

Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire 2014

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 June 27, 2014, to sfparentpac@gmail.com. The SF Parent Political Action Committee 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?
(longer answer)**

I'm running as a public school teacher who has taught in dozens of our SFUSD schools. I'm also running as someone who can combine the practice and front-line experiences of a teacher with a proven record of leadership. Finally, I'm running because I notice so many other young people at this stage in our lives – would be parents thinking about long-term plans – are concerned about how public schools enter into their planning.

While progress in our schools has been made, we know from listening to parents and community members that there is still work to do and the nature of the work is such that a front-line worker's perspective can be especially valuable. I am running on a platform of equity, innovation, and enlarging community. But I will use my position on the school board to reach out to stakeholder networks and work for transparency/accountability.

I'm proud to be politically active. At the heart of the concept of politics is an idea of bringing people together, aggregating ideas, and moving forward in a practical way to create real policy change. That's what I want to work with parents/guardians on. Parents/guardians are a group that I hope to empower but I also hope will empower me by sharing good ideas, keeping me honest, and helping me connect authentically with school sites.

I want to stand with macro principles while also addressing the 'micro' issues that parents and teachers face on a daily basis. Parents should support my candidacy because like them, I work with public school students everyday. I am an enthusiastic, independent voice for practical solutions to big and small issues in our schools. And parents should support my candidacy because I am going to work as a commissioner as I work as a teacher and candidate in which parent involvement is key to any successful policy. Reaching out to parents isn't a talking point - it has to be a board commissioner's main focus of partnership in order to learn from, listen to,

and work with the ultimate stakeholders to ensure we live up to our highest ideals for the highest cause in a young person's life.

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

One of my first jobs out of college was as a paraprofessional at Leonard Flynn. During that time I also taught afterschool programs (Kaplan and Bay Area SCORES) at Paul Revere and Glen Park. In my credential program at SFSU I did my student observing at Lawton (Ms. Fung's class). After I got my credential I was a substitute teacher throughout the district, most often at Denman, SF Community School, and Burton. I have been a tutor with the San Francisco Education Fund and 826 Valencia working with students in our SFUSD and in particular students at John O'Connell. I have attended dozens of Board of Education and subcommittee meetings, as well as community meetings including but not limited to LYRIC, Parents for Public Schools, Coleman Advocates, Teachers for Social Justice, and the current PEEF-reauthorization and Choose Health SF initiatives.

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

The strategic plan is great – inspirational in its scope and vision. But grand ideas aren't enough: sustained work is needed. I like the 13 strategic priorities, *but* it needs a "tracking tool" for parents/guardians to really understand how the district (or an objective outside committee) is evaluating success around these priorities. In this campaign I consistently find that transparency and accountability are key values I want to ensure are on the forefront of my tenure on the school board and certainly around strategic plan implantation.

We had some great ideas and planning done right around the beginning of the Great Recession. Now that we're coming up for air, I want to do a post-recession evaluation about how we as a district and board behaved in our planning, consultation, and communication around the recession-based budget cuts and how we can move forward in implementing the promises of things like the strategic plan.

Student Achievement

1. As SFUSD moves to eliminate tracking, what are you going to do to make sure that differentiation is effective? What should "honors" really mean?

My ultimate goal is that there wouldn't be a great worry over this topic – all schools should have enough teachers, enough resources, and enough flexibility to provide all their students with appropriate courses. The district's reports on tracking/differentiation are glowing – but the board should take this with a grain of salt (especially when parents often tell us otherwise). I would prefer a single system, supported district-wide, but won't force anything new in a transitional period – we need more guidance from school-site stakeholders first. We need to teach high achievers, train teachers to do so, and make sure we are not creating two different classes of students within the same school. I think there is understandable anxiety around Common Core math changes and kids being calculus-ready by high school. Again, I think this is as much about communication and consultation with parents as it is about a major policy shift.

2. How should SFUSD ensure that the Common Core Curriculum is implemented effectively, especially in terms of communicating with parents and supporting teachers?

Common Core implementation is a daily concern of mine professionally. Philosophically I'm excited with this shift but after seeing NCLB and other school reforms dictated down to the classroom, I'm worried about this process. The confusion about math, "rigor" and the trust parents have (or don't have) in the ability for the district to differentiate instruction appropriately is palpable and emblematic of a need for greater communication or transparency.

I think there is going to be some macro negotiating with state/federal forces to maintain autonomy as well as some micro issues (Lowell admissions, teacher training, implementation in immersion programs) I will focus on. As someone who rose up during the NCLB and now is implementing Common Core, I think I will offer leadership in talking with parents about this and making sure teachers are supported while they find the best ways to enhance their practice.

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

The goal of a K12 district should be to have students be ready for college. Period. We need to make sure the actual expectations of a Freshmen in college are the ultimate goal of not just 12th grade, but the all of our SFUSD children's education. Also, in this campaign I'm talking about vocational education and moving beyond internships and partnerships. The Business Roundtable is fine, but more education around career is needed.

Part of preparing students for college or career is maintaining high standards and focusing on growth mentalities. The AG requirements are a step (but need consultation and oversight still). I want engaging curriculum that considers student interest (Burton's wall-to-wall model is interesting) and I want to avoid the summer slump.

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

Under the current board we certainly have made great strides. Mainstreaming alone has been a huge culture shift in the right direction. Regular review, new staff, and accountability systems for classroom-by-classroom policy review are excellent recent additions.

One thing I will bring to the board is a desire to generally, but especially with special ed, make sure we are following policy from 'macro' to the 'micro' implementation. That's what a classroom perspective of a teacher is all about. Yes, special ed mainstreaming has seen more interventions chronicled. That's great. But what are those interventions? How many of them are 'just' preferential seating? What have been observable results from these interventions? Do the suggestions of the original 504 or IEP work well in a larger classroom social and learning setting? What is the rate of parent communication and follow-up (across social-economic and racial groups)?

Parent Engagement

1. What does effective partnership between SFUSD and parents look like to you? Give an example of where you have seen effective partnership with parents – or not. Be specific.

Parents/guardians should be consulted at the beginning of a policy push, not after the fact. It's not just good PR, it's a reliable predictor of student success. There are some concrete steps we can take: make the budget process easier to understand with an emphasis on the early steps rather than post-committee/Board mark-up. I would like to hold Board members, teacher site leaders, and administrators for engaging with the PTA, PTO,

SSC, ECLACs etc. Also, in this campaign I have made a commitment to many parents and principals to hold regular - monthly at the least – office hours at school sites (coffee nearby, staff room meeting, student council etc.). For every vote on the board we should be asking ourselves, “Which parents know about this vote? How have we solicited feedback? What empowers parents and what do they need?”

- 2. SFUSD says that it values parent engagement. However, SFUSD has a perpetual problem with not communicating with parents until decisions have already been made. What do you propose to do about this?**

I hear these concerns often. We also have to make sustained efforts to evaluate how we reach all our city’s diverse communities. Again, this shouldn’t be top-down. The parent advisory council are a good step – it would be great to support the idea that new board business, reports, nominations, etc. go to these meetings *prior* to being voted on.

We need to ask parents/guardians whose voices aren’t being aggregated or heard what is getting in the way of their authentic participation. We have 9 openings on the bilingual parent committee. What’s the impact of things like childcare services at committee meetings and during what hours do we get the most participation? Frankly, I think communications from the district tend to be polished– pushing an agenda or complementing work they’ve done. The tone of communications can encourage more parents to feel their voice and efforts are respected.

Student Enrollment

- 1. Do you think that the redesigned student assignment system is meeting its stated objectives? This week a proposal was made to switch the order of CTIP and neighborhood area tie-breakers for elementary school applications. Do you support this proposal? Why or why not? Is there a different way we should be addressing student assignment? If yes, how and why?**

I am thrilled this is being re-evaluated. The student assignment system is still a source of concern among new or would-be SFUSD parents/guardians. That is a community I am part of and eager to listen to. I think the pacing of reforms was appropriate (and a better model of community input) – the CTIP issue was somewhat predictable, but we knew that a sea-change in student assignment needed time to show results and illicit feedback.

The assignment system is generally not serving its goal. Desegregation has not happened. It is tragic and we must keep equity and social justice as our goal, while being realistic how the process is working.

Neighborhood schools should be our ultimate goal. We should also remember that the spirit of *Brown v Board* should guide us moving forward, while we admit how families react to the uncertainty, frustration, and lack of transparency/authentic communication.

- 2. Are we serving our middle school students as well as we should be? Why or why not? Be specific. (longer answer)**

One of the reasons I decided to run was that I felt there has been a historic absence of middle school focus in SF educational politics and that there was a shift on the horizon regarding this. I am a middle school teacher and advocate through-and-through. I don’t think we are serving our middle school students as well as we could. I think a problem with middle school is parent engagement – we all get excited about the sweet

community of K5 and the rigor of high school college preparation, but sometimes tend to neglect the vital middle school years.

While I think the feeder system is a great step, the transition from 5th to 6th is still messy, not uniform, and in need of a thoughtful process soliciting feedback. I think teachers who focus on the middle grades should be identified and nurtured. I think that authentic connections between incoming middle school families should be fostered in summer programming (Step Up programming is fine and should be expanded). I think that middle school tutoring of K5 students should be a district priority even in the face of increased pressure of standardized tests. I think counseling, PE, and mental health needs are acute in these transitional years and as the district moves to addressing these in its budget, middle school should be considered a priority.

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

My fiancé asked if we'd stay in the city when we have kids. Of course we would. But that's because I know how great our schools are, how the lottery system works, and about the many services at park and rec, the SFPL, and afterschool programs (when available). There is a zeitgeist and rumor mill about our schools that cause families to leave or not enroll.

I will be pushing – from Day One – for a sustained, serious, and responsive PR campaign headed by permanent communications staff to help reverse these feelings. Our website is woefully under-translated. I want school videos allowing for virtual tours. As a city we are innovative enough to come up with a better system we have to market our schools, solicit feedback from parents (including parents who aren't part of our SFUSD), and keeping the accountability process as transparent as possible.

Budget and Finance

- 1. With the new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the district is required to create a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). Parent input is required. How do you propose to solicit and incorporate community feedback into SFUSD's budget development process in a way that is respectful, clear and collaborative?**

The local LCAP process should be a year-round venture. It's *our* process. It doesn't have to be dependent on bizarre state politics and funding priorities. I think an LCAP task for that is part of [6/10 parent group] is a great idea.

We have other examples – we can compare LCAP processes with other districts and begin to develop a set of best practices. Again, this has to come from the community, not expensive outside consultants or the district. A great PowerPoint at a board meeting doesn't always translate into a process that is satisfying or actually achieves its goals at the school-site or classroom level. This is why I'm running – I want to always remember the specifics of implementation in listening to the SFUSD community on the frontline.

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

Recent efforts to shorten the budget are laudable. But “short” can sometimes mean “simple” which can hide details and removes the onus on the board to make sure the entire process is transparent and accessible to stakeholders.

From Day One of the budget process (which should begin at the school site level) the issues at stake should be clear, meeting times should be varied, activity-based participation should be considered (have the budget process reflect best practices from the classroom), and the classroom impact should be understood (just like a voter guide for propositions explains the fiscal impact of a measure, I’d like to foster a mindset or even a capacity for measuring the actual classroom impact - this program costs the same as ten new computers, etc.). Like many aspects of the districts work, I think our budget design process could be more “customer oriented”

- 3. For the 2014-2015 school year, SFUSD expects to have \$13.2 million more in revenue than its current obligations. Some areas under consideration for additional funding include: increased teacher and paraprofessional salaries; adding a 7th period to the school day in middle and high schools to accommodate electives, A-G, and other required courses; and adding teachers to reduce class size in elementary schools. The district has already proposed to put \$3.5 M back into schools by increasing the weighted student formula and also the MTSS (targeted assistance to schools with higher needs). Every 1% of salary increase given to UESF teachers costs about \$2.2 million. Adding a 7th period to the school days of middle and high schools would cost about \$13 million total (\$5M for middle and \$8M for high). Reducing class size in elementary schools would cost about \$6 million. What is your approach to balancing the budget, given that all the priorities everyone wants to fund can’t be funded? Give specifics.**

Understanding the school site impact is vital to budgeting. Having cuts fall as far away from the classroom as possible isn’t just a good saying, it has to be the transparent and accountable manta that guides us. After years of furloughed days and no raises, at this moment we need to prioritize a cost of living adjustment for our UESF crew. You can’t have quality schools if you can’t recruit/retain quality teachers.

Reducing class size is a vital goal, but we need the best teachers possible to fill those new posts. A 7-period day is a great model (I teach at such a school) but we need to understand we need the best teachers possible for those new periods. Once we get back to 08-09 levels of teacher compensation we can then work with them and our larger community in moving forward with these exciting programs.

Role of the board

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

The board hires and oversees the Superintendent. We set policy and the district implements it. I think we both are accountable to families but, because we are “political,” I think there is more of a need that we represent families immediately to the district.

If elected, I will seek to be collegial with the Superintendent, but will always hold reports, statements, and declarations of policy achievement under scrutiny – that’s also our job. Having been to almost every board meeting since December, I have to admit that I think I will be much more suspicious than current commissioners of facts, figures, and “this is the way things are” statements that come from representatives of the Superintendent’s office. We make decisions for them to implement based largely on information *they* give us. I think that’s not a natural recipe for transparency and accountability, which are a main platform of my campaign.

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

I want the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to be partners with the Board. The Mayor and the Board of Supervisors have the best intentions for our schools. But ultimately their best impact, like some non-governmental organizations, is to coordinate non-education specific programs that impact our students.

The Mayor and Board can be crucial in school funding, community leadership, and working to foster public-private partnerships to benefit our schools but I don't think they should dictate school policy. I don't mean to discount their efforts, especially because their work with funding – maintaining a robust rainy day fund, coordinating DCYF programs, working with transportation, and public health – is so vital. They are vital partners, wrap-around service providers, and honest brokers to help our communities thrive, to help our kids stay safe, and to help our district remain solvent.

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

I would be thrilled to earn your endorsement – I am running a serious campaign and have held dozens of meetings with principals, activists, parents, teachers, and student leaders. A majority of the Board of Supervisors has endorsed me as well as Phil Ting, Carmen Chu, and Fiona Ma. I will always be in touch and accessible. I will always remember that public servants work *for* the public and are not supposed to manipulate the public. And I will always strive to make reasonable, pragmatic, and honorable choices if given the high honor and sensitive responsibility to help guide and grow a great school district for your children.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for your activism.