

# **NAACP**

## **OZAUKEE COUNTY**

**M-T School District Board of Education  
Candidate Q & A  
P.O. Box 301  
Thiensville, WI 53092**

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### **Maria Douglas**

**Tell us a bit about yourself, your background/experience, and your connection and/or interest in the Mequon-Thiensville Schools. What are your reasons for seeking a position on the Board?**

My name is Maria Douglas, and my husband and I currently have three children in the Mequon-Thiensville Public Schools.

I am a school psychologist, with a Masters in Clinical Psychology and a specialization in School Psychology. I have worked in both high-achieving and under-resourced districts throughout my career, and I am adept at partnering with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community.

I have the professional skills that would work seamlessly with the school board: data collection and analysis; school-wide practices to promote learning; resilience and risk factors for students; academic, mental health, and behavioral interventions; instructional support; special education services; crisis preparedness, response, and recovery; diversity in development and learning; and family-school-community collaboration.

My unique educational skills make me an exceptional candidate for school board.

**What are some major issues that you believe our school district is currently facing? How would you like the district to deal with those issues?**

MTSD Board of Education must continue to address student academic performance issues due to the pandemic and implement creative and dynamic ways to attract and retain the best teachers.



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The school board needs to closely monitor the current Academic Recovery Plan, put in place since the pandemic, and make sure the administration has sufficient resources to boost our students' recovery—both academically and emotionally. We need to constantly review and improve these tools to help our students reach their learning milestones and ensure that our academic excellence guarantees student success and teacher retention.

Teachers have been in high demand and low supply for years, now more aggravated by the pandemic. But MTSD is an award winning district that employs great teachers, and we must implement creative ways to continue to attract and retain our educators, not only through compensation packages, but by initiatives that positively present our community as a great place to live, work, and play.

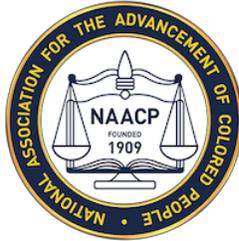
**What is your perception of the current working and learning climate in our school district? Do you have any ideas on how to ensure a positive working and learning climate is in our district?**

I perceive the current working and learning climate to be somewhat negative at this time, as reflected in our recent recall election. The COVID pandemic—coupled with a divisive political climate—has pitted neighbor against neighbor, and even family members against one another.

It is up to the elected members of the school board to address these problems and support, protect, and elevate our school administrators, our teachers, and our children. Board members are the bridge to reconcile differences within the school community.

Working together as a body—through good listening, communication, respectful discussions, and sound policies—we can bridge these differences. We must not, as individuals, bring preconceived notions to the board table.

Once the input is evaluated and a consensus is built, we can produce the best possible outcomes for our children and the greater community.



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### **How do your goals align with the NAACP?**

I am an active member of the NAACP of Ozaukee County. Our mission seamlessly merges with that of our schools: ensuring the political, educational, social, and economic equality of all students, staff, and families. We achieve this vision of educational equality by eliminating any racial prejudices. We achieve this through careful and thorough attention to the educational practices that we employ within our school district, making sure each and every student is free of any barriers of racial discrimination.



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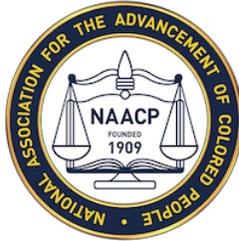
### **Paul Buzzell**

**Tell us a bit about yourself, your background/experience, and your connection and/or interest in the Mequon-Thiensville Schools. What are your reasons for seeking a position on the Board?**

Background/Experience. I am able to “hit the ground running.” Besides direct school board experience (MTSD board Treasurer, 2014-2017), I have strong business and financial acumen (CFO, started two businesses, MBA finance). I am trusted by board members, district administration, teachers and the community because I tell the truth, have no agenda, and do what I say. Trust is critical to success and efficiency. Serving as CFO/Co-President for a \$50 million company, I have proven to be a good listener, ask relevant questions, and have strong critical thinking and decision-making skills. I have one high-school student and two recent graduates of Homestead.

Connection to/Interest in MTSD: I grew up here and chose to raise a family here. After graduating Homestead, I remember sitting in an Accounting class at UW Madison feeling so appreciate of my education, I made myself a promise that one day I would give back to the community that gave me my great start in life. I always thought it would be teaching business courses. Instead, I found a give-back path through Junior Achievement, Sports Booster Club and School Board.

Reasons I am seeking the School Board now. We need trusted people who can re-build trust. Post-special election, our community is still fractured. We need to elect two school board members who have a deep understanding of operations and issues, have no agenda, are not tied to any political party and who desire to serve selflessly. “Listening” is table stakes and “Masking” is a microcosm of the role of the Board. I understand all of this, and will be a value-add to the current board of education.



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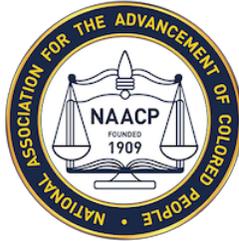
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**What are some major issues that you believe our school district is currently facing? How would you like the district to deal with those issues?**

Over the next three years, there are three critical areas which MTSD must address within the strategic planning framework:

- (1) Pandemic management, primarily responses to disruptions in learning and staffing (we are here now). When students are not in school there are obviously disruptions in learning, but equally problematic are staffing issues. When a teacher is sick, instruction is managed through a pool of about 10 FTE building substitutes, with additional gaps filled internally, by specialists and other admin. While economically prudent, when a math specialist (for example) is teaching, the specialist is not supporting students with other needs. Further, when teachers are out, they lose the ability to plan and collaborate with their teams. MTSD operates best when teaching, coaching and collaboration are synchronized – anything else is also disruptive to learning.
- (2) Staff availability & recruitment (an increasing national problem). Fewer people are becoming teachers. Enrollment in Education in the UW system is near a low. Fortunately, we are destination employer and right now, do not have trouble recruiting best and brightest, but this will not always be the case. When the education job market tightens, we need to be positioned as a Great Place to Work, which is more than just total comp. GP2W for MTSD should include excellent relationships with Admin, parents and the community.
- (3) Significantly increased costs coming in the 2023-2024 school year, without the ability to increase revenue (a structural deficit not seen since before Act 10). Per Act 10, wages increases cannot be negotiated by unions beyond CPI. Historically, CPI has been closer to 0.5%, MTSD is showing 4% and my research shows it could be higher. The entire Board will need to be fully engaged and equipped to take on these challenges to position MTSD for academic excellence beyond those of our peers.



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Beyond these existential challenges, I have no specific agenda for MTSD. I am a firm believer school board candidates who seek office to drive a targeted action will be disappointed, along with those who elected them, because one-off tactical changes are not how the Board of Education functions. More on this later.

There is also one critical area which the BOE must address together. At the annual Board retreat in spring, the Board can choose topics to research in the year as "work of the Board". Typically, the Board has the capacity for 1-3 topics in a year (they cannot do 10). The topic I would present at the retreat is community communication. This topic may go beyond the topics currently under review since the last Board self-evaluation (which can be a great source for projects). Instead, my proposal focuses on how the Board (not MTSD) interacts with the public. The community has the impression the Board is "robotic" and does not listen. Speaking as a former Board member, I get it. Unfortunately, while regimes have changed, Board behavior has not. The Board should consider more public real talks. They should explain in detail their decision-making process for key votes. They should be more intentionally accessible to the public. Some of the rules about public comment and engagement should be reviewed. Branching from here, MTSD procedures should be available in BoardDocs along with Policy. The availability of public records should be more easily accessible without the need for a FOIA request. All of these actions will help build TRUST and save Administrative time, allowing for higher level District function. Beyond Board work, as stated earlier, the three most pressing issues facing MTSD are: pandemic management, staffing & recruitment and balancing budgets while maintaining quality.

**What is your perception of the current working and learning climate in our school district? Do you have any ideas on how to insure a positive working and learning climate is in our district?**

Internally, the working and learning environment is very good. District employee engagement is measured through a self-developed survey and "net promoter score". MTSD scores are very high relative to the nation and state. Goal 4 of the strategic plan focuses on the workplace environment, which emphasizes employee experiences, availability of technology and the learning environment. One example of the work of the District to make MTSD a "great place to work" is building principal and staff relationships, through building leadership coaching. Another



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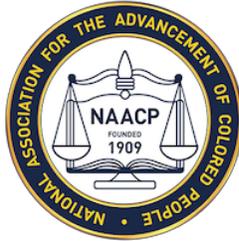
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example which focuses on the learning environments is having model classrooms with appropriate furniture.

To ensure a positive climate, the district needs to continue to focus on areas of the engagement survey where results fall shorter than our peers. One example, which is typically lower for most school districts, is the quality of pay and benefits. MTSD meets State law with maximum base pay increases, but also has a DPI approved equivalence model, which provides for enhanced compensation based on performance. As the market tightens over the next several years, it will be important to have a deep understanding of how we can compete for the best and brightest.

**How do your goals align with the NAACP's mission and vision?**

The Vision and Mission of the NAACP is consistent with my beliefs about equal rights for everyone.



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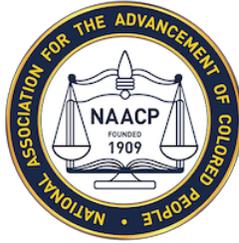
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### **Jason Levash**

**Tell us a bit about yourself, your background/experience, and your connection and/or interest in the Mequon-Thiensville Schools. What are your reasons for seeking a position on the Board?**

My wife Amy and I along with our two sons, ages 5 and 3, moved to Mequon in the summer of 2019. Amy was born and raised in Mequon and we wanted our boys to graduate from Homestead following multiple generations before them. Currently, I serve as the Chief Operations officer of CESA 6, an education service agency that provides solutions to K-12 school districts to maximize their success. Prior to my current executive leadership position, I served the West Bend School District in multiple administrative positions with my last being the director of secondary education. I started my educational career as a technology and engineering teacher in the Cedarburg School District. I have a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stout in technology and engineering education, and a master's degree from Marquette University in Educational Policy and Leadership. Education is a passion of mine and my professional and personal experiences uniquely position me to serve as a school board member.

I was motivated to run for a position on the Mequon-Thiensville School District Board of Education because I care about our children, their future and our community. I want our schools to reflect the community and what we value and I want the greatest opportunities possible for our children. Being united as a community is critically important and I want our board to engage the community so every child can succeed. I was not motivated by a single issue or have a predetermined agenda, instead I am truly looking to serve our community. I am uniquely qualified for the position as I have professional experience in both education and business which will allow me to be a champion for the students, a representative of the parents, a steward for the community and an advocate for the staff. As a former teacher and administrator in public school districts and now as a chief operations officer of an educational service agency, I understand the teaching and learning process, the programs needed to support children in and out of the classroom and the necessary business and operational systems in place to run an



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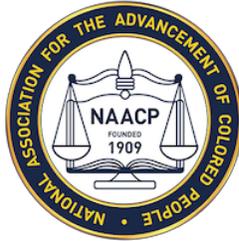
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effective and efficient district. As a board member, I will support the governance model, be an active listener and build consensus through collaboration, ensure transparency in the decision making process in order to build trust. Through board service, I would always lead and make decisions with a strong moral and ethical compass.

**What are some major issues that you believe our school district is currently facing? How would you like the district to deal with those issues?**

Supporting Learning - The pandemic has resulted in learning loss for students. The district needs to ensure its academic recovery plan is being deployed with fidelity and supported with adequate resources. The plan needs to be studied frequently for effectiveness and actions need to be taken to adjust the plan to ensure ALL students are on a trajectory to close the gap. Equally important, we need to provide resources to support our children's social-emotional health. As we emerge from the pandemic we cannot forget the impacts it has had on our children and we will need to adjust for years to come in order to position our children for future generations of success. I would also like to see improvement in the district's student growth and target group outcomes on our state report card while also increasing overall student achievement. We need to unlock the possibilities for every student to achieve their goals and dreams.

Community Engagement - Strong communities build strong schools. Raising the next generation is a shared responsibility that we all have ownership in. When families, communities and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits. Moving forward, I want our board to engage with the community in new ways so every stakeholder can play a role in ensuring every child can succeed. Board members, access to easy to find and interpret information and the process deployed across the district need to be accessible to the whole community. No community member should have doubt about information, feel lost in the process of engagement and feel as if they have not been heard. As a board member, I would like to provide additional opportunities utilizing a variety of different methods to listen to stakeholders in addition to the public comment agenda item at board meetings. I also would like to invite stakeholders into as many advisory structures as possible so



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their voices are informing the administration and board on current topics of discussion. While at times we may not always agree on the approach, we need to be respectful of each other, speak the truth and engage in the process. I will always be there to listen, share the facts and encourage civil engagement. Being united as a community around our children is critically important if we want them to succeed now and in the future! We cannot forget the common goal of providing the best opportunities for our children and their futures.

**Fiscal Management** - The district is going to be facing significant fiscal restraints while developing the 2022-2023 budget, a focus will need to be on allocating resources in a fiscally conservative manner that will support ALL students. Inflationary pressure that the district has not seen in decades will require the district to utilize the resources that were established as part of the bilingual budget in ways that have not been tested since the late 2000s. The district will need to manage its operations in a fiscally prudent manner in order to meet the expectations of the community while also ensuring the greatest return on the investment the community is making.

**Human Capital** - The educational community is currently facing a shortage of individuals entering the profession. The district will need to keenly focus on maintaining a competitive advantage with its human capital system by creating exceptional experiences for employees across their employment life cycle in order to have the most qualified and engaged teachers, leaders and support staff for our students.

**What is your perception of the current working and learning climate in our school district? Do you have any ideas on how to insure a positive working and learning climate is in our district?**

The Climate and Culture Survey administered to parents, the annual survey for all students in Grades 4-12 which assess school climate and student engagement along with the annual staff engagement survey provide a window into the working and learning climate for the school district. The district's commitment to continuous improvement is grounded in data-informed analysis and research-based actions to attain and surpass measurable goals, aligned with desired outcomes. The district's strategic plan has two goals associated with the working and learning climate: Goal 3: Student Belonging and Well-Being and Goal 4: Workforce Environment.



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The student goal is focused on fostering collaboration and developing relationships to enhance the safety, connectedness, and well-being of our students. There are four objectives: A - Define and implement culturally responsive principles and best practices in the school environment to foster the connectedness and belonging of our students, Objective B - Cultivate authentic and positive relationships amongst students, staff and families to enhance our students' physical and psychological safety, Objective C - Integrate social and emotional learning practices within the instructional environment to strengthen student engagement and wellbeing and Objective D - Respond with urgency, flexibility, and compassion to the individual social and emotional needs of students as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategy teams the district has in place allows the district to focus on ensuring a positive working and learning climate is in our district. The district's mission is that together, we will ignite each student's passion for learning, preparing for a life of infinite possibilities. A positive school climate and culture is essential to realizing that mission.

### **How do your goals align with the NAACP's mission and vision?**

As a professional educator and leader in the educational community, I believe every child should be provided what they need to succeed. The children of the district have the right to learn in a safe and supportive school environment that provides for the whole child. My belief on education equality parallels the NAACP mission and vision in which ALL students have access to opportunities and support unique to them so they can be successful today while preparing them for college, careers and life regardless of their current ability, socioeconomic standing, race, ethnicity, language, gender or disability. I believe equity does have a place in schools because it allows schools to focus on the individual needs of children in order to provide them fair and adaptable support. I do not support practices of isolating children or taking away resources or opportunities from one to provide to another. We need to advocate and be empathic for all children; they are part of our community and our future!



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### **Jill Chromy**

**Tell us a bit about yourself, your background/experience, and your connection and/or interest in the Mequon-Thiensville Schools. What are your reasons for seeking a position on the Board?**

I hold a Master's of Social Work. Professionally I've worked with underserved families in Milwaukee, in hospice care and pharmaceutical sales. These experiences gave me the skills of listening, information gathering, negotiating, and finding understanding and resolutions in even the most challenging situations.

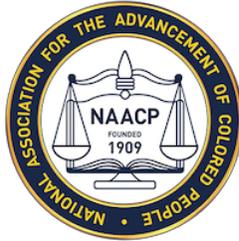
I've rolled up my sleeves and gotten involved with my children's education through volunteerism as room parent, fundraising and coaching Destination Imagination. I'm the PTO president at Lake Shore Middle School and serve on Area Council. I even obtained my substitute teaching license to help with the teacher shortage.

I began to contemplate serving on the Mequon-Thiensville Board of Education about five years ago. I come from a long line of family members that have served in local government, and I now feel the desire to serve as well.

My professional skills along with district insight gained from teaching and volunteerism, make me uniquely qualified to be a strong school board member.

**What are some major issues that you believe our school district is currently facing? How would you like the district to deal with those issues?**

Academic Excellence - Data from MTSD's Milestones for Post-Secondary Success show decline in 5 out of 7 areas since 2015. These Milestones were set up by the district and monitor student progress in preparing for college and future career success. These drops in achievement show we have gaps in our curriculum. As a school board member, I would ask that we review ELA and Math curriculum options and make adjustments to put more students on a pathway toward



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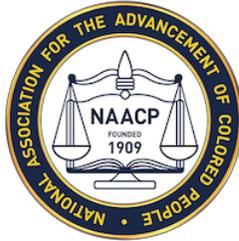
greater post-secondary success. Also, I would propose parent/stakeholder focus groups to encourage feedback and discussion in academic areas. This would build trust within the community, identify areas of concern that might be missed in a survey, and engage parents on how to support their children and the teaching staff. Lastly, I would advocate for anonymous staff surveys to allow for curriculum feedback and identification of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. This information could then be utilized to make adjustments in curriculum to improve student outcomes.

Trust Through Transparency - Detailed information regarding curriculum, instructional materials, and education consultants, along with the associated costs should be accessible to all taxpayers on the district's website. This would build stakeholder trust by providing easy access to curriculum, showing fiscal responsibility as well as save time and resources in responding to overwhelming Open Records requests.

A Voice for All - A school board should find a way to hear the views of all its stakeholders and respond to their questions and concerns. This should include teachers in addition to parents, students, and community members. I am dedicated to finding new ways to ensure stakeholders have a dialogue with the board and feel heard. Some suggestions include the following, in accordance with board policy, as it relates to Open Meeting Laws: board hours, open forums, monthly board newsletters, and listening sessions.

**What is your perception of the current working and learning climate in our school district? Do you have any ideas on how to ensure a positive working and learning climate is in our district?**

It is my belief that the current working and learning climate in our school district is challenging. As a substitute teacher in our classrooms, I have had the opportunity to speak with staff and gain a better understanding of the successes and struggles both students and teachers encounter daily. Drawing on the question above, I do believe we need to improve communication with our most valuable asset, our teachers. We are facing teacher shortages not only in our district but across the country. Our school board is tasked with finding ways to improve staff retention and employee satisfaction, and in order to do this; we need feedback



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from the teaching staff. Creating positive working environments where staff feels valued, supported, and engaged can lead to a better learning climate for our students. When our educators feel supported, they are then able to assist students meet and achieve academic goals for post-secondary success.

### **How do your goals align with the NAACP?**

MTSD is composed of students and families that represent a variety of cultures, religions, economic backgrounds, disabilities and academic abilities. All students should be given the tools they need to succeed and reach their full potential regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or disability. Equality in education means that students are treated equally and that all have access to the same opportunities and resources. Equity means that some students will also receive additional resources and opportunities depending on their specific needs or situation to help them reach their full potential. It is essential that as a community and school district, we respect and value one another, and see the strengths in our differences.