

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? (More than 150 words)**

I'm running for the Board of Education because there is nothing more important to me than every young person receiving a high-quality education that provides them with the opportunity to actualize their potential and pursue their dreams.

I was raised in a middle class family in Bay Area public schools, and public schools made many of the opportunities I've had in my life possible. For most of the last ten years, I've worked to improve public education as an advocate, organizer, educator and policy analyst. I've been deeply involved here in San Francisco in our schools working to ensure that we provide a high quality educational experience for all of our students.

We are a city of doers and dreamers, and there is no doubt that we can and should have the best urban schools in the country. SFUSD has made a lot of positive changes, and the district has done a lot of things right. Yet we are now at a crossroads, and we can either continue this momentum, or see it slow or stop. There are still major challenges facing our school system, and it is going to take creative, thoughtful, experienced, energetic leadership to ensure that we meet these challenges. I believe I have the skills, background, and commitment to provide that leadership.

I'll work with closely with parents as a Board member, and always respect and value your views. As a member of the Board of Education, I want to work for you all, and I'll work to ensure that the district is accessible, transparent and responsive to your needs.

I attended one of SF Parent PAC's first events, and have communicated regularly with your members since then. I respect a great deal what you are doing, and believe that parents should have a strong voice in school board elections. I'm honored to be considered for an endorsement.

- 2. Briefly state your experience with SFUSD? (Have you been a student, parent, educator, and/or advocate?) Please explain. (More than 150 words)**

I have been a volunteer tutor and mentor, organizer, and advocate in SFUSD schools. I was a School Volunteer at Junipero Serra Elementary, El Dorado Elementary, James Lick Middle School and Burton High School. I started an organization called Citizen Hope where we have brought hundreds of new volunteers, tens of thousands of dollars, and put on dozens of events to support our schools. Through Citizen Hope, I was one of the main organizers helping to bring in hundreds of volunteers for “The Great African American Read-In” and “Tools for Schools.”

While studying for a JD at Stanford Law and an MA in Education from Stanford School of Education, I spent much of my time studying and thinking about SFUSD education policy. I also worked as part of a legal team on a constitutional funding adequacy case in which SFUSD was a plaintiff.

I have served as an appointee of Commissioner Mendoza to the Public Education Enrichment Fund Community Advisory Committee, where I advise the district on how to spend critical enrichment funds. I was an appointee to the SFUSD Restorative Justice Taskforce, where I worked to help establish a new paradigm for school discipline and school climate. I’ve worked closely with organizations that serve SFUSD students, including on the Board of the Music Mural and Arts Project and Opportunity Impact, and as a volunteer with College Track and Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. I have attended dozens of meetings of the Board of Education.

I have deep roots in San Francisco. My cousin attends Fairmont Elementary and my Aunts and Uncles attended SFUSD schools. My Grandfather was the Dean of the School of Education at USF. I plan to stay in San Francisco for the rest of my life, and raise kids here in San Francisco public schools.

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

I support SFUSD’s Strategic Plan, particularly the “Goals” outlined in the Plan, as well as the “Beliefs,” “Mission,” and “Vision.” I believe that the Strategic Plan has helped guide the district in the right direction since its adoption and provided a needed focus to the district’s work. With that, I generally support the district’s Thirteen Strategic Priorities. Still, while the district has emphasized these Strategic Priorities, it does not seem as though they have made accessible a tracking tool to assess progress on the targets laid out in the Strategic Plan. Certainly, looking at the targets put forward in 2008 when the plan was adopted, it does not seem as though many of them are likely to be met. This year the district should look back and make it clear not just current priorities but what our progress has been, and in light of that progress or lack thereof, how the Plan should be adjusted or re-aligned.

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?

From what I know, differentiated instruction without separate “tracks” is ideal, and that when it is done well it can actually be the best learning environment for all students, including high-achieving students. With that said, differentiated instruction takes a tremendous amount of professional development and support to ensure success. We wouldn’t want to move towards implementing it in all of our schools if we were not sure that we had the supports in place for our educators to be successful. If I were on the School Board, I would want to prioritize support for schools that wanted to transition to differentiated instruction, and put forward the benefits of such an approach. Still, we should continue to allow middle and high school sites to decide on whether to offer an honors track, while providing support and guidance to those schools that want to transition to differentiated instruction.

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 am a strong supporter of the community school model, where we provide additional mental and physical health services to students and the community. As a member of the Public Education Enrichment Fund CAC, I have also been a strong supporter of our Wellness Centers and Peer Resources. I would like to see these programs expanded, and also brought into our Middle Schools. At the Middle and High School levels, we should make sure that all of our schools have well-developed and well advertised opportunities for mental health services. I'd be especially supportive of programs that involve students in providing many of these services, particularly peer counseling and mentoring. Another critical area in which schools can support physical and mental well-being is in the nutrition of the food we provide. I would advocate for us to continue to explore a "scratch" cooking central kitchen model for preparing our food.

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

SFUSD should provide a high-quality, modern, and engaging curriculum that gives all students a pathway to success. To make this a reality, the district should put a strong emphasis on project-based learning and the skills needed to succeed in the 21st century economy. I'm especially supportive of a the "wall to wall" Academy model that Burton High School has with strong support from community and business partners. We district should assess how we can support schools and educators to integrate real-world learning into each subject area. The district must provide close monitoring and oversight of our "A-G" graduation requirements to help close the opportunity gap, and ensure that we are investing in high-quality academic support, tutoring, mentorship and intervention for students that are struggling. Finally, it is critical that we protect seat time for students by standing against efforts to cancel summer school, shorten the school day, or shorten the school year.

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

There is no doubt that we are a long way from serving all of our special education students well. The audit released in 2010 showed a failure in data keeping and analysis, student outcomes, and issues with racial disparities. As the audit pointed out, there are serious questions as to whether we are spending our money wisely, and that we should be doing a much better job in how we educate our Special Education students than we are. There has been some progress, including restructuring of the special education department under new leadership and a Superintendent ordered review of special education. There is also a strong district commitment to inclusion of students with disabilities, which is positive, yet the district must ensure that the support is there for educators as this occurs. I deeply respect the work that Rachel Norton has been done in focusing the district on Special Education, and I'd want to learn from her and support her.

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.

Layoff notices are incredibly disruptive and damaging to our ability to our ability to provide high quality education to every child. I believe in doing everything we can to prevent layoffs in all of our schools and maintain staff consistency, especially in our lowest performing schools. My view is that seniority should have a central role in layoffs, though there can be some specific areas where we "skip" seniority (e.g. math, science, and special education). However when such "skips" occur, they should be negotiated with our educators, and should be well thought out with clear justification. I do understand the motivation behind the skipping of the

Zone schools, yet I do not believe that it was good policy in light of the strong objections of our educators and the fact that nearly all of the “skipped” teachers have/will be recalled. If I were on the Board, I would have sought out other options that might have helped to prevent layoffs

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?

Despite continuous cuts, we should do whatever we can to ensure that our school sites are places where our educators, administrators and school support staff are respected, valued and supported. We should focus on professional development that can have major “spin-off” effects, as our educators learn how to use tools that they can then share with each other. We can do this by creating professional learning communities in all of our schools and building capacity for the use of student learning data to inform instruction. There should be a prioritization of Instructional Coaches at every school to support our teachers to provide ongoing professional development. The district should search for innovative professional development partnerships where we get the most value with the least amount of funds. We should develop strong relationships with local educational institutions and innovative companies, and find ways that they can support our educators through partnerships.

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

Parent engagement is one of the most important predictors of student success. The district should value the parent voice at both the school site and district level, and engage parents with every aspect of decisionmaking. The district should prioritize funding for the Office of Parent Engagement, Parent Liasons, and ensure there are expanded translation services available to ensure that all parents can participate. The district should also invest in pre-academic year intensive programming to provide parents with the information and tools they need to full engage with their child’s education. We should bring a “customer service” approach to the student assignment process to ensure that there is extensive outreach and support for parents as they are navigating the process. I’d also put forward a survey to ensure that the district understands exactly what the needs of parents are with respect to support, communication and information.

Student Enrollment

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

I support the redesigned student assignment system, and I think it is a step in the right direction. There was a tremendous amount of parent and community input that went into creating the new system, and for that reason, I remain optimistic. Still, I would not be prepared to say yet whether it is meeting its stated objectives. While it seems that there have been some improvements in simplicity and clarity, I am concerned that it does not appear to have had a significant impact on diversity in our schools and there is uncertainty around the impact on equity. For that reason, the Board of Education must continue to analyze and assess the student assignment data closely, and if necessary, consider tweaking the process. In any case, we should double down on our efforts in outreach and education related to the process, which could change some of the results.

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?

From what I understand, the middle school feeder pattern policy is on track and headed in the right direction. I would hope that the middle school feeder policy puts us in a position where we can work to ensure that all of our middle schools are high-quality. It is also critical that the district continues to look closely at ensuring the availability of language pathways and special programs to ensure continuity in the transition from elementary to middle school. There needs to be a focus on adequate alignment, particularly the phase in of dual language programs in middle schools. This includes credentialing issues around BCLAD teachers, scheduling, and transportation. There also must be continued attention to enrollment changes because of the growth in middle school enrollment and the impact on over/under enrollment in some schools.

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

Yes. I believe that Lowell and School the Arts have an important role to play in providing high-quality educational opportunities to all of our students. Our focus should always be on high-expectations, high standards, and high quality in all of our schools, not just in a select few. Still, Lowell and SOTA are successful schools that offer a particular educational experience to those who seek them, and they have an essential role in our district. Our district must make it clear that it values our highest achieving students and will ensure that there are opportunities that challenge them. I'd be open to additional competitive entry schools in the district, or converting one of our existing schools to a competitive entry school with a specific mission or focus, yet I'd want to look closely at what the impact of such a change might be on our other schools and our enrollment patterns.

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

Ensuring that we have high-quality schools in every neighborhood is the best thing that the District can do to keep families in public schools. The district should also be responsive, flexible, accessible, and transparent in its dealings with all of our families, which will help to keep them in the public schools. This means more transparency with decisionmaking, more direct communication with parent groups, and more communication to parents that are considering public school. We should make sure that parents of young children understand that they do not have to move out of San Francisco to receive a high-quality public education for their child. Clarity and effective outreach around the student assignment process is especially important. We also should make sure that San Francisco public schools draw on the innovation economy in San Francisco, and that there are real benefits for students from living in a city with a thriving technology sector.

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?

We need to look closely at which programs are working for our students and which programs are not. We absolutely need to be willing to put everything on the table, and cut those programs and services which are not serving students effectively. I would ask SFUSD to develop a survey to get a better sense of how our parents and other stakeholders would like to see the budget process changed to be more accessible. At the least, we need to make sure that the budget is readable and that it can be easily searched and accessed online. Board members and SFUSD leadership should hold regular forums, townhalls and online Q and A sessions to engage with SFUSD employees, parents, and students. If elected, I would work with elected officials and city department heads in City Hall to ensure that we are looking for more creative and efficient ways to use city resources to serve our schools.

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

We need to make sure that parents are brought in much earlier in the budget process, and not just when the final votes are taken. The Board of Education should hold community meetings on the SFUSD budget at as many of the schools as possible. I'd like to see us put more of the budget online and have it be more accessible online. Parents should be able to easily click through to find a budget for their school and clearly view all of the costs at their school. I would always consult with parent groups, including the SF Parent PAC, before making any budget decisions. There should be ways for parents to give comment on budget proposals without having to come to Board Meetings, potentially online and/or with the help of surveys. We need effective mechanisms to ensure we understand what parents and students need and want.

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?

I will campaign actively for Prop 30 over the next couple months, and will be doing everything in my power to mobilize in support of the initiative. If the tax initiative fails, the consequences will be devastating for our students. We'll need to take immediate action to protect our district's finances and maintain our commitment to our students and families.

I would commit to:

- Calling for an open and transparent process that engages all stakeholders, especially parents, students and educators
- Open up communication with our educators to begin negotiations about how to address the budget deficit in a collaborative manner
- Immediately exploring local funding solutions and pushing for more leadership in City Hall to support our schools
- Convening a dialogue about new local revenue sources dedicated to SFUSD, potentially an additional parcel tax, sales tax or other revenue source that comes to the city and then to SFUSD

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

We should end the furlough days and restore the school year to at least 180 days. We should restore summer school, funding for credit recovery, and professional development days. We should ensure that funding is maintained for Instructional Coaches in as many of our schools as possible, and stabilize funding to protect librarians, counselors, para-professionals, nurses, parent liaisons, and social workers in our schools.

Further, we should analyze closely what programs/professional development/policy changes worked for our students at the SIG and Superintendent schools. There should be an intensive and comprehensive process to analyze the programs, services, and changes that were implemented through the SIG process in particular. Once we do that, we should prioritize maintaining those programs, and expanding them to other schools. There was a lot of innovation that came about as a result of the SIG grants, and we should not miss the opportunity to learn from those experiences.

Role of the Board

1. Who do you believe are the most important stakeholders to shape the direction of the school district? How would you engage those stakeholders to ensure they have a voice in the Board of Education decision-making process?

We must ensure that students, parents and our community have a voice in the policies that affect their lives. On the Board of Education, I will support the Parent Liaison positions at school sites and look toward community groups like the PTA, Parents for Public School and SF Parent PAC for other ideas on how to best engage parents in an accessible and meaningful way. As a youth organizer, I will fight for a stronger Student Advisory Council and Youth Commission to ensure that their voice is heard on important Board issues and look for opportunities to expand student voice within the schools. I'll also open up a citywide dialogue with our innovative businesses and educational institutions and work with them to find innovative ways to support our schools. It is critical that we engage the entire city in the conversation around how to best support our children.

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

The School Board sets the overall policy, vision, and priorities for the district. The Superintendent, with his staff, is then responsible for implementing and executing this vision. The Board manages the Superintendent and holds him accountable to ensure adequate and effective implementation. The Board also has an important role in ensuring that the priorities of the community and the district's stakeholders are reflected in the district's operations and understood by the Superintendent and his staff.

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 have an important role in the education of SF children and youth. They ensure that the City and County supports the School District with the Rainy Day fund and other ways that CCSF provides direct funding to SFUSD. The BoS and Mayor would also make sure that they prioritize education related services and coordinate these services with SFUSD (e.g. DCYF or summer programming). CCSF also makes decisions relating to transportation, housing, and other services that deeply impact children and youth and have an indirect or direct impact on a child's well-being educational opportunities. The Mayor and BoS can also be advocates publicly for our schools, and help to elevate the schools and communicate information to parents and community members. They will of course also be critical partners in any local revenue measures.

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

Parents should have an absolutely central role in our school district, and should be viewed as essential partners in everything that happens in our schools. Parent groups should be consulted on policy and budget decisions, and given significant opportunity to provide feedback and input. Parents also must be provided information when changes occur, and kept up on any relevant information related to their child's education. Engaging parents is also essential for the district to be able to be successful in educating every child. Schools that have seen great improvements in every case were able to do so because of strong parent involvement. For that reason, the district should not only welcome parent engagement, but it should also foster, encourage and facilitate it wherever possible. SFUSD cannot be successful without strong parental engagement.

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

San Francisco parents face many challenges and our schools do not exist in a vacuum. In order to serve our students, we must address issues facing families outside of the classroom. One of the most pressing issues for many San Franciscan families is the high cost of housing. Families are leaving San Francisco at alarming rates

because they simply cannot afford to live here. I would work closely with city elected officials to help address the affordability crisis.

San Francisco parents also struggle finding adequate recreation facilities and play fields for their children. Additionally, insufficient public transportation for families is a real concern in many parts of our city, especially with cuts to school transportation. Finally, San Francisco's parents need access to more diverse employment opportunities and a more supportive environment for small businesses. Our school district leaders should partner with City Hall to help address these issues and keep our families in San Francisco

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

I've developed a broad base of support across the city among parents, educators and community members that I believe will allow me to win this election and be successful once I am elected. I have over 700 individual donors, have raised over \$60,000, and have the support of numerous elected officials, including Assemblymember Tom Ammiano, Supervisor David Campos, Supervisor Scott Weiner, Supervisor Sean Elsbernd, Public Defender Jeff Adachi, Commissioner Kim-Shree Maufas, Trustee Steve Ngo, Trustee Chris Jackson, former Supervisor Bevan Dufty, former Democratic Party Chair Aaron Peskin, and Speaker of the Assembly John A. Perez. I am going to run a serious, determined grassroots citywide campaign, and hope to join together with the SF Parent PAC in this effort. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the members of the SF Parent PAC, and I would be incredibly excited and honored to have your support.