



Latino Democratic Club 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

Campaign Profile:

Please attach a brief personal bio with your submission*

Candidate Name: Natalie Zimmerman

Office You Are Seeking: Board of Education

Candidate Contact Email: zimmermanforeducation@gmail.com

Candidate Contact Number: 202 – 734 - 6904

Campaign Website and Social Media Handles (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram):

www.zimmermanforBOE.com

<https://twitter.com/ZimmermanforBOE>

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61557122841765>

[instagram.com/nzimmermanforboe/](https://www.instagram.com/nzimmermanforboe/)

Amount Raised (include as of date): approx \$2,000

Cash on Hand: approx \$1,500

Other Endorsements: MCEA Apple Ballot; Progressive Neighbors

Questionnaire:

Below is a candidate questionnaire produced by the Latino Democratic Club (LDC) of Montgomery County. The LDC will distribute the questionnaire to candidates for office in the 2024 Democratic primary in Montgomery County for the 2024 early vote. Please submit your responses by April 5th, 2024, to ldcendorsements@gmail.com. **Please limit your response to each question to 200 words or less. Your response will be shared on our website unless you explicitly opt-out;** therefore, we encourage you to submit your responses in English and Spanish

to make them accessible to all members of our community.

1. Latinx Engagement

- a. Please provide details of your prior involvement or work with the Latinx/Hispanic community in Maryland.

I am afforded the incredible opportunity to engage with the Latinx/Hispanic community every day through my work as an educator in MCPS. I not only am certified to teach general education, but I also have my ELD certification. This year, one hundred percent of my students speak at least one other language at home and about sixty-five percent of them are Spanish speakers and/or identify as Latinx/Hispanic. Both elementary schools I have worked at in MCPS have a high population of Latinx/Hispanic students. It is important to me to make sure that my students feel as though their culture and language is celebrated in class, as well as include their families in communication and celebration.

Some, not all, ways I have made sure to do this are:

- Continuing to work on my own Spanish knowledge and learn new vocabulary from my students
- Featuring Spanish language posters in my classroom
- Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month with interactive learning opportunities for my students
- Communicating using bilingual platforms whenever possible, translating any class communications into Spanish and other known home languages, and advocating for and utilizing translators as well as the Language Line
- Updating my classroom library with popular and relevant books in Spanish for students to read independently
- Choosing to feature books with Latinx/Hispanic characters
- Using translanguaging as a method to enhance my students' understanding of English
- Sending home curriculum materials with students in both Spanish and English to ensure that families can help their students

2. Housing

- a. According to a study done by Montgomery County planning, those who identify as Hispanic/Latinx are more likely to pay more than 30% of their income on housing than residents of the County overall. This is most pronounced for Hispanic and Latinx renters, among whom 62% are burdened by housing costs. What would be your solution for affordable and quality housing?

While I find this issue to be pressing and inequitable, there are few things I can do to address this on the Board of Education. Some measures that will not prevent this issue, but can help treat the symptoms include ensuring that MCPS follows The McKinney-

Vento Act, providing adequate funding to Community Schools, and increasing the availability of Linkages to Learning in school sites.

3. Mental Health and health

- a. How would you approach the need to both increase access to mental health services among Latino residents and address the shortage of linguistically and culturally competent mental health care professionals? Especially among Latino youth?

MCPS currently does not meet the national recommendations for mental health professionals in schools, such as school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers. We must first reach the national recommendations for these professionals. MCPS also needs more multilingual counselors for students. One way we can attract more of these mental health professionals is with higher salaries, decreased caseloads, increased time for paperwork, and mentorship opportunities in order to increase support for our mental health professionals. Our current allocations of multilingual counselors are not meeting the needs of our students. There are many students who have experienced trauma from immigration or in their home country and we must ensure that these needs are being accounted for and met as well.

4. Fentanyl

- a. The fentanyl crisis has been devastating our community. In Montgomery County, we have seen it disproportionately affect our Latinx/Hispanic youth. How do you recommend that we address this issue?

I believe that MCPS can help combat this issue in a few ways. First, there must be more comprehensive education for students that includes what opioids do to the body, what is addiction, and how to tell if someone is experiencing an overdose and how to help them. MCPS can utilize our community partnerships to provide multilingual “Parent Toolkits” that explains the warning signs of opioid misuse and how to take action. Beyond this, we must increase our mental health professionals in schools. Another mental health initiative could include closely chaperoned peer-to-peer support groups that are not aimed at providing therapy or interventions, but instead offer judgement-free listening to help students feel supported by their school community. Secondary students are highly motivated by peer relationships, so utilizing the network students already seek can help make fentanyl use prevention programs stronger.

5. Education

- a. Hispanic/Latinx students are the fastest-growing ethnic group in MCPS, with 34% of the student population. The graduation gap of Latinx students has been exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you address the truancy rate in the Latino community and close achievement gaps?

I believe there is a general issue in MCPS of absenteeism at schools – especially at the secondary level. There are plenty of factors in this situation, like parental expectations,

childcare, and meeting essential needs for families. Removing these other factors, I think the real question we are getting at here is “How do we make school a place where students want to be?”. Students need to feel like they belong in their school environment. We must choose curriculums that will interest students and use data-driven strategies close gaps so students will believe that effective effort leads to achievement and know that the work at school will be accessible and rigorous. We must invest in different classes and programs, like CTE, that will allow for students to find an element of school that makes them interested and excited to show up for school every day. We must increase our hate and bias trainings for staff and students at all levels so students will be welcomed into their learning space. With a multi-faceted approach, we can decrease truancy and in turn continue to decrease achievement gaps.

6. Crime

- a. Studies show that crime is one of the most pressing issues for Latinx /Hispanic voters. How will you work to both improve public safety, as crime is rising in our communities, and make the criminal justice system in Montgomery County more equitable?

I think this is an important issue in Montgomery County, but this is outside of Board of Education policy. I do believe that MCPS should not be utilizing SROs in schools (as we know from data the SROs do not increase safety, but increase arrest numbers - especially for our black and brown students) and that we need more data on the CEO program currently in place. Through closely examining the data, MCPS can ensure that they do not create further inequity in the criminal justice system.

7. Business and economic prosperity

- a. Small businesses are the engine of economic growth and are critical to the financial health of the Latinx/Hispanic community. What would you do to strengthen and create Latino-owned small businesses?

This is not the purview of the Board of Education specifically, but I believe there are ways the Board can act that will strengthen and create Latino-owned small businesses. One method is to not only increase our student scores for college-readiness, but to also enhance and grow our CTE programs in MCPS. Students should be offered more opportunities to learn a trade that they can carry into the workforce upon graduation. Beyond this, when I taught an ELD summer program in a different district, we partnered with local immigrant-owned businesses. Our EML students visited multiple local businesses owned and operated by multi-lingual immigrants - students could see themselves in these business owners. Students then created grade-level appropriate brochures about one of the establishments they visited and shared their writing with the community. Authentic learning experiences like the one described above will show students that they, too, can be local business owners, and MCPS should look to invest in community partnerships that will inspire our students.

8. Immigration

- a. What programs or legislation do you think would best support our immigration residents who do not have access to federal funding in Montgomery County?

I believe that MCPS has resources that can help support our residents who do not have access to federal funding, and some of those include Community Schools and Linkages to Learning. Beyond this, I believe MCPS could be doing more to make sure they are not causing unintended harm through their policies. One example is MCPS currently utilizing an inequitable system to identify schools for Title I status. MCPS previously used FARMs data to identify Title I schools, and has now switched to a system that uses SNAP data. There are linguistic, political, and structural barriers for families to qualify for SNAP. This is especially a disadvantage for our immigrant families because their needs are not being quantified in determining Title I status. MCPS must consider who will be impacted when policy decisions are made, and I plan to make more equitable decisions as a member of the Board of Education.

9. Asylum

- a. Do you support a comprehensive immigration reform that better supports and protects those who have been displaced by war and seek asylum? If elected, what would your priorities be to change our current system?

Yes, I support asylum seekers, and I support reform to protect them. I often find myself returning to *Tell Me How It Ends* by Valeria Luiselli when I think about the challenges our students face in regards to immigration and seeking asylum. I believe that MCPS can help support students by allowing for excused absences to support a family member when they are meeting with lawyers (as students often are translators), increasing multilingual mental health supports, and by creating more comprehensive bias training for students and staff to ensure that students feel welcome in MCPS.

Natalie Zimmerman Personal Bio:

My name is Natalie Zimmerman and I am a candidate for Board of Education – District 2. I am originally from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and I am a proud product of public schools. I earned both my bachelor's and master's degrees from The University of Michigan. I studied international studies, political science, and gender and health as an undergraduate. I have a master's degree in Educational Studies with certifications in 1-6 all subjects, 4-9 English Language Arts, K-8 English Language Development, and K-8 Special Education. I moved to Montgomery County in 2019 and immediately began my career teaching elementary school. I have taught fourth grade and second grade at Summit Hall Elementary School and Wheaton Woods Elementary School, respectively. While I do not have children of my own yet, I am deeply committed to my students. Teaching at Title I community schools, I am acutely aware of how our school system is succeeding and failing for students and educators. As a public school graduate, I believe that public education is the greatest investment we can give our children and their futures are at stake. My belief in providing the greatest possible education to our students is my driving force in running for the Board of Education.