wraparound services to students and families especially during a crisis, including hiring a psychiatrist for each of the high poverty high school clusters identified in the County Council OLO report.
- k) hiring more counselors so that we have 2 at the elementary level, one for each grade level in middle school and a lower caseload for high school counselors.
- l) providing more school choice at the secondary level.
- m) hiring more diverse staff
- n) rotating 20 minutes of sustained silent reading in grades 6-9

Specifically I think the alternative program is not working and we do not have viable programs to address issues related to drugs, alcohol and mental health issues in our schools.

5. As a Board member, what metrics would you use to determine if MCPS policies and programs are closing the achievement gap?

I would look at the disaggregated data for all students,(Asian, Black, Latino ,White, FARMS, SPED, LEP) to see if we are achieving the milestones of being proficient and advanced that the system has established for student achievement in grade 3,5 and 8 in reading and math, Algebra 1 with a C or higher by grade 8, English and math with a grade of C or higher in 9th grade and being eligible in 9th grade, Algebra 2 with a grade of C or higher in 11th grade, AP score of 3 or higher/IB score of 4 or higher, SAT score of 1650/ACT score of 24 or higher, and on time graduation.

I would also want to have data disaggregated on when students entered the system and how much schooling they have had before they came to MCPS.

6. Given the dynamics of various relationships with administrators, parents, community members, the employee organizations and the county government, how can you work to build consensus within and between these groups?

I think it is important for all of these groups to collaboratively work together and be completely transparent with each other especially as it relates to how much funding is needed and is available for the school system as the budget is being developed. I would work to take the politics out of these relationships by getting to know stakeholders as people who have the same goal, to wit providing a world class education for ALL of our students. I know that the County Council still has feelings of resentment towards the BOE for casting them as the “bad guy” that needs to be pressured to provide the funds it wants for the school system. It would also rather not have to deal with Maintenance of Effort (MOE).

I would also support the establishment of a BOE Advisory Committee which would be made up of one representative from groups such as MCEA, SEIU, MCAAP, MCCPTA, Montgomery County Retirees Association, NAACP Parents Council, Parents Coalition, Montgomery Taxpayer League, LEAAP and Identity. The BOE would meet quarterly to receive advice from major stakeholders such as these in education.

7. What are your views of the significant state wide policy issues that are impacting MCPS?
I think we must have the Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI) fully funded otherwise the governor’s refusal to release millions of dollars earmarked for schools will be devastating to MCPS and lead to larger class sizes and reductions in needed staffing. We cannot afford to “play politics” with school funding.

I oppose any efforts which take public money from public schools like vouchers and education credits.

I support the effort to gather input on school issues like student to counselor ratio, access to AP classes (which I revolutionized at Paint Branch) through the state Opportunity Dashboard.

I also support The Montgomery County Student Loan Refinancing Bill which would help borrowers refinance their loans at a lower fixed rate. This is especially important for teachers who find themselves with crushing debt that takes so much of their income and erodes their quality of life including being able to live in the county where they work.

8. Describe an environment where students and educators succeed. What resources and human capital are needed?

Students and educators succeed in an environment where there is mutual respect for cultural differences, and teachers have high expectations for all students to achieve. Students and teachers succeed in an environment where students are prepared with the materials they need (pen, paper, pencil, completed homework, textbook) and where organized, creative teachers steeped in their content are prepared to teach (follow their lesson plan) and students are encouraged to think critically and are engaged in their own learning. Typically students would have a warm-up to prepare them for the lesson where the teacher employs a variety of strategies during the class period, students can have their questions answered by the teacher or a peer and the teacher checks for student understanding. Technology such as promethean boards and computers (chromebooks) are a must for instruction because of the myriad

resources available online. Additionally teachers need to have time for planning, collaboration and reflection with their colleagues in their Professional Learning Community (PLC) and just like for many students who feel that knowing the teacher likes them is important and will help them be successful, so too teachers need to feel appreciated and recognized for the great work they do by supervisors and parents.

9. What do you believe needs to be done to increase public support for our schools, and what do you see as your role in accomplishing this goal?

I believe the residents of Montgomery County support our schools and want us to have what is needed to provide a world class education for our students. Our schools are the reason families move to Montgomery County and indeed some families who do not live in the county have their students attend our schools by using a friend or relative's address.

Operating in a transparent manner and constructing the FY'18 budget on a zero based basis so that we can review all programs and see what is truly working and needed, and what is not would I think increase public support for our schools.

As a Board member it would be incumbent upon me to be an advocate and, a drum major for education for our schools. I would also never let an opportunity pass during the Board member comments section of BOE meetings without getting out the good news about what is happening in our schools. Establishing a BOE Advisory Committee as I suggested in question #6 would be another way of increasing public support, as would conducting all Board business in a transparent manner. For example engaging the public more in major decisions like the selection of the superintendent would also increase support for whoever is ultimately chosen. Being a member of the Board has evolved into a full time job thus it would be difficult for a Board member who worked full time to do justice to increasing support for our schools. Luckily I am retired so I have the time and energy to work hard visiting schools and attending other county, state and national meetings. This would help accomplish this goal.

10. Do you support Paid Family Leave policies, similar to those provided by DCPS for their professional, supporting services, and administrative staffs?

Yes I do. In DCPS employees are given 16 weeks of leave or 80 days as opposed to the 60 days given in MCPS. As someone who is a caregiver to my mother who is recovering from a stroke, I am grateful this didn't happen to her while I was working so I did not have to choose between her and my job.

Part II

Please share your opinion on each of the following issues:

- A. Class size-We need to reduce class size to at least what it was in 2009 and especially in high impact schools.
- B. Universal pre-k -I support universal pre-k for all county 4 year olds.
- C. Career and technology education-I support fully funding the Technology Initiative and expanding career and technology education at the Edison Center. I also support increased internship and year-long apprenticeships where students can learn by hands on experience while in high school. I also support opportunities for students to get licenses in the health care, restaurant management and technology fields.
- D. Music and the arts- It is imperative that we expand music and arts education so that these programs are strong at the elementary, middle and high school levels.
- E. School start times- I would favor a pilot in a cluster that volunteers to pilot later school start times for high school so that we could collect data on whether it makes a difference in student achievement and well- being.
- F. Teacher retention-this must be made a priority by providing teachers with the support they need to be successful. I would also assign every teacher new to MCPS a "Professional Partner". This would be another teacher they could go to without fear of being evaluated or judged. I also believe it is important to increase teacher pay and honor the contracts signed with our unions.
- G. Class discipline- ALL parents want their children in classes where students are engaged in learning, respect their teachers and behave themselves. Students who cannot for various reasons behave should have a parent called and if necessary be referred to their administrator. At the secondary level this may also include In School Intervention (ISI) where they are able to complete their work and receive other services i.e. counseling. Staffing needs to be given to schools for ISI in high impact schools.
- H. Grading policy/ final exams- I think the BOE put the cart before the horse by voting to do away with final exams and then voting on the grading policy IKA which would add centrally developed,

in class marking period assessments. Additionally they did not wait to allow teachers to weigh in on doing away with finals. My understanding is that 70% of teachers were opposed to this. I support the goal of cutting down on the amount of testing in order to have more time for instruction however I do think we should have final exams in English and Math so that we can benchmark student achievement across the system and prepare students for college where they will take finals exams.

- I. School calendar- I support making Eid al-Adha, the Lunar New Year and Diwali holidays when they fall on a week day. This is a matter of fairness and respecting the diversity of our school system which I think also fosters brotherhood among our students.
- J. Special Education burden of proof-I oppose the current system of putting the burden of proof on parents to prove that an IEP recommended by the school does not meet the needs of their child.
- K. School choice-I favor school choice through magnet programs to give students and parents the opportunity to apply to attend a school that has a special program they are interested in and as a way to prevent the increasing segregation of the school system because of the economics of where students live.