

Dane Dems Endorsement Questionnaire

Thank you for seeking an endorsement from the Dane County Democratic Party. **This questionnaire is due by no later than Friday, January 24, at 11:59 PM.**

You do not need to answer all of the questions below, but please answer all of the ones you feel are pertinent to your campaign and mark the questions you do not feel are pertinent N/A. We will ask more detailed questions and followups during our interview, if we choose to have one, so feel free to answer these questions as briefly or thoroughly as you desire.

These answers will be shared in full with our membership before they vote on your endorsement.

Email *

nichelle4mmsd@gmail.com

Candidate name *

Nichelle Nichols

Position you are running for (include municipality) *

Madison Metropolitan School District Board of Education, Seat 5

Campaign website

nichelle4mmsd.com

Professional Experience *

Since 2021, I work at the National Equity Project as a Senior Equity Leadership Consultant where I work directly with public school district staff and leaders. Prior to this role I worked in MMSD from 2015-2021 leading family, youth, community engagement and equity initiatives. From 2010-2015 I worked in community-based organizations in partnership with MMSD, creating more opportunities for students. In addition, I have held a variety of roles in Dane County non-profit organizations serving children, youth and families since 1998. I have a MS degree in Business Management and BS degree in Family & Consumer Journalism.

Political/Service Experience *

I am currently in my first term, serving as a Board of Education member since April 2022. I am the current President. I currently co-chair the City, County, Schools Collaborative committee as a Board member. I serve as the Advocate for Social Justice / Political Connections chair for the Kappa Psi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Why are you running for this seat? *

I am seeking re-election for the MMSD Board of Education to bring stability and continuity for the District. I believe continuity, and as little disruption to the Board's composition, is critical, especially as we are still in the first year of Dr. Gothard's transition, and as he sets a new strategic direction for the district. I want to ensure that our stewardship of the 2024 referendum dollars that were approved by this community are well spent, especially in the operations of the district, and that we continue to have public transparency. Lastly, it is critical that we remain focused on the achievement and learning of our students and the overall wellbeing of our students and staff.

What are the three most important issues in your race? *

One of the most important issues in my race is ensuring that our district makes progress with student learning and continuing to create more equitable access and opportunities for our students to succeed. We are in a turbulent national political climate that is going to create barriers for students, staff and families based on their identities, and it will be critical for our district to remain diligent and to fight for their rights to a fair and public education in this community.

Another important issue is ensuring that the referendum dollars that our community approved are spent in ways that help our district retain and attract staff and help us direct more support to students without causing any future structural deficits in our budget. Without addressing the state funding issues, we will have to make strategic budget decisions.

Lastly, MMSD will need to strengthen its position to attract and retain families and students by innovating on programs and making significant progress with our students who are most marginalized to show that we can serve all students well in MMSD. We have a lot of work to do and we want every family to feel like their child is thriving in our district.

What are the largest environmental concerns you aim to deal with in office?

We will be breaking ground to build two schools each year beginning in 2026, for a total of 10 schools (7 physical sites), and a couple of the schools will be renovated. As part of our facility referendum, renewable energy sources will be utilized to meet the Board's Sustainability Goal -- Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions Resolution by 2045. This is a goal I will continue to focus on while in office. In addition, the District's contract with First Student bus company will support the addition of electric buses. This is another area to keep improving.

How will you use your position to create more equitable opportunities and help those living in poverty?

As a school board member, I will bring a commitment to equity leadership in decisions that impact budget, policies and programs that impact our students and families, especially those living in poverty. I will do this by staying focused on our families and students with the least resources and opportunities when we are presented with instruction, curriculum and programming updates, especially students who are diverse learners and students who continue to have persistently disparate outcomes. I will bring this lens into our budget decisions as well. I will also continue to look for opportunities for us to address school food lunch debt and opportunities to expand universal free lunch.

What will you do to address racial inequality, promote restorative justice, and/or address racially biased policing?

One way I will address racial inequality is to stay focused on our student data and to ensure that we have district actions to reduce disproportionality and opportunity gaps for our students. I will continue to look at our staff data to ensure that we are improving our hiring and retention efforts with staff of color. I will also stand up for our students, staff and families who experience racial inequality because they identify as people of color, English learners and/or from families who are multilingual. As a Board, we have maintained a stance that SROs are not the only answer to school safety and have invested in restorative justice coordinators at each of the comprehensive high schools. I will continue to promote these decisions.

How will you improve the public health of our community in your position?

From my position as a school board member I will contribute to improving the public health in our community by making sure that we invest in our schools' nurses, psychologists and other clinical staff who are the front-line support for our students' health. When the school board invests in renewable energy in our facilities we also contribute to better air quality. By promoting healthy school meals and reducing food waste, we help our students to learn more about nutrition and keeping their bodies nourished. Also our investments in school based health centers, mental health screeners, mental health programs and dental clinics also helps our students get the healthcare and support they need in our school, which contributes to public health. My role in supporting these investments and working with our community partners is a role I will play in relation to public health.

What are the largest transportation issues you wish to work on and how will you address them?

We had a significant bus company change in the 2023-24 school year, which had several challenges. We are in the second year of working with First Student and I would like to see communication to families improve and the addition of electric buses added to the fleet.

How have you elevated diverse voices in government and public discourse? How would you continue to do so if elected to this office?

Most of the diverse voices I have heard have been through our public comments at our three board meetings a month. As I respond to emails, phone calls, attend school events and am out in the community I also acknowledge and bring those issues into our public meetings as we have discourse about the items we have to make decisions about in budget, policy and programs. In my next term, I would like to do more to elevate diverse voices and to engage with the community more.

Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

N/A

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