

Election of the 44th Student Member of the Board of Education

MCR Special Elections Committee 2021 Voters Guide

MONTGOMERY
COUNTY
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
Maryland

Election Days
April 22, 2021
AND
April 23, 2021

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.



Henry Kaye

Candidate Profile
Grade 11, Richard Montgomery High School
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Whether it be a part-time job, a language barrier, distance from the Board of Education, caring for siblings, playing sports, or taking challenging courses, I understand it is fundamentally difficult to join or participate in student advocacy. Many students are underrepresented because of these challenges. I feel that the school board has become disconnected from THE STUDENTS, even though its sole responsibility

is to represent them. I am running to change this. I understand the difficulties involved with becoming active in county-wide advocacy because I have personally experienced these challenges. I am an athlete, participate in various extracurricular clubs, own a local business, have worked part-time jobs, and play an active role in my family. Being elected to the board will allow me to refocus its interests on the students.

Together, we will ensure that ALL Montgomery County Students are represented with fairness and equity at the Regional Level.

Who Am I:

- Junior at Richard Montgomery High School
- Brother to an 8th grader at Julius West Middle School
- Varsity Track/XC runner
- Eagle Scout
- Ice hockey Player
- Welder
- Small Business Owner
- Employee of Local Businesses
- Amateur Radio Operator

Once Elected:

- All students have the ability to participate in advocacy so that we can bring needed change
- All students are prepared for a career, technical school, or college after graduating from HS
- More and diverse counseling services at all high schools will be implemented
- All MCPS schools will be ADA compliant
- All students, regardless of ZIP code or physical/mental ability, have the opportunity to participate in quality athletics
- We will use our robust budget to provide the best quality resources to our students in the short-term,
- We will invest in the future of our school system
- We will improve our school lunches and their nutritional value
- We will reduce our impact on the environment by updating our facilities to be more environmentally-sustainable
- We will beat addiction as a community and eliminate addictive substances from our school system
- We will represent diverse interests and get programs implemented as quickly and as efficiently as possible

Q1. Why did you decide to run for SMOB?

I decided to run for SMOB because I have personally seen and experienced the massive disparities within our county. I have seen how difficult it is for many students to become involved with advocacy, have their voices heard, and see needed change. I understand that if you have to work to support your family, have responsibilities at home, play sports, take challenging courses, or participate in other extracurricular activities, your time and resources are stretched thin. This barrier to entry results in a lack of diversity of the interests, voices, and perspectives represented at the county level. I will represent all students.

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

- **Nicotine & Addiction**—Recently, substance abuse has become extremely prevalent in our school system. We need to take a countywide approach and implement support sessions in EVERY middle and high school. These sessions will allow students who are struggling with addiction to see that they are not alone and that they can beat the cycle.
- **Counselors**—Counselors are overburdened and cannot personally connect with our students. Swelling the number of counselors (especially those with specialties) and fully automating the course registration process will allow our counselors to counsel and focus on what is important: our students' health.
- **Nutrition**—Many of the foods we serve our students are unhealthy. We must invest in our students' health and well-being by partnering with local farms and producers to provide high quality, nutritious foods at affordable rates. This investment will improve the health and learning of our students.

Q3. The Student Member of the Board of Education recently acquired a vote on the MCPS budget. If you could allocate 10 million dollars anywhere in the budget, where would it be and why?

- **4 million**—Poor nutrition within our food distribution facilities stifles learning, especially for disadvantaged students and students on the Free & Reduced Meals Program. Direct investments into improving the nutritional value of foods within our schools would allow our students to learn better, lead healthier lives, and improve mental health.
- **4 million**—Counselors are overburdened, and there are a lack of specialized counselors (e.g., psychologists, mental health professionals) who can accommodate and help students with their unique needs. I plan to drastically increase the number of mental health professionals and ensure that all students can get the HELP THEY NEED.
- **2 Million**—College & Career readiness programs. All students must leave high school prepared for life. I plan to do this by increasing the number of college & career readiness counselors, expanding programs such as Edison HS, and expanding courses that teach fundamental life skills (such as Quantitative Literacy).

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

SMOBs must maintain clear and cohesive communication with their constituents—the students. I plan to maintain this clear communication by staying active on social channels, visiting student leadership groups, and establishing a cabinet that represents students from diverse geographical locations, socioeconomic backgrounds, interests, and beliefs. This will ensure that I am legislating in a manner that is fair and equitable to every student. Developing and maintaining these relationships and means of communication will allow me to be accountable to the students, ensuring that no student is forgotten or left behind.

Q5. The MCPS SMOB for the school year 2021–2022 will be dealing with school recovery from a pandemic, the loss of \$100M in funding, debates on the roles of SROs in schools, an antiracism audit, a boundary analysis, and the selection of a new superintendent. How will you become properly knowledgeable and prepared to manage this work while still being a student?

I will educate myself on this diverse range of topics by conducting extensive research, working with the other school board members, and establishing a student-run cabinet of advisors. I will do this before making any decision that will impact the well-being of our students.

I have demonstrated my ability to juggle school, work, sports, and extracurricular activities. While I will make concessions within my schedule, I believe that the SMOB represents the ideals of the students. Therefore, I will remain in my classes, extracurriculars, and sports to continue to have an innate understanding of the challenges facing us and avoid becoming disconnected!

As Benjamin Franklin once said, "If you want something done, ask a busy person." I am this busy person, and we will get things done!

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Hana O'Looney

Candidate Profile
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We have been through so much together this past year. As MCPS students, we have faced a global pandemic, a resurgence in the calls for racial justice, our own student movement against sexual assault and harassment, and so much more. And throughout it all, the students of MCPS have chosen unity over division, community over isolation, and faced this past year with strength, grace, and a renewed sense of purpose.

That's why I'm running to be your next SMOB. As a lifelong MCPS student having attended schools in six high school districts, I know the power our students holds -the power that has been shown through the @blackat, @queerat, and @survivorsat Instagram accounts, the power that has organized protests, and the power that does not stop until the change we seek is achieved. And today, after the year we have had, we are ready for change.

For the past six years, fighting for educational equity has been my life's focus. As SMOB, I am ready to fight for a school system built on the principles of equity and equal opportunity instead of racial disparities. I am ready to fight for increased counselors and greater individualized mental health support. I am ready to fight for a curriculum that teaches valuable skills you can use after graduation, instead of just how to pass a standardized exam. Most of all, I am ready to fight for the world-class education you deserve.

COVID didn't break MCPS, it revealed what was already broken. All of us have been asked to make many sacrifices that we weren't ever ready for this year, but our strength and unity through the toughest of times has proved the power of the student voice. Join me as we restore our rights, our education, and our dreams, and finally create a school system that meets the diverse needs of all students.

Record of Action:

- **Vice President of the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association (involved 2018–2021)**, where I worked intimately with MCPS central offices and MCPSstv to advocate for students and host forums on county events
- **Chair of MoCo EmpowHER (involved 2019–2021)**, where I successfully committed MCPS to implement free menstrual hygiene products in our bathrooms
- **President of MCJC (2017–2018)**, the countywide middle school student government
- **MCPS District Assessment Committee (2017–2019)**, where I successfully advocated to end PARCC
- **MCPS Systemwide Wellness Committee (2019–2021)**, where I advocated for increased mental health support

The Vision:

- **Reopening:** Ensure that we support students' physical and mental health throughout the reopening process, while keeping virtual learning a permanent option
- **Anti-Racism:** Diversifying our staff through revised hiring practices, and our curriculum through increased diversity in course content
- **Programming:** Increasing course offerings, extracurriculars, and career-development programs in the DCC and NEC so your zip code doesn't determine your educational experience
- **Opportunity Gap:** Establishing a universally free SAT, ACT, and magnet exam preparation course accessible from every school
- **Communication:** Visiting every school at least once per semester, and ensuring that all students have a direct line of contact with me

Q1: Why did you decide to run for SMOB?

As a lifelong MCPS student that has attended schools in six high school clusters, and the Vice President of the countywide student government association whose job is to be in constant communication with leaders from every high school in the county, I have personally seen the huge disparities in educational opportunities that are given to students, especially those in the DCC, NEC, and other under-resourced regions of our county. I am running for SMOB because your zip code in Montgomery County should not determine the courses, extracurriculars, resources, or infrastructure you have access to. Whether it's through utilizing the MCPS anti-racism audit, reopening

schools, or distributing equitable funding to schools that need it most, I want to ensure that students in every region of Montgomery County have access to the world-class education that they deserve, and that this seat is an opportunity for all of our voices to be heard.

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

Reopen Schools Safely: With extended online learning disproportionately affecting the most marginalized students in our schools, we need to ensure the reopening process is supportive of all students' physical, as well as mental health. That being said, I will fight to keep virtual learning a permanent option for students who don't feel safe returning to in-person classes or who prefer online learning.

Diversify our Staff and Curriculum: Especially with the ongoing antiracism audit, I want to utilize these results to hire more teachers, counselors, and administrators of color and ensure that students are learning from diverse perspectives in English, History, and Health classes.

Close the Opportunity Gap: Through universal SAT and ACT preparation courses, universal testing for magnet programs, increased course offerings and extracurriculars at under-resourced schools, and hiring more multilingual staff members, I will do everything I can to combat the opportunity gap in MCPS.

Q3: The Student Member of the Board of Education has a vote on the MCPS budget. If you could allocate 10 million dollars anywhere in the budget, where would it be and why?

- **\$2 million:** Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for every student, sanitizing stations at every school building, and renovations in school ventilation systems across MCPS to ensure that students continue to feel safe returning to in-person school.
- **\$2 million:** Kickstarting a universally free, county-based SAT and ACT preparation course accessible from every school, and increasing course offerings and extracurricular opportunities at historically under-resourced schools to combat the countywide opportunity gap.
- **\$3 million:** Hiring more school psychologists for every school, and investing in the hiring of teachers, administrators, and counselors of color to ensure that the demographics of our faculty are representative of our student body.
- **\$3 million:** Strengthening MC2, dual-enrollment, and other career pathway programs for students starting as early as middle school to ensure that we all graduate from MCPS with the resources necessary for future success. Expanding systems that connect students with scholarship opportunities, internships, and college visits.

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

As SMOB, I will be an accessible and available presence to every MCPS student, regardless of school, background, or language. I want to ensure that this isn't just my seat at the table, but one that we all share. Here are some ways I am committed to communicating:

- **Social Media:** Giving frequent updates on, and being accessible through, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter. Hosting weekly live-streams on these platforms.
- **Emails:** Sending monthly newsletters and updates to all students, and ensuring that my email address is readily accessible to all students on their Canvas page for easy contact.
- **Printed Communication:** Recognizing that not every student has access to reliable technology, bringing back more mailed communication and translating it into as many languages as possible.
- **Student Advisory Council:** Appointing a team of students who consistently help me with outreach, specifically to the DCC, NEC, and students who are not fluent in English.

Q5: The MCPS SMOB for school year 2021–2022 will be dealing with school recovery from a pandemic, the loss of \$100M in funding, debates on the roles of SROs in schools, an antiracism audit, a boundary analysis and the selection of a new superintendent. How will you become properly knowledgeable and prepared to manage this work while still being a student?

As the Vice President of the countywide student government, and even before I was elected by the students of MCPS to this position, I have always prioritized my work furthering educational equity in MCPS above all else. I have made substantive changes in our county through securing free menstrual hygiene products for all middle and high schools, ending PARCC exams, and advocating for increased mental health support systems. These reforms weren't easy to enact and required years of dedication to meeting with policymakers, brainstorming with fellow students, and reading up on county policies, but I continued fighting because I knew these reforms would improve the lives of our students. You can and should expect this same level of commitment and more if I am elected to be your next SMOB. I promise that I will make your educational experience my #1 priority, and I will always be your advocate.