

Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire 2012

San Francisco Parent Political Action Committee

We appreciate your time and thoroughness with these answers and will be posting them online for voters to educate themselves on your views and experience. Please return this questionnaire by August 3rd, 2012, to sfparentpac@gmail.com. The SF Parent PAC may contact you for an interview following its receipt of this questionnaire. The interview date will be announced early next week.

Candidate Information

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Please answer each question below in 150 words or less. If desired, you may choose two questions to answer at greater length.

Qualifications and Involvement

1. Why are you running for Board of Education and why should parents support your candidacy?

*I'm running for Board of Education because I believe in public education. As a born and raised San Franciscan, I am product of our school system. Today, my husband and I are proud parents of children attending San Francisco Public Schools. In high school, my teachers weren't just mentors – they were my hero's. They inspired, challenged, and taught me to believe in myself. They gave me the foundation to grow and become a successful professional and a good parent. Even today, I credit my teachers, as much as my parents, as a guiding force that moved me towards public service. That's why I believe, when elected, **I will bring a unique perspective of an active public school parent, teacher, and creating jobs.***

My history of public service includes my volunteer effort in our schools, serving at the San Francisco Human Rights Commission and work within the non-profit community. I have also served on boards like the Caltrans Statewide Small Business Advisory Board and demonstrated leadership through the organization of people and programs in various events, programs, and workshops.

As a professor, I enjoy teaching and engaging students in my Cultural and Physical Anthropology courses at Skyline College in San Bruno. As a passionate believer in the power of education, my position on San Francisco's schools is quite simple: quality schools emerge from healthy communities.

We must make our schools the center of our communities and implement practices that result in our children learning the critical skills and subject matter necessary for the challenges they face. These are achievable goals if we adopt and remain committed to policies that focus on sustainable public education. As a member of the SFUSD School Board, my priority on every policy decision will be for our children to have the abilities and values to contribute to the social, cultural and economic well-being our city. I plan to do this through the collaboration and partnership of parents, teachers, and administrators. I have a proven track record of accountability and I will ensure that the Superintendent as well as the Board is held to our mission, responsibilities and ethical behaviors that parents and families demand.

My top priority as a School Board Member will be to rebuild and reform our schools from the bottom up. Working with my fellow Board Members, I will work every day to create an environment where our schools are the reasons families stay in San Francisco – rather than the principal reason they leave.

2. Briefly state your experience with SFUSD? (Have you been a student, parent, educator, and/or advocate?) Please explain.

I was a student and graduate of the SFUSD. I am also a current parent of two children at Jose Ortega Elementary School.

3. What do you think about SFUSD's Strategic Plan? Do you think its implementation is on target?

Overall, I think the Strategic Plan has good intentions but I think the biggest challenges to the SFUSD's strategic plan is that it have so many priorities and I'm not sure if the District has the resources, especially, financially to ensure that goals and milestones are met. No. I don't think that its implementation is on target.

Student Achievement

1. Currently each middle and high school site decides whether to offer an honors track or not. Do you think that this model of decentralized decision-making works well to serve all students? Why or why not?

No. I don't think that a decentralized decision-making model works well. We should set standards as a district for all schools so that all students are allowed equal opportunities for access to such programs.

2. What should the district's role be in addressing students' physical and mental health and well-being? You may focus on specific issue(s) if you choose.

I believe that the schools must grow the capacity of our students and just providing the academic portion is not the best approach. I believe in a holistic approach of offering physical, mental health and well-being programs to nourish and grow students so they are ready and able to learn when they are in the classroom.

3. How should the district best prepare students for college and career?

I feel that the SFUSD is on the right track to make the Class of 2014 the first class to meet A-G requirements. This is a basic offering that will prepare students and also meet the minimum college admissions. To ensure success, there needs to be tutoring for students who need or require this to graduate on time. In addition, there should be offerings of Advanced Placement Courses as well as an on going exploration of professions, careers, and jobs that introduces and allows students to learn and plan for their career. There should be a hands-on, internship component in which high school students can intern with local businesses during the summer.

4. Do you think we are serving our Special Education students well? Why or why not?

No. I do not think that we are serving our Special Education students well. From media coverage it appears that SFUSD is not in compliance with the very basic requirements set forth by the federal government for special education students. This is the tip of the iceberg as over the years, the district has tried to make progress, but the perception of families that it's not working and the system is terribly wrong as evidenced by the lawsuits and many complaints.

5. In February, the Board of Education approved a plan to "skip" layoffs of low-seniority teachers in Superintendent Zone schools. After the resolution was challenged by the teachers' union and struck

down by an administrative law judge, the Board declined to pursue the issue further and layoffs proceeded per the collective bargaining agreement. Do you agree with the outcome? Please explain how you arrived at your opinion.

I agree with the outcome but understand the intent of what the BOE was trying to do. I feel that District staff presented a path that the BOE felt they should take a stand on for the "kids" in the communities that are affected year after year. The BOE took a chance and hoped that the judge would side with them to circumvent negotiations to create a real contract and collaborative solution with UESF. The problem is not this round of layoffs, but a systemic issue in which the same schools and communities get hit every year with layoffs thus never getting traction or stability to create better results. The BOE should have tackled this difficult conversation as it has been done before with skipping math and science teachers in SF. No one wants the same schools and communities to get hit with layoffs including teachers themselves. The solution is to start a dialogue with UESF to address a complicated systemic issue that includes issues such as hard to fill/employ schools, geography, as well as seniority and seniority placement. District staff did not recommend to do that and the BOE just took the District staff's recommendation. I think the BOE felt that politically, it looked like an easy battle to win. Who wouldn't side with them? However, it's not a simple matter and it involves more than making a stand to create real solutions for the benefit of our children. State law is clear on the matter and in the end, the BOE's vote created a big mess, eroded public confidence, and upset UESF. I view this "incident" as another example of the BOE needing a new direction in leadership, vision, and patience to work on such issues with UESF.

6. Given the cuts to professional development and general District resources, how should SFUSD attract, retain and develop high quality educators, administrators and school support staff?

I would like to reexamine using vacant SFUSD properties to provide affordable housing for such staff. I would support examining a public-private partnership to offer teachers some sort of forbearance or credits to their student loans. A similar program was implemented in New York City.

7. How should the district better support and engage parents? Be specific.

To support and engage you need a good communication department and clear goals. We lack this. There needs to be a re-examination of the communications goals and department at SFUSD. Also, communication at the school level is inconsistent as there is variation of effectiveness from site to site. We really need to look at all of this by first inviting families to discuss this issue and to come up with better ways of communicating. It's through the dialogue and process that together, families and the District will create a better way to communicate with each other.

Student Enrollment

1. Do you think that the redesigned student assignment system is meeting its stated objectives? Why or why not?

It appears that the redesigned student assignment system is meeting its stated objectives. I think that the recent "tweak" to the school assignment system is going in the right direction. It appears that there are less complaints and more families happy. However, this system will always be a point of controversy and constant re-examination needs to be done to ensure the assignment system is responsive to the needs of the families.

2. Last June, the Board of Education passed a new middle school feeder pattern policy. Do you think its implementation is on track and headed in the right direction? What do you recommend the District do to ensure its success?

Yes. I think that its implementation is heading in the right direction. To ensure success, I recommend that the District continues a constant dialogue with families and teachers so that the District can be responsive and make adjustments to the policy.

3. Should SFUSD have competitive entry schools, such as Lowell and School of the Arts? Why or why not?

Yes. Students should have the opportunity to be such schools that offer a specialized focus such as rigorous academics or the arts. These schools are within the goals of student achievement and growing the capacity of our students.

4. What should the District be doing to keep families in the City and in public schools?

The district should address the common major complaints in a manner that is empathetic, restorative and constructive to create solutions that stop systematic problems from reoccurring. The SFUSD has had high profile, "horror stories" that the district has tried to "cover up." This has been a systematic pattern of handling problems and it only undermines the relationship and trust between the District, BOE, families, and all San Franciscans.

Budget and Finance

1. California's public schools continue to face severe funding cuts. How would you suggest SFUSD restructure or leverage existing resources to serve our students effectively? What do you think is the best approach to the budget process?

I think that there needs to be a combination of restructuring and leveraging existing resources. First, there should be public meetings or some sort of summit on this. I would like to engage families, teachers and the general public on their ideas, priorities and realization of the situation. That discussion would yield a better understanding (for our families and community) of our budget. Ideas to restructure and leverage existing resources will emerge. Families are the most important stakeholders and they should be able to actively participate in such important decisions.

Personally, I'm interested in looking at the District Office in terms of staffing and programs. I would like the district to renegotiate contracts, such as 10 year leases on photocopiers to get a better deal and save us money. I also feel that we have not fully engaged a collaborate partnership with the City and County of San Francisco. We need to leverage the existing resources (i.e. in kind services) and ask for more for all of the programs and resources they provide.

2. What should the district do to make SFUSD's budget more understandable and accessible to parents?

Communication between parents, teachers, students and the school board should be the first effort at transparency. A summit would be ideal (see my answer for #1 in this section). In addition, I would like to see greater resources spent on communicating directly to groups involved in this process and inviting them to workshop, online FAQ sessions or presentations by SFUSD personnel and the School Board to community and neighborhood groups across the city. There should be regular communication with the media prior to and after the budget is released that will help San Franciscans truly understand how the budget is produced and the impact it has on our children and their educational futures.

3. There are two state funding initiatives on the November 2012 ballot. If both initiatives fail, SFUSD will face mid-year cuts of \$24 million. What should our contingency plan be as a district and city should this happen?

Increase all avenues for additional revenue or in-kind contributions from City and County of SF and other community partners. Re-negotiate all long term leases to get savings and a better deal. Increase furlough days and quickly identify duplicate positions, duties, and programs in central office to trim down that unit's budget.

4. When we are able to fill back in the holes of the current cuts, what should our next funding priorities be?

We should look at reducing the amount of furlough days. This is valuable instruction time that students need.

Role of the Board

1. Who do you believe are the most important stakeholders to shape the direction of the school district?

Families are the most important stakeholders.

How would you engage those stakeholders to ensure they have a voice in the Board of Education decision-making process?

I have a commitment to capacity building for our students as well as our most important stakeholders: families. With the understanding of historical issues, existing programs, and a quest for continued input, I would engage participation at school board meetings and other events through invitation and outreach in multiple languages. In addition, I understand some communities/stakeholders may not be as vocal or organized to provide input to the Board of Education. I intend to engage various stakeholders through meetings and conversation so that I understand and stay in touch. It is my belief that creating a culture of inclusiveness and cooperation rather than competition will support the goal of equity for all students.

2. What is the role of a School Board member versus the Superintendent?

The school board members manage and supervise the superintendent. They set policy and programs and the superintendent with his staff, implements.

School Board Members should work with the Superintendent to ensure that the spirit of the policy and programs adopted are reflected in the plan of implementation and various milestones that the district will report on in committee meetings.

3. What role should the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors have in the education of SF children and youth, if any?

The Mayor and Board of Supervisors should have a more active and collaborative role with the Board of Education to work on issues/projects such as:

1. *Funding – partner with the Board of Education to find supplemental funding.*
2. *Increasing programs from the City and County of SF – work together on engaging City and County of SF Departments to provide as many programs as possible in our public schools. For example, the Arts Commission had a program to provide the SFUSD programming but this is ending and needs to be renewed. Or have the Department of Health have afternoon clinics at school sites.*
3. *Public-private partnerships – as the City and County of SF enters in to more public-private partnerships, have a public benefit from that partnership go directly to the SFUSD. This benefit can be programs or money to a particular cause.*

What should the role of parents be in our school district?

I think the role of parents in our school district should be active and engaged in their children's education by being involved and supportive at school. Parents can be engaged in various ways. For example, serve as a classroom parent, work on a school workday, donate food at a potluck, bring needed supplies, plan and organize a fundraiser, etc. There are many ways for parents to be active and involved. PTA leadership needs to recognize and embrace language, cultural, and economic differences among families to create culturally relevant and accessible ways for all families to participate. The result will be a sense of community and supportive network for their children, teachers and administrators.

What are some of the pressing issues for parents/guardians educating children in San Francisco?

- Childcare before and/or afterschool – onsite care for all would be ideal
- Safety to and from school for students who walk and/or take MUNI
- Bullying
- Language barriers for parents to communicate with teacher, school, district, etc.
- In some cases, start and end times don't coordinate for drop off and pick ups when siblings are in different schools
- The availability and use of modern technology is inconsistent from school to school.
- Class size
- Reduced budgets
- Lack of visual and performing arts
- Safety on campus
- School lunch program is not nutritious
- Programs that help students are threatened because of political ideology. For example, JROTC.
- Not enough physical education
- Standardized test stress that kids go through
- Afterschool tutoring and homework help

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

No.