

Wisconsin 2020: MPS Referendum Dialogue Report

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Presented By:

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Executive Summary

This report presents an overview of participant responses during the first community conversation of the Wisconsin 2020 Dialogue Series, a partnership of UWUM, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the Zeidler Group. The dialogue was hosted at Good City Brewing on February 25, 2020. 87 community members participated in 14 listening circles led by 14 Zeidler Group facilitators.

The event focused on the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Referendum, which will ask voters in the school district to approve a total of \$87 million to pay for educational programming phased over the course of four years. The structured discussion format centered around two questions:

1. *"What's a personal experience in your life that has impacted your position on the MPS referendum?"*
2. *"What should MPS do to improve outcomes for students? Does that necessarily include additional funding? If so, what do you think additional funding should go to support?"*

After each participant was given a chance to respond to these discussion questions, they engaged in an open discussion during the Connected Conversation. Participants were prompted with the following questions:

"As a citizen of Milwaukee how do you balance the needs of the school system with other needs of the city (for example, infrastructure, crime & safety, etc.)? How do you rank the priorities for tax-payer funded dollars?"

"What drives you to care about the referendum?"

For the first question, many participants attributed their position on the MPS referendum to their personal experience as educators. Other participants described personal connections to educators in their family. Participants also attributed their position on the MPS referendum to their direct connection to MPS as graduates and parents. A few participants shared their personal experiences with public schools outside of MPS while some simply expressed their desire to learn more about MPS and the referendum at this event.

For the second question, participants provided a variety of suggestions and ideas. Many participants emphasized the need to focus on teachers and specific programming for MPS students. Many participants also provided a long list of suggestions stretching across multiple actors beyond MPS. Some participants suggested focusing on institutional level changes, while other suggested focusing on reducing classroom sizes. A few participants also suggested focusing on the needs of marginalized students and student health overall.

During the Connected Conversation, a variety of topics were discussed across all the listening circles. These topics include the allocation of funds, buildings and facilities, diversity issues, family mobility, a focus on students, the importance of education, problems with MPS, the role of parents, and strategy and planning issues with the referendum. At the conclusion of the event, participants generally expressed positive Parting Words as they acknowledged the challenges that lay ahead for the MPS referendum.

Please direct questions about this report to the Zeidler Group, office@zeidlergroup.org.

Analysis

Question Round One: *“What’s a personal experience in your life that has impacted your position on the MPS referendum?”*

The most common personal experience reported by participants was their previous or current professional role as educators. Many participants also described that their position on the MPS referendum was influenced by their personal connections to educators in their family. Some participants attributed their position on the MPS referendum to their direct connection to MPS as graduates and parents, while others described their personal experience with public education outside of MPS. A few participants simply expressed their desire to learn more about MPS and the referendum from community members at this event.

1.1 Personal experience as educators

Many participants introduced themselves as educators such as teachers and administrators. Some of these participants have had direct experience working within MPS.

“I have yet to form a position on the referendum. I’ve worked in the district for years, in both voucher and charter schools. Creates questions for me... I think the district does need more money. What impacts my ability to take a position is wanting to know the strategy for that money. How will that money be used will really help me form an opinion.”

“I am an artist educator in the MPS system and directly work with MPS kids. All the children I’ve worked with have similar visions no matter the school, where they reside, what they look like, etc. I think kids need to see success for their visions of themselves.”

Similarly, other participants who worked in education outside of MPS explained how their professional experience as educators and administrators affected their view of the referendum.

“Through my work, I’ve seen how school can be a stabilizing force for students, new opportunities, role models. The more we can do to support MPS, the better we all are.”

“I know the importance of education as I had the opportunity to use mine for over forty years to teach. My daughter teaches for MPS, she is dedicated and works after hours to get done what is needed so I share where the money is needed, and I think it’s crucial for education.”

As this last quote illustrates, many of these participants also personally knew someone with an educator background. Examples of this theme are presented in the next section.

1.2 Personal connections to educators

Some participants described others in their family who worked in education. These participants indicated that their view of the MPS referendum has been impacted by these personal relationships.

"I favor this referendum. We had four children in MPS—they are all adults now—and we were and are happy with the results. They had an excellent education. I remember at Roosevelt, they were enhanced by the arts and music programs. They graduated high school in the 1990s. In the last years, with the increase in growth of poverty, it is therefore in my view ever more important to support students. My wife worked in MPS serving special needs students. That has impacted how we see the value of MPS. And let me add that teachers get a bad rap that is not fair. There are far greater challenges now for teachers. In summary, I want to see MPS continue. It is an incredible resource."

"I am not a Milwaukee native, so the idea of school choice is new to me. I grew up and was educated in Ohio's public education system and my mother was an educator. I understand the value of teachers and the value of an education. I have been a Big Sister to an MPS student for five years now."

1.3 Graduates of MPS

Several participants declared they themselves were graduates of MPS, indicating that their first-hand experience with MPS inspired their opinion about the MPS referendum.

"I'm an MPS grad. I moved to Milwaukee at five years old. I'm really proud of being an MPS grad. I'm forty-four, so I entered in the eighties at the back end of white flight. My parents were committed (to public school) so that seeped into me. I went to Roosevelt and King and felt well prepared for college. I've had a positive personal connection about MPS for many years. Lately though, I've felt like it (MPS) was under attack. My daughter goes to Golda Meier. Her supposedly smaller class has twenty-eight students. That's crazy."

"I am a product, mother, and teacher in the district. To learn more about the referendum and then give my opinion as to it being the best for MPS."

As seen in these above quotes, participants also stated that their roles as parents of MPS students impacted their views of the MPS referendum. These are described in the next section.

1.4 Parents of MPS students

A few participants identified themselves as parents of MPS students. These participants expressed a variety of concerns about the future of MPS, such as the importance of reflecting the diversity of Milwaukee.

"A personal experience with how I feel about the referendum...our school district will or won't model society based on the resources we have. It's going to suffer. If we have a society that's not educated, we [will] have more health issues, violence etc. I don't want to grow old in a city that I'm afraid to go outside. As a parent of two kids in MPS, I've always looked for diverse MPS schools. I didn't want them to be in any area where all the people are the same."

"[I am a] MPS alumni parent and that informs my views. My sons attend charters. They graduated being really good people. My kids learned a lot in MPS, even beyond the classroom. I prefer an educated populous. Milwaukee should aim to have a majority of middle class that expresses the diversity of this city."

1.5 Public education experience

Some participants described their experience with public education in places outside of MPS as factors influencing their current views of the MPS referendum.

"I am a proud graduate from a public school and a taxpayer. I come from one of the most disadvantaged zip codes in the state, so this topic is of utmost importance to me and to my people. That affects my position on this referendum."

"I don't know a lot about the public schools here as a recent transplant. I went to public schools in Iowa and got a great education. I have no children but do own property. I am aware that different places have different levels of taxation. I know Rhode Island has low taxes. I like the public option, but we need a good revenue stream."

1.6 Desire to learn more about MPS Referendum

Like the previous theme, other participants who did not have direct experience with MPS described their motivation for attending this session stemmed from simply their desire to learn more about their community within the MPS district.

"I am new to Milwaukee, and therefore new to understanding how the MPS system functions. I have lived in a lot of states and even several other countries, and our children—now all adults with families of their own—have attended both public schools

and private schools in these various locations. Our children had effective teachers, even outstanding teachers, as well as some who were not so effective. The challenge for parents is striving to connect good teachers with our children's needs. I do not know which schools do well, or why, or what is the best manner in which MPS can proceed. I am new to Milwaukee and MPS, and I am still undecided about the Referendum. I will have to do more research."

Question Round Two: *"What should MPS do to improve outcomes for students? Does that necessarily include additional funding? If so, what do you think additional funding should go to support?"*

Participants provided a variety of suggestions and ideas to improve outcomes for MPS students. Most participants emphasized the need to focus on teachers and specific programming for students such as arts and music. Several participants provided a long list of suggestions which encompassed multiple overlapping ideas. Some participants also suggested focusing on institutional level changes, while others suggested focusing on reducing classroom sizes. A few participants also suggested focusing on the needs of marginalized students and student health overall.

2.1 Focus on teachers

The most frequent suggestion from participants was to focus on teachers in order to improve outcomes for MPS students. These suggestions ranged from hiring quality teachers to providing ongoing professional development support for MPS teachers.

"Improving outcomes is directly linked to whether you have highly qualified teachers. The district needs to attract, retain, and develop. I'm an educator. And I was also developed at MPS. Someone came to my classroom and helped me deliver on my professional development. That piece might be missing now in MPS. Teachers need support, people. We have to start with teachers."

"Hiring and supplying teachers is important. They need continuing education. They need classroom support. They need to improve the quality of teaching and the environment (classroom culture) created by the teachers."

2.2 Focus on specific and additional programming

Many participants also highlighted specific programs for additional support, such as arts and music. Others emphasized the importance of supporting programs in order to bring the focus back on MPS students.

"I heard a report on NPR about MPS needing additional money. MPS has no music. The basics of social studies, math, science are improved if the child has music. Music brings a discipline in the practice even more than homework."

"There should be a focus on commercial, business and finance learning, not through the eyes of the computer. Teach about safety. What about working in shops, bakeries, farms and on water issues? It's all around us. MPS should help kids to feel confident. I love the arts and museums and seeing kids be creative and helping each other in class. It is important to morale. Tomorrow's graduates will come out of high school and look forward to their future. They will be better able to solve problems. I hope we see exciting results."

As this last quote illustrates, many participants suggested multiple areas of focus. Examples of these participant quotes are presented in the following section.

2.3 Multiple areas of focus

Many participants presented a variety of areas for development in order to improve MPS student outcomes. These participants talked about a wide range of issues such as mental health, supporting programming for students, and improving facilities.

"It took me forever to write on this because it's a big problem that we're trying to solve. Some things that come to mind: to shrink the workload of teachers and leaders. They're asked to do many things. They should departmentalize, even in the elementary school. Allow teachers to get specialized in content. Focus on the mental health of both adults and students in the building. Bring partners who can help with mental health. Teacher preparation, especially for teachers who aren't prepared and need to be sustained through the hard work and not burn out. We could direct funding toward these things, so the work isn't overwhelming for people."

"I also think the class sizes need to be smaller. My husband is a former teacher, and I know that was a difficult job for him. The facilities in MPS—I wonder if they are really adapting the interiors today for how kids learn. I know that changing the interiors would involve getting big bucks involved, but I think looking at how kids interact in an environment and adapting the environment to their needs could make a big difference in the way they learn. I think there is also a connection between what is happening in school and with kids' home lives. School is not what it was back in the day. Kids are coming from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds. No matter how much money you have—things like nutrition, home life and mold in buildings—we are trying to build on a system that in and of itself is not supposed to be as it is. I also think the arts are important and believe in exercising our left and right brain."

2.4 Focus on institutional level changes

Similar to the participants highlighted in the previous section, a few participants offered suggestions focusing on a large scope. Specifically, these participants focused on ideas that push for institutional or systemic changes. These participants framed their suggestions as a reimagining of how MPS conducts its programming and curriculum.

"There's no one perfect price. Money is going to be a solution, but I'm struggling to know where to put it. We need to identify gaps—teachers, students, support staff. Wrap around services for challenged families. Specific programming—now that we have STEAM—the technical learning now is good. Let's predict what we'll need down the road. We need to redo MPS because it's not working. Somehow, it's got to be totally rethought. We need year-round schools. We aren't farmers anymore. We need to rethink what we're doing."

"I think the whole system needs to be revamped to reflect the social landscape of Milwaukee. I think students need to see themselves in their teachers. I see a big disconnect of servicing for current comforts, and I think it needs an overhaul."

"I think there are an overwhelming number of issues, so where to start? I support the referendum, but the panel presented the potential tax burden on low income residents and I don't think that is a sustainable answer. I have seen how my Little Sister has benefited from MPS programming, and I think it would be beneficial to expand these opportunities. I don't know where to start, but systematic change is needed."

2.5 Focus on reducing classroom sizes

Like the previous participant quote, a few participants focused on the importance of reducing classroom sizes for better MPS student outcomes.

"I think that areas that can improve outcomes for students are basically: smaller classrooms and managing the stress and anxiety that students have. The poverty and stress [that] some experience is just more than what they can deal with. Yes, these need more money to implement. Smaller classrooms improve odds for better outcome and students should also be encouraged to be more rounded than just the academic testing."

"Smaller class size in addition to health attention may improve student outcome. There is a lot of possibilities for great improvement."

2.6 Focus on marginalized students

Some participants highlighted the needs of marginalized or minoritized groups of students.

"I agree that curriculum is very important. I am sorry to hear that music programs were eliminated. Arts help develop the whole person. I also agree that parental involvement is very important. My wife and daughter have been social workers in MPS. In homes where they are very poor, there often are no books, but the TV is on all the time. Parental help with homework is crucial. Students on the margins, including immigrants, have many needs. MPS has to deal with increasingly larger numbers of needs."

"Focus needs to continue to be working on the margins: ESL, special needs, those in poverty. Increase the community-based partnerships, such as with universities, policy groups, and hospitals. There should be augmentation of primary, secondary, and tertiary supports, including in health, nurses, and counselors. I was an immigrant from a Latin American country and undocumented for a time. I was given opportunities in music and arts. My last observation in 2017 was that those counselors were not equipped to help students who were immigrants and needing to learn another language. And their parents could also not access the right persons/experts to help, even though there supposedly was such a resource."

As this last quote shows, the importance of health was also a theme that emerged from this discussion. Examples of this theme are highlighted in the next section.

2.7 Focus on student health

Participants also highlighted the importance of focusing on student health and providing trauma-based care.

"Classroom size is very crucial, and mental health services is another. A lot of students have trauma, and they just need support. I once worked as a public defender in the juvenile justice system, and I saw students disrupting others. And I think they simply needed support, to allow kids to be kids and not the injustice that brings trauma. Does it require additional funding? I think yes, they are not regular students; they require special attention."

"In my estimation, some focus should be directed to trauma-based care for the students."

Connected Conversation: As a citizen of Milwaukee how do you balance the needs of the school system with other needs of the city (for example, infrastructure, crime & safety, etc.)? How do you rank the priorities for taxpayer funded dollars? What drives you to care about the referendum?

During the Connected Conversation, a variety of topics were discussed across all the listening circles. These topics include the allocation of funds, buildings and facilities, diversity issues, family mobility, a focus on students, the importance of education, problems with MPS, the role of parents, and strategy and planning concerns about the MPS referendum.

3.1 Allocation of Funds

Many listening circles directly answered the second part of the prompt during the Connected Conversation by talking about the challenges and issues of allocating funding and taxes.

"We address issues and allocate money according to zip code, where people live, not what will build up the community."

"It is hard to prioritize, but I think there should be preventative ways to mitigate traumas in community policing. The current criminal justice system impacts those on the margins. Also, there should be investment in spaces: libraries, county parks, neighborhood connections."

3.2 Buildings and facilities

A few participants mentioned the issues of managing buildings and facilities in the MPS district.

"Efficiency is the first concern, for instance, having so many unused buildings."

"I also wonder how comfortable is the community to say, 'I'm willing to close a school in order to have a stronger district'? We have dropping enrollments at MPS. Some of our schools are gorgeous, and when they are vandalized it makes me want to throw up. We've got to get real with these buildings and be willing to downsize. I've worked at all different districts. Communities become really nervous about that, but sometimes you have to cut an appendage to keep the body moving."

3.3 Diversity issues

Some participants talked about issues of diversity within MPS and across Milwaukee school districts.

"Acknowledged, there's a need for more culturally relevant conversations and training to become culturally aware because the population has changed."

"I have noticed that there are less teachers of color in the district over the past twenty-five years."

3.4 Family mobility

Some listening circles highlighted the issue of family mobility and bussing across districts, which is a reflection of challenges faced by certain MPS students and families.

"Kids in poverty have to move all the time. If I'm that mom that has to decide that I have to move, I just have to find housing. Part of the reason we're talking about this is that we have a community of impoverished stakeholders that don't even know that they are stakeholders."

"But this idea of bussing kids [to] places...I am not sure how that fits. The suburbs have small class sizes, but it seems some people still want to bus their kids into the city to attend MPS schools. People are simply choosing to move away from the problem, but not really."

3.5 Focus on students

Many participants redirected the conversation to focus on their children and the students of MPS.

"The heart of our district is a reflection of the heart of our city. This is all interconnected. Who benefits and who gains from this? It's bigger than the referendum. Are we courageous enough as a city to start having these conversations about our children?"

"We need to consider the quality of life questions that affect students in Milwaukee. This affects the education of our children too. I want the school system to be proactive. I do not want more dads of MPS students going to jail. Education is important if we want to stop the school to jail pipeline. I think that the members of the School Board have good will. I just am not sure that they have looked at the myriad of problems carefully or developed a plan that can help most of the students. And this is not just an MPS problem. MPS is failing its graduates, too. Too many MPS students drop out of college after half or one semester and return home to become squatters in their parents' home."

3.6 Importance of education

Participants talked about the importance of education and schools, with some highlighting the importance of early childhood education. These participants primarily focused on solving poverty.

"Education is connected to other issues, like crime, safety, and infrastructure. To produce a better environment linking to policing, the fire department, teachers and participation. Education allows you to compete and also to reconcile theories that produce change. Change the scope of poverty and change the culture around you. General priority is poverty."

"Early Child Education has proven to be the most effective way to attack poverty."

3.7 Problems with MPS

Several participants voiced criticism of the MPS district by highlighting its systemic challenges and problems.

"What are the cultural challenges that face MPS administrators? Are we providing them with the skills and tools that they need in order to support their teachers and students in today's world? Open Enrollment, where students can attend whatever school that they want, in or outside their district, has not helped MPS schools, nor have Voucher or Choice options, either."

"The Administration of MPS and the members of the School Board need to be directly invested in the education of all students in the MPS system. Each teacher in each school, and in every classroom, needs to be passionate about the education of all students in each building."

3.8 Role of parents

Participants also shared their opinions about the roles of parents as they consider the referendum.

"What makes a school successful is parents. Parents push. The more parents are involved, the better the school."

"Parents need to be involved with their child to see for yourself how things are. You cannot rely on hearsay."

3.9 Strategy and planning

Many participants also voiced their concerns about the strategy and planning that would follow after the referendum decision.

"One of the things that this second question made me realize is that we need a real strategy for the money. Otherwise, the money will just trickle away. With all the ideas we put on the table, we need a strategic plan."

"Funding is needed, but it needs purpose. Investment to not only meet current needs but also those anticipated in the future is important."

"What is the next step if it passes? Is there a strategic plan?"

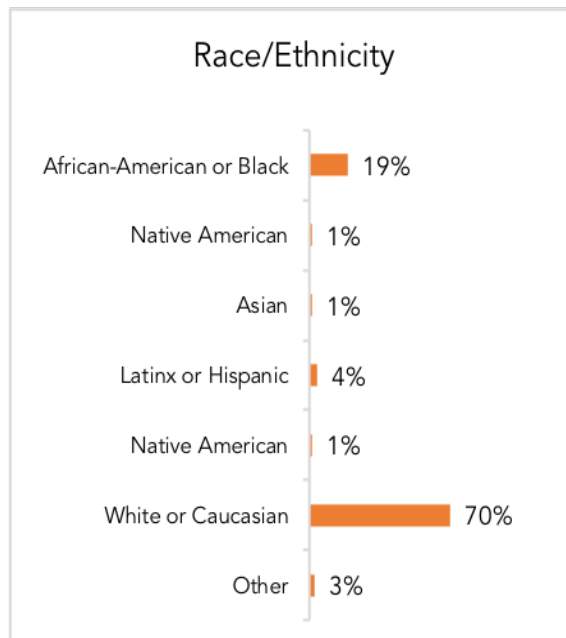
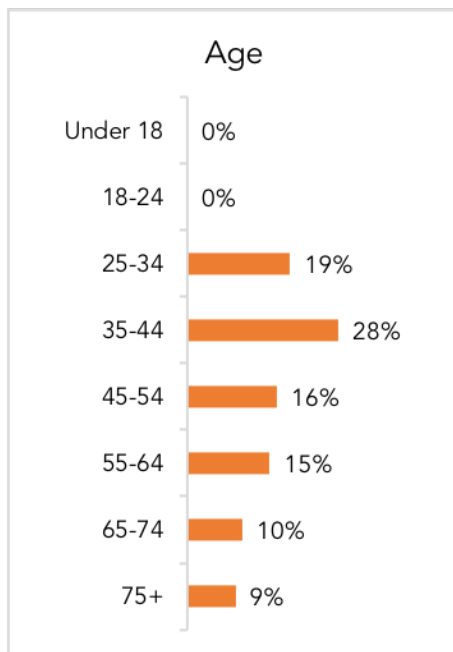
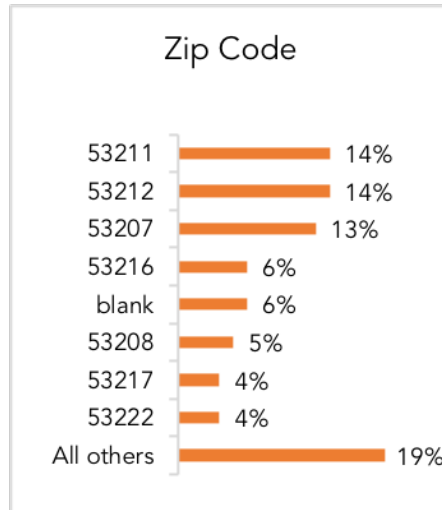
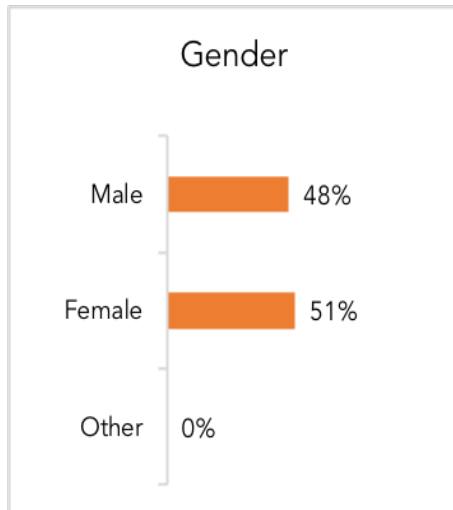
"What would help is having a plan from the district itself. What does MPS intend to do?"

3.10 Parting Words

Overall, participants left the event expressing positive words while acknowledging the challenges that lay ahead of the MPS referendum.

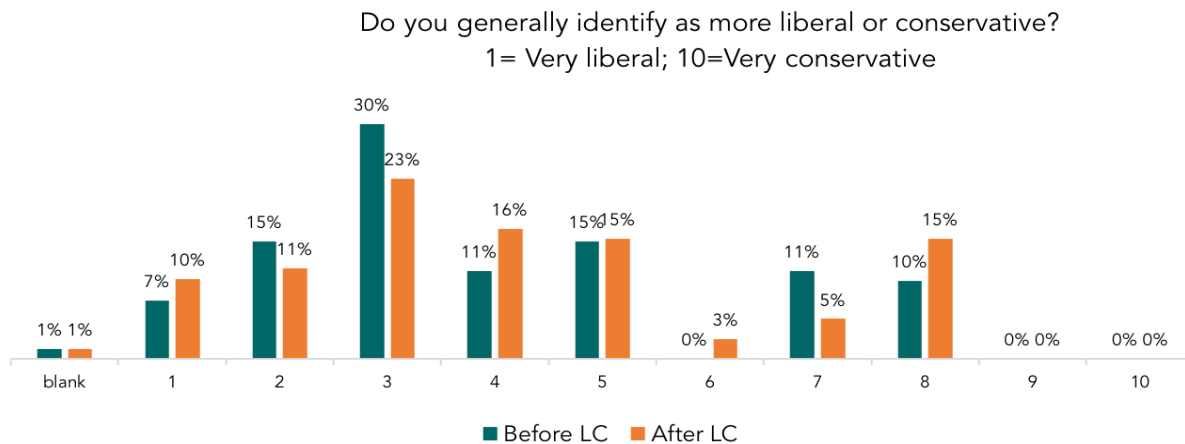
Quantitative Data

Demographics



Participants' Quality of Experience	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
Location of the event	1.30%	1.30%	6.49%	12.99%	77.92%
Large Group Presentation, Event content	0.00%	0.00%	3.95%	13.16%	82.89%
Small Group Facilitation, Role of the facilitator	0.00%	0.00%	2.60%	5.19%	92.21%
Your overall experience	0.00%	0.00%	1.30%	5.19%	93.51%

Generally, participants of the dialogue skewed towards a liberal persuasion:



Question Round One: *"What's a personal experience in your life that has impacted your position on the MPS referendum?"***1.1. Personal experience as educators**

- Through my work, I've seen how school can be a stabilizing force for students, new opportunities, role models. The more we can do to support MPS, the better we all are.
- I serve as a teacher. To have the privilege to serve and work with children and have an impact regardless of where they come from. We need to make it happen in MPS, we're going to make it happen. That's what we do.
- I have yet to form a position on the referendum. I've worked in the district for years, in both voucher and charter schools. Creates questions for me ... I think the district does need more money. What impacts my ability to take a position is wanting to know the strategy for that money. How will that money be used will really help me form an opinion
- I am in MPS and experience a lot of tension in 1993 between teachers and administrators over poor pay and the expectation that the teacher be a social worker, substitute parent and more.
- I have taught in River-west neighborhood for over 30 years, and I have a lot of connections to schools. I have also seen a number of school programs diminish because they didn't have a teacher. So, I say to myself, if these children were in a different zip code, they would be having a full-time teacher for music, mathematics etc. I also think that we need to make efforts to understand and support these learners, for they are disadvantaged. Some will tell you they missed class because they had to take care of their siblings so that their mothers can do some work somewhere. These facts affect my position on the MPS referendum.
- My personal involvement in education has basically been in private schools as a parent and now as a headteacher. I have my daughters still in school, and what frustrates me in being part of a choice school, is the education funding structure. We really want to educate our children in the best way we can, but this structure is just crazy. It is even embarrassing that MPS has to ask for money to improve education. My position is, although I want to give the system more money, I don't know if it is going to get them better education.
- I teach at University of Wisconsin Park side, which is my connection to the education system. We often get a crisis in Mathematics and medical courses because there are just a few students graduating from high school that qualify to take up these courses in universities. I work in the department of science, and public schools are behind. In private schools, parents can drive their children to do sciences because that's where better jobs could be, you may not want to do that in public schools. I am therefore wondering why are we stuck on just property tax? If government can fund military, why not public schools. Public schools need government support.
- I am here to learn other views. I moved here to Milwaukee in 2018 from Iowa. I worked in a school system there with different demographics, but similar in that we had a very high rate of students receiving free and reduced lunches. Our funding for that came from the United Way. I saw benefits from increased funding in many areas. I don't exactly understand budgets, but I see the benefits of having counseling, school nurses, healthcare, etc. that impact students' lives.
- I was just looking over the MPS Referendum Fact Sheet and they mention things like: attract and retain good teachers, expanding tech programs and the arts. I just recently left the MPS district and I have seen what is NOT going on right now. I am supporting the Referendum. Regarding training of electricians and plumbers and offering the arts, I am not sure why that is going away. I worked at Roosevelt and they lost their band and choir and the school became a dropping ground for troubled students. The words "Career and Technical School" are built into the names of schools, but they are not really offering the curriculum because they don't have the skilled teachers.
- I have a personally intimate history working on campaigns for school board directors. In that role I got to listen to parents', educators', and administrators' frustrations to 'do more with less'. I heard and saw so much passion. I was so closely involved and privy to different perspectives.
- I am an artist educator in the MPS system and directly work with MPS kids. All the children I've worked with have similar visions no matter the school, where they reside, what they look like, etc. I think kids need to see success for their visions of themselves.
- I am in between on this issue. I did not grow up here. I work in education with non-profits raising funds for schools. I have experienced all three sectors: public, charter and choice. I know how funding impacts schools. As a fund raiser, I want to see more emphasis on output and outcomes. I don't see this in this referendum. I would like to see more transparency in what is really happening in the budget. This is a great opportunity for new outcomes, but I understand it is very hard.
- I have worked in both Milwaukee Public Schools and Suburban Districts and I see a different level of support and commitment from the community. Leadership, and parents.
- "I used to teach art at one of the Milwaukee Public Schools and witnessed how, when programs are cut and not reinstated, how it affects the students in particular [art, fulltime librarian, etc.].
- I am a retired teacher. I worked in suburban schools. For the last several years I have been a docent for school tours at the Milwaukee Art Museum. I also tutor 4th and 5th graders in an MPS school. So, I am able to compare MPS to suburban schools. I think suburban legislators should spend a day in an MPS school.
- I am a retired MPS paraprofessional in special ed. I have worked in early childhood and middle school. My children went to MPS. I see the whole issue as composed of property tax issues, parent issues, and administration issues.
- I am a city employee living in the city. I started school in Milwaukee as a child but then we moved to the suburbs. I always wished I had gone to the French Emersion Specialty school instead of my suburban school where I was taken as white though I am a first-generation child of parents from Turkey. I see great value in the arts in schools. When the budget cuts came to MPS and the arts were cut that was cutting essentials for a well-rounded child. I am committed to this city.
- I have been involved with ____ (an urban Voucher School) for the past 6 years, so my personal experience is from this professional vantage point. Our school needed more space and we approached MPS with an offer to purchase a nearby MPS vacant school building that we thought would meet our needs. MPS refused to sell one of their empty buildings to our school; instead, MPS spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to renovate the building that we wanted to buy for an MPS Middle School, which is now only 53% occupied, with reading and math scores in the 7% to 9% range. There are 15 MPS schools in our specific zip code area, which included 93% of students of African American heritage, and they are all functioning way below state guidelines. 22,000 of these students are reading at 1/5 grade level. At our school, which also has a large percentage of African American students, 87% of these students are reading at grade level. I want to know

what makes the difference. I cannot support a referendum when School Board members and Administrators continue to support such shoddy policies. It would be like throwing good money after bad.

- I have spent my adult life working in education, in public schools in urban settings, and with Teach for America. I have always loved teaching. After some years, I returned to the University to earn my Master's Degree and then my Doctoral Degree, both in Educational Leadership. I have worked with schools in states as distant as New York and California, and a number of states in between. In each of these places I explore how school systems are engaged in Best Practices to benefit its teachers and its students. I have found some really great schools and I also have found some very troublesome schools. MPS falls into the troublesome school category. MPS has a challenge with red tape; principals do not have the professional authority to either hire good teachers, nor fire their ineffective teachers. These Administrators and School Board Members also do not seem to invest in human capital; top performing teachers are retiring while new teachers, often young teachers, are assigned to the most challenging classrooms in the most challenging schools, often with very little support. Another challenge is that the funding sources do not help address the great poverty needs of students in MPS. Further, parents can more easily find information about good and bad restaurants on YELP than they can find out anything about a good or bad school. MPS needs to do much more to assist good teachers so that they can have good schools. I believe in School Referendums, and have always supported them; I have not yet made a decision about whether to support this upcoming MPS Referendum.
- I work as a fundraiser for a private school; further, I am a data nerd. I see the data regarding MPS students' low test scores in Math and Reading. I also see that while many MPS students may excel in sports, their academic scores are very poor. Further, enrollment is not steady; there is an increase during Middle School years, and then a great drop off as students enter 10th grade. There are also cultural issues that shape how well students do or do not succeed in schools. Lastly, there are really good schools, such as Vincent High School, which has reestablished itself as an urban agricultural school. This school attracts, and retains quality students and quality teachers. There is a level of trust among teachers and staff and students, so that students feel safe. I am aware of the challenges XXX mentioned with his school and MPS administration and the School Board. The alumni from our school (a private charter school) often enroll in MPS High Schools. However, many of them transfer out to private high schools because of the poor quality of education that they experience in the MPS system. There certainly does need to be a higher level of trust between taxpayers and the MPS School District before some can support this referendum. I still support the Referendum, especially if it directs funds to programs such as the Agriculture Program at Vincent, as well as arts programs, and trades, as well as college prep schools.
- My personal experience impacts my interest in the referendum. I went to UWM for education to teach grades first through ninth. I did my student teaching in Milwaukee Public Schools and met lots of well-meaning people that later moved out of the city and joined public works. I saw this situation from a different lens in that position. How do we use the \$87 million dollars? Is it for rebuilding? Are their current challenges with the budgeting? Is this a positive thing for local investors and business owners like me in that it will attract more people to our city? Is it a negative thing for the bottom line in that it will take money away from my company in the form of taxpayers' dollars? I guess it is a bit of a double-edged sword. I guess you cannot always know what will happen until you do it.
- I have been working for MPS for 30 years. As a teacher I thought it was great. But now as an administrator for 20 years and seeing how much we have had to give up, it literally has been traumatizing. It really is affecting me to my core. I have relatives who live in Florida, and they don't go through what we do. It's crazy what we're putting up with. We don't have music, art, phys ed. I grew up in the Virgin Islands where we had music, art phy ed. We didn't even think about it. Here we have to fight for everything.
- I taught at La Causa charter school for three years, a non-instrumentality charter school, so what you said resonated a lot with me. I feel torn by this. But if I were still teaching there today, my students would not benefit from this (if the referendum passes). I'm also thinking about the tax burden. It's hard for me to reconcile.
- I know the importance of education as I had the opportunity to use mine for over 40 years to teach. My daughter teaches for MPS, she is dedicated and works after hours to get done what is needed so I share where the money is needed, and I think it's crucial for education.
- I am a product of MPS. I went to college and I now work in the district where I incorporate my personal experience in my work.
- I am a product, mother and teacher in the district. To learn more about the referendum and then give my opinion as to it being the best for MPS.
- I attended and worked in schools with financial needs for supplies, etc. and I think the referendum is important, but I think about the burden on others with the taxes being raised.

1.2 Personal connections to educators

- I favor this referendum. We had four children in MPS - they are all adults now - and we were and are happy with the results. They had an excellent education, I remember at Roosevelt they were enhanced by the arts and music programs. They graduated high school in the 1990s. In the last years, with the increase in growth of poverty, it is therefore in my view ever more important to support students. My wife worked in MPS serving special needs students. That has impacted how we see the value of MPS. And let me add that teachers get a bad rap that is not fair. There are far greater challenges now for teachers. In summary, I want to see MPS continue. It is an incredible resource
- I feel strongly for the referendum because my mom was an MPS school teacher. I was 1 of 6 children educated in the MPS education system and 2 of us had learning disabilities. My family was on welfare before my mom got her teaching position. I believe the pathway provided to my family by MPS was life-giving. I do not see the same programs I had currently in the system
- I am not a Milwaukee native so the idea of school choice is new to me. I grew up and was educated in Ohio's public education system and my mother was an educator. I understand the value of teachers and the value of an education. I have been a Big Sister to an MPS student for 5 years now.
- I am a mom to 2 kids, not currently in the MPS system, and I am a wife to an MPS primary educator. I can't help but compare and contrast the experiences of my husband's students to my own kid's student experiences - I hear differences in the class sizes, extracurriculars offered, art and language and music courses offered, AP courses offered, and more. I believe every child should have these fundamentally, they are not extra or add-ons
- I know the importance of education as I had the opportunity to use mine for over 40 years to teach. My daughter teaches for MPS, she is dedicated and works after hours to get done what is needed so I share where the money is needed, and I think it's crucial for education.
- My wife is an ex educator and I have two daughters so I have listened to their stories about the needs of MPS and I think the referendum would be for the best.

1.3 Graduates of MPS

- MPS alumni parent and that informs my views. My sons attend charters. They graduated being really good people. My kids learned a lot in MPS, even beyond the classroom. I prefer an educated populous. Milwaukee should aim to have a majority of middle class that expresses the diversity of this city.
- I've been an MPS student. From a socio-economic diverse school. I see disparity between schools in MPS. I get to interact with high school students in my work. I see how the resource scarcity impacts students. Gives me a lot of concern.
- I am a student from the MPS and my parents were students from the MPS and we live at the poverty line. Improved education provides for social mobility. More people like me should be included in conversations about more education funding. It should be about getting people out of poverty and into higher paying jobs. I want to know if this increase in funding will result in increased high school graduation rates and going on to college and an increase in social mobility. It is definitely a good idea to allow more things to be done.
- I am an MPS alum and whenever I share this with others in my life the reaction is typically always negative and poorly received but for me this was a very positive experience.
- I feel strongly for the referendum because my mom was an MPS school teacher. I was 1 of 6 children educated in the MPS education system and 2 of us had learning disabilities. My family was on welfare before my mom got her teaching position. I believe the pathway provided to my family by MPS was life-giving. I do not see the same programs I had currently in the system.
- I am a product of Milwaukee Public Schools [Roosevelt Intermediate] and I traveled with sports teams and forensic / debating squads to different parts of the state of Wisconsin and witnessed the disparity in, funding [facilities and accouterments] these experiences helped to shape my life and help make me the person I am today.
- I'm an MPS grad – I moved to Milwaukee at 5 years old. I'm really proud of being an MPS grad. I'm 44 so I entered in the 80s at the back end of white flight. My parents were committed (to public school) so that seeped into me. I went to Roosevelt and King and felt well-prepared for college. I've had a positive personal connection about MPS for many years. Lately, though I've felt like it (MPS) was under attack. My daughter goes to Golda Meier. Her supposedly smaller class has 28 students. That's crazy.
- I am a product of MPS. I went to college and I now work in the district where I incorporate my personal experience in my work.
- I am a product, mother and teacher in the district. To learn more about the referendum and then give my opinion as to it being the best for MPS.

1.4 Parents of MPS students

- MPS alumni parent and that informs my views. My sons attend charters. They graduated being really good people. My kids learned a lot in MPS, even beyond the classroom. I prefer an educated populous. Milwaukee should aim to have a majority of middle class that expresses the diversity of this city
- Our children went to MPS, started in arts-based education. One of my largest disappointments. They are in college now. That type of education puts everyone on an equal playing field. My son's best friend has autism didn't matter. Now the arts are disappearing and that's very disappointing. Their arts teacher in HS did everything with his whole heart. There is hope for MPS to continue to grow and return these programs
- A personal experience with how I feel about the referendum...our school district will or won't model society based on the resources we have. It's going to suffer. If we have a society that's not educated, we have more health issues, violence etc. I don't want to grow old in a city that I'm afraid to go outside. As a parent of two kids in MPS, I've always looked for diverse MPS schools. I didn't want them to be in any area where all the people are the same
- I favor this referendum. We had four children in MPS - they are all adults now - and we were and are happy with the results. They had an excellent education, I remember at Roosevelt they were enhanced by the arts and music programs. They graduated high school in the 1990s. In the last years, with the increase in growth of poverty, it is therefore in my view ever more important to support students. My wife worked in MPS serving special needs students. That has impacted how we see the value of MPS. And let me add that teachers get a bad rap that is not fair. There are far greater challenges now for teachers. In summary, I want to see MPS continue. It is an incredible resource.
- I am a retired MPS paraprofessional in special ed. I have worked in early childhood and middle school. My children went to MPS. I see the whole issue as composed of property tax issues, parent issues, and administration issues.
- We started our children in MPS but then moved to South Bend, Indiana. Our children went to public schools there. The issues are the same in urban areas: Poverty and People of Color linked together. I served on the school board there. The children are very challenged. I see privatization of education as a loss of revenue and general support for public education. MKE needs funding and it is a wide spread issue – the need is to fund a first class education.
- I have five children all of whom were or are homeschooled. Our oldest is in an MPS IB charter school. I support parental choice. We chose to live in the city. When we moved to our neighborhood our neighbors sent their children to the public schools. But when the residency requirement changed they all moved away – because they wanted better schools for their children. Then people would ask us why we were still here. Were we coerced into staying? No, I believe a well-funded public school is essential to keep people in the city. My hope for the referendum is that the money will go to individual schools not just stay in the bureaucracy.
- We lived in Canada and my son's first week in school we received a note from his teacher that there was an influx of students and so they had to open a new classroom and hire new teachers. And I thought wow, in MPS they just keep adding more and more students. When we moved back (to Milwaukee) we ended up leaving MPS and coming to the Indian Community School, where there's a limit of 11 students per class.
- I'm an MPS grad – I moved to Milwaukee at 5 years old. I'm really proud of being an MPS grad. I'm 44 so I entered in the 80s at the back end of white flight. My parents were committed (to public school) so that seeped into me. I went to Roosevelt and King and felt well-prepared for college. I've had a positive personal connection about MPS for many years. Lately, though I've felt like it (MPS) was under attack. My daughter goes to Golda Meier. Her supposedly smaller class has 28 students. That's crazy
- My granddaughter is disabled and there are many expenses such as transportation, teacher, and teacher's aide along with the other personal interaction needed for her education. Many students in MPS have special needs and I feel the funding is necessary.
- I am a product, mother and teacher in the district. To learn more about the referendum and then give my opinion as to it being the best for MPS.

1.5 Public education experience

- I am a proud graduate from a public school, and a taxpayer. I come from one of the most disadvantaged zip codes in the state, so this topic is of utmost importance to me and to my people. That affects my position on this referendum.
- I am not a Milwaukee native, so the idea of school choice is new to me. I grew up and was educated in Ohio's public education system and my mother was an educator. I understand the value of teachers and the value of an education. I have been a Big Sister to an MPS student for 5 years now.
- We started our children in MPS but then moved to South Bend, Indiana. Our children went to public schools there. The issues are the same in urban areas: Poverty and People of Color linked together. I served on the school board there. The children are very challenged. I see privatization of education as a loss of revenue and general support for public education. MKE needs funding and it is a wide spread issue – the need is to fund a first class education.
- I am a city employee living in the city. I started school in Milwaukee as a child but then we moved to the suburbs. I always wished I had gone to the French Emersion Specialty school instead of my suburban school where I was taken as white though I am a first-generation child of parents from Turkey. I see great value in the arts in schools. When the budget cuts came to MPS and the arts were cut that was cutting essentials for a well-rounded child. I am committed to this city.
- I don't know a lot about the public schools here as a recent transplant. I went to public schools in Iowa and got a great education. I have no children but do own property. I am aware that different places have different levels of taxation. I know Rhode Island has low taxes. I like the public option but we need a good revenue stream.
- I have spent my adult life working in education, in public schools in urban settings, and with Teach for America. I have always loved teaching. After some years, I returned to the University to earn my Master's Degree and then my Doctoral Degree, both in Educational Leadership. I have worked with schools in states as distant as New York and California, and a number of states in between. In each of these places I explore how school systems are engaged in Best Practices to benefit its teachers and its students. I have found some really great schools and I also have found some very troublesome schools. MPS falls into the troublesome school category. MPS has a challenge with red tape; principals do not have the professional authority to either hire good teachers, nor fire their ineffective teachers. These Administrators and School Board Members also do not seem to invest in human capital; top performing teachers are retiring while new teachers, often young teachers, are assigned to the most challenging classrooms in the most challenging schools, often with very little support. Another challenge is that the funding sources do not help address the great poverty needs of students in MPS. Further, parents can more easily find information about good and bad restaurants on YELP than they can find out anything about a good or bad school. MPS needs to do much more to assist good teachers so that they can have good schools. I believe in School Referendums, and have always supported them; I have not yet made a decision about whether to support this upcoming MPS Referendum.
- I went to Chicago Public Schools in the 1950s, then Lincolnwood (very much like Nicolet) I raised my 2 daughters in Fox Point, Bayside, and I've never seen anything but well-funded schools. I have an idea for a fourth school system. We have public, private, and home-schooled systems now. In the Chicago Public School system there were some kids who just left halfway through the day for catechism class. Would that idea work? Maybe a state-funded system where some kids would leave early and go to something different, like a language class or learning to fence or something else that was of interest to students.
- I'm an MPS grad – I moved to Milwaukee at 5 years old. I'm really proud of being an MPS grad. I'm 44 so I entered in the 80s at the back end of white flight. My parents were committed (to public school) so that seeped into me. I went to Roosevelt and King and felt well-prepared for college. I've had a positive personal connection about MPS for many years. Lately, though I've felt like it (MPS) was under attack. My daughter goes to Golda Meier. Her supposedly smaller class has 28 students. That's crazy.

1.6 Desire to learn more about MPS referendum

- I am here basically to listen because I am currently not a property taxpayer. I would however want to point out the fundamentals that make education important. I also grew up in a disadvantaged family, but now I have a good profession. What I want to say is that of recent, the class environment is so abysmal, and the quality of education is simply abysmal.
- I still have questions, even though the panelist, provided comprehensive information. I too am a home owner and the immediate impact would affect my tax situation.
- I am new to Milwaukee, and therefore new to understanding how the MPS system functions. I have lived in a lot of states and even several other countries, and our children, now all adults with families of their own, have attended both public schools and private schools in these various locations. Our children had effective teachers, even outstanding teachers, as well as some who were not so effective. The challenge for parents is striving to connect good teachers with our children's needs. I do not know which schools do well, or why, or what is the best manner in which MPS can proceed. I am new to Milwaukee and MPS, and I am still undecided about the Referendum. I will have to do more research.
- I am a Catholic Sister, as a religious I do not own any property in the city of Milwaukee. I do not pay any income tax, but I do pay sales tax. So even though I do not pay a lot of taxes, I still want to understand all that I can about the referendum and ways I can support it.
- So, I think there are a lot of things we need to consider. A lot of the students coming into MPS come with a lot of trauma. This referendum means that we are going to be able to meet their needs better. When I was a student, it used to be about coming to school, sitting down, and learning. Now, it is really about meeting students' physical and emotional needs, and MPS is not currently able to meet those needs for our students. MPS also need to do more to support our new teachers who are coming in, to avoid burnout. I came here wanting to hear what others were talking about. I have lived in the city of Milwaukee for a long time and I would like to continue investing in the city.

Other comments

- I see kids who aren't getting attention who need to be at the top of the list.
- I get into schools and just think they are not getting a good education.
- I get upset when I see how important programs like music and art are getting cut. I get furious that kids don't get that experience.
- I keep reading about state salary increase and I thought that was of help. There is a lot that is confusing. Anyway, my position is, I want to give students more money, but I don't know if it is going to translate into better education
- I come from a refugee family from Laos and from a lot of trauma. I struggled a lot and needed extra help. From 3rd to 5th grade I felt isolated. Then I received good support at the school. That school is closed down now and I don't know if there is a program to help students heal from trauma. I think it is very important. It is only me in my family that went on to get a higher education. The others work in factories and have low pay. It takes them much longer to be able to pay to get a house and to have a family. Education opens eyes to more than is

possible, how to do more for themselves. I am a mom with three kids now and going back to school for a master's degree. My kids are in Catholic schools because they meet their needs better than the public schools

- My background is a little different in both public and private. When I went to school my vision was to do well in school and continue to learn and to do better. One example in my family is that my father grew up in a rural community with no electricity. The main thing he said made a difference in his life was when they brought in electricity. The world has changed a lot. Right now, why is it so hard for me to find skilled people like plumbers and electricians to do jobs? MPS is not preparing students for jobs. I hope that when we put more dollars into MPS it's not going to go down the rabbit hole
- I have nothing personal that I experienced to impact my position. Maybe my parents paying taxes. My daughter did not go to MPS schools.
- I am not from Milwaukee. I have no personal experience. I am still getting to know Milwaukee.
- I have been away from Milwaukee for 15 years. I recently came back and bought a house in Milwaukee and intend to send my son to an MPS school. MPS does not have a good reputation. We still want to send our son to an MPS school.
- The referendum impacts me personally, because I am a home owner and reside in an area that has a higher property value assessment, I am retired, live on of fixed income and now that my children are no longer a part of my tax situation [right off/exemption] the impact is greater."
- During an internship at Robert W. Baird I worked on a team that assisted MPS with procuring funding to expand educational funding for the district
- I want the MPS School Board and Administrators to show sincerity in terms of their use and upkeep of facilities; the performance of students; the manner in which they manage their budget; and their openness with concerned citizens who ask informed questions. I attend a lot of School Board Meetings as a member of ____ (a local business organization). The data from my research does not seem to match what I hear at these Board meetings. From my perspective, I think that MPS fails in all of these areas.
- I am both a homeowner and a taxpayer. I am also single, so I do not yet have children in any school. My thoughts come from memories of my own childhood. I spent hours every week in the library, both the libraries at my schools and in public libraries. MPS has 30 libraries, and most are not open, or if open, not fully staffed. Literacy rates, as several have mentioned, are very low; access to quality books is essential for helping children learn to read and enjoy reading. This MPS Referendum includes funding to increase and improve school libraries, hire more librarians, stock libraries with quality books and other resources, and support teachers in this process. I support the MPS Referendum and trust that administrators will spend the money for libraries, as they promise.
- I have been in Milwaukee about 1.5 years, after having a professional career in different parts of Wisconsin, including Sauk County, Merrill and Wausau. I worked on a number of unsuccessful and successful school referendums. I have got some real biases as to what a paying community should be spending their money on.
- I grew up in Milwaukee and relocated to Brookfield in the 80's and then moved back to Milwaukee due to the desire to support educational equality. We, my husband and I, are interested in this event because we would like to see the MPS school system become better. I am very concerned regarding some of the information I heard and how we are spending our tax dollars. I do believe the city is doing better now than it was before, but I want to see how this shakes out with the referendum. Where are we going to send our kids for school? This is a point of interest in our family.
- I want all kids to have a fuller education. My daughters school currently only has a librarian at her school one day per week. As a librarian myself, that is truly heartbreaking. We want to build readers, writers and thinkers. We are equipping young people with the skills for the rest of their lives. I know that taxpayers are not really in a position to pay a lot more, but this is so important.

Question Round Two: "What should MPS do to improve outcomes for students? Does that necessarily include additional funding? If so, what do you think additional funding should go to support?"

2.1 Focus on teachers

- It's important to attract teachers and staff so they can become role models. Individual people can make a huge difference.
- Improving outcomes is directly linked to whether you have highly qualified teachers. The district needs to attract, retain and develop. I'm an educator. And I was also developed at MPS. Someone came to my classroom and helped me deliver on my professional development. That piece might be missing now in MPS. Teachers need support people. We have to start with teachers.
- I talk with teachers who think the administration just doesn't care.
- Teachers need incentives, higher salaries and sense of support.
- I think that most of what requires improvement has been mentioned. But about good-quality teachers that are satisfied and licensed, most of those I know of have left District schools to others places like Waukesha for better pay. So, I think increasing teachers' salaries is also crucial in improving the quality of education. There may also be several people that are exhausted and need attention. I know of teachers that are going through some sort of trauma, poverty, divorce and addictions and they just need help. So, both teachers and kids need support and it calls for money.
- I think investing time and money into teaching the teachers is intimately connected to student outcomes. Providing the teachers equity training or cultural competency training is valuable. I also support funding the arts, the languages, the extracurriculars, the sports, etc. in addition to investing in educators.
- I support the referendum. I think additional funding for the teachers and staff is necessary because they are worth it. My MPS experience in one word is diversity and I view it as a positive experience. I think poverty is a core issue for other issues in the larger community like crime and safety. I think funding for life skills such as home economics would be beneficial because I personally have a very memorable experience of learning to write a check in one of my high school classes. I also think funding recreational trips outside of Milwaukee is an irreplaceable opportunity to expose students to other experiences and perspectives. I also think parental outreach and student internships in high school are potential areas for funding, too.
- Teachers are the most important factor in schools. A single teacher can make a huge impact on students' lives. I know my 5th grade teacher made a huge impact on my life. MPS needs to invest in management and teachers just like the private sector invests heavily in supporting and retaining their top producers and managers. MPS needs to make sure they have great teachers. After school programs are great. Nurses and mental health workers are so important. What complicated issues students bring to school from their families can't all be on the shoulders of teachers. They need help so they can do their job and teach.
- In my estimation the additional money should be earmarked/directed to "quality teachers" and retaining them.

- My thoughts would be to recruit and retain high caliber teachers and continue their professional development, which would have an almost immediate impact.
- Hiring and supplying teachers is important. They need continuing education. They need classroom support. They need to improve the quality of teaching and the environment (classroom culture) created by the teachers.
- We are going to need funds so we can keep staff. Health care benefits were one reason we were attractive. You don't need money to teach children to read. You need good teachers. What should we do with the money? Restore what public education was established to do in this country. Schools shape our community and society.
- I think the funding should be used to increase teachers' pay as to attract the best in the field and there is a need for top level principals so they can set the standard of successful outcomes.
- I think there needs to be a thoughtful approach with teachers and leadership guiding and contributing with the in-put. The funding should also be used for the professional development of teachers and trainings, trainings so the best teachers are attracted. There's so much trauma, social and emotional suffering that must be addressed and a need for training in these areas in order to see improvement in academics. I think there should be more training offered at the University level beyond on the job training with the seasoned mentors.
- I work for an organization who helps low income students as they prepare to go off to college and we're always wondering how we can support the district in a better way. I enjoyed my time as a student with MPS personally so it is challenging for me to say what can be done for improvement. I do think there needs to be an investment for the teachers surrounding Trauma Informed Care and I think there should be more community programming engaging with the families.

2.2 Focus on specific and additional programming

- I think we need to put more money into programs for those with disabilities.
- We need to put the money into early childhood education.
- Art and music programs are crucial.
- There should be a focus on commercial, business and finance learning, not through the eyes of the computer. Teach about safety. What about working in shops, bakeries, farms and on water issues? It's all around us. MPS should help kids to feel confident. I love the arts and museums and seeing kids be creative and helping each other in class. It is important to morale. Tomorrow's graduates will come out of high school and look forward to their future. They will be better able to solve problems. I hope we see exciting results
- I agree that curriculum is very important. I am sorry to hear that music programs were eliminated. Arts help develop the whole person. I also agree that parental involvement is very important. My wife and daughter have been social workers in MPS. In homes where they are very poor there often are no books, but the TV is on all the time. Parental help with homework is crucial. Students on the margins, including immigrants, have many needs. MPS has to deal with increasingly larger numbers of needs.
- I think investing time and money into teaching the teachers is intimately connected to student outcomes. Providing the teachers equity training or cultural competency training is valuable. I also support funding the arts, the languages, the extracurriculars, the sports, etc. in addition to investing in educators.
- I would suggest a major improvement in after school programs that target students' interest. I would suggest more opportunities in technology like working with students to create an App. I think more opportunities would be helpful in focusing on the trades and developing skill sets like in culinary arts and food catering. This would more readily enhance relationships with students and teachers which would give kids a purpose for learning. It would be important to give time to develop these relationships. "As my father always said, "You have to understand the why behind what you do." I would like to see a collection of schools work together to offer these programs.
- I agree with all that has been said. I agree with importance of after school programs, mental health and getting students interested in something.
- I heard a report on NPR about MPS needing additional money. MPS has no music. The basics of social studies, math, science are improved if the child has music. Music brings a discipline in the practice even more than homework.
- It has been shown that the arts improve learning. I have tutored a 6th grader who started in MPS, went to a parochial school from grades 2 till 5 and came back to MPS not reading at what I consider a 2nd grade level. This is because of lack of phonics and is now being addressed. These children benefit from one on one help in tutoring situations. I tried a list of sight words also. I was not able to follow what happened later.
- I hope the funding can be put to good use. There is so much bureaucracy. I was in a fourth grade class and the clock was a bit off. I volunteered to climb up and fix it and was told, "Oh no, we have someone to fix that. I just have to fill out this form." Several weeks later it was fixed.
- I do think arts funding is important.
- Much depends on the culture of the school that is set by the administration. A good professional administrator can be a support to the teachers and be present to the children. Teachers need support for discipline but also because of the special needs that students have such as a teenager with no home. And arts are a help. After school activities in debate, plays helps the attitude problem and attendance as the youth want to be a part of the activities. Funding these in public schools with high poverty is important as middle class parent shave the means to supply these but not those in poverty. This is not to be seen as extra but as important as social studies, math and science. My children went to a magnet school not a neighborhood school. It was a boon for them as high school graduates as they had friends of a diverse background. At college they missed that mix.
- I totally agree with what everyone has been saying. The question of equity is also important. I know the classroom size is a challenge in MPS. I have four sons- four kids actually- and I remember one of my son's class had 44 kids in his sixth grade. He was the type of kid who would say, "Yes Dad, I do whatever the teacher says." He was fine, but how do we really support kids with the needs that they have? Do we need people to be more trauma- informed? Do we need more restorative practices? I think that we need to have more art, gym, and after school clubs and sports, because those are the things that really get kids showing up for school. Creating a sense of excitement to come to school is very important.
- One thing I hear that was communicated is there needs to be a clear plan. I've been trying to find out whether this would solve the problem of funding art and music. But does that mean some schools will and some won't (get art and music)? All I've heard is well, we'll make the plan after the referendum passes.

- I think additional funding should be put towards arts, sciences, sports and activities for the students. I also think that it should fund a psychiatrist for the teachers.
- I think there is a need for more funding in Early Childhood Development and I say yes to fund for Arts, dance and music.

2.3 Multiple areas of focus

- It took me forever to write on this because it's a big problem that we're trying to solve. Some things that come to mind, to shrink the workload of teachers and leaders. They're asked to do many things. They should departmentalize, even in the elementary school. Allow teachers to get specialized in content. Focus on the mental health of both adults and students in the building. Bring partners who can help with mental health. Teacher preparation, especially for teachers who aren't prepared and need to be sustained through the hard work and not burn out. We could direct funding toward these things so the work isn't overwhelming for people
- I think continuing to provide art and sports for students so they can find success. Behavioral health and quality lunches. A lot of what they eat is disgusting. Smaller class sizes. Look at a longer year to have longer options. Looking at other year-round programs. Get newer furniture and computers. Opportunities for small group discussions. Class sizes are crazy and classes aren't designed for so many students. Funding and implementing schools that work. Attracting and retaining the best teachers. Base salary for a first year teacher — Tosa is going to pay a friend \$10,000 more than MPS.
- When I look at improving outcomes, I do feel overwhelmed by that questions. We need to meet the needs of students today. So, they can have sustainable lives. Social workers at schools. Having access to the arts. We need to fund all those services like special ed, ESL etc. Funding all those pieces. Those structures are complicated. Working in a large system like MPS, it's a complicated piece. Additional funding is important
- I can't be defensive about outcomes. It is very surprising how some students graduate from schools and they can't even read or write. I then wonder how they go through the system. I think we avoid calling it quality. About what outcomes should improve, let schools hire well qualified teachers and let them not just follow templates. But I also think that there are things schools can do and those they may not be able to. Like a whole rounded person, no. Let them focus on what they can improve upon and do best
- Focus needs to be to continue working on the margins: ESL, special needs, those in poverty. Increase the community-based partnerships, such as with universities, policy groups, and hospitals. There should be augmentation of primary, secondary and tertiary supports, including in health, nurses and counselors. I was an immigrant from a Latin American country and undocumented for a time. I was given opportunities in music and arts. My last observation in 2017 was that those counselors were not equipped to help students who were immigrants and needing to learn another language. And their parents could also not access the right persons/experts to help, even though there supposedly was such a resource.
- I think more funding is needed. I feel strongly for funding after-school and summertime programming. Also, facilities because my MPS grade school was 100+ years old and when temperatures rose this affected learning. Growing up, my family was poor and in the summertime I felt the impact of not being fed because I was not in school. I also think funding to retain quality school teachers is necessary and requires spending money
- I support the referendum. I think additional funding for the teachers and staff is necessary because they are worth it. My MPS experience in one word is diversity and I view it as a positive experience. I think poverty is a core issue for other issues in the larger community like crime and safety. I think funding for life skills such as home economics would be beneficial because I personally have a very memorable experience of learning to write a check in one of my high school classes. I also think funding recreational trips outside of Milwaukee is an irreplaceable opportunity to expose students to other experiences and perspectives. I also think parental outreach and student internships in high school are potential areas for funding, too.
- Teachers are the most important factor in schools. A single teacher can make a huge impact on students' lives. I know my 5th grade teacher made a huge impact on my life. MPS needs to invest in management and teachers just like the private sector invests heavily in supporting and retaining their top producers and managers. MPS needs to make sure they have great teachers. After school programs are great. Nurses and mental health workers are so important. What complicated issues students bring to school from their families can't all be on the shoulders of teachers. They need help so they can do their job and teach.
- A change should be instituted with respect to focusing in on low cost solutions and streamlining operations and placing more emphasis on providing support for teachers and technology.
- To improve outcomes more funding is needed along with better utilization of existing resources. MPS enrollment has shrunk but costs have not shrunk. It has to be seen if the referendum will work. MPS needs to get to the right size. There needs to be empowerment of the local school. There is a disconnection from the local community with bussing across the city. It is hard for the community to connect to the school. I support more money for MPS if the money goes to neighborhood schools.
- I have worked as an educator for all of my adult life. I study the schools in USA with Best Practices. Money is surely a part of what makes for best schools. However, so is human capital, human talent. The schools with Best Practices put their emphasis on teachers and the students and the quality of the services that we provide to these students. In my opinion, MPS continues to send students to schools that are and have been continuously failing schools. Many have declining school populations. Parents face real challenges in seeking to find good quality schools for their children. It is easier to find top-rated Air B&B's than to find rankings for MPS Public Schools. There is another issue, too; many school buildings are under capacity, and too many are old and dilapidated, too. I want the School Board members to think creatively; perhaps sell these empty and partially empty buildings to be used for condos, or other creative options. I want them to stop the focus on politics and instead focus on Best Practices for children. I also want the School Board members and Administrators to be held accountable for how they use tax-payer dollars in order to best educate our students.
- A long time ago, you could put thirty-five kids in a classroom and the outcomes were still pretty good. But now we have one fourth living in low poverty and twenty percent who are considered special education- there is no way the outcomes can be the same. I think if we want to improve outcomes, we need to look at kids individually. Kids who are not succeeding in the classroom need to be exploring other things- maybe the trades, for example. I think support needs to be bolstered for the school psychologists, social workers and others. I think we need to encourage more educational leadership so that principals can lead change and monitor strategies for kids to be successful. The superintendent needs to be sure the buildings are in good shape and not out of whack. I think they said it would cost \$1-\$2 million to reduce class sizes. I really think we need smaller class sizes. I am in favor of all taxes- both sales and property- that give more money to

support better schools. I am in favor of our kids. I also think the current infrastructure needs re-adapting due to the former administration. Some of the restrictions need to be revised.

- I also think the class sizes need to be smaller. My husband is a former teacher and I know that was a difficult job for him. The facilities in MPS- I wonder if they are really adapting the interiors today for how kids learn. I know that changing the interiors would involve getting big bucks involved, but I think looking at how kids interact in an environment and adapting the environment to their needs could make a big difference in the way they learn. I think there is also a connection between what is happening in school and with kids' home lives. School is no what it was back in the day. Kids are coming from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds. No matter how much money you have- things like nutrition, home life and mold in buildings- we are trying to build on a system that in and of itself- is not supposed to be as it is. I also think the arts are important and believe in exercising our left and right brain.

2.4 Focus on institutional level changes

- Focus on instruction...make sure students are college ready. We need to change the staffing structure. Deconstruct that structure. We have to rethink the problem. We would say these are our lowest performing schools, take the highest performing teachers, give them more money and more them to least performing schools. Give them new contracts. Move the money around in a different way.
- There's no one perfect price. Money is going to be a solution but I'm struggling to know where to put it. We need to identify gaps - teachers, students, support staff. Wrap around services for challenged families. Specific programming — now that we have STEAM, the technical learning now is good. Let's predict what we'll need down the road. We need to redo MPS because it's not working. Somehow it's got to be totally rethought. We need year round schools. We aren't farmers anymore. We need to rethink what we're doing
- I think the whole system needs revamped to reflect the social landscape of Milwaukee. I think students need to see themselves in their teachers. I see a big disconnect of servicing for current comforts and I think it needs an overhaul.
- I think there are an overwhelming number of issues so where to start? I support the referendum but the panel presented the potential tax burden on low income residents and I don't think that is a sustainable answer. I have seen how my Little Sister has benefited from MPS programming and I think it would be beneficial to expand to these opportunities. I don't know where to start but systematic change is needed.
- I think that the Referendum fails to address directly the outcomes the School Board seeks to address. There needs to be flexible systems -- voucher and school choice options, which I do support. There is evidence that indicates that increased capital does not increase capacities. This requires a deep cultural change within the MPS system. I attend a lot of School Board meetings as a member of ____ (business organization). From what I have observed, I do not think that the School Board members and the Administrators are capable of bringing about such a cultural change because I do not see a focus on students, as is needed.
- I think that the biggest challenge for improving MPS schools would be discipline. I also think that it is vitally important to empower principals. I often wonder what are the qualifications to be ranked as a grand school. And why do schools keep changing rankings? Some schools have a high ranking one time, then a low ranking, and then a high ranking again? I think that it is because of changes in principals. In my experience, the quality of a school and the quality of student performance both depend upon quality principals. It would be helpful if MPS reorganized their school clusters to create pockets of success, with feeder schools supporting each other. Programs like Language-Emersion Schools seem to succeed; why can't all MPS schools operate on a similar pattern? I think that residents in Milwaukee need to lobby their State representatives for funding for quality education for all students. Still, I am not sure about this upcoming MPS Referendum. It seems to be something that has people chasing for good money without adequate thought given to systemic change within the MPS culture at the Administrative levels.

2.5 Focus on reducing classroom sizes

- I graduated from Solomon high school, a public school where I was the first African American to get a scholarship. Basing on my experience on the quality of education at my high school, I think that smaller classrooms would improve the quality of education. Does that require additional funding? Am not sure.
- I would support that as a teacher {Referring to the previous speaker}. Classroom size is very crucial and mental health services is another. A lot of students have trauma, and they just need support. I once worked as a public defender in the juvenile justice system and I saw students disrupting others. And I think they simply needed support, to allow kids to be kids and not the injustice that brings trauma. Does it require additional funding? I think yes, they are not regular students; they require special attention.
- Smaller class size in addition to health attention may improve student outcome. There is a lot of possibilities for great improvement.
- I think that areas that can improve outcome for students are basically: smaller classrooms and managing the stress and anxiety that students have. The poverty and stress some experience, is just more than what they can deal with. Yes, these need more money to implement. Smaller classrooms improve odds for better outcome and students should also be encouraged to be more rounded than just the academic testing
- Anything and everything should be done so hell yeah to additional funding. I view MPS like a triage system. I have a concern with selling assets for short-term gain and consequently long-term losses. I'm afraid of that potential revenue-generating pathway. I have not been in the classrooms but I have heard that smaller class sizes allow for higher teacher-student connection and engagement.
- I have researched the statistics for the MPS School District, and I find them shocking. There are 125 public schools, and only 4% of the students in these schools are performing at grade level; even in College Prep schools, only 38% of students are performing at grade level. (XXX showed participants in our small group a variety of pages of data he stated supported his concerns). I am skeptical about pouring more money into a failing school district. It seems that the School Board and the Administrators are about adult interests rather than student interests. I think the challenges are not about funding but about priorities. If the Referendum does pass, the funds should be used to reduce class sizes, which is supported by lots of data. Personally, I just think that the Referendum is both flawed and misguided.
- A long time ago, you could put thirty-five kids in a classroom and the outcomes were still pretty good. But now we have one fourth living in low poverty and twenty percent who are considered special education- there is no way the outcomes can be the same. I think if we want to improve outcomes, we need to look at kids individually. Kids who are not succeeding in the classroom need to be exploring other things- maybe the trades, for example. I think support needs to be bolstered for the school psychologists, social workers and others. I think we need to encourage more educational leadership so that principals can lead change and monitor strategies for kids to be successful. The superintendent needs to be sure the buildings are in good shape and not out of whack. I think they said it would cost \$1-\$2 million to reduce class sizes. I really think we need smaller class sizes. I am in favor of all taxes- both sales and property- that give more money to

support better schools. I am in favor of our kids. I also think the current infrastructure needs re-adapting due to the former administration. Some of the restrictions need to be revised.

- I also think the class sizes need to be smaller. My husband is a former teacher and I know that was a difficult job for him. The facilities in MPS- I wonder if they are really adapting the interiors today for how kids learn. I know that changing the interiors would involve getting big bucks involved, but I think looking at how kids interact in an environment and adapting the environment to their needs could make a big difference in the way they learn. I think there is also a connection between what is happening in school and with kids' home lives. School is no what it was back in the day. Kids are coming from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds. No matter how much money you have- things like nutrition, home life and mold in buildings- we are trying to build on a system that in and of itself- is not supposed to be as it is. I also think the arts are important and believe in exercising our left and right brain.
- I think smaller class sizes are necessary. When I was a teacher there were fifty-four kids in my classroom one year, and I remember there were about seventy students in the first grade. We didn't even have any issues! Back in my day I was always getting interrupted over the PA system and all those interruptions made it hard to teach. We also need more dynamic teachers, not teachers who just put the television on at 3pm. Can teachers get extra time in the morning or the afternoon to prepare for their classes? I grew up in southwestern Wisconsin and I remember we would go to the outdoor playground three times per day. I can remember occasionally they would make me teach music, and I can remember I struggled so much. But a real music teacher could come in and get those kids singing in three-part harmony in thirty minutes. We really need the music and art teachers in MPS.
- One thing I have been wondering is how much time do principals spend on their budgets? Principals should be coaching new teachers and spending more time in classrooms- not managing a budget. When there are thirty-five kids in a classroom, that seems like a gross inequity.

2.6 Focus on marginalized students

- I think we need to put more money into programs for those with disabilities.
- Look at the barriers keeping students from moving ahead and even reaching school. What will help their stories get heard? One of the barriers is the poverty level. Funding schools goes to the highest priority. There should be specific things to allow them to reach the goals.
- Focus needs to be to continue working on the margins: ESL, special needs, those in poverty. Increase the community-based partnerships, such as with universities, policy groups, and hospitals. There should be augmentation of primary, secondary and tertiary supports, including in health, nurses and counselors. I was an immigrant from a Latin American country and undocumented for a time. I was given opportunities in music and arts. My last observation in 2017 was that those counselors were not equipped to help students who were immigrants and needing to learn another language. And their parents could also not access the right persons/experts to help, even though there supposedly was such a resource.
- I agree that curriculum is very important. I am sorry to hear that music programs were eliminated. Arts help develop the whole person. I also agree that parental involvement is very important. My wife and daughter have been social workers in MPS. In homes where they are very poor there often are no books, but the TV is on all the time. Parental help with homework is crucial. Students on the margins, including immigrants, have many needs. MPS has to deal with increasingly larger numbers of needs.
- A long time ago, you could put thirty-five kids in a classroom and the outcomes were still pretty good. But now we have one fourth living in low poverty and twenty percent who are considered special education- there is no way the outcomes can be the same. I think if we want to improve outcomes, we need to look at kids individually. Kids who are not succeeding in the classroom need to be exploring other things- maybe the trades, for example. I think support needs to be bolstered for the school psychologists, social workers and others. I think we need to encourage more educational leadership so that principals can lead change and monitor strategies for kids to be successful. The superintendent needs to be sure the buildings are in good shape and not out of whack. I think they said it would cost \$1-\$2 million to reduce class sizes. I really think we need smaller class sizes. I am in favor of all taxes- both sales and property- that give more money to support better schools. I am in favor of our kids. I also think the current infrastructure needs re-adapting due to the former administration. Some of the restrictions need to be revised.

2.7 Focus on student health

- It took me forever to write on this because it's a big problem that we're trying to solve. Some things that come to mind, to shrink the workload of teachers and leaders. They're asked to do many things. They should departmentalize, even in the elementary school. Allow teachers to get specialized in content. Focus on the mental health of both adults and students in the building. Bring partners who can help with mental health. Teacher preparation, especially for teachers who aren't prepared and need to be sustained through the hard work and not burn out. We could direct funding toward these things so the work isn't overwhelming for people.
- I would support that as a teacher {Referring to the previous speaker}. Classroom size is very crucial and mental health services is another. A lot of students have trauma, and they just need support. I once worked as a public defender in the juvenile justice system and I saw students disrupting others. And I think they simply needed support, to allow kids to be kids and not the injustice that brings trauma. Does it require additional funding? I think yes, they are not regular students; they require special attention.
- Smaller class size in addition to health attention may improve student outcome. There is a lot of possibilities for great improvement.
- Focus needs to be to continue working on the margins: ESL, special needs, those in poverty. Increase the community-based partnerships, such as with universities, policy groups, and hospitals. There should be augmentation of primary, secondary and tertiary supports, including in health, nurses and counselors. I was an immigrant from a Latin American country and undocumented for a time. I was given opportunities in music and arts. My last observation in 2017 was that those counselors were not equipped to help students who were immigrants and needing to learn another language. And their parents could also not access the right persons/experts to help, even though there supposedly was such a resource.
- Increase the funding. In technology, help them learn how to use it in the right way to benefit them or there will be mental health problems and trouble focusing. My kids are in Catholic schools because they have special needs and have trouble focusing. I have to budget for private school. I think we have to worry about how students will connect with the community. My kids do that through their school and church. Also, I enroll them in sports and STEM programs. I have to pay for the extra activities.
- In my estimation some focus should be directed to trauma-based care for the students.

Other comments

- I want the administration and principals to not be defensive but being more willing to share the struggle in the search for solving school problems.

- Personally, I would say getting into the homes and having one-on-ones with the parents. That's where the groundwork is. Making sure the home life is secure. We have some kids in MPS that come out of rough environments. Have Parent/Teacher conferences. Parents should be held accountable. Offer classes in finance and how to use IT. Slowly but surely MPS is coming around. As an example, there are programs in woodshop and hospitality. If parents are interested, the kids are interested, especially in real life experiences
- I don't feel qualified to answer this question. I believe money should focus on, as the speaker said, aspirational goals. I don't believe there is much faith the institution of MPS. We as parents need help in navigating the system. How do we get different facts more verifiable to help us decide where to enroll our son? How can we rebalance student enrollment so our taxes will go to support strong systems?
- No matter how the additional funding is utilized, MPS has an uphill battle. In my estimation when you focus on a priority area [MPS has many] the triage approach has to be instituted and that will change over a period of time.
- Money is relative, the Milwaukee Bucks can threaten to leave Milwaukee and money can be found to placate their requests. My question is ... when will the community wake up and get on the same page and demand change and hold responsible those who are responsible for the students.
- Improvements need to be data driven. Research on education is needed to make the right decisions. Diversity is important in schools. There needs to be a mix of students, not just families that have no other choice all together. The money should help overcome this.
- I have no idea how to weigh in on the MPS Referendum because I am too new to Milwaukee and I do not yet have a clear sense of the needs and issues related to the MPS school system. I am a homeowner, so I will do further research, because my tax bill will reflect the costs incurred if this Referendum passes. NYC used a lottery system to support their public schools. I am not sure how I feel about that. I have always supported School Referendums because I believe that we need well-educated adults, which begins with well-educated children. I will probably support the MPS Referendum
- I live in Bayview as a single man with no children who has a real interest in the community where I live. For this reason, I am currently running for public office. In this capacity, I talk to lots of people in Bayview at various public and semi-public gatherings, and during these conversations, the issue of Public Schools and the MPS referendum often comes up. I have learned that most families with high school students who live in Bayview do not send their youth to the local Public School, Bayview High School. I have not yet discovered a reason why they choose another MPS Public School, one outside their local community. I want to know what these other schools, perceived as "good schools" offer, what are they doing that helps their students succeed. I also do not think that MPS should be using school dollars for transportation purposes.
- I have been out of the classroom about twenty years- so I am not sure I am the best person to speak on what is needed. But perhaps more infrastructure? It seems like more people and perhaps a Financial Director? Perhaps it is best to focus on that? It is still not really clear to me what the goal is with the \$87 million. The information shared earlier made it seem like \$87 million was still falling short from where we needed to be. Do we need to go further with the money to get a better outcome? I also still need to see some sort of comprehensive plan for the spending.
- My impression is that many kids going into MPS are woefully unprepared because of what happens way before they enter kindergarten. Is there something that can be done before they get to school?
- All our schools are underfunded. Public and charter as well. Anyone who thinks choice schools are getting good results only with public money is misinformed. MPS wants to include trauma-informed care, art, music, gym, but the challenges in the building are tremendous, and the number of high-quality folks needed to make a difference is tremendous, and it takes money. Part of the solution has got to be financial
- What is an outcome? Do we know? There was a teacher in my school who was making copies of textbooks because there was only one textbook for every three students. What are you supposed to do? With the (referendum) money, what would be priority #1? Taxpayers should have a say. There's nothing that funding would go to that wouldn't be helpful.
- I think people would breathe a sigh of relief if some things that were taken away were restored. And it would give the teachers a break too, if we're talking about retention. I would feel a lot better if we know where it (the money) was going. Also ... working with the universities a little so we know how well teachers are being prepared. Right now, we're seeing burnout within 5 years.
- I think that MPS needs to look at the individual needs of the students and become more conscious of ways to approach and offer assistance.

Connected Conversation

3.1 Allocation of funds

- There's been a lot of movement with the sales tax. We have a huge percentage of funding from property tax. We should be using sales tax, especially when people come to the city.
- My question — back in the day, there was SAGE funding and 3rd Friday. Why doesn't the money follow the child? There are some children going to 3 different schools in one school year. Let's let the money follow the students.
- We address issues and allocate money according to zip \code, where people live, not what will build up the community
- The disparity in the amount of money used per student in the suburbs versus the city speaks volumes about how we see the community
- It is hard to prioritize, but I think there should be preventative ways to mitigate traumas in community policing. The current criminal justice system impacts those on the margins. Also, there should be investment in spaces: libraries, county parks, neighborhood connections.
- I personally would be willing to pay the additional property taxes for the referendum but I know that that is a position of privilege.
- The idea of 'fair funding' is not a new topic for discussion and without resolution it will continue to be a topic for discussion for decades.
- I think the idea of prioritizing funding is an issue of competing demands. I want all the priorities to be funded. I feel like the various school districts are competing against each other for this or for that.
- I think cutting costs can cause greater issues.
- The return on investment is a no-brainer. I am ambivalent about the moral case and the pragmatic case. What am I spending my money on? Where is my money going? We know the good MPS schools like King. How can they be replicated? Teachers and parents need to work together.
- The problem is tax based funding. MPS can't compete with a housing stock that is valued less than a suburban community. Suburbs get more money with a lower rate because the houses have more value.
- We have to figure out a better funding... but from where?

- From my research into the MPS System, I have observed that 4 year old kindergarten students receive 50% of the funding that is allotted to 5 year old kindergarten students; this seems backward to me. I have also observed that many parents search for the 25 schools that do have quality reputations; these include schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. These schools are sought after by white middle class families who have both time and energy, as well as other resources needed to search out quality schools, and to advocate for their children to attend these schools. Most of these schools also have a predominately white population. I have also observed that MPS uses a lot of substitute teachers, and most of these substitute teachers are placed in some of the most troubled classrooms. There is also a very uneven distribution of resources: for example, some schools have well-run copy machines with stacks of paper for copying materials for class, while other schools have copy machines that do not work, or lack sufficient copy paper, or both. Arts and other enrichment programs have been cut in most schools within the MPS system. (XXX showed participants in our small group a variety of pages of data he stated supported his concerns). Children need exposure to the arts, to music, art, drama, and other enrichment opportunities. I would gladly pay extra in taxes if I knew that the MPS School System would use this Referendum funding to support these programs for their students.
- Does MPS have anything around equalization?
- What is that?
- Equalization focuses on the distribution of property tax money. For example, a district like MPS would have equalization added. Equalization aid allows them to fund a broad range of initiatives. If their community would be better off than they should be able to use it. But I know there is a ceiling behind the amount of dollars that can be used in equalization and it cannot exceed that amount.
- I am not sure how relevant the conversation about equalization is in Milwaukee compared to what it has been like in other districts. The needs are so different here in Milwaukee.
- Eighty-two percent of the students are low income. Perhaps if the community was more highly valued, then there would be higher property values?
- At the state level, the equalization aid on the \$87 million would make up for the inequalities between other districts. I know there could be more money from the state added to the district, but I do not know what percentage.
- Well, I know the state is supposed to pay a certain amount of funding, but this number has dwindled down to 45%, whereas it used to be 70%
- I know DPI had something to do with that amount of aid being sliced down.
- Educators at the state level are fighting among each other. In some cases, it is DPI versus the school district.
- Perhaps we should consider the prison budget versus the education budget, and creating more jobs on the front end instead of on the back end.
- Where is the money from the referendum really being allocated?
- There should be another way to look for resources in funding such as consumer tax, etc. my reasoning is that nonprofits do not pay taxes as my residence where I live and many others around town are nonprofits. I believe more state funding would help us.
- My question is how do we get other taxes involved besides property taxes? Our Governor promised to work on funding and it seems the conversation changes as the reoccurring increases in taxes.
- As a citizen I feel schools should come first because it will cost a lots more afterwards because education is the last chance before incarceration.
- I really struggle with more not always meaning better so let's use the funding where we can get the best results.
- I think there's a tricky balance between infrastructure and schools because there is a need for good infrastructure, transportation, housing which is very important for a good outcome.

3.2 Buildings and facilities

- What other ways could the district generate other income? Through facilities?
- I also wonder how comfortable is the community to say, "I'm willing to close a school in order to have a stronger district"? We have dropping enrollments at MPS. Some of our schools are gorgeous and when they are vandalized it makes me want to throw up. We've got to get real with these buildings and be willing to downsize. I've worked at all different districts. Communities because really nervous about that but sometimes you have to cut an appendage to keep the body moving.
- Efficiency is the first concern, for instance, having so many unused buildings.
- I see several facilities not being used. What is the operational cost to keep them standing? Declining enrollment and lower birth rates will drive more empty buildings. Can they be sold?

3.3 Diversity issues

- Whatever we address we need to deal with segregation. The air in Milwaukee about 'race' is toxic.
- In my 12+ years in the MPS system I never had an educator who looked like me, however the love and time that was invested in me made me feel cared for. Unlike my community neighborhood, my MPS educators who did not look like but invested so much into my learning provided me a fairer, holistic life understanding and perspective.
- The figures strike me: MPS has 90% students of color when the city has 40% population of color. 82% are low income. Urban schools around the country have the same challenges. Is there an example somewhere else where success has occurred? They have the same outside pressures: Income, politics; poverty and racism.
- Acknowledged, there's a need for more culturally relevant conversations and training to become culturally aware because the population has changed.
- I have noticed that there are less teachers of color in the district over the past twenty five years.

3.4 Family mobility

- We have really high mobility rates in Milwaukee. Kindergarten enrollment is really important. Don't look at these sexy new schools. When 3rd Friday comes along we don't have funding for you. So, this is state legislation.

- A lot of other structures would have to change too. How you get staffing for the 50 new students who would come? We would have to blow up a lot of different policies and do things different.
- What if when families move within the cities, the kids stayed where they are? What if the kid is where they are for the year? What would that do for student achievement?
- Bottom line, if we can get enrollment to go up, that helps.
- Kids in poverty have to move all the time. If I'm that mom that has to decide that I have to move. I just have to find housing. Part of the reason we're talking about this, is that we have a community of impoverished stakeholders. That don't even know that they are stakeholders.
- I support those that do innovate things especially for the special need students, because should public schools collapse, the city too will collapse. I think people want to move to a city with strong schools to live and work there and to do business.
- Schools are obviously critical. People are leaving MPS to go to suburban schools. The priority for the city of Milwaukee: schools and safety.
- But this idea of busing kids' places...I am not sure how that fits. The suburbs have small class sizes but it seems some people still want to bust their kids into the city to attend MPS schools. People are simply choosing to move away from the problem, but not really.

3.5 Focus on students

- Thinking from a cross-sector approach, if there are X number of students in Milwaukee, how does the referendum impact all students in Milwaukee? Can there be funding for kids inside the district who are in charter schools?
- I would want those students, even if they are in non-instrumentality charter schools, to benefit from the money.
- The heart of our district is a reflection of the heart of our city. This is all interconnected. Who benefits and who gains from this? It's bigger than the referendum. Are we courageous enough as a city to start having these conversations about our children.
- It's not just now. I think our children can't wait anymore.
- I get upset when everything is about money and we forget to ask "how are we benefiting the kids?"
- I think I brought up a good conversation about trauma in the MPS system. Most trauma targets the African American students which eventually links to the juvenile justice system. From my experience, growing up in a less privileged community, I saw lots of students with potential that was not well nurtured in the available school system, and they in the long run ended up in incarceration. Education should not therefore be predetermined; it should be taking up learners first, and thinking of the end as it manifests.
- If we educate students correctly their needs can be met. Create partnerships with jobs and students. Teach classes in self-defense. "Bridging the Gap" is a good program.
- Connect children with the community. How do we get parents involved? It is a struggle to be motivated and getting parents involved
- I try to think of what I can do to impact students in the classroom where I have influence. Children come with experiences and opportunities unique to them which I do not think should dictate the quality of education in their classroom.
- I hope my interactions in the classroom with students transform their lives outside of the class but I know this is beyond my control. I try to give them information related to their personal visions of themselves beyond MPS whether it is about work, college, or whatever path they want to pursue.
- We need to consider the quality of life questions that affect students in Milwaukee. This affects the education of our children, too. I want the school system to be proactive. "I do not want more dads of MPS students going to jail". (When asked by the facilitator to clarify this statement, the speaker responded "Education is important if we want to stop the school to jail pipeline". I think that the members of the School Board have good will. I just am not sure that they have looked at the myriad of problems carefully, or developed a plan that can help most of the students. And this is not just an MPS problem. MPS is failing its graduates, too. Too many "MPS students drop out of college after 1/2 or 1 semester, and return home to become squatters in their parents' home".
- The education of homeless youth is a big challenge at the moment. We are required to send a homeless student to their school of origin, which often means busing them from the north side to the south side or vice versa. In the past, we had students who were living as far out as Waukesha that would need to get bused in for school. This is one example of the 'mandates' that MPS is required, by law, to pay for. Busing is just one example. Personally, I think it is better for kids to go to school near their home, my own kids went to school in the neighborhood and I was able to walk to the school, chat with their teachers or the principal, and it was good.
- Is divergence of children's learning levels problematic? If you have 20 kids and 8 or 10 aren't at the level of the others? Can you separate them out so the others can learn at a faster pace?
- Usually you can do that within the classroom. Teachers are getting away from ability level groupings that stigmatize some students.
- One of the issues, as far as kids with trauma ... some schools need more help than others. Equity is important but every place doesn't need the exact same thing.

3.6 Importance of education

- What drives me is seeing the need for Early Childhood Education.
- Early Child Education has proven to be the most effective way to attack poverty.
- I think it is also important to know when and where education happen. It would be good that it happens in schools, churches and at home which are the safe places for learning.
- I think that schools are the foundation of training people to be good citizens, to manage life and to develop analytical skills. I therefore think that there is so much more that can help students in school than just reciting definitions.
- Education is connected to other issues, like crime, safety and infrastructure. To produce a better environment linking to policing, the fire department, teachers and participation. Education allows you to compete and also to reconcile theories that produce change. Change the scope of poverty and change the culture around you. General priority is poverty.
- I think investing in education prevents many of the greater community issues such as crime and safety, low income and poverty, etc. I support particularly primary education funding efforts as an investment which would have a ripple effect as students age.
- Well, they do have a community schools' program here in the city.

- The community school concept is where schools provide extra resources to families and the community. For example, they might keep their schools open longer so students have a place to go after school. The model of the community schools still needs to be strengthened, but overall it is a good model and we need more of it.

3.7 Problems with MPS

- The size of the school system is unmanageable so we need to re-visit the idea of three districts within the city that interact, communicate and collaborate.
- The figures strike me: MPS has 90% students of color when the city has 40% population of color. 82% are low income. Urban schools around the country have the same challenges. Is there an example somewhere else where success has occurred? They have the same outside pressures: Income, politics; poverty and racism.
- There is a lot of negative publicity that discourages parents. We need to hear the positive. I was part of a program for special needs students that was a school to work program. There were many different businesses involved from hospitals to insurance companies. There was always an MPS staff, and aide available.
- When I moved here the realtor was very negative about MPS. He printed out a list of the schools and their ranking data.
- MPS is a patchwork of good and bad schools. It is difficult to choose. I am glad a good school was in walking distance or we would still be homeschooling our oldest. I am sorry about Bradley tech.
- I have a friend whose wife is an administrator in a Chicago Public School. They are doing well. MPS bad reputation makes it worse.
- Leadership at a school is what makes it thrive. I read about a school that started low and in just a few years was a top school because of the principal. Also, that school has a relationship with a church in Whitefish Bay for tutoring
- It would help to change the "rules of the game". The Administration and the School Board set the tone in a school district. Right now, the administration and the members of the School Board do not empower their Principals or their teachers. Principals cannot hire or fire staff. They do not seem able to look at data and make decisions for their schools based on that data. They do not seem able to give input into the direction of their own schools. And parents and students seem to have even less of a voice. These are not the behaviors one sees in schools that do manifest Best Practices.
- The Administration of MPS and the members of the School Board need to be directly invested in the education of all students in the MPS system. Each teacher in each school, and in every classroom, needs to be passionate about the education of all students in each building.
- In my opinion, there is a major systemic problem over School Board elections and Referendum in any community. These are always held during the Spring Elections, when voter turnout is often very low. Those with the loudest voices, and often those with the most negative message, know this, and can often sway an election. There are other systemic challenges. Some high functioning schools have been allowed to deteriorate; does anyone ask why? Howard Fuller served as Superintendent of MPS Schools 23 years ago. School Board members resisted his efforts to effect change, and he was asked to resign. His resignation letter is as relevant in regard to issues facing MPS today as it was when the letter was first written 23 years ago.
- What are the cultural challenges that face MPS administrators? Are we providing them with the skills and tools that they need in order to support their teachers and students in today's world? Open Enrollment, where students can attend whatever school that they want, in or outside their district, has not helped MPS schools, nor have Voucher or Choice options, either.
- Bussing also destroys the culture of a school; busing generates barriers between a school and the parents; students cannot stay after school for extracurricular activities, like sports or special events; and parents cannot easily cross town to attend parent-teacher conferences and student events, either.
- I have studied the data, which shows what works and what does not work. Charter schools and choice schools work; MPS does not.
- There's a Mental Health problem and the Trauma is so great that I can't say the educators can do a lot with that. An example: I was part of a group that was delivering dinners for Thanksgiving and at a number of the houses where they knew we were coming with the delivery I had to ring the doorbell several times and then finally UI would call on their cell phones and then they would come to the door.
- I agree there is a huge problem and I feel it's important to give teachers a space to build relationships. My mom and I talk all the time as she has been an educator for over 25 years so she has had training but I offer in our conversations that nowadays there is a need for a more intentional training around Trauma Informed Carew.

3.8 Role of parents

- Dialogue is extremely important, and we need to ask the parents, what's going to h
- Parents need to be involved with their child to see for yourself how things are. You cannot rely on hearsay.
- A bad reputation hurts MPS. There is so much negative to read about MPS. They do not give MPS a chance. It's just creates fear. In the 1990's people were afraid to go to downtown Milwaukee. This is the same negative talk from media. Parents need to try out MPS and find it is not inherently bad. Maybe I am just naive.
- What makes a school successful is parents. Parents push. The more parents are involved the better the school.
- Parents navigate to the best schools
- Parents apply to have their students attend those higher functioning MPS Magnet Schools. These are mostly filled with white students who come from middle class families.
- I also think a single parent family is a huge problem. I remember speaking with a family not that long ago, where the oldest son kept getting in trouble. He only lived two or three blocks from school, but he was having trouble getting there on time because he was taking care of his siblings. People need to be able to keep their jobs to keep their families. People need to make more money, and then they can deal with supporting each other. I say more money to education and less money to prisons. It seems that adults and leaders still hold on to their idea that we should not put money in education.
- It seems that in this modern setting, we need more parents involved. I think the schools are trying to be both parents and teachers at the same time. But they obviously cannot be parents- they cannot spank kids. If schools are acting like parents then what are we really doing, what are we really accomplishing? How are we strengthening families?

3.9 Strategy and planning

- One of the things that this second question made me realize is that we need a real strategy for the money. Otherwise, the money will just trickle away. With all the ideas we put on the table, we need a strategic plan
- What is the next step if it passes? Is there a strategic plan?
- I think it's a really good strategy. What they are going to do with the money should be less myopic too.
- What would help is having a plan from the district itself. What does MPS intend to do?
- MPS should provide a plan. More information on their website.
- The entire education system seems to be hurting and the fractioning does not solve the issue. I feel this discussion is a short-term diversion from solving the larger issues.
- I think taking the vision off of paper and transforming it into reality in the classroom, into something tangible for the students is critical.
- Funding is needed but it needs purpose. Investment to not only meet current needs but also those anticipated in the future is important.
- There is a need for the arts. My son is in middle school and arts are a must at his IB school. I just don't trust the bureaucracy with the money. We will need to convince the cynics. I want to empower the local schools and am not just anti-magnet schools. MPS is big and how will it spend the money effectively?

Other comments

- Why are both counties listed in the referendum?
- I'm not sure why they are lumped together.
- There's a little tab of MKE county that goes into Washington County. So, I think that's how that works.
- That would be good to share with the general public.
- I would wonder how important for the district to share how other districts utilize referendums. Is it a leveraging point?
- When you read about other districts...they might be building a gym at the high school. As citizens, we've never had to deal with a referendum. Are citizens of other districts talking about how it's going to impact the wider community. Our inexperience is affecting our decisions.
- All of this is what the majority of families we're serving are thinking about.
- My frustration ...I've seen several times when they've tried to close a school and the parents reject it. It's so challenging!
- Different leaders and 'models' for success come every 3-4 years and we start all over again.
- Neighborhoods and people have to get to know each other and know what is important. It is hard to get people to talk to each other.
- I received personalized learning opportunities for my disability in the MPS system and this gave me sense of being cared for and instilled in me a sense of responsibility for myself. I think there are different ways to succeed and I learned this at MPS. I think reinforcement at home is also needed and is important to students' education.
- Cohort modeling for diverse experiences and exposure within the MPS system.
- Disconnection between resources and children's visions for their life during and beyond MPS education system.
- Systematic change is needed.
- Emphasis on individual interactions for change.
- My experience with MPS when growing up was the biggest thing. I had a wonderful experience. In 2005 I chose not to send my daughter to an MPS school because things changed so dramatically. Now in high school, my daughter did not want to go an MPS school. She now attends a choice school
- What were the indicators that caused friends to say MPS schools are bad? It is hard to find solid facts outside of just stories told by friends. The merging middle and high schools was not helpful.
- The city has changed, like white flight, but the schools have not. They function under the same old structures that are decades old. Schools are operating on old budgets. Students now have more and different needs. For example, they need more drug programs.
- Milwaukee is change averse. I work for the county and I constantly hear that this or that program, "can't work here in Milwaukee." I feel there is a huge sense of inertia. I hope there will be a new generation of leaders that will shake things up.
- I am glad parents are here.
- My white middle and upper middle-class friends ask with surprise: "Why do you live in Milwaukee and why would you send your children to MPS and get killed!"
- We have high end donors go to a classroom to teach for a day. Their attitudes change and they have better conversations about education.
- I have the advantage of white privilege and work in systems management. I still can't figure out how to navigate the system to make an educated choice on where to send my son to school. There is such a variation in terms of the quality of schools.
- There needs to be more support for school leaders. They are brought into a school and only have five years to turn things around. Then a new leader comes in and the cycle starts all over again.
- Access
- Opportunity Gap
- Common Core impeding progress
- Discipline is an issue for both students and teachers
- Holistic Student Centered Approach
- Wrap around services for families
- Relationship building with parents
- Parental Literacy
- Transient renters and home owners [difference]
- Changing the narrative of the culture of the City of Milwaukee
- Bradley Tech was a good school but it became a place to send students -to a tech, i.e., lower expectation school/ nonacademic – who were troublesome in other schools.
- The system is a fault in failing to help students but just move them to somewhere else together. Tech ed was categorized as less valued.

- Can we attract suburban volunteers?
- If the MPS Referendum passes, I wonder if there will be improvement in student performances; in their test scores; in their abilities to meet the challenges that they face each day, both in school and in the communities where they live. At times, it all seems a little disheartening. I will be considering who is running for School Board, and also encourage others to consider running for School Board, too
- How do profit-earning companies really contribute to the referendum?
- I know my architectural firm contributes to these efforts. We have a learning environment studio where we bring students in to learn about architecture and we give tour to students. We have shadowing for students to come in and learn about the architectural profession. I am not sure if they get a tax break for doing some sort of community work, but the firm is very involved in the community and making an impact. We constantly have kids coming through. We also do some work with Habitat for Humanity as a way of giving back to the community.
- Well a portion of our budget often goes to support categorical aid. Categorical aid can really be a red flag, as it is lumped in with everything else. People are often robbing Peter to pay Paul.
- What is categorical aid?
- An example of a categorical aide is like when your school has money to hire a paraprofessional who speaks Hmong. But then let's say they are never able to find a Hmong paraprofessional, so the money never gets spent.
- It seems like that is a situation where the community council could weigh in. Maybe they could get more library time, or more programs or more professional development for the teachers?
- I think the challenge is that we live in a profit-driven capitalist society, and the education sector doesn't really yield any profits.
- Does MPS ever apply for grants?
- Yes, the district does go after grants.
- That makes sense because then they could spend time with their friends from school after school.
- I thought they got rid of the transport to specialty schools.
- No, they still provide the transport for specialty schools, especially if they are too far for walking. In Connecticut, there were only buses, not anything else.
- I remember back in 1993, I was waiting at a bus stop and there was a group of young boys there that called me terrible names. I think the more we can work one on one with kids- the better. If we can provide goods and services one on one to kids, I think that will better.
- Is there a fact sheet out there?
- Yes, there is a fact sheet.
- What is the situation with the retention of teachers? I remember for myself, it was an easy decision to change careers because I could double my salary.
- What is the typical workday like now for teachers? Do they get enough supervisor support? I am guessing that management has a lot to do with the retention rates.
- Are there people that mentor teachers?
- What about school climate? I am guessing that is a big factor as well.
- I think the school climate would be different if principals could actually spend time in the classroom and less time organizing their school's budget.
- Well there is a Chief Financial Officer that supports the budgeting for the entire district. There is also a budget analyst that is shared between many different schools- probably between twenty and twenty-four schools per budget. Principals really only have control over a portion of the budget in their categories.
- I wonder, if there are volunteer teachers – say retired people that wanted to come into the schools. If you had 10 volunteer teachers in a school would that make a difference?
- Yes
- Actually, MPS has a pretty organized system of bringing volunteers into the classrooms to help students read.
- In Ontario, provincial funding is the primary source of funding. They max out at 18 students per classroom.
- Getting back to flexibility ... At Bradley tech students can leave early if they are in an apprenticeship with a company. But so many students haven't even had a chance to use a triangle in art class. How can they handle machine technology in high school? There's no shop class anymore.
- I think we should have a fourth school system where students could leave to participate in other things that a kid could never otherwise do. Fully funded by state taxes. Maybe parents would pay a co-pay for transportation for some buy-in. They should have to pay something.
- But you know, that's really difficult for some parents who are in abject poverty. They don't have money for transportation.
- We're talking about a lot of things that others take for granted before W-2. Our students were much more prosperous or prepared when parents were home – to supervise homework, pick them up from after school activities.
- I think the downfall came when the teachers were not allowed to give input on Act 10. I read the book evicted and as I read I sensed the lack of stability for the students and their families so there's some other areas where funding is needed.
- I like Milwaukee and having been a student in a school where the powers thought we were going nowhere as human beings that makes me care about the referendum.
- I care because of the Mental Health that must be addressed, the social adjustments and the quality of education for the students.
- I care as a citizen, employee and parent of MPS students about the referendum.
- I care because I see so much potential of better outcomes with the referendum if funds are thoughtfully used where most needed.
- I care because education and improvements are needed which calls for funding sources.
- I believe it my duty as a citizen to care and as a product of MPS I care.

3.10 Parting Words

- Long term real strategic planning
- How and frustration
- Time critical and this is bigger than all of us. This more than just about parents and teachers, it impacts all of Milwaukee.

- Frustrated because the state legislature has put Milwaukee in this position that they have to go to referendum to support our community.
- [Making a sad face] The children.
- Courageous. Carefully thought out. Researched. Intentional, Focused, Strategic Plan.
- Public education is underfunded. This is particularly true for MPS students and the referendum is necessary to bridge that gap.
- We should provide more funding in education by taking away from the department of correction.
- I strongly believe that students in Milwaukee need better education and the referendum is one step towards that.
- I think that we want to acquire the cart before the horse. Why do we choose to spend money before knowing what outcomes it is going to create? I think we are going into what we are not prepared for.
- My take-away is, I wish for a rethinking of the priorities of public funding. Education should be very high.
- I think that students in Milwaukee deserve more funding. But if we continue spending on what is not as relevant from experience, I wonder where we shall be in the next ten years.
- Education decreases crime and poverty
- Effectiveness of education in the community and neighborhoods
- Intriguing
- Enlightening
- Shared conversation
- Education is critical
- Where do we go with this now with this discussion and information?
- Informational
- 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'. Strategic investments because kids deserve better.
- Personal, passion, educated, thankful
- Insightful, informative
- Believe, achieve, succeed
- Enlightening and hopeful
- Resolution and satisfying
- Grateful
- Interesting
- More events like this one
- Needed
- Uplifting
- Stimulating
- Inspiring
- This was a wonderful evening. There was discussion with different positions. It was a broad minded discussion.
- Need to get the money. We can't spend too much on education. MPS needs all the help it can get. To overcome the poverty and problems we need creative and intelligent leaders to turn the corner. We can't afford not to do it.
- Thanks, all. We need leadership in individual schools if this passes. We will see results if individual schools with strong administrators.
- This is complicated but getting funds has improved schools.
- I liked hearing experiences. I bike through Riverside to the bike trail and see students but don't get to interact.
- I hope YES. I hope MPS will improve.
- It is important that MPS prepare their students for college readiness; right now, it does not do this.
- I learned a lot tonight, and I appreciate the opportunity to listen to each of you share your own thoughts about MPS and its strengths and challenges MPS faces.
- The City of Milwaukee needs a strong MPS School District. Unfortunately, I think that the MPS School District is a highly dysfunctional school district. I cannot support this 2020 MPS Referendum.
- Three people passed during closing remarks.
- My main takeaway is a great sense of passion for the kids. MPS has been good to my family. I feel like I have been able to be a servant to the district and the community. I have also learned that we are more alike than we are different. 'how do we help kids today?' Well, we help them now because if we do, eventually they will come back to the community. I feel hopeful and encouraged leaving this conversation.
- This was an enlightening conversation for me. I appreciated the opportunity to digest information prior to the referendum. I also enjoyed learning more ways to have these types of conversations and I am interested to see what else- as a community- we come up with.
- I wanted to have some questions answered tonight and I did. The biggest takeaway for me is that MPS still needs more money. The money we are spending is money we will not be getting back unless we do something differently.
- Pass.
- As with many problems- there is no easy solution. I think the referendum is a positive thing. I took a picture of the document and I am feeling supportive of strengthening MPS. I want to support the people who are here tonight to stay here in the city of Milwaukee. And, since I believe someone asked earlier- I currently work as the Deputy Superintendent for MPS.
- I think it is interesting that we haven't talked at all about the CHOICE schools. I really see this issue of the referendum as a social justice issue. There are inequities that MPS needs to respond to, and maybe the CHOICE schools are not really the answer. I know there have been a lot of different viewpoints shared here tonight, but are we still all mostly skewed on the same end?
- Good
- Good
- Mixed
- Enlightened
- Engaged
- Invested
- I wish these types of sessions happened more often in the real world. This structure is a very good tool.
- I appreciate all of the different perspectives and I felt refreshed to hear them.
- I enjoyed the different views and the caring between the groups.
- I loved the format.
- I am taking away that as participants we were like minded individuals.
- I thought the verbal presentation was good but it didn't grab my attention as it was too calm, cool and standard for presentations.