

Election of the 43rd Student Member of the Board of Education

MCR Special Elections Committee 2020 Voters Guide

MONTGOMERY
COUNTY
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
Maryland

Election Day
May 20, 2020

The candidates' profiles have been prepared by the candidates and do not necessarily represent the views of the Special Elections Committee (SEC), the Montgomery County Region of the Maryland Association of Student Councils (MCR), or Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The SEC cannot assure the accuracy of the statements contained in this document. Published by the SEC of MCR in cooperation with MCPS.



Nick Asante

Candidate Profile

Grade 11, Richard Montgomery High School
@nick4smob

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13 years ago, my parents and I packed up our bags, left our home in Ghana and moved to Montgomery County, Maryland. When I was younger, I didn't understand my parent's decision to move to a completely different continent and restart our lives. However, my parents saw something in our county that I

didn't at the time: *the promise of high-quality education.*

Sadly, one thing I've learned during my time in the system is that promises can be broken and our county often fails to meet the needs of many students. In 2020, it doesn't make sense that students are prohibited from high achievement solely because of the school they attend and their socioeconomic status. It's time we ensured that every student had the resources and opportunities needed to succeed.

For 7 years, student empowerment and championing the student's voice has been the central focus of my life. Through my advocacy on county, state, and national levels, I have pushed to bring change that the students of our county yearn to see. I have fought to make diversity and equity a priority in our county, worked with the Maryland Board of Education to strengthen school safety procedures throughout our state, and advocated for the student voice throughout our nation.

As SMOB, representing your voice at the board table in unprecedented ways will be my priority. It's time that our county's policies better reflected the needs and wants of our county's student body. It's time that your success was not hindered by factors beyond your control. It's time to **stand up for your education.**

Record of Action:

- **SMOB Chief of Staff:** This year I had the honor to serve as SMOB Nate Tinbite's chief of staff. Through this position, I aided Nate in representing the voice of all of our county's students at the board table.
- **MCR-SGA Legislative Affairs Director:** Through this role, I became familiar with the processes required to push change in all levels of government. With the knowledge I've gained, I will ensure that my SMOB term is as effective as possible.
- **MCJC-SGA President:** As president of the middle school, countywide SGA, I fought to ensure the voices of middle school students were being heard, county-provided tutoring for students, and increased environmental awareness in schools.
- **Maryland Center for School Safety:** Working under the State Board of Education, I had the chance to work with policy makers to directly influence policy that impacted students across the state.

The Vision:

- Letting students vote on the lunch menu options they'd like to see in the cafeteria
- Allowing parents to give permission to MCPS to unblock social media sites for middle school students who are 13 or older
- Ensuring pads and tampons are available for free in all girls bathrooms
- Implementing anonymous teacher evaluation forms so students can give teachers feedback
- Establishing spaces in every school building dedicated to mental health and de-stressing
- Pushing for the addition of more environmentally friendly measures in our county: refillable water bottle stations & electric school buses

Q1. Why did you decide to run for SMOB?

Growing up, I spent a lot of time with my grandma, who was an elementary school teacher in Africa. She instilled in me the idea that a good education is vital, no matter who you are and where you come from. During my years of work in advocacy, I have held on to this sentiment and it has become extremely clear that there are major systematic problems in our county that must be fixed. I am running for SMOB because it is time to eradicate the inequities in our county, fix the holes still present in our system, and ensure that the student voice is heard. When I first began advocating for students, I envisioned an MCPS where every student throughout the county received a high-quality education. That vision still holds strong today and, as SMOB, I will ensure that long-term and impactful change is brought to our county.

Q2. What are your top three goals for your term? What steps would you take to achieve your goals?

1. **Increase Access to Technology:** With an increasing number of our assignments becoming digital, it's vital that all students have equal access to technology in and out of the classroom. As SMOB, I plan to launch a system in which every student receives their own chromebook to use at school and at home.
2. **Closing the Opportunity Gap:** As the opportunity gap continues to plague our county, I plan to address the epidemic through:
 1. Free ACT/SAT prep programs for students
 2. Increased employment of bilingual staff members
 3. Expanding our county's career pathway programs.
3. **Improving Student Life:** Every year we spend over 1,200 hours in school, it's important that our daily experiences set us up for academic success.
 - We need a lunch menu that better accommodates vegetarian/vegan students
 - A straightforward and digital system of reporting facility issues (e.g., broken bathroom locks)
 - Project-based learning to reduce the stress of traditional testing.

Q3. The Student Member of the Board of Education recently acquired a vote on the MCPS budget. If you could allocate ten million dollars anywhere in the budget, where would it be and why?

- For many students, the opportunity to gain work experience by holding a job would be very beneficial. However, finding flexible jobs that accommodate the busy schedule of a student can be a difficult task. I would use two million dollars to launch a program in which students can be given paid work opportunities directly through MCPS.
- I would set aside four million for the hiring of more school psychologists and more comprehensive mental health awareness training for staff members. I believe that it's important that we not only work towards aiding students struggling with mental health but also work to prevent the development of mental health issues.
- With the last four million dollars, I would strengthen our county's career pathway programs. Our county needs to provide students with the resources necessary for future success, regardless of what path they take after high school.

Q4. How will you ensure clear communication with the students of MCPS?

The job of the SMOB at its core is representing the voice of the students of our county. Without proper communication this would not be possible and so, as SMOB, I would utilize new methods of reaching out to a greater range of students in conjunction with older modes of communication:

- I plan to establish a coalition of students at each school who will document the issues most prominent in their building. I'll meet regularly with this coalition to come up with specific game plans for addressing those problems.
- In-person school visits, that are publicized ahead of time, to ensure that your voice is accurately represented at the board table.
- The SMOB Minute (monthly update video)
- Regular communication and updates through social media
- Digital live streams to answer student questions

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Vicky Kidder

Candidate Profile

Grade 11, Magruder High School

@vickysmob

Hi! I'm Vicky Kidder and I'm a junior at Magruder High School. To be completely honest, if someone had told me that I'd be one of the finalists for SMOB as a junior in high school a few years ago, I'd have told them that they're crazy. But, after years of seeing so many issues in our county go unresolved, and seeing so many students be

let down time and time again, here we are.

As a fellow MCPS student, I understand your concerns and criticisms involving what goes on in our daily school lives, and I'm asking the same questions as you. Why is my school's infrastructure so broken? Why doesn't my school do anything to address my mental health needs? Why is the school lunch so bad? How come another school seems to have a lot more resources than my school? Why do progress checks, GPAs, and test scores define who I am as a student and determine my overall academic success?

No student in our school system should have to be asking these questions, and I've brought up these concerns to the key figures in our county who need to hear them. As a staunch advocate for the student voice, I've urged the Board of Education to address our crumbling infrastructure and fiercely pushed for the Board to prioritize equity, racial and socio-economic diversity, and above all else, close the opportunity and achievement gap that has been plaguing our county for decades.

Throughout this election process, I've been given the honor of being able to visit all of your schools and speak with you. I can honestly say that our student body is composed of promising, talented students who are not properly equipped to reach their highest potential, which should be the mission of MCPS. Hearing all of your stories has hardened my belief that, while we as a school system are improving, there's still a long way to go. But, the driving force behind progress in our county has been, and always will be, YOU and your voice. Only you see first-hand what goes on in our schools. **That is why, as your SMOB, I will do everything in my power to ensure that you are never overlooked, underrepresented, or left behind.**

History of Fighting for You:

- MCR-SGA Special Elections Deputy and Educational Policy Deputy
- SMOB Advisory Council for SMOBs Matt Post, Ananya Tadikonda, and Nate Tinbite
- 2-year member of Montgomery County Students for Change
- SGA Vice President of Magruder High School
- SGA President of Shady Grove Middle School

On the Issues:

- **Transportation:** alleviate overcrowding on buses and push for adoption of electric school buses
- **Technology:** improve WiFi and increase bandwidth for streaming fix and expand graphing calculator, iPad, and Chromebook rental system
- **Mental Health:** expand Mindfulness training and Wellness Centers
- **Infrastructure:** minor renovations for schools not a part of CIP, remove barriers so all schools are ADA compliant
- **Opportunity Gap:** implement SAT and ACT prep courses in all high schools, offer more career-pathway programs

Q1. Why did you decide to run for SMOB?

Because I feel like I need to do something for my peers. Being a Montgomery County resident my entire life, I know the disparities that exist in our community all too well, and I have felt the anger of feeling neglected and overlooked by the same people who should be listening to me. With rampant incongruity in racial composition, FARMS rates, graduation rates, and test scores happening right under my nose, I feel inclined to ask myself, how could I NOT do something?

I also go to Magruder, a school that is not really one of the more well-known schools in our county. I want to send a message to anyone who feels that their environment does not breed SMOBs and that they'd never be qualified. I want to let them know that ANYONE can be the SMOB no matter what school they attend. **YOU can be the SMOB.**

Q2. What are your top three goals for your term? What steps would you take to achieve your goals?

- **Improving mental health:** our students face increasing pressure to take several rigorous academic courses while pursuing extracurriculars. I propose expanding availability of Wellness Centers, implementing advisory/study hall periods, and hiring full-time school psychologists, while also bettering teacher training to identify signs of mental illness
- **Bettering student experience:** I've heard too many stories of overcrowded buses, poor school lunch options, broken athletic equipment, and crumbling infrastructure. As SMOB, I would work to create an app that gives students the option to take the Ride-On bus, increase funding toward our athletes and building services in schools, and work to create a more diversified and higher-quality lunch menu
- **Closing the opportunity gap:** with disparities in several areas, I would work to provide SAT and ACT prep courses in all high schools and implement more career and project-based learning pathways as an alternative to progress checks and state tests

Q3. The Student Member of the Board of Education recently acquired a vote on the MCPS budget. If you could allocate ten million dollars anywhere in the budget, where would it be and why?

- **\$2 million:** implementing SAT and ACT prep courses, as well as driver's ed courses in every high school
- **\$4 million:** hiring school psychologists who can be at school for at least one hour every day, hiring more bilingual counselors and teachers, and getting furniture for school Wellness Centers
- **\$4 million:** expanding MC2, dual-enrollment, and other career-pathway programs to more high schools in the county as well as creating a system that can provide a comprehensive review of scholarship opportunities, career-oriented opportunities, internships, college visits, and plans for life after high school for at least every senior in the county

Q4. How will you ensure clear communication with the students of MCPS?

- **Social Media:** I'll be sure to communicate with students via a variety of platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Tik Tok to ensure that students see what's going on at the Board and in the county
- **SMOB Minute:** something I'd really like to get a grip on as SMOB is making sure that EVERY school plays the SMOB Minute so their students don't miss any vital updates or information that will undoubtedly affect them in some way
- **YouTube:** I'd like to create a YouTube channel that will feature weekly vlogs so our students can see what happens at the Board table on an almost day-to-day basis and will always stay up to date about what's going on in MCPS
- **Council of students:** On top of the SAC, I'd like to establish a council of students in every school who will have a direct line of communication with me