

MCCSC School Board Forum (9/26/22)
Tri-North Middle School
Notes (RJS)

Co-Sponsors: Indiana Coalition for Public Education–Monroe County; Monroe County Education Association; League of Women Voters of Bloomington–Monroe County; The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce; University Alliance on Racial Justice

Candidates present:

District 1:

Tabitha Crouch
Erin Wyatt

District 3:

Jon Hayes
Daniel O’Neill
Ashley Pirani

District 7:

Brandon Shurr (didn’t speak, since he is running unopposed)

Candidates absent:

Brian Turner (district 1)

Questions (clicking on a hyperlink takes you directly to that question and candidates’ answers)

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Opening Statements

Tabitha Crouch: Issues are becoming more political. Her major concern is school safety.

Erin Wyatt: Students should be viewed holistically, be challenged and engaged. Schools should engage with the community. Education is key for workforce development. To keep school climates healthy, licensed professionals should be available to meet student needs

Jon Hays: Has been a school bus driver and is very concerned about transportation. School safety is a major focus. Wants to see that all students have an equal education

Daniel O'Neill: [Longest and most prepared opening] Very supportive of the referendum and actually helped manage the last one. Education is the greatest engine of opportunity, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

Ashley Pirani: Her presence on board will benefit from the fact that she has been a PTO president, and has a strong background & connection to public education. Her priorities: strategies to keep schools safe; a data-based approach and reliance on experts; all students meeting their potential, especially marginalized students

What do you see as the greatest challenge facing the board?

Erin: Transportation and the lack of registered nurses

Jon Hays: Transportation and the lack of bus drivers

Daniel O'Neill: Students not prepared as well as they could be

Ashley Pirani: Equity and having a strategic plan to get there. Need to reconsider school boundaries as part of that.

Tabitha Crouch: Lack of trust from parents and school transparency. Making sure that schools are receptive to feedback. School safety and guns in school.

What would you do about preventing violence and promoting a positive school climate?

Jon Hays: Re-arm SROs. The prevention of violence starts at home—parents need to be more responsible. There need to be repercussions for student misbehavior at home as well.

Daniel O'Neill: Believes there are strategies that can prevent violence. Clear behavioral expectations clearly and compassionately enforced. The weapons issue is serious. Would favor revisiting the decision to remove weapons from SRO's

Ashley Pirani: Not in favor of re-arming police. There is no data to support that—in fact, research has shown that increasing the presence of guns makes school environments more, not less dangerous. Prevention should start well before the presence of law enforcement. Armed SROs do not deter violence.

Tabitha Crouch: Take every action possible with a robust approach, including SROs, carefully trained and placed. Engage students in planning for school safety. Address mental health through student assistance programs

Erin Wyatt: Proactive planning. Identify potential violence and intervene before it happens. Policies should involve students with mental health issues and students with disabilities. Work with families to store guns safely in the home. Promote a more positive climate, including social-emotional learning. Not convinced of the necessity of re-arming policing.

How should districts and teachers teach about concepts and content on race and racism?

Daniel O'Neill: Do not support bills to limit teaching of race, culture, and racism. Views it as meddling. Acted as advisor to IU medical students, promoting the needs of Black med students. Believes in radical inclusion in our classrooms.

Ashley Pirani: Views educational censorship attempts as “pretty atrocious.” Not in favor of either limits on talking about race and racism or book banning. Such an approach advantages White, straight individuals at the expense of BIPOC citizens, and doesn't allow us to move

forward as a society. Our history is troubling—do we like it? No, because we’re culpable. We owe it to those who have been marginalized to learn from our history. Referenced the students ambassadors as a great group, and supports their efforts towards anti-racist bullying policies.

Tabitha Crouch: Also supports the student ambassadors. But suggests that we shouldn’t focus on what makes us different, but instead on what we have in common—focusing on differences drives us apart. Believes that teaching about history and culture should be opt-in electives. Supports equity but “I would like to see us take a different approach.”

Erin Wyatt: [Suggested reading her statement] Schools would be remiss if they failed to talk about our history of racism and genocide. “Those who don’t recognized history are doomed to repeat it.” Find the best way to introduce that information. Need to prepare our students to understand our history

Jon Hays: “I don’t know what bills you guys are talking about.” History should be incorporated—our history of racism and inequity should be introduced.

[Audience] What are your goals in addressing racial equity both academically and socially?

Ashley Pirani: Look at the school boundaries through redistricting. Meet marginalized students where they are. Reach out to parents at the Boys & Girls Club. Continue to address discipline disparities—the MCCSC Strategic Plan is a good place to start doing that.

Tabitha Crouch: I don’t have answers not being a person of color—I’m not an expert. I agree on redistricting. Sent son to the Boys & Girls club to expose him to diversity. Absolutely think redistricting should be pursued. “I don’t have the answers.”

Erin Wyatt: Need to listen to the Student Equity Ambassadors (the students who came to the School Board asking them to address a range of equity issues) and leverage their voices by being in touch with those students to address equity in MCCSC. Curriculum and testing to assess students holistically (vs. standardized tests). Promote college prep for marginalized students—bring in mentors of color.

Jon Hays: Don’t really have a good answer. Everybody should have the same opportunity as everyone else has.

Daniel O’Toole. Worked in this area for two decades with minoritized students. We (Ivy Tech) graduates students of color at a higher rate than any other higher ed institution in the state. Need good clear policies compassionately and consistently applied. There are problems when policies are consistent at the classroom level. Minoritized students face considerable challenges.

[Audience] Do you support the MCCSC referendum?

Erin Wyatt: Yes! It’s a question of staff and teacher pay.

Jon Hays: Yes. Teachers need to be paid, without that, we will lose positions in MCCSC.

Daniel O’Toole: Yes. I helped organize the 2016 referendum campaign. This is the way Indiana organizes school funding, we *must* support the referendum.

Ashley Pirani: Yes, otherwise there will be a fiscal cliff. As a mom of a student with an IEP, also advocate for funding for special ed.

Tabitha Crouch: Yes. I don’t like the way it (funding for schools) is set up. But it will be devastating if it does not pass.

[Audience]. What are your thoughts on how a school board should respond to requests to withdraw certain books from school libraries?

Jon Hays: Would consider it. Everyone has to be in agreement. Yes, I would.

Daniel O'Toole: Used to navigating respectfully—would attend and listen. But would be inclined to leave it to the professionals—teachers and librarians.

Ashley Pirani: Of course, I'd listen. But I'd also ask, "why are you asking us to ban books?"

Tabitha Crouch: Listen, seek to understand. There is a difference in providing books and basing instruction on them.

Erin Wyatt: Would listen, ask for reasons in writing, with citations. With very few exceptions, students have the right to read all the books in the library.

[Audience]: What is your understanding of how charters affect the public schools?

Daniel O'Toole: Any siphoning off of funds from public education harms our children. Am a bit of a policy wonk, having looked at how independent and private schools are capturing public funding. Charters represent "taxation without representation" for those who do not enroll their children there. School board can't fix, but should lobby.

Ashley Pirani: Charter funding impacts public schools through a massive re-allocation, often without oversight. Agree with Daniel. Especially vouchers don't work for children. There is a robust group fighting.

Tabitha Crouch: I support families. Vouchers may allow families to send their students to the school they'd like to. "I'd like that opportunity."

Erin Wyatt: Charters funnel funds away from public schools. Charter boards are not elected, so there's no accountability. There is a higher rate of teacher turnover in charters, which negatively affects students. I don't agree with public funds going to non-public schools.

Jon Hays: Doesn't have a stance on it.

[Audience] What would you recommend to increase parent involvement and engagement?

Ashley Pirani: As PTO president, 110% committed to community involvement and relationships with parents. We're there to listen.

Tabitha Crouch: Also very much in favor of. Better to have transparency than to have parents go wild on facebook. Parents become irate because they are not giving them a voice

Erin Wyatt: Information about board actions should be publicly available. Strategies for parent involvement should be on course syllabi.

Jon Hays: Parents should be involved.

Daniel O'Toole: School board members should always listen to parents. Must stay transparent

[Audience] Please share your views on teaching SEL.

Tabitha Crouch: Do support SEL, but I don't agree with the way its done. If I'm having a hard time with it, then how are the kids not. Some of the topics, aimed at sexuality, make students uncomfortable, especially if those teachings don't share my child's sexuality.

Erin Wyatt: Support it. There's been a lot of misinformation, conflating SEL with CRT. SEL is really about learning to manage one's emotions.

Jon Hays: Support a variety of things. Should be parents' choice

Ashley Pirani: Supports it. Helping kids to manage their emotions. Depriving students of SEL classes is part of a broader agenda.

Daniel O'Toole: If its appropriately done. We are overdoing it with SEL. Have to focus on the primary product—content education.