

Keys to the Candidates
Compiled by the League of Women Voters of Bloomington-Monroe County
for the
2016 General Election

MCCSC Board, District 6

Lois Sabo-Skelton
Martin Spechler

1. What are your qualifications for the office you are seeking?

SABO-SKELTON: I have served on the MCCSC School Board of Trustees for three terms. A distinct priority for me has always been the needs of our children and teachers in the classroom. Currently teaching at Ivy Tech Community College in Bloomington, I experience on a daily basis, the dynamics of the everyday classroom and this remains my focus as I work to insure a safe, healthy, and vital curriculum for every child in the MCCSC system.

SPECHLER: Ph.D. in Economics and Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard University. Professor of Economics Emeritus, Indiana University. I have served on the Bloomington City Council (Jack Hopkins Social Service and Sidewalk committees) and the University Faculty Council (seven terms). Past President of the Bloomington Jewish Community. Elected member of the Democratic Central Committee for several terms. Father of two graduates of Bloomington public schools. Frequent invited lecturer in high school and university classes and on WFIU.

2. How would you work to ensure transparency in school board operations?

SABO-SKELTON: During the past ten years we have made great strides in getting information to the public. Thanks to “technology” we have a website that contains complete information about past and future meetings. The MCCSC has held numerous “Community Conversations” and welcomes the public to attend our meetings and voice opinions. Knowing that people are very busy and cannot always attend meetings, great effort has gone into the planning of these activities. I continue to meet with members of the public whenever called upon. It has been my pleasure and a great way to listen to the ideas and concerns of many parents. I will continue to do so, working to make all of our information as transparent as the law will allow.

SPECHLER: I make my telephone number and e-mail address public, unlike some other public officials, and I regularly attend neighborhood meetings, as invited. I speak my mind on public radio stations and in the newspapers, inviting responses. Citizens know me by sight and often stop me to exchange opinions.

As an economist I would scrutinize the MCCSC budgets to prevent unnecessary expenditures and voice my opinions at meetings of the Board and at PTA meetings, if invited.

3. Should teachers have a role in the development of system-wide policies and priorities and, if so, how can the school board ensure that they do?

SABO-SKELTON: The MCCSC has worked closely with their teachers to create a solid working relationship, one that considers the ideas and talents of the teachers and what they see as the needs and future of the school system. Great examples are the trips taken to study the prototype schools by our teachers and administrators that have culminated in the Baccalaureate School design in three of our elementary schools as well as the Arts centered curriculum at Fairview. All of these curriculums have been the result of our teachers and administrators working together in order to give the children of the MCCSC the finest education possible.

SPECHLER: Along with parents, teachers have the best access to our students, their learning, ambitions, and complaints. As a long-time union member, I support collective bargaining by elected representatives of the teachers, bus drivers, and eligible administrators. Of course, with diminished support by the Indiana General Assembly and the current governor, we will need to be careful and make necessary compromises. Our superintendent should declare her priorities openly and explain any compromises (such as the school day and academic calendar) that must be made. Teachers' representatives must be given the right to question these policies and priorities at a meeting of the School Board.

School Board members who have served three or more terms may not be willing to do so openly, as I would.

4. Is it appropriate for the school board to oppose state mandates if they run counter to the community's interests or desires and, if so, how should that be done?

SABO-SKELTON: Yes. The MCCSC has done so in the past by letters, emails, and attending meetings and reading protest statements against those laws that work to hinder and destroy public schools like the Monroe County Community School Corporation. But, as the public must realize there will be no change in this direction until those in the Indiana legislature who support vouchers and Charter schools are voted out and those who understand the great value of public school education – the real public school – the ones that have an "elected board," not an appointed board over which the public has no control. Until this happens we must continue to fight for our MCCSC children in order to give them the best education they "all" deserve.

SPECHLER: Alas, the State of Indiana has sovereign authority here. At best we can work around the stated mandates to respond to widespread community desires.

For example, we cannot prevent giving authority and vouchers to charter and private schools, nor can we insist that they teach recognized scientific principles. What we can do is to explain to parents that attending public schools with a broad variety of students serves the long-term interests of their children. Public schools have various fiscal responsibilities (community facilities, pensions, insurance, special education) that new charter schools don't. The MCCSC should find out why we are losing students to these alternatives and make

adjustments that could be publicized as a way to prevent further erosion of our student population.

5. Given the importance of recess to children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development, what are your thoughts on crafting a district wide policy that prohibits the practice of withholding recess as a punishment in our schools or eliminating recess altogether?

SABO-SKELTON: Withholding or eliminating recess? No and No! Everyone who understands the necessity of rest while working or studying knows that this “rest break” is imperative to learning and teaching. Students and teachers need breaks in order to maximize learning. It would be fascinating to put together a group to work on the variations of “recesses” that exist and see if we could design an original model. Bearing in mind, that the Indiana legislature has mandated so many minutes of the school day directed at what “they” want done in the classroom. This hinders greatly the creativity of our teachers and robs our children of the right to be free to take a moment to swing, sing, jump, run – and laugh in the fresh air.

SPECHLER: Recess is both popular and necessary for healthy children relaxed enough to pay attention. It is not an acceptable punishment for any child. In particular, there is no understandable reason to eliminate recess in the elementary grades. Older children may substitute organized athletics, walks to school (instead of taking the bus), and extracurricular activities (dancing, for example) with approval of their parents and school principals. Meditation may complement physical activity, too, but not at the expense of core subjects, music, and art.