

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 am running for school board because I want to further institutionalize some of the efforts I have started, such as the Parent Engagement Plan. Parents should support my candidacy because I have been a SF public school parent of three children and have spoken to thousands of parents about our schools. I understand the parent perspective and am sympathetic to parent voice and concerns. I believe in the rights of parents to advocate for their children and believe that our school district should and needs to serve parents well. I have a long history of advocating for parent voice and as a Board member I respect and appreciate parent voice.

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

Four generations of my family have attended San Francisco public schools. I, along with my grandfather, parents, husband and three children, are SFUSD alums. I have been a PTA President for 12 terms, a SFPTA Vice President for 2 terms, served on 11 school site councils, served on the PEEF Committee for 4 years and have served on numerous community and advisory committees in SFUSD. I was the Director of Parent Organizing and Education Policy for Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth for 8 years and during that time I wrote the resolution to create the Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education. I secured funding for the council and it is now in its 8th year. I am a founding Board member of the Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network, now in its 10th year. I have presented workshops on parent rights to over 3000 parents and have trained many parents to be advocates for their children.

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

I am a strong supporter of the strategic plan and think it has helped transform the district. I believe we are on the right track but the implementation has been slow because of the lack of funds. However, I am surprised how much we have been able to get done, given the lack of resources.

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?

In this particular case, I do not think this model works well to serve all students. For example, we know from our data that there is great discrepancy between those in honor classes and those who aren't, and the decision to continue to have two tracks is a difficult one for principals to make. In fact, it is unfair to make a principal decide whether or not to have an honors track. Parents will have their own thoughts and strong feelings while the principal must make decisions on what will best serve all students. I believe this decision must be a Board decision. It must come as a directive that principals must follow and the Board must take the "heat". Another example of decentralized decision-making, such as schools deciding on one lunch period or two, is a good issue to have school communities decide.

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.

The district has a responsibility to keep students safe and prepare them for the 21st century, and that includes a quality education, and skills that will help them navigate and be successful in the 21st century. Therefore, the district should use the opportunity to prepare them as well as possible which includes teaching them how to stay healthy, physically, mentally and emotionally. We have a legal and moral responsibility to keep them safe.

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

The district should educate EVERY student ready for college or a living wage job. That should be our goal and it is our main job and responsibility. That is how we best prepare them to live viable lives in the 21st century. We should prepare them also for college, which means our classrooms should teach critical thinking, analytical skills and promote a strong sense of confidence and resiliency.

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

No, I do not think we are serving them well and we have not been serving them well for a very long time. Personally, when my daughter was eight years old, she had an IEP and the way it was presented to me was in an envelope, which she gave to me and said, "The school wants you to sign this." I did sign it, but I did not know what I was signing. I never had a meeting, no one discussed the services and no one told me about my rights. Our district had an audit done on our Special Ed program and the auditors, who audit SPED program nationally and internationally, said that our program was the most egregious program they had ever audited. We spend \$14.5 million on non-public school placement for our SPED students, never knowing if they ever achieve their academic goals. The majority of SPED students we keep in our district are not in the least restrictive environments, few participate in inclusive classrooms, they are not being taught by a teacher certificated in the subject matter and Black students are 7 times more likely to be placed in SPED simply because they are Black. However, we are making slow progress: we are moving to inclusive classrooms, IEPs are being more closely monitored, we now have a screening process for students to be referred for an assessment to be placed and SPED and most important of all, we are implementing tiered interventions, otherwise known as RTI.

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.

As a Board member who voted for the skipping and also voted not to fight the decision of the administrative law judge, I can tell you that the reason I chose not to further pursue it was because if

we lost, our attorney told us it would cost us approximately \$5-7 million dollars. Our attorney advised us not to pursue it since we do not have the funds to spare.

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?

We have been able to attract high quality teachers but our problem has been the retention. We lose 47% of our new teachers at 5 years and part of the problem is the expense of living in SF. Prop. A was a great incentive because it made our pay for new teachers competitive with surrounding jurisdictions. We could and should assist with teacher housing and we should be supporting teachers to be successful. Most teachers went into teaching knowing they would not be earning millions of dollars. They do it because they believe in education and how profound education is in a child's life, and they want to provide that for our students. Therefore, we must give them the tools, skills, strategies and support that will make them successful. This is why professional development is so important. Although we have limited resources, we must prioritize some of the resources for professional development

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

The district needs to develop a parent engagement plan that takes us from a dependency model to an empowerment model. Parents need to be educated on the school system, their rights, school governance, graduation requirements and how to advocate effectively for their children. We, as a district, need to encourage this and see our parents as true partners in their child's education. We can do this by providing the training for parents in different languages, provide and make mandatory training for administrators on parent engagement and parent relations, set up an office that officially welcomes parents, has resources for parents, real information for parents, trains parents and assists parents when something goes wrong and we need to respond to parents respectfully, promptly and honestly.

Student Enrollment

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

The student assignment process is a really difficult and complicated issue. It is not a perfect system by any means, but I do think we can better ensure it meets its goals by closely monitoring it and evaluating it. The factors in demographics change quickly so things like the CTIP areas need to be readjusted in response to population changes. I think the Board had hoped that the assignment system would be a tool to help us desegregate schools and bring more equity to schools but learned that we can only hope to meet these goals minimally through the system and most probably the main thing the system should do is assign students to schools in the most efficient and easy way possible for parents.

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?

Since the middle school feeder pattern will not officially take place for a few years, we have still have time to work on its implementation. In order for it to be successful, every middle school must be seen as viable options for parents to send their children to and we must have a solid commitment to strengthening the language strands. Also, our world language programs at the high school level must be aligned with the language needs of the middle schools so parents can see a true pathway.

Should SFUSD have competitive entry schools, such as Lowell and School of the Arts? Why or why not? I don't have a firm opinion on this issue because I have not seen all the data and have not examined all the factors of how competitive entry schools align with the goals of our strategic plan and how well they meets the needs of all our students.

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

First, the District needs to serve families well and that means have strong public schools that deliver a quality education. We can help keep families in San Francisco if we help build the economy of San Francisco with the tools we have such helping with affordable housing and employment opportunities through local hire.

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?
SFUSD will have to get "lean and mean" which means we will have to make very difficult decisions in the coming years in order to stay afloat. Our budget must reflect our strategic plan goals and prioritize resources in our classrooms that help us meet the goal of graduating all students A-G. We may have to rethink the weighted student formula, sitebased budgeting and how we use our Tier III funds. We have been successful using a two year budget model and I am hoping it continues to serve us well.
2. What should the district do to make SFUSD's budget more understandable and accessible to parents?
The district could break the budget down in easier to understand language and a more accessible format. Most of us are not dealing with a \$300+ million budget so it is daunting to look at the budget and try to make sense of it. Although the community meetings are not highly attended, I do think we still need to take the budget out to the community, but maybe we should have community partners host the meetings so they can help us get folks there. I am always surprised how sparsely attended our budget meeting are.

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?

After crying, I think we need to look at reducing instructional days, work closely with city leaders on how we can keep the district afloat and revisit some of our initiatives that we budgeted for and put them aside until a stronger budget year. It would be devastating.

3. When we are able to fill back in the holes of the current cuts, what should our next funding priorities be?
Our teachers have not had a pay raise in many years, not even a cost of living increase. We need to give our teachers a raise, even if it is just 1%. I would also take a look at school site resources and what schools have had to cut because of the budget, but they deem necessary to do the job, such as instructional materials, professional development, technology needs etc. After that, I would want us to look at things like full districtwide implementation of tiered interventions both academically and behavioral, strengthening our core curriculum and looking hard at what needs to be in place for our high school students to graduate A-G.

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?
The most important stakeholders are the students and their families because quite frankly, they have the most to gain and/or lose and they are who we serve. The needs of the students should come first-precisely, what they need to be successful and be educated for the 21st century is what we should be giving to them. It takes, however, the expertise of many people to help design and deliver that. Our families, as our most important stakeholders, should be helping us shape our direction or in our terms, our strategic plan. That is why when we hired Richard Carranza we asked him to go out to the community and hear what they are saying about our schools and what they want for their children before he creates a new strategic plan for our district. When I wrote the resolution to create a Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education, I was attempting to bring

the parent voice to the Board level. Our student advisors also help bring the student voice to the Board.

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

A school Board member does not supervise personnel, that is the job of the Superintendent. A school board member is one person on a 7 member board and works with his or her colleagues to oversee the district's budget, direction and progress. School Board members vote on policies and give direction but the Superintendent carries it out. The school board supervises and evaluates only the Superintendent and the General Counsel.

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

The Mayor and the Board of supervisors should have an active supportive role in the education of SF children. Every Supervisor should have close relationships with the schools in their neighborhoods and know what is going on in those schools in terms of student performance and leadership. The Mayor and the Supervisors should be supporting our public schools with resources and promoting our schools by sending their own children to them.

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

Parents should be real partners in their children's education but they should also be pushing us to better serve their children and all children. Parents should be providing us with the gentle tension that keeps us on track but also ensures that we are doing our jobs in educating their children.

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

One pressing issue is the new graduation requirement of A-G. For many students it is a much more rigorous course of study and parents need to be aware that their children will need to meet this higher standard. Also, they need to be aware that in order to meet this standard, elementary and middle school are extremely important. Another pressing issue is the budget. We are at the mercy of the state budget and that alone has the biggest impact on their child's education. It affects days of instruction, class size, school resources, the quality of our teachers. However, after having raised three children here, I think it a wonderful place to raise children, not to mention the "cool" factor.

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

The decision to run for re election was a very difficult personal decision for me. My husband just retired after 35 years as a police officer and I planned to retire with him. However, I just kept thinking about what I can contribute to the Board and the district and decided that the perspective and voice I bring to the Board is an important one. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your interview process.