

Responses of School Board Candidate Mike Durso to Progressive Neighbors Questionnaire

1. Do you support the use of high stakes testing (such as the Maryland MSA and HSA tests) as a way to improve the quality of education in MCPS? What would you propose as alternative methods of holding schools accountable?

I am hoping that sanity soon returns in the form of how we judge students, teachers, and schools by test scores. Having been in education for a good while, I know we cannot discount testing altogether. I do think that measuring growth, and looking at other barometers might be more equitable and informative. Growth from when one enters a grade level, attendance rates, graduation rates, and satisfaction surveys can paint a clearer picture than a one stop test score snap shot.

2. Do you support providing enriched and innovative instruction with a rigorous curriculum to all students as a way to address the achievement gap? What changes to the current MCPS policies regarding gifted and talented instruction would you make?

Certainly, all students across the spectrum should face a rigorous curriculum. For starters, I think GT instruction can be broadened to be offered to more than receive it now. The key is to make sure placements are accurate, and students, in conjunction with parents - teachers are placed in appropriate settings. While we pursue GT issues, we must not lose sight of those students struggling with language and reading deficiencies.

3. In this period of limited resources, do you support maximizing the resources devoted directly to the classroom and reducing administrative expenses? What specific changes to the current budget would you propose?

I think the classroom remains as sacred as possible. We have numerous great programs in MCPS, many staffed with excellent and caring educators. That being said, in financial hard times, some of our favorite and popular programs and initiatives might have to take a back seat to classroom staffing. These are the difficult choices we will face in the next budget.

4. Do you support initiatives to give schools and teachers greater flexibility in meeting the needs of their populations? What specific changes in current policy would you propose?

I believe that the local school (Principal in collaboration with stakeholders) should have additional leeway with staffing - spending issues. Staffing formulas, and discretionary spending are two areas we can gain improvement as we address local needs.

5. As a BOE member, will you support the integrity of collective bargaining and negotiated contracts with MCPS employees' unions?

I believe in collective bargaining, and the sanctity of contracts, the challenge is when the dollars are not available to sustain positions - programs, these are not easy options remaining. I worry over staff morale in the face of bleak financial predictions, but also believe it is our (MCPS - BOE) responsibility to do whatever we can to protect and honor our employee union contracts.

6. What qualities would you look for when selecting a new superintendent for MCPS next year?

I believe we need an educational and fiscal visionary who can garner the respect of all of the various constituencies in our county. The next Superintendent must be a listener, bridge builder, and able to create a consensus on the major issues of the day. The Superintendent will have to deal with shrinking budgets, rising expectation and probable continued growth..