

Hello students of Maryland and MASC! My name is **Madison Watts**, and I am thrilled to be a candidate for the Maryland Student Member of the Board of Education. I am a sophomore at Rockville High School in Montgomery County, and while I am a product of MCPS, I have worked closely with students in other Maryland counties over the course of my education. The role of the Student Member of the Board of Education is extensive, and includes, but is not limited to, valuing the student voice, showing full transparency about policy and Board decisions, representing students from all counties equally, and advocating for legislation and action that students are passionate about. I am running for the Student Member of the Board of Education because I am fully motivated to foster positive change! My internships and other experiences have given me significant insight into student advocacy at the local levels in Montgomery County and the state and national levels. Now, I am interested in applying my experience to the state level and working to benefit over 900,000 Maryland public school students.

As Maryland SMOB, I would push student voices to the forefront, implement a clear communication system in order to directly deliver student feedback to Board members, create opportunities for students to have one-on-one conversations with Maryland decision-makers and play a large role in the policies that impact them. I am committed to engaging with students statewide, as student voices must be the basis and foundation of Board of Education policies. I am not only soliciting for students to identify areas for educational improvement within the state. I am also interested in getting students involved with these efforts so they can take initiative to solve conflicts they see in their own communities.

Among the issues that I intend to prioritize include college and career readiness, diverse and inclusive curriculums, equitable education, and bringing more attention to student mental health.

1. **College and Career Readiness-** Many students around the state can agree that they would appreciate career/college planning help much earlier in high school than in the last two years where things suddenly speed up on SAT, college searches, thinking about GPA and committing to career paths. I will work with the Board of Education to seek additional resources for students in the 9th and 10th grades, or even middle school, so that planning and brainstorming can begin earlier in the process.
2. **Diverse and Inclusive Curriculums-** As Maryland is such a diverse state, it is imperative that the Maryland education curriculum reflects that. I am advocating to implement more cultural relevance in history and English classes, as these are the classes that should depict a wide variety of experiences and viewpoints from different groups of people. I would also like to add more classes statewide that educate students on environmental impact, personal finance, and mental health education, as these topics are becoming more prevalent in our time.
3. **Equitable Education-** The educational and opportunity gap is a large problem, that has been growing in the past few years, including with the COVID- 19 pandemic. It is imperative that the Board of Education extends resources and opportunities to all students. There is a noteworthy disparity in the Maryland graduation requirement statistic demonstrating that certain groups have lower rates of graduation, and some have much higher. The SMOB and Board of Education must work together to receive feedback on causes and combat the problem together, as all students should have the opportunity to graduate and thrive.
4. **Mental Health-** I am focused on improving student mental health - highlighting the importance and necessity of heightened mental health resources. Since the pandemic, many students have been expected to bounce back and automatically return to school like normal, however, this has not been the case for many Maryland students. It is important that the Board of Education is aware of this struggle and provides access to a plethora of mental health resources, like counselors, hotlines, and education. If elected, I will also work with the Board of Education to bring more education and awareness to mental health so students, teachers and staff can work collectively on healthy well-being.

As your 2023-2024 Student Member of the Board of Education, I will pursue these critical agenda goals, but more importantly, listen to you! I am ecstatic to work with and for the student of Maryland to encourage progress and improvements to our school system.

Warmest Regards, *Madison C. Watts*