



Phaedra Dunn

- 1. Please provide 3 words that capture your candidacy.

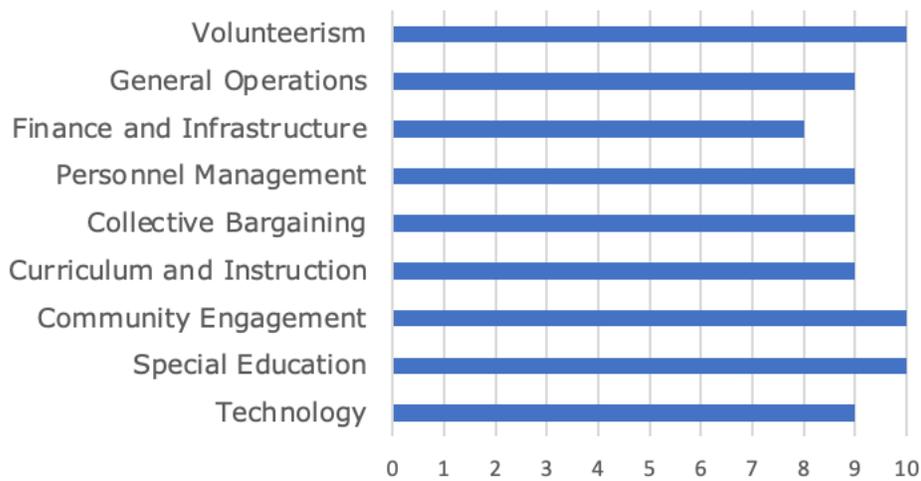
Opportunity, Access, Equity

- 2. Why are you running for the BOE? Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on the Board of Education.

I am running for the Montclair Board of Education (BOE) because I have a deep passion for education and I want to impact lasting change in the lives of students. I want to utilize educational policy so that we are better able to address students' needs and offer services and resources that are effective. As a former educator, I understand the importance of what quality school buildings, strong teachers, and a plethora of resources can do for a child. I also understand how not having this educational trifecta in place can jeopardize a child's chance at educational success. Our schools need to be places where our students grow not only academically, but also in character. In order to do this, students must feel strong connections to their educators. I am motivated to continue the fight towards eradicating the disparities and inequities in education. Our schools should be reflective of our highest ideals as a community.

- 3. Please rate your work/life experience in:

Phaedra Dunn's Self-Rating



Note: Scale of 1 (least experience) to 10 (most experience)

Please feel free to elaborate on any of the above self-rating.

- 4. In what school district or community activities/organizations have you been involved?

My community advocacy has included being involved in various school and community activities. I was involved with Book Chat and the Antiracism Committee at Bradford. I am a Co-Chair of PTAC's DEI Committee, SATp Co-Chair at Renaissance and an active member of Renaissance PTA. I am



also a Co-founder of Montclair Moms of Color, a group which was founded to give voice to those who have often felt unheard. We have sponsored a number of community based events, including but not limited to: a Halloween trunk or treat and providing toiletries and grocery store gift cards to community members in need.

5. If elected, what are your top 2-3 priorities for the BOE? Specifically, what do you think the BOE should prioritize in the next year and what should be prioritized in a longer-term plan?

If elected, I believe the infrastructure and health and safety of our schools has to be prioritized. We have to provide a more ideal teaching and learning environment for our children and educators. Investing in a comprehensive plan that includes the current heating, cooling and ventilation systems and restoring the grounds of our schools will not only improve the physical learning environment but also allow schools to be better utilized as community spaces.

It is imperative that we provide and meet equitable educational standards for our underserved students. We can do this through addressing concerns in special education and the achievement gap. Addressing these concerns will not only allow for access to high quality education for underserved students, but will also allow for higher quality instruction and access for all students. Consistent review of services, practices, process and procedures surrounding special education will allow for improved curriculum and targeted professional learning and development aimed at standards based teaching; which provides benefits for both teachers and students.

The achievement gap has to be included in both short and long-term plans. The short-term plan includes defining our district's definition of the achievement gap. We must work to understand how and why it exists and persists in our district and work to change not only individual school disparities, but disparities on elementary, middle and high school levels. The achievement gap is an educational inequity that must be addressed collectively by all community stakeholders; including discussions of the role we can all play in meeting individual student needs and provision of evidence-based services to narrow and eventually close the achievement gap.

A longer-term BOE plan would include a return to focusing on improving the implementation of educational policy within our district. This plan must include a yearly data based review of: school based programs, the school placement process, special education, the achievement gap, literacy programs, curriculum. Again, we must ensure that infrastructure issues are consistently addressed. We have to focus on these issues, and also address the pressing issues that caregivers, parents, students and educators bring to our attention during BOE meetings. The work that must be done in our district goes far beyond any list I may create. There is more to be done in our district and overall in educational policy. We must always remember that education, if done properly, is a constantly changing landscape if we do it right.

6. In your opinion, what would be an "ideal/well" functioning BOE? How can the BOE be more accessible and more communicative with the community?

As a member of the community, I believe one of the functions of the BOE is to be a link between the community and the district. As a BOE member, I would advocate conducting community engagement sessions as a way to provide for greater accessibility. These sessions would provide: listening, discussion and, when appropriate, understanding of current district policies and guidelines. As a BOE member there are community stakeholder meetings that I currently attend. I will continue to attend these meetings so that I am attuned to educational concerns and issues in our community.



7. Recognizing that relationships are a foundation of our school community, what specific steps would you take to improve the relationships between the BOE and the district administrators, the various unions, and parents/caregivers?

We have to first see ourselves as a group of community stakeholders with the common goal of providing what is best for our students and teachers. This group of stakeholders represents the different facets that make up education and we have to serve the needs of all and understand that one is not taking from the other. As a community member, I can want what is best for all students and want teachers to have their needs met and hold the BOE and district administrators accountable for policy implementation. We have to communicate with one another in the same way we teach and expect our children to communicate with their peers. This would include listening and finding common ground in discussions and seeking solutions.

8. What should MPSD do differently? Please be specific – academic programs, sports, civic programs, extra curriculars, etc.

We need to ensure that we are supporting district-wide standards in teaching and learning, especially in our elementary and middle schools. Students should have the same level of readiness when entering high school across core subjects due to district-wide standards. The course content in these subjects across grade levels and schools can be better aligned to address discrepancies in high school preparedness. This would allow for greater achievement for all learners. It would also provide improved outcomes in screening for and addressing students with different needs sooner, which could lead to more equitable placement in small learning communities and AP classes.

9. What are your thoughts on school district's programs for special education students? How can the BOE better serve the special education students, and what would you do as a board member to ensure our special education students' needs are being addressed?

I was a member of a Child Study Team for many years and feel that one of the ways we can better serve our special education students is by consistently reviewing our current procedures, standards and practices. We cannot continue to allow the special education and 504 plan process to feel disconcerting for students, parents and educators. As we implement yearly goals for our students, we must do the same as a district. The May 2021 report cites concerns in: staffing needs, professional development, need for a more systemic approach, operational standards for paraprofessionals and many other concerns. More importantly, it provides recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the special education program in MPS. The BOE's role in this is to hold the district responsible for making sure the recommendations are being implemented in all schools. If we address the needs of one student, we address the needs of all students.

10. How can the BOE address the opportunity/achievement gap in our district? What are your specific ideas and plans for addressing the achievement gap and educational equity? In your opinion, what is the role of BOE in this area?

Addressing the disparity in performance between groups of students will include an unabashed look at inequities in all areas of our school system and how it has been perpetuated and experienced by students, parents, teachers and staff. Like all areas in education, we have to collect data on a yearly basis so that we are able to address these inequities immediately. The systemic nature of these issues is why we have to work both as a community and a district to dismantle educational disparities. We have to utilize and incorporate ways of measuring student success beyond test scores. We need to implement district-wide goals for student learning that are inclusive and emotionally supportive. We must not situate the student as the issue, but conduct our strategic planning around measurable evidence-based practices such as: high quality instruction, supports for teachers, a challenging



curriculum, implementation of culturally responsive practices, encouraging high level family involvement and as research suggests, strengthening our elementary level education to improve reading and math proficiency before students go to 4th grade.

11. How should the BOE balance the need to provide a quality education with the need to manage the local taxpayer burden? What should the district's capital spend priorities be? Would you consider budget cuts, if so – what specific areas would you cut?

Striking a balance in providing a quality education for our children while needing to manage the taxpayer burden is an issue that must be addressed. This issue, like many others we face, highlights one of the many inequities in our community, which often mirrors larger society, with issues we did not create, but are charged with "fixing." Raising taxes to fund education will come with ease for some members of our community, yet create a financial burden for others. As a BOE member, I am committed to taking a hard look at our budget, utilizing data-driven decisions, while also taking measures to exercise good stewardship in our use of funds. We need to incorporate improved ways to take advantage of state and federal funding. Our capital spend priorities need to address educational disparities and improved student outcomes.

12. Montclair is known for its magnet schools, which are supported by a unique school ranking and placement process and a "courtesy busing" program. What changes, if any, would you consider with respect to the magnet system, the school ranking and placement process, and/or the courtesy busing policy?

The current school placement process and algorithm needs to be updated to include the most recent census which would lead to a redrawing of the BOE opportunity zones to ensure greater diversity and equity within our schools. The landscape of Montclair has changed greatly in the past 10 years and our placement process should reflect this change. A school assignment task force which meets annually to discuss changes and make recommendations would address our continued need for diversity and equity within our schools. Bussing should not be considered a courtesy, for many in our district, it is a necessity for not only getting our children to school as a function, but also further supports our need for ensuring diversity in all our schools.