

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS RETIREES ASSOCIATION**  
**Political Action Committee**

Please return this bio page and the completed questionnaire by January 24, 2020 to Lou D'Ovidio, loudov37@gmail.com,

Candidate for: \_\_\_\_\_ BOE \_\_\_\_\_ District: At large \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Dr. Sunil Dasgupta \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: friends4sunil@gmail.com

Website: \_\_\_\_\_sunildasgupta.com \_\_\_\_\_

Education:

PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (Political Science)  
MA, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (Political Science)  
B.Com, University of Calcutta, India

Relevant Experience:

I am a Montgomery County parent of 3 MCPS students, I have 20 years of classroom experience, ten of which have been in Montgomery County teaching mostly MCPS alumni.

I am a community organizer. I have served as PTA President and Vice-president at Earle B. Wood Middle School and continue to serve as Rockville Cluster Coordinator. I am also a volunteer parent chair of MCCPTA's Health and Safety Committee, I have brought together different people, groups, and offices to address issues concerning school nutrition, mental health and wellness, substance use prevention, and safe technology.

Where in the past the Special Education and Gifted and Talented parents were among the best organized, we worked to make Health, Safety, and Wellness community in the system one of the most effervescent. The level of engagement on these issues shows in the fact that a majority of testimonies presented to the BOE at public hearings talk about these issues. Clearly, the national and international climate has contributed, but we have created a broad coalition on health and safety matters, including and especially on mental health and wellness.

In 2017, following three suicides in the school system, we began organizing a Mental Health and Wellness Forum in partnership with MCPS. Held on April 22, 2018 at Gaithersburg High School, more than 200 people attended. After the event, we decided to make it an annual occurrence and have held two more forums in 2019 and 2020.

The last one on Jan 11, 2020, attracted over 300 attendees. The keynote speaker was Dr. Raymond Crowel, director of the county Health and Human Services. We have more than 50 providers and 10 breakout sessions, including an onsite mindfulness class. We offered free Mental Health First Aid, the three Gaithersburg Cluster principals ran a workshop on trauma-informed schools, and the Montgomery County Police Department premiered its mock teen bedroom trailer, an education tool they have developed to warn parents about whether teenagers engaged in substance use might hide their contraband. The event was covered by local media: <http://towncourier.com/mcps-mccpta-hosts-mental-health-and-wellness-forum/>.

I am the organizer of a Facebook group, MoCo Mental Health and Wellness, whose purpose is to support the forums by fighting stigma, connecting families, teachers, and students with resources, and to advocate for youth mental health and wellness in the county. The group has 430 members.

I have taken the energy from the group into real community action beyond the forum. We are working on a project called “Postcards to Dentists” where we get county residents to write postcards to county dentists to encourage them to follow CDC guidelines on prescribing opioids to young people for wisdom tooth removal or other oral surgery. Pain medication for oral surgery is the first time young people are prescribed opioids. Hopefully, we can expand the project to include sports medicine specialists and pediatricians. Right now, I am working with county agencies to refine the language.

I also run another Facebook group called Parent-Teacher Exchange (294 members), which has become the venue for organizing Parent-Teacher Social Hours, also in real life. We have well-attended organized social hours every month since August 2019 (except November). These social hours are a rare public venue where teachers and parents come together socially. I strongly believe that developing relationships at a matter of course provides the ballast we need when we have crises to solve. If we wait for crises to talk about building relationships, we are not being forward thinking.

Toward that end, I will look into BOE’s traditions and prohibitions of open communication between Board members and the public. I will use all means at my disposal to open two-way communications in the BOE.

I have also worked in two other areas as an education advocate. I work with environmental groups to enhance environmental education in schools, including professional development, and to help MCPS transition from fossil fuels. We have made some progress here to begin a dialog with MCPS. I would love to see MCPS move school buses to electric and more solar generation on school roofs. I believe there is industry funding available. I also work with pedestrian activists because I am concerned in about

student safety on the streets and would like to see improvements in bus stop choices and walk routes. I would like to see all school buses have GPS tracking not only so parents know when they should expect buses to arrive but also to improve bus routing itself.

I bring 20 years of academic and research experience and the interest to address knotty policy problems. I lead an academic program, conduct academic research, and work with complex and intractable issues. I have experience with using, manipulating, and analyzing data and datasets. I have experience reading and reporting on financial statements and legal documents. I have done this most recently with the boundary change issue, offering a process that can help mitigate the anger around the issue. See: <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/17/opinion-focus-on-process-to-get-school-redistricting-right/>.

As a college professor, I have the flexibility to devote the time to the Board job and bring to bear considerable knowledge of government, organizations, education policy, and local politics. Rather than the Board job taking away time from my professional work, I see synergies where my Board experience informs my research and my research helps me be a better Board member.

I have written about local education politics. See here: <https://www.sunildasgupta.com/research-and-writing.html>. Please note the op-ed series in Source of the Spring and my op-ed in Maryland Matters, which I think can help us come out of the boundary change debate with positive forward-looking steps.

Most significant achievements:

Dad. Teacher. Published Scholar. Higher Education Administrator. PTA Leader. Convener of Annual Mental Health and Wellness Forum. Community organizer. Class of 2020, Leadership Montgomery.

One of the things I am most proud of is helping my wife, Elana Mintz, found a nonprofit that provides outdoors-focused, hands-on education programming to hundreds of school children from more than 80 schools in Washington DC.

MCCPTA Dad4PTA 2018

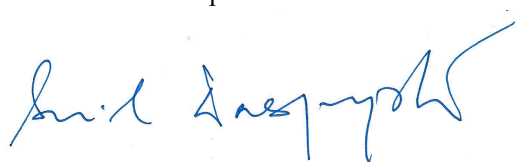
Occupation: Director, Political Science Program, UMBC at the Universities at Shady Grove

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ UMBC \_\_\_\_\_

I understand the answers from this questionnaire may be circulated among your members and may be used in Montgomery County Public Schools Retirees Association publications.

Date: \_1/27/2020

Signature:



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS RETIREES ASSOCIATION**  
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**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**2020**

Sunil Dasgupta Responses

**The County school budget pays a significant portion of retirees' health insurance costs. What is your position on maintaining or improving upon this commitment to MCPS Retirees?**

I believe MCPS should stand by commitments it has made to retirees. I understand generally that healthcare costs are rising and I am open to discussing cost and quality concerns with stakeholders.

**Mandatory state and local student testing receive much criticism from some. What are your thoughts on student testing? What would you support as a Board member?**

The standards movement arose in the 1990s from the need to ensure consistency across race and socioeconomic divisions. The advent of computer-based education technology vastly expanded testing and with it the time teachers spend it, and now it seems that we might have overbalanced.

Teachers complain about being stretched thin and becoming data-gatherers more than teachers. Teachers appear to have little time to process the needs of all their students, to plan, to develop relationships with students and their families central to learning, and to promote health and wellness for students and themselves. Many students, including my own children complain about excessive testing.

The kicker is that the performance gap remains significant and has even grown somewhat in the last decade. Now testing time is not responsible for all of this, but a thoughtful review of where the balance ought to be should be part of BOE's work going forward.

I would like to see the BOE invite all stakeholders to participate in a public process for determining some what kind of rebalancing is possible and desirable given that most standards are state and federal requirements.

I personally favor solutions that enable teacher autonomy but also combine that effort with a big push toward teacher and staff diversity and cultural competency training.

**If the County Council had to cut the school operating budget, they historically asked the Board to prioritize. What programs would you reduce or eliminate?**

MCPS operating budgets are protected by the Maintenance of Effort Law. The only condition under which County Council could cut the operating budget is if the economy went into a tailspin and we returned to recession. While this seems improbable at this moment, it is possible that extraordinary levels of national debt could trigger inflation and economic slowdown. If that were to happen and the County received a waiver for Maintenance of Effort, the first thing to do would be to convene a group of stakeholders to develop a plan. The task of reconciling competing interests is not easy, but I would like to see savings first through rebalancing capital and operating budgets.

Using current numbers, this is what is possible to do (with or without a recession). The current MCPS Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is \$1.82 billion, which requires \$1.2 billion in new bonds (money the county government borrows) with a requirement to repay them at a cost of close to \$100 million annually. Reassigning students from overcrowded schools to under-enrolled schools can make it possible to shift financial resources to a hiring expansion.

- By reducing the need for new buildings, MCPS will decrease the new bond amounts and the annual cost of repayment of those bonds. For every \$100 million reduced in bonds, MCPS will save \$8 million\*, about the salary of 100 new teachers.
- Schools that had been overcrowded will receive less per/student funding, but will decrease or even eliminate costs associated with overcrowding, like rental of portables.
- Schools that had been under-enrolled will get increased per/student funding to support associated expenses.

This kind of re-prioritization requires assertive leadership within the BOE and a willingness to work with the county government, the county council, and with the state.

If we do nothing, our borrowing and debt service will keep growing and our operating budget will become further constrained.

**What is your overall assessment of the job that MCPS is doing for children? Explain.**

Public education has clear public purpose: our schools should aim to produce productive and participatory citizens as well as provide equal access for all residents. This non-excludability is what makes public education public.

With growing population and demographic shifts, the challenges in front of MCPS have also grown. We know that parts of the MCPS approach work very well, but some parts are failing to break through. This manifests most of all in the performance gap that is visible by demography and geography, and if it is left unaddressed, will rise to hurt the

reputation of the entire county as a place to live and raise families. Therefore, it is incumbent on those who have access to good schools to support education policy that uplifts all schools in MCPS.

Looking under the performance gap reveals opportunity gap, resource allocation issues, proper asset management, teacher and staff advancement questions. To effectively address student performance, MCPS will have to deal with these underlying issues.

MCPS has taken some positive steps by expanding Pre-K and adding universal screening for magnet selection, but we need to take a hard look at class-size, planning time, teacher training, and the mental health and wellness of students and staff. Teachers and staff are stretched as enrollment and needs have increased.

MCPS has to find ways to hire more teachers, staff, and counselors to make a real dent in class size and staff ratios; empower teachers and staff with training and planning time; and rebuild the home and school partnership. Meeting these goals come down to money. Board members have a pulpit they can use to generate public support for more county and state funding, but they have a responsibility to make the best use of the money that is allocated. I have a proposed a plan that can help rebalance capital and operating budgets over time and allow MCPS to expand hiring. Please visit: [sunildasgupta.com](http://sunildasgupta.com)

**What is your position on vouchers for public or private charter schools?**

I do not support public or voucher-based charter schools in Montgomery County. Advocates of school choice have seen the greatest support when public education has failed in some respect. I am running for a BOE seat to improve the system, to help foster innovation, and to ensure we are adapting to coming challenges.

I think we could consider some charter ideas such as non-traditional school design and specialized programming.

**Name: Sunil Dasgupta BOE District: At-large Date: 01/27/2020**

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