

## **MFT Video Questions Script, April 2020**

My name is Rebecca Gagnon, your former Citywide School Board Director. I am a mother of three children, two SWHS graduates and a current Laker Sophomore. I want to thank MFT for this opportunity to virtually connect with educators. I also want to thank our educators and school staff for their flexibility, ingenuity and incredible patience in this new COVID19 virtual education reality.

My recovery from reconstructive knee surgery and the COVID19 stay at home mandate have given me time to reflect upon my 8yrs of work on the Board, much of which is detailed on my website [RebeccaforMN.com](http://RebeccaforMN.com). I've also had time to follow the Comprehensive District Design work. I am frustrated by the approach current District leadership has taken in this process, presenting a more detailed "final plan" only recently, and moving forward with a vote in the midst of a pandemic crisis.

I am running for election in District 6, and asking for YOUR support for the DFL endorsement, to ensure our community is better informed and thoughtfully and authentically engaged in a timely manner. As your District 6 School Board Director, I will work to make your voices heard and reflected in District decisions.

## **#1 Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Culturally Competent Instruction:**

*MPS has a diverse student population, where over 65% of students are people of color. Parents and educators agree that in order for students to be successful, we must have culturally competent instruction and curricula that reflect the diversity of our city.*

*What concrete changes will you make to assure every student has a culturally reflective curriculum and culturally competent instruction?*

I have seen some shift to curriculum materials and instruction that reflect the rich and vibrant diversity of our students and families. Our students' identities, many in the midst of discovery, are complex; race, gender identity, ethnicity, beliefs, LGBTQ+ and immigrant cultures are interwoven in to who they are and who they want to become. In the past decade, we have improved access to classroom resources that allow our students to see themselves reflected in their learning, including culturally appropriate food in our school lunchrooms. We must do better, however, to improve the quality, factual nature, historical accuracy and positive representation of these materials. A huge barrier has been our reliance on giant curriculum companies, many of the same companies that dictate our testing accountability systems. Both of these are biased, broken, and burdensome on our school communities and MPS. I would change policy to prioritize culturally responsive curriculum and the necessary training and supports for culturally competent instruction in the classroom. These changes would most likely happen closer to the classroom and schools than top down District mandated purchases. The District would audit its current curriculum and vendors and report the status of that audit to the Board who could then create a plan to review, revise and reinvest in learning

materials and supports for educators that better serve our MPS students. Many educators are already doing this work & I would look to them for leadership.

## **#2 Predictable Staffing and Budgeting:**

*Every school has unique strengths and areas to improve. The current budgeting process has created a system of schools where some students have access to art, music, language, and media centers while others schools cut those programs to fund other initiatives within the school.*

*Additionally, some schools have even greater needs for resources and funding to meet the basic needs of students and are forced to make even bigger trade offs between basic needs and programming that makes our schools special. This has led to vastly different experiences depending on the school you attend, its geography and demographics.*

*How will you work to ensure every school has equal access to programming like art, music, world language, and other offerings and equitable funding to meet the safety and wellness needs of all of our students?*

We have done school audits in the past to see who has well rounded programming for our students. We've looked at alignment across school pathways to ensure a student can continue a language, a musical program, or an academic focus like IB. That process must, however, be ongoing to ensure fidelity. What we

have not done is committed to a needs assessment at every school, starting with a more robust school profile that identifies their unique demographics beyond free & reduced lunch, including factors like racial and language diversity, mobility, special education and English learner percentages, for example. I believe identifying the needs is important in context. When everyone fully understands who a school community serves, unique in their own right, then I believe building necessary community partners, applying resources and access to opportunities in that school, is more successful.

We also must look at the top down demands on various schools, especially those in schools labeled “higher priority.” Demands that often take time away from students receiving access to more well-rounded educational programming. Finally, many school leaders have a significant amount of influence over their budgets and programs. We must identify those choices being made at the site level, and ensure the voices of the families, educators, school staff and students are part of that decision process. This typically would happen with a robust site council, but I have seen that system of school leadership vary greatly across school communities. School leaders must be held accountable for doing better and ensuring a decision-making process that works for their school community is implemented with fidelity.

After understanding where we have gaps and why, we can change policies and practices and re-allocate resources to address those inequities so that every student has access to a well-rounded education in MPS. Finally, school size matters. We have limited resources. Money is generated by students in a building. Granted some students generate more, and a lot of money is reallocated to address the more significant needs of some students and school communities, but small schools have a difficult time generating the

resources to have more robust programming in the building. Then we have to discuss choices and how we can address those needs differently. For example, some families may prefer a K-8 model with less programmatic choices than a traditional MS model, something I strongly support.

### **#3 Economic Justice:**

*MFT believes that one job should be enough for all of our employees. During this extraordinary time we are seeing how our hourly employees are critical to our students' education, physical and emotional well being.*

*If elected, how will you work to increase the wages of hourly workers to a living wage?*

Significantly increasing hourly wages requires a legislative focus on increased funding from the state. I fought to raise the minimum wage during my time on the Board. We successfully committed to no one making under \$15 per hour, however, that is not a living wage in an urban environment. I have always been a huge supporter of Davis Center as a support center, NOT a top down administrative decision center. If we decentralized decision making more, brought it closer to the school communities & classrooms, then we could possibly free up resources to increase pay and benefits for our hourly workers. However, those costs have an inflationary increase and COLA that require we look for a fiscally sustainable way to make those adjustments. Again, that goes back to a commitment from our state leaders to adequately fund public education, including an inflationary adjustment to the student formula. I believe we currently have the

Governor and Education Commissioner to get this done in the next couple of years. But it would require collaboration amongst school districts, something I have done in the past, and making this issue a high priority for our legislative platforms.

#### **#4 CDD Question:**

*Over the past year and a half Minneapolis Public Schools has worked to create a comprehensive plan for the district that involves changing pathways, programming, transportation, placement practices, and more. The intent of this plan is to close academic disparities through school integration, expand access to quality programming options in historically underserved communities, and make operational adjustments to ensure the financial viability of the school district.*

*There has been widespread criticism about the process in which the district made decisions, specifically that it left out key stakeholders from the decision making process (staff, students and families) as well as concerns about whether it will meet its stated goals.*

*Whether it passes or not, there will be many more big changes and important decisions to be made about the organization and future of MPS. As a board member how will you ensure that decision making processes like this one are inclusive, impactful and representative of all of our school communities?*

Because the District process in building and engaging around the CDD was confusing, opaque, lacked follow up and plan specificity, the community is frustrated and lack of trust is exceedingly high. I believe transparency and truth telling are critical to good leadership and governance. Pushing out digestible, relevant information in a timely manner is key. As a Board Director, asking critical, informed and relevant questions then following up on answers and data requests is time consuming but necessary to ensure you can fulfill your commitment to engaging stakeholders in the work. I have a network of community members across Minneapolis that have helped me in my process to engage and lead. As a leader, you must be available, present and prepared to have conversations about these topics throughout our diverse communities. These conversations and venues will look different across communities. Whether I am invited or I reach out, it is incumbent upon me to know that I have created opportunities for people to learn, give feedback, have their questions heard and answered, and see their perspectives reflected in our decisions. It is also incumbent upon me to circle back with community, follow up with answers even when they involve tough conversations. This might be community coffee/office hours, a newsletter, or maintaining information on my website; I am open to finding the most efficient and effective ways to engage and inform communities across Minneapolis.

### **In closing:**

I will lead with community. I will govern informed and knowledgeable, ready to ask the tough questions and engage in difficult conversations. We aren't always going to agree, but you should always know where and why I stand on an issue. And my decision-making will always be about the collective input and impact, not

my student, my community, my school. Achieving transparency and accountability for District leadership requires collaboration and advocacy from the ground up. Only together can we improve student outcomes and achieve equitable access to high quality well rounded educational opportunities within every community. Please support me as your District 6 School Board Candidate. I ask for your vote for the DFL endorsement.

**You can learn a great deal more about me and my work and priorities through my website and social media at [RebeccaforMN.com](http://RebeccaforMN.com) ~ or feel free to call me or email me at 612-865-9465 or [rgagnon247@gmail.com](mailto:rgagnon247@gmail.com) if you have any questions.**