

## SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES PROFILES

## MMSD School Board candidate profiles

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) Board of Education has two open seats for the April 7 election. In Seat 1, Donald Gors is challenging incumbent and current president Arlene Silveira. In Seat 2, incumbent and current vice president Lucy Mathiak runs unopposed.

Candidates were given the three questions listed at right and asked to share their viewpoints for Northside News readers.

**Donald Gors***Candidate for Seat 1*

**ANSWER 1:** If we as a community, state and nation believe that education is one of our most basic resources along with water, food, shelter and heat why shouldn't we do everything possible to ensure that funding for education is not cut? Saying that; shouldn't we always measure the value provided through education? Education's ability to produce young vibrant, engaged citizens who can contribute to our community, state, nation or world upon graduation is important.

Programs are not the same as Budget Items. Program results must be continually tracked and measured. Understanding what is working, what isn't working or the value which a program provides must be understood!

Measurements of Expected, Proposed and Actual Outcomes are essential to all world class school districts. By employing Innovative, Creative Educators and Utilizing Measurement Standards we will continually learn how specific programs leverage their skills, talents which directly impact our young students as they pass through this vehicle called education.

**ANSWER 2:** Schools can be one component in creating healthy neighborhoods. The involvement or lack of involvement by the citizens of the neighborhood is a larger more important key.

Building Age, Upkeep Costs, Replacement Costs and overall Community Use of School Buildings are some factors to determining overall value. Elementary schools typically are associated with neighborhoods.

**ANSWER 3:** All the Citizens of every community must continue to engage our young people directly and indirectly. Education takes place every where both formally and informally regardless of the setting.

Indirectly Citizens can become mentors, advocates in schools, involved within their neighborhood or city.

Directly, Parents, can help their children understand the importance of Respect, Discipline, Dignity, Morals, Ethics and Education.

When attending school meetings or school functions children learn how much their loved ones really care about them. The importance adults place on helping their children learn, by creating Healthy, Learning, Teaching Environments is significant to their child's education success and future.

By each of our actions or inactions we set the expectation for our children to follow. Change takes place when everyone is involved; Voting is one action of directly becoming involved.

**QUESTION 1**

The projected multi-billion state budget gap will likely result in state aid reductions to schools. When cuts are necessary, program and schools are pitted against each other. What will be your approach to deciding what budget items to eliminate or trim? What are your highest priority items to avoid cutting?

**Arlene Silveira***Candidate for Seat 1*

**ANSWER 1:** My priority is to keep as many cuts as possible away from the classroom. Our new strategic plan will drive some of the decision-making in budgeting, meaning we would budget to support our plan. I am an advocate at looking at district-wide processes to see where we can save money based on efficiencies and will continue to encourage that programs are evaluated to ensure we are effectively meeting student needs. If programmatic cuts are recommended, data on the programs and students being served is imperative in the decision-making process. We have to ensure we are meeting the needs of children at each school and different schools have different needs. Class size, support services, and educational environment (including safety) are high priorities.

**ANSWER 2:** I agree schools contribute to the strength of neighborhoods. I've come to understand that with needs for parent and community involvement in schools and emphasis on developing relationships in schools, it would be difficult to envision a situation where factors that go into a cost-benefit analysis on school closings would outweigh the relationship benefits associated with neighborhood schools. If closings were presented, evaluation data should include: current/projected enrollment; building condition; alternative space; expenses versus savings; other potential shared uses for the building; "people" factor and demographics. Parents/staff from the affected schools should be involved in the dialogue/solution.

**ANSWER 3:** Parents and taxpayers should be proud of all schools and focus on the health of the entire school district, not just your neighborhood school. A good school district is central to thriving communities. A district's mission should relate to community goals, which is why our new board governance model has strong community engagement and collaboration components and why we are starting our community-based strategic planning. Community involvement in school demonstrates the importance of school and education. There are opportunities to participate through: volunteering; mentoring; development of business-education partnerships (e.g. Webcrafters at Mendota); resource sharing; business internships; advocacy for funding and other school issues; supporting community groups helping students; expanding learning activities at home; modeling the behavior expected of students. Parents and community members are necessary partners in collaboration for student achievement.

**QUESTION 2**

Many people believe neighborhood schools are an essential component of healthy neighborhoods. If budget cuts require consideration of closing schools, what criteria and process will you use to determine if a school should be closed?

**Lucy Mathiak***Candidate for Seat 2*

**ANSWER 1:** We do not need to pit programs, or areas of the city, against each other to manage the MMSD budget. I have focused on making sure that we make a solid case for decisions when we spend money, reviewing spending to fund highest areas of need, and working to provide resources in keeping with the needs of the students at each school. My top priority is to preserve people, programs, and resources that directly serve schools. Job #1 is educating our children, and I will continue to work to align spending with that basic mission.

**ANSWER 2:** High-achieving schools are key to strong neighborhoods. Faced with serious funding shortages, I have worked to keep schools open while finding other ways to save funds. I strongly opposed proposals to close Lindbergh, Lapham, and Marquette, and supported moving alternative high school programs from rented space into Lapham and Marquette. That decision was a win-win outcome. It achieved the desired savings, kept neighborhood schools

**QUESTION 3**

Decisions made by state government and school district leadership play a major role in the quality of our schools, but so do the actions of parents and taxpayers. What actions can parents and taxpayers take to sustain and improve our schools?

open, and worked to the benefit of the full range of students and their families. I believe that closing schools should be considered as a last resort.

**ANSWER 3:** The most important thing that parents and taxpayers can do is to connect with school communities and then use their experiences as advocates for those schools. Madison's schools have changed dramatically in recent years, but many people are unaware of the changes and what they do and do not mean. We can meet the challenges of schools where 50 percent or more of the students are from low income families, and where the diversity of languages and cultures changes quickly each year. To progress, we must work to educate elected officials at all levels. We must work to include all members of our community in our schools, and to engage with students to understand who they are and their desires for success. Finally, we must become passionate supporters of public education by: supporting school funding; using our voices to educate and engage others in debate of the issues; and, putting aside our differences to work together for schools that are strong parts of our communities.

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