

**2020 Maryland Primary Election**  
**Montgomery Board of Education**  
**Candidate Questionnaire**  
**SEIU Local 500**



**SEIU: 2.2 MILLION WORKING MEN AND WOMEN FIGHTING FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM**

The Service Employees International Union is the largest and fastest growing union in North America. SEIU's mission is to build strength to gain fair wages, healthcare, pensions, safe workplaces, and respect for working Americans.

SEIU represents over 45,000 Healthcare, Property Service, and Public Sector Workers in Maryland and Washington D.C. More specifically, SEIU Local 500 represents 15,000 women and men working in universities, community colleges, public schools, pre-school education, child care, and in service to communities and the public interest in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

Thank you for participating in the SEIU Local 500's Candidate Questionnaire and Interview Process. SEIU Local 500 will consider your responses as we make a recommendation to our membership for both your party nomination process and/or the general election. To help assist us in our endorsement process we ask that you answer all questions as completely as possible and return by Monday, February 10<sup>th</sup> by 5:00 PM.

**Return by e-mailing completed questionnaire to BOTH:**

**Travis B. Simon**  
**Political Director**  
[simont@seiu500.org](mailto:simont@seiu500.org)

**&**

**Dolly Kildee**  
**SEIU PAC Chair**  
[Dollykildee@hotmail.com](mailto:Dollykildee@hotmail.com)

Also, if you have additional questions or concerns please contact Travis at 540-335-2969 or Dolly at 301-670-5543.

### **CANDIDATE STATEMENT**

I affirmatively seek the endorsement and support of SEIU, its members, and their families. In seeking this endorsement, I pledge to support the rights of workers to join a union and collectively bargain. I understand that as a community leader, I may be called upon to help workers form unions, including speaking with employers and urging them to respect these same rights. Further, as an elected official, I will maintain regular contact with SEIU Local leaders and members. Any campaign contribution I may receive is from SEIU members who voluntarily give small monthly donations.

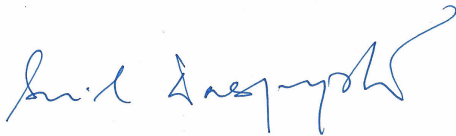
**Name:** Sunil Dasgupta

**Office Sought:** At-large BOE

**Phone:** 240-554-5923

**Email:** [friends4sunil@gmail.com](mailto:friends4sunil@gmail.com)

**Signature:**



- 1. Our union believes that economic inequality is one of the greatest threats facing our communities and the future of public education. If elected to the Board of Education, what initiatives would you be willing to undertake to begin addressing this critical issue?**

Inequality is a widespread social problem. Real wages have been stagnant for decades even as we are now at close to full employment in the national economy. As a Board member, I will work hard to find the money so that MCPS salaries do not stagnate. This is important not only for addressing inequality but also enabling recruitment and retention of MCPS staff.

Further, we have to address inequality faced by students, between schools and inside schools. We know that many students from lower income families go to schools with fewer resources and this opportunity gap results in the performance gap, often distinguished by race and ethnicity.

We have to both add resources to these schools and to de-concentrate poverty. This is one reason I support regular school boundary review and adjustment. I have written extensively about boundary change and would point you to this op-ed that lays out a reasonable pathway to do this:

<https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/17/opinion-focus-on-process-to-get-school-redistricting-right/>

There is some apprehension that boundary changes will reduce Title 1 funding to MCPS. My research shows that all four Title 1 grants are calculated districtwide and are not school-specific, which means that MCPS will continue to get the same amount of Title 1 funding as a district no matter how we choose to distribute between schools. What we have to think clearly about is how we distribute these resources. MCPS, for example, targets all Title 1 funding to elementary schools and uses no Title 1 money to support secondary schools. That's a choice we currently make.

Beneath the large policy questions, for me, lies the central fact that we need more staff in MCPS. Reducing staff-to-student ratios is my number one priority. I would imagine this includes more hours for current staff as well.

Obviously, this is a matter of finding the money to do it. We have to ask the state and the county for more and we need to rebalance capital and operating budgets. If we can reduce borrowing by \$100 million, we can save \$8 in debt repayment annually. That is the salary of 100 new MCPS staff. If we can expand staff the way I think we should, we can have more para-educators in schools and expand the Pupil-Personnel Worker (PPW) program so that we can create a system of home visits.

I am grateful to the SEIU500 Board for signing on to the public letter in support of the current boundary analysis. Boundary change is not going to solve all our problems or even solve them quickly, but this is a historic opportunity to tackle longstanding artifact of social inequality. I firmly believe that we can only cross this line together in a coalition with unions and other progressive organizations in the county.

Tackling social inequality is a big task that goes beyond schools, but there are steps we can take inside the school system to help. Closing the performance gap and rebalancing the capital and operating budgets are likely to have the biggest long-term impact on social inequality within the MCPS universe. Addressing wage stagnation and better targeting of resources to those in need are more immediate term policies we can pursue.

**2. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future recommends fulltime preschool for all of Maryland's 4 year olds, low income 3 year olds and those with special needs. If elected, will you support actively including SEIU Local 500 in discussions with the BOE and the Superintendent of how this may be achieved? Including options of neighborhood home childcare providers as deliverers of these services?**

Yes, I support the expansion of preschool options laid out in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. What is missing in the Kirwan Commission recommendations that inform the Blueprint is discussion of how we engage staff and not just teachers. I think this was a big missed opportunity and as a Board member I will actively consult with and include SEIU500 in discussions of how to expand preschool options.

Kirwan's focus on preschool could possibly increase staff hours for early education staff.

I like the idea of building out a network of home childcare providers to support expanded preschool, especially since we have a shortage of childcare providers. I would certainly like to examine any proposals from SEIU500 about how to do this, including what licensing, professional development, and supervision that would be necessary. I would imagine a neighborhood system as is implied in the question will involve other county and possibly state agencies. Ensuring coordination will be critical.

**3. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future also recommends elevating the teaching profession by increasing compensation to teachers. Will you support increasing compensation for all of MCPS employees?**

Yes, I think it was big omission on the part of Kirwan Commission not to address staff in its report and to limit its recommendations to teachers. MCPS staff are critical for the effective delivery of education to our students. Staff and teachers work together every day in the same schools and classrooms and face challenges together. I support hiring more staff and paying them more so that the job is attractive so that we reduce retention problems. Paying staff more really comes down to finding the money. I have a plan for rebalancing the capital and operating budgets to begin to find this money.

Paid family medical leave has been an issue that is on my radar. I would like to see if we can expand coverage of family medical leave.

A secondary issue not talked about often in this context is professional development for staff. MCPS staff bring a varied set of skills from paraeducators and bus drivers to speech pathologists and data analysts. So, designing PD opportunities and advancement possibilities can be hard but we need to bring focus to it.

**4. What are the three top issues motivating you to run for the Board of Education that would impact our members and their children, and their communities?**

- Expand hiring of teachers, staff, and counselors to address class size and staff ratios.
- Rebuild the home and school partnership to where teachers have the time to develop these relationships and ensure families, even those with significant stressors, can participate in their children's education.
- Invest in the health and safety of our students and staff, including in mental health and wellness.

And find the money to do this.

All of these issues affect SEIU500 members, their children, and their communities.

I would like to point out that while this question is framed in "their" terms, I see it more as "our" terms. SEIU500 employees are an integral part of our community. Our children go to school together, participate in sports and extracurricular activities together, we go to each other's homes, and we are friends. The SEIU community is not them. It is us.

**5. The public discourse regarding the county budget process always seems to pit the school system budget priorities against all other funding priorities, as if they were mutually exclusive of each other. Our union sees this as a significant problem. If elected, or reelected to the Board of Education, how would your leadership approach alter this dynamic?**

Unfortunately, this is all very true. We pit the school budget against other priorities and even one school against another when a) we have tight revenue situation, and b) we forget/ignore/reject the public character of public education. BOE does not raise taxes, but as Board member I hope to add my voice to those county and state leaders who are willing to work on fully funding our schools.

Second, the BOE has a pulpit and it should be speaking out more openly about the challenges we face. However, BOE members seem hesitant to make public statements with regularity and forcefulness. From the outside, it is unclear why the BOE is hesitant—and leaves much of this work to MCPS itself—but if elected I want to have a much more direct and open relationship with the public, with MCPS staff, with students, and really anyone who will talk to me. The onus is on BOE members to reach out, not wait for public hearings to hear back. That's a change in the tone of leadership I would bring.

**6. Will you pledge to make full funding of collective bargaining agreements a priority in the school board's budgeting process?**

Yes. We need to stand by agreements we make. If not, why do we make them? In the unlikely event that we face a serious economic downturn, we have to act in consultation with the unions to find a way forward. But we cannot leave the relationship-building to the time of crisis. Therefore, I promise to consult, do so openly, and include MCPS staff who with our teachers constitute the engine, transmission, and the wheels of our education system.

**7. Will you commit to opposing the contracting out of Montgomery County Public School jobs?**

As a matter of principle, yes. I would like more hours for staff instead. But this commitment is only meaningful when accompanied by professional development and advancement opportunities that help training and retention of our current workforce. As education changes and job descriptions evolve, we need to make sure there are adequate training opportunities and pathways of growth.

**8. If asked to do so, would you provide a letter of support to workers for their efforts to form a union?**

Yes, I support and recognize the long historical role of unions in reducing inequality.

**9. Viability is an important consideration for our union in determining which candidates to support. A well-funded, strategically sound campaign means an opportunity for us to provide a meaningful "value added" to your efforts. Can you describe your campaign structure, the amount of money you've raised, and your strategy for winning? (Please note that our committee will hold this information in strict confidence.)**

I have a clear message, strong connections around the county geographically and functionally across key organizing areas such as public education, health and safety, environment and climate change, transit and pedestrian safety, and as an educator in county institutions of higher education serving mainly MCPS graduates. I believe my message centered on expanded hiring of staff and teachers will resonate with county residents who support public education.

It should come as no surprise, given my views, that MCPS staff and teachers are among my strongest supporters. I believe we need to work with staff and teachers if we want to close the achievement gap, enhance content education, and rebuild the home and school partnership. As a reflection of this support, MCEA has decided to endorse me with the Apple Ballot, the only candidate they have recommended in the entire BOE race. We will be announcing more endorsements shortly.

I have built a strong campaign team. My campaign chair, Angelo Parodi, was my son's 5th grade teacher from when we lived in Washington, DC. Mr. Parodi is a Takoma Park resident who still works in the same school my kids went to in DCPS when we lived there. He brings a school staff perspective and helps us develop campaign positions and strategy. My campaign treasurer, Jamison Adcock, is a veteran of civic association politics in the county and a key liaison to the civic associations. We have a two-person website, social media, and communication team, a coordinator for questionnaires, and a volunteer coordinator. There are several volunteers who have picked up different parts of our campaign work.

We are readying an operation that will include door-knocking, mailers, and digital communication.

I am hoping to win SEIU500's endorsement and am approaching other unions including MCGEO. I have reached out to other progressive groups in the county.

We have a goal of raising \$30,000 and have lined up a series of fundraisers to get there. We have already raised enough to begin funding campaign activities. Expect to see our campaign volunteers start to knock on your doors.