



2022 MPS Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

The Advancing Equity Coalition (AEC) has spent the last several months listening to and learning from MPS families, community leaders, teachers, and principals to help guide these questions. We invite you to fill out this candidate questionnaire to help inform voters about your plans to improve the quality of education for students of color and Indigenous students across MPS. Your responses will be shared with the Minneapolis community through our newsletter, website, and social media channels. AEC is a registered 501(c)3 organization. We will only use the information collected in this questionnaire for voter education purposes. We will not endorse candidates in this election.

Candidate and Campaign Information

Name: Laurelle Myhra

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

Which Seat Are You Running For?: District 5 school board

Campaign Website: laurellemyhra4schoolboard.com

Candidate Email Address: laurellemyhra4schoolboard@gmail.com

Candidate Social Media Channels:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LaurelleMyhra4SchoolBoardDistrict5/>
- Twitter:
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/laurellemyhra/>
- Others: www.linkedin.com/in/laurelle-myhra-phd-lmft

Candidate Questions:

1. Why are you interested in serving on the Minneapolis Board of Education?

During my two years on the American Indian Parent Advisory Council for Minneapolis Public School (MPS), I had the opportunity to learn about challenges MPS is facing and believe my skills set and experience could be of help. For example key issues I would like to address include but are not limited to low enrollment and its impact on the budget, potentially facing school closure due to difficulty balancing the budget, disruption to children and families due to process and decision in the CDD, need for improvement literacy and math performance, funding issues for special education, and race equity and disparities concerns.

2. What skills, experience, and/or expertise do you bring to be an effective member of the Minneapolis Board of Education?

I work for my tribe as the Director of Mino Bimaadiziwin ("Good Life"; Mino-B) Wellness Clinic in Minneapolis. I have seven years of experience as a director. I have experience with obtaining and implementing large scale state and federal grants to balance budgets, and have developed

successful and culturally responsive programs. I'm also licensed marriage and family therapist and have a doctorate in family social science. My research has focused on racial and health disparities experienced by Native American people, integration of behavioral health and cultural healing practices into healthcare, and healing and resiliency. My personal experiences of racism and bias in education and healthcare have informed my professional activities and volunteerism. In addition to directing the Mino-B Wellness Clinic, I teach and have developed curriculum in the area of racial trauma and worked on a team to develop the Indigenous Health Toolkit. I also serve on multiple community advisory boards aimed at decreasing racial bias in education and healthcare. I have served the last three years on Hennepin Healthcare System's Community Advisory Board alongside leadership to improve equity across their system. I also served four years on the Health Equity Advisory and Leadership (HEAL) Council for the Minnesota Department of Health since its inception in 2017.

3. The last three years of interrupted learning has only exacerbated Minneapolis Public Schools' nation-leading racial disparities in academic outcomes, leading to an academic crisis. What would be your top 3 priorities to address this racial disparity and improve the academic outcomes and experience for students of color and Indigenous students? What data and information will guide your decision-making in academics?

To move the dial on culturally responsive education, I'd work with schools and teachers to offer training and peer mentoring to enhance understanding of students and families histories and needs. I'd ensure schools and teachers have access to training in identifying children with both gifted and special educational needs to ensure all students have access to education at their level. I would ensure that teachers and staff have training in evidence based math and literacy teaching strategies.

4. One of the biggest assets of Minneapolis Public Schools is the diversity of families the district serves. However, students receiving English Language Learner services often have some of the worst academic outcomes in the district. What actions will you take to improve the academic quality and educational experience for students receiving ELL services?

I agree this is one of the greatest assets. I would need to learn from schools and teachers, and families to identify how best to support them and improve outcomes, i.e., what is working in the district and what are the challenges. I would implement a workgroup to address the unique challenges that each of the schools are experiencing.

5. Given that we are in a child and adolescent mental health crisis, what key policy changes or investments would you make to support the wellbeing of MPS students?

There is a workforce shortage in mental health in Minnesota and across the Nation, however there are a number of community programs that offer culturally responsive care. I would partner with these programs and improve the referral process and coordination process between schools and existing partners.

6. Teachers of color and Indigenous teachers are severely under-represented in comparison to the student population, with approximately 80% of the MPS teacher population identifying as white. Teachers of color and Indigenous teachers in the district report feeling isolated,

experiencing a challenging work environment, and a lack of support. What strategies would you support to rapidly increase the percentage of teachers of color and Indigenous teachers in the district? What strategies would you support to improve the work environment for teachers of color and Indigenous teachers?

Diverse employees are in high demand, and other employers are needing to increase wages and benefits, and get creative with incentives to be competitive. From what I've observed, many of the diverse employees in MPS are receiving low wages and they don't feel valued. I would implement a policy that would offer additional training time/funds and mentorship for these teachers, to both better support their career advancement and to enhance their sense of value and being part of the team.

7. Despite nearly 20% of MPS students receiving special education services, the academic experience and opportunities for students receiving special education services is rarely discussed by the Minneapolis Board of Education. What key policy changes and investments would you support to improve the educational experience and quality for students receiving special education services?

I would request regular, ideally monthly meetings, with the Minneapolis Board of Education to discuss the needs and experiences of special education, in order to bring them up to speed and start to collaborate with them to solve and remedy current challenges and plan for a better future experience for children and families.

8. For several years, the MPS Finance Department has said, "the current cost structure is unsustainable long term" and "enrollment increases alone are not the solution". As a policymaker and financial steward for MPS, what changes would you consider to MPS' cost structure to ensure MPS is financially sustainable into the future?

I would like to review the budget and spending trends over the last 5 years (consider before COVID and inflation), and better understand each school's unique challenges and their potential solutions. I'd like to work with the schools directly to identify opportunities for decreasing spending and also identify external funding to balance budgets.

Please email your completed questionnaire to kenneth@advancingequitycoalition.org along with a headshot by Sunday, July 31st.

About Advancing Equity Coalition:

The Advancing Equity Coalition (AEC) is a coalition of organizations, working closely with MPS parents, educators, and community members, who have come together to develop the political will to eliminate institutional racism in Minneapolis Public Schools. We are driven by a vision that every student in Minneapolis Public Schools can succeed and deserves a high-quality education. With that, we are focused on ensuring the policies and conditions are in place for high-quality academic experience and opportunities for students of color and Indigenous students.

If you would like to learn more, you can visit our website: www.advancingequitycoalition.org

You can also visit our social media channels:

- Facebook: facebook.com/advancingequitymps
- Twitter: @EquityMPS
- Instagram: [advancingequitymps](https://instagram.com/advancingequitymps)
- Youtube: Advancing Equity Coalition Minneapolis