

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?

Over the last couple of years, I have seen our seven-year-old daughter fall in love with her teachers and educators at our nearby public elementary school in San Francisco. I am amazed at how she remembers all the humorous moments she experienced in kindergarten, leaving no doubt that her kindergarten teacher holds a special place in her heart.

This year I experienced the delicate balance of how to respond when, without warning, my daughter expressed sadness that her garden science teacher was leaving and she didn't know why. I had to explain the concept that it costs money to run schools and sometimes difficult decisions had to be made affecting some teachers, but not all. I felt like I swallowed a lemon when I finished and our daughter remained quiet and went on with her business.

On the last day of school while the kids were gathering for morning assembly I watched our daughter spontaneously bear hug her first grade teacher, and soon after every other student in the class joined in. It was another precious moment of tearful delight that once again underscored the incredible work teachers, educators, counselors and others contribute to each community of learners.

After almost ten years of draconian state budget cuts to public education we are now facing unprecedented times. How do we stop the 'crisis' and change the conversation away from a 'cuts mentality' to a 'we must invest strategy'?

In my race to be a member of the San Francisco School Board, I am committed to pursue bold and innovative ways to stabilize the workforce and find pragmatic solutions to stop the lay-offs.

I currently serve as the Legislative Chair of the San Francisco District Parent Teacher Association, on the Bilingual Community Council for the San Francisco Unified School District, on the SF Workforce Investment Board, on the Governor's Employment Training Panel, and am a founding father of the Futures without Violence Organization. Addressing policy issues affecting K – 12 public education, workforce development, unemployment, job training, apprenticeships and ending domestic violence are important to me.

I have had the honor to serve in public service at the federal and state levels. At the US Department of Energy I was the Assistant Director of Science Education and was instrumental in developing national programs to provide Master Teacher Professional Development Scholarships and fellowships for economically disadvantaged students and their professors from Community Colleges. At the state level, I spear-headed the creation of the first Labor and Workforce Development Agency and help launch programs to fully-fund student teachers who desired to have expertise in Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM) subject matter at UC and CSU campuses. I later served as the Chief Deputy Labor Commissioner ensuring that the most innovative and progressive laws related to fair wages, break periods, work safety and others were adequately enforced.

In the private sector, I helped develop state and community programs focused on education, diversity, technology and digital literacy to help underserved community groups, schools and students.

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

I currently serve on the Bilingual Community Committee for SFUSD to help shape the district's overall policies and administration of bilingual and immersion programs for English learners, and on the SF Workforce Investment Board helping to develop public policy around programs to expand youth employment opportunities in the city. I also serve on the Governor's Employment Training Panel, reviewing and assessing proposals from companies and not-for-profit organizations on how to best invest in programs that create jobs and upgrade the skills of workers that sustain our economy.

Additionally, I serve as the Legislative Chair of the San Francisco District Parent Teacher Association (PTA), addressing complex issues related to budget cuts, academic achievement, anti-bullying, arts and science enrichment programs and transportation, while working closely with SFUSD, the Board of Supervisors and other city officials.

I've been very involved in helping the SF-PTA leadership develop legislative strategies to better inform SF Supervisors and their staff about the consequences of budget cuts to SFUSD and parents. We have also built strategic alliances with other parent groups and SF Supervisors to support parent's use of parking lot spaces for fundraising without incurring fees from the City and are working with SF Supervisors and SFUSD leaders, developing an outreach plan to help market weekend school yard openings across the city.

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

The strategic plan of SFUSD serves as a good guide post in expressing goals and values, but is deficient in articulating how to best to address budget short-falls and their impact on core programs, as an issue of policy. Our policy framework should be a “Kids First” approach that will guide the Board to apply analytical thinking to policies related to those programs whose reach have the best interest of all children in mind, especially those identified as at-risk for falling behind. With this approach, we can concurrently invest and build upon success to have the most academically enriching public education system whereby academic excellence is embraced at every level of learning.

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?

Having parents engaged with teachers and principals at the site level on a variety of issues is good policy and moreover, is critical on issues related to curriculum, enrichment and honors track programs. Fundamentally, the variance between middle school sites offering a dynamic honors track program and those that do not is too great, because decisions to offer a dynamic program is based on funding rather than ‘student data’. Therefore it is incumbent of the district to have a more integrated approach to help in assessing and identifying resources early in the budget year before school begins so that parents can have more choices in guiding their kids to academically challenging course work.

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. How should the district best prepare students for college and career? Do you think we are serving our Special Education students well? Why or why not?

I grew up as a recipient of Head Start services in the inner-city and have always recognized the value and importance of early childhood education starting at pre-school. We will need to assess our capabilities to leverage local discretionary funds with state and federal dollars to holistically support early childhood education opportunities system-wide. An increase of funds dedicated through Proposition H funds should help SFUSD adequately address inequities and demands for early education programs.

It is imperative that we address the existing “achievement/opportunity gap” head-on and own it as the most critical public policy issue of our time, as we guide the SF Public Education System to the next level of accountability, transparency and academic excellence for all parents, kids and stakeholders.

Only 17.7% of the households residing in the County of San Francisco have children totaling approximately 156,000 kids. Our public school enrollment is estimated around 56,000 kids – comprised of 39% Asian, 25% Latino, 11.3% African American and about 11% White.

More than 41,000 kids in San Francisco below the age of seventeen live the following communities: Outer Mission, Excelsior, Ingleside, Inner Mission, Bernal Heights, and Bayview/Hunters Point. A majority of families in these communities suffer from income inequality and lower education attainment than other parts of the city.

I support the following strategies to help identify and support kids to stay the course from early childhood education thru high school, and graduate college and career-ready:

- Wrap-around services to help kids and their families to be ready to learn from Pre-K – 4th grade
- Special Education services focused on reading from K – 3rd grade
- Integrate science literacy with the basic curriculum from K – 3rd grade
- Integrate parents as primary partners from Pre-K through High School and incorporate parent engagement and education strategies.
- Fully supported community schools – that will also offer summer classes
- Develop a sustained monitoring and tracking system that focuses on early identification of students who veer off-track in their academic studies, and implement intervention strategies.
- Integrate the SF Workforce System from middle school through high school so that kids begin to understand the labor market, skills needed and opportunities available.

Finally, I experienced first-hand “inclusive practices” during my daughter’s first grade experience. I am very supportive of increasing supportive measures that encourage teachers to fully implement these practices and receive the proper professional development and feedback necessary to achieve success with all students. “Inclusive practices” is a learning program that benefits all students, and potentially parents. I believe we should integrate a program for parents to participate in to become better informed and knowledgeable of its benefits.

- 3. 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.**

First and foremost one of the most important tenements of public sector unions is “seniority” – it underscores the principal of equity and preserves the rules of fair play between the Labor and Management. There are more consistent and reliable policy strategies to address the achievement gap in more measurable and sustainable ways.

Once again, the policy decision by SFUSD was driven by budget considerations to avoid lay-offs of teachers within the Superintendent Zones. It is imperative that we engage in the budget process early in the fiscal year to help identify reasonable remedies that could include, as an example, temporary re-allocation of discretionary monies within Proposition H, Proposition A or other innovative resource agreements involving the City and its financial institutions to better alleviate budgetary uncertainties while the State continues to negotiate in balancing the budget by June 30th in the fiscal year.

4. 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?

We must concurrently pursue additional revenue streams that will foster support for ongoing professional development and increases in teacher/educator salaries and wages. Prop A – The Quality Teacher Education Act - serves as a good model to enhance, allowing flexibility for strategic investments in teachers and educators of SFUSD.

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

Communicate early and often with all parents! I believe SFUSD has dramatically improved their outreach and communications to parents over the past couple of years. It is imperative that parents are well informed about changes in policy or programs at every level of the process. Parents and parental organizations should be informed early in policy deliberations before receiving final notifications of policy or program changes that may significantly affect their children's education opportunities.

SFUSD should explore expanding their core outreach and communications to include: weekly video updates aired on SFgov.tv, KQED/Community Section, SF Asian News TV, SF Bay Telemundo and Univision. Monthly evening community forums by Supervisorial Districts should be considered to help attract working parents to attend. Summer Parent Orientations in partnership with SF Parks and Recreation and other parent organizations should be on-going to help parents become better consumers and understand the San Francisco Public School System.

Student Enrollment

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

Progress has definitely been made in communicating the goals of the redesigned student assignment system. However, parents and other stakeholders do not have consistent and constant information on how the newly design system works. Significant progress must be made on 'transparency' detailing processes used through modeling samples that should help parents and other stakeholders grow more confident on how the system works.

- 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?**

There's not a parent in the public school system that does not feel a sense of urgency and anxiety when their children transition from elementary school to middle school. The change of policy to cluster elementary schools and provide parents a level of certainty to a designated middle school has in part accomplished its desired result. Elementary school parents are getting more informed, involved and concerned about the overall new feeder policy. Early engagement by the district staff and parent organizations to help guide parents to understand the various aspects of the new policy, and how best to navigate the system to meet the needs of their children is paramount. I do not foresee a need for another immediate policy change that may cause unintended consequences, but I do believe we should begin to consider how we can expand some of our K-5 elementary schools to 6th, 7th or 8th grade.

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

In order to build and sustain a world-class public education system, a school district must contain institutions that are the most academically challenging in the country. Major cities such as Chicago and New York enjoy a globally recognized, vibrant, scientific- and arts-enriched community. They all have at least one high school dedicated to science and math, and another to Performing Arts. We must offer opportunities towards high academic achievement for students who demand to be challenged to the utmost in pursuit of their dreams.

Our society is better served when we foster demanding, highly competitive schools for children because it is within these institutions that invaluable discoveries are made by young people to become something greater than themselves.

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

First and foremost, the District and the City should collaborate in developing "workforce housing" for teachers, administrators and support staff. This will help attract teaching professionals with children to the district, and expand the number of parental stakeholders in the system. We must continue to build upon a culture that all parents are stakeholders regardless of socio-economic status or geography, and they must have a reliable and trustworthy forum in which to be heard.

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?**

Federal and State funds that are primarily formula driven with certain criteria such as enrollment in free school lunches and family incomes below the poverty level should be sufficiently leveraged with programs administered by the City, such as the Department of Children, Youth and Families and the Department of Human Services and Public Health to create one-stop, wrap-around services for K - 3 schools. Joint assessments can be executed without incurring additional costs because the agencies are providing critical services to the same population at one point of entry, reducing redundancies and adding more efficient processes to help children stay healthy and better prepared to learn.

Resources directed to the district should be clearly identified as to their funding source, purpose and desired outcomes. Resources that are clearly discretionary and contain policy flexibility should be managed as an 'investment tool box' to help foster co-investing opportunities with other institutions interested in enhancing learning for students, rigorous academic course work, professional development and after school educational enrichment activities.

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

The district could consider deploying activity-based budgeting to better illustrate all the activities associated to delivering instruction in the system. This approach also helps the public's understanding of what costs are incurred to manage grants and contracts that are outside formula-based funding to the district.

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

I have over 20 years of experience in developing wide and broad coalitions of stakeholders to help drive a consensus of the majority for change. Parents, Teachers, Business Leaders, Innovators, Labor Leaders and Political Leaders are all key stakeholders needed to help amplify the need to have a "real conversation" about how San Francisco should have the best academically enriching public school system in the state.

I will immediately engage all stakeholders in a conversation about how we can explore and identify new revenues at the local level to directly support public education in San Francisco. More than any other city in California, San Francisco is growing economically and attracting the highest level of skilled workforce in the country. We cannot afford to allow our K – 12 education system to fall through the cracks and to be a sub-par institution, especially in a place where technology innovation thrives and endless human capital expertise is available by pressing enter on your computer key pad or iPad.

My expertise on budgetary analysis and workforce economics provides unique insights on how best to bridge public and private partnerships to support and fund our public education system in San Francisco.

Currently, the district receives approximately \$25 million per year for Proposition H – to fund Education Enrichment Activities and another \$30 million per year to fund Proposition A – Teacher Quality Professional Development Programs. The Prop H monies are derived from a 1% sales tax as a set aside and Prop A is derived from set parcel tax fee applied to homeowners.

Proposed contingency plans should include relatively small amounts of temporary tax or fee increases in the sales, utility, hotel or parcel taxes and fees that will sustain the district workforce and not terminate any teacher or educator position in fiscal years 2012-13.

Thereafter, the district and the school board must work closely to assess and develop a dynamic plan that help recruit, train and sustain the most talented and highly skilled workforce of teachers and educators for the San Francisco Public System. After ten consecutive years of baseline budget cuts from the state affecting teachers and educators we must re-focus our collective efforts to reverse this trend and identify new resources to invest on best practices in teaching and learning to help build capabilities and academic excellence.

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?**

Parents, their kids and their teachers are the core triangle of stakeholders we should listen and respond to when developing policy at the school board. I will develop strong relationships with parent organizations at all levels – district wide, community and neighborhood.

Additionally, I will form my own “Parent Advisory Committee” – to keep me informed and to serve as a catalyst to solve issues and concerns from individual parents and families.

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

The Superintendent serves at the pleasure of the School Board and his/her mission is to properly manage the day-to-day operations of the district and to develop administrative processes guided by Board policy, federal and state laws, and compliance rules and regulations.

The School Board is responsible for developing broad policy direction and guidelines for the district, but it also has definitive fiduciary powers to provide budgetary oversight and to perform evaluations of programs, contracts and grants to ensure that decisions are being made in the best interest of students. The School Board, in partnership with the Superintendent, is responsible for developing an agenda that clearly distinguishes between managerial and policy concerns that may come before the Board for discussion.

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

In order to build a world class public education system, we need an informed and engaged constituency of elected leaders. This includes not only the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors but also all city-wide officeholders; State Legislators – Senator Mark Leno, Senator Leland Yee, Assemblyman Tom Ammiano, and Assemblywoman Fiona Ma; U.S. House of Representatives - Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Congresswoman Jackie Speier; and U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. These elected leaders and their staff can help the district identify and pursue additional resources to enhance the learning and academic achievement for all students. Moreover, elected leaders can develop legislation in partnership with the district and school board that could have tremendous positive effect on building the capabilities of teachers and educators through publically funded programs.

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

Parents must continue to be effective stakeholders by sharing ideas and communicating concerns throughout the district so that we can systemically improve all levels of outreach and communication to every school in the district.

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

Parents desire to have trust and confidence in a public education system that will deliver on its promises and be transparent about its policy ideas and changes throughout their children’s tenure in San Francisco schools at every level. Parents understand that no system is perfect, but care deeply about being informed in a timely manner and having their voices heard when concerns are expressed related to their children’s learning environment.

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to engage in this process and discuss policy ideas to explore in improving our public education system. As an older parent with a child in elementary school, there’s no doubt that I am experiencing a journey that has enlighten my every sense of what challenges we face in the near future about public education in California. I stand dedicated to returning us to a state of being when President John F. Kennedy gave the commencement speech at the University of California at San Diego, declaring his admiration to then Governor Pat Brown’s success in building the best K – 12 and higher education publically financed system in the country.