

## MEQUON-THIENSVILLE SCHOOL BOARD PRIMARY ELECTION

# Candidates discuss their strengths, key issues

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MEQUON — Five people running for a seat on the Mequon-Thiensville School Board will be whittled down to four in the Feb. 15 primary election.

There will be two open spots on the board come April. Current board members Akram Khan and Chris Schultz have chosen not to seek another term.

The nonpartisan spring election will be held on April 5.

The News Graphic asked three questions of the five candidates ahead of the primary:

## 1. What qualifications and strengths would you bring to the School Board?

**Paul Buzzell:** I am able to “hit the ground running.” Besides direct school board experience (MTSD board treasurer, 2014-2017), I have strong business and finan-

cial acumen (CFO, started two businesses, MBA finance). I am trusted by board members, district administration, teachers and the community because I tell the truth, have no agenda and do what I say. Trust is critical to success and efficiency. Serving as CFO/Co-

president for a \$50 million company, I have proven to be a good listener, ask relevant questions and have strong critical thinking and decision-making skills. I have one high-school student and two recent graduates of Homestead.

**Jill Chromy:** I hold a



**Paul Buzzell**

**Age:** 51

**Education:** MBA-Finance, BBA-Marketing & Real Estate

**Occupation:** Business Owner / CFO

**Years in the district:** 33

**Elected experience:** 2014-2017 MTSD Board of Education



**Jill Chromy**

**Age:** 52

**Education:** BS, Masters of Social Work

**Occupation:** Social worker, pharma sales, hospice care coordinator, substitute teacher

**Years in the district:** 12 1/2

**Elected experience:** None



**Maria Douglas**

**Age:** 44

**Education:** BA in clinical psychology, BA in biblical and theological studies, MS in clinical psychology

**Occupation:** Full-time homemaker, previous school psychologist, researcher in child psychology and development

**Years in the district:** 2 1/2

**Elected experience:** None

Master's of Social Work. Professionally I've worked with underserved families in Milwaukee, in hospice care and pharmaceutical sales. These experiences gave me the skills of listening, information gathering,



**Scarlett Johnson**

**Age:** 47

**Education:** BA in political science

**Occupation:** Stay-at-Home mom

**Years in the district:** 13

**Elected experience:** None

negotiating, and finding understanding and resolutions in even the most challenging situations.

I've rolled up my sleeves and gotten involved with my children's education through volunteerism as room parent, fundraising and coaching Destination Imagination. I'm the PTO president at Lake Shore



**Jason Levash**

**Age:** 41

**Education:** BS in technology education; M.Ed. in educational policy and leadership

**Occupation:** COO- CESA6

**Years in the district:** 2 1/2

**Elected experience:** None

Middle School and serve on Area Council. I even obtained my substitute teaching license to help with the teacher shortage.

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

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## Primary

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strong school board member.

**Maria Douglas:** I am a public school psychologist by profession, and working directly in the classroom, I have the expertise of collaborating with educators, administrators, and families alike, bringing about creative solutions to complicated and challenging issues. I am the mother of three children currently attending MTSD schools. This would allow me to bring both educator and current parent perspective to the board.

**Scarlett Johnson:** As a mother of five with 20 years of volunteer work in schools, I have a wealth of knowledge in dealing with the educational needs of children. I know from first-hand experience that a one size fits all approach to education harms students at every level. Children have unique needs and thus require a diverse set of supports. A "boots on the ground" perspective is missing on our current board; without it, the last two years have become contentious as many parents and students feel they are unrepresented.

**Jason Levash:** I am uniquely qualified for the position as I have professional experience in both education and business. As a former teacher and administrator in public school districts, a small business owner and now as a chief operations officer of an educational service agency, I understand the teaching and learning process, the programs needed to support children in and out of the classroom and the necessary business and operational systems that need to be in place to run an effective and efficient district. Through prior experiences of working with and for boards and serving on boards, I understand the roles of each and how to balance the roles and responsibilities while serving stakeholders.

2. What do you believe are the one or two most important issues before the board in the next term?

**Buzzell:** Over the next three years, we have three critical areas to address within the strategic planning framework. (1) Pandemic management, primarily responses to disruptions in both learning and staff (here now). (2) Staff availability and recruitment (increasing national problem). Fewer people are becoming teachers. Besides total compensation, we need to stay focused on staff retention through employee experiences. (3) Significantly increased costs in the 2023-24 school year, without ability to increase revenue (a financial pickle not seen since before Act 10). The entire board will need to be financially engaged to keep MTSD poised toward academic excellence beyond our peers.

**Chromy:** Our children go

to school to learn. Excellence in academics is priority one and happens when we have high standards and expectations of students, quality curriculum and a strong teaching staff. District Milestones for Post-Secondary Success show decline in five milestones starting in 2015. We must reverse this trend and responsibly use resources to support teaching staff and get all students back on the path to excellence, so they can achieve their full potential.

We must improve communication and trust between the board and stakeholders. Providing transparency of curriculum, consulting, outcomes and finding new ways to engage and respond will help us find common ground and move forward in our shared goals.

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

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

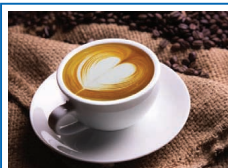
Teachers have been in high demand and low supply for years, now more aggravated by the pandemic. But MTSD is an award-winning district that employs great teachers, and we must

implement creative ways to continue to attract and retain our educators, not only through compensation packages, but by initiatives that positively present our community as a great place to live, work, and play.

**Johnson:** Improving MTSD students' academic performance requires more direct instruction, smaller classes, differentiated learning, specialized classrooms and a rigorous curriculum. After two challenging years, it is time to focus resources on priorities that provide long-term benefits for students and support for teachers. I detail several educational recovery initiatives on my campaign website resulting from conversations with educators and parents who want classrooms to get "back to basics." As a Board of Education member, I will work tirelessly to improve academic performance by advocating a student-centered approach to education. We all need to focus on what unites us, not what divides us; knowing this MTSD schools must teach kids HOW to think critically, not WHAT to think ideologically. It is also time to phase out mandated mitigation in order to prevent further emotional, psychological and cognitive damage inflicted on children.

**Levash:** Student learning — The pandemic has resulted in learning loss for students; the academic recovery plan in place needs to be deployed with fidelity, supported with adequate resources and monitored. A focus also needs to be on improving the district's student growth and target group outcomes.

Community engagement



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### 4th Thursday

Fredonia Adult Day Center  
508 Fredonia Ave, Fredonia  
10:00-11:30 am

For information and caregiver resources

Check out our website:  
[www.ozccc.org](http://www.ozccc.org)

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— Strong communities build strong schools so the board needs to engage with the community in new ways so every stakeholder has a voice, is responded to, and is able to engage in civil discourse.

**Fiscal Management** — The district is going to be facing significant fiscal restraints while developing the 2022-23 budget, a focus will need to be on allocating resources in a fiscally conservative manner that will support ALL students.

3. What is a school board member's role and responsibility? How does that role differ from the role of the superintendent or administration?

**Buzzell:** Simply, the board's role is strategic ("above the line") and administration's role is tactical ("below the line"). It's appropriate for the board to ask about tactics and present challenges, but inappropriate to do this work. What I've described is a "governance" model, which MTSD has been working under since the K-8 and high school districts merged in 1972. Specifically, the roles of the board are to establish strategy, create policy, approve the budget and

appoint/evaluate the superintendent. In contrast, the superintendent and administration execute the will of the board. Together, the BOE and superintendent operate as a "Team of 8."

**Chromy:** The board develops and revises board policy, hiring a superintendent to oversee and implement the vision of the board, and approving a district budget. This is strategic in nature, while the role of the superintendent and administration is operational and involves the implementation of the board's vision for the district. It's essential for the board, superintendent and administration to work collaboratively to meet the diverse needs of the students and community they serve.

**Douglas:** As one body, school board members make policies in order to guide our superintendent and administration. Board members are entrusted by our community of voters to act as the liaison between the schools and families. The school board leaves the daily operations to the hired experts: superintendent, administration, educators and staff. The elected board members do not presume to be the educational experts

in these specific fields, but they know the needs of our community and make policies accordingly.

**Johnson:** The pursuit of academic excellence for all students is the primary focus of any school board. It is the board's responsibility to set policies that ensure students will succeed in future endeavors and direct the superintendent in policy implementation. The superintendent provides an advisory role, but the board ultimately has the responsibility to make informed decisions about allocating resources, the professional development of teachers and staff, hiring and strategic planning.

**Levash:** At the highest level the role of a school board is governance and the role of the superintendent and administration is to run the district. In the governance model, the board "stays above the line" while the administrative team is "below the line" deploying strategies and procedures in alignment with the board approved policies, strategic plan and budget. The superintendent is accountable to the board for results and ensuring alignment.



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