



2024 Candidate Questionnaire: Board of Education

Please submit the completed questionnaire as a pdf
to contact_us@phdemclub.org no later than Monday, August 26.

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1. If elected, name the first **key area** you would prioritize for change.
 1. What **specific** actions would you take to drive change in this area?

My first priority is stabilizing the budget and preventing state takeover of SFUSD. I know that if we don't right-size the district, we will just end up under state control. The hard decisions we avoid today will be made tomorrow by Sacramento staffers who don't know our city.

The superintendent's resource alignment initiative is going to be hard. But we can do hard things, especially when we're doing the right thing. The district needs to approach these tough decisions by prioritizing equity and excellence.

Through meaningful community engagement, the school district can emerge from this process with better-funded, better-enrolled schools offering all of the enrichment and supportive resources that our kids deserve.

Stabilizing the budget will be the first task facing the new school board. The current board will vote on which schools to close in December, and the new board will be immediately faced with overseeing the superintendent's implementation of that decision and working with the state to respond to its ongoing concerns.

2. Please share **relevant experience** demonstrating your ability to achieve this change.

I've spent my entire career fighting to protect San Francisco and its residents. I

moved to San Francisco nearly twenty years ago, and I've been a public servant for over a decade. As a Deputy City Attorney, I won cases that people once thought were impossible--against the opioid industry, and against the Trump administration.

My experience as a litigator means that I'm used to working through high-stress situations, and able to work collaboratively even with those on the other side. Having provided the highest level of government service and having won groundbreaking cases means I always maintain my optimism about what we can achieve together against the odds.

Negotiating massive, novel, complex, technical and politically sensitive matters with many moving parts and repeat stakeholders is my specialty. I won the California Lawyer Attorney of the Year award last year for my role in San Francisco's \$350 million victory in its opioid litigation. That case touched nearly every City department and involved coordination across other cities, counties, and states. It required negotiation against not only some of the biggest and best-represented companies in the world, but also between jurisdictions across the state and with the Attorney General.

I have experience building coalitions to pass and defeat proposals sponsored by folks who I have to continue work alongside no matter what the outcome. As a board member, I'll be ready to fight for and champion what's right for the district, but in a way that respects and preserves relationships.

2. (optional) What **other areas or issues** (up to 2) would you prioritize for change?
 1. Again, what **specific actions** would you take?

My second priority is restoring trust and drawing families back to the District.

Nothing matters more to us than our kids and their futures. Parents aren't going to trust the district with their kids if they don't trust it to do the right thing. So in order to increase enrollment, we first need to restore trust. That starts with electing a competent, calm, and communicative school board.

As part of restoring trust, I will work to keep our promise to fix our broken school assignment system. The confusion, uncertainty, and stress of the lottery drives families away.

My third priority goes hand in hand with building trust and growing enrollment—I will work to improve educational outcomes in literacy and math for all SFUSD students.

Every SFUSD student must have access to an excellent education. Families see that we are underperforming in basic markers of achievement, and they vote with their feet.

The district's upcoming adoption of new literacy and math curricula is a good first step toward helping all of our students reach their academic potential.

To increase math and literacy proficiency rates for Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander children—who have significant achievement gaps—I'll support proven, evidence-based methods such as increasing instructional minutes in these subjects and providing in-person high-dosage tutoring by trained educators.

2. What **relevant experience** can you share demonstrating your ability to be effective?

Many of my own family members didn't graduate high school, even though they were capable of graduating and so much more. The odds were stacked against them, and they lacked the right supports to overcome their circumstances.

As the first woman on my mom's side of the family to graduate from college, I understand that giving one student an education has ripple effects on those surrounding them. That's why I volunteered for over a decade for ScholarMatch, a Mission-based nonprofit that makes college possible for first-generation students who are almost entirely low-income students of color.

As a college coach, I saw firsthand that our SFUSD high school students are wildly capable of college readiness and success, despite the obstacles some face. ScholarMatch students are not only admitted to college, they graduate on time at higher rates than the average American college student.

While I was on the board of ScholarMatch, Inc., it faced an existential crisis in the spring of 2020. COVID hit and our budget was depleted as we scrambled to get our scholars across the country the emergency funds that they needed to fly home as their dorms were being closed, and sometimes to get computer and internet access in order to continue their studies remotely.

Amidst the Black Lives Matter movement, our young and passionate staff were advocating for systemic change within the organization, while dealing with burnout from serving students in crisis. Our executive leadership was struggling with unprecedented professional demands while also sheltering in place with their children who were suddenly distance-learning.

I served on an ad hoc committee of the board that was created to respond to these crises, which included confidential personnel matters. I coached our executives, led trust building communication with staff, hired professionals including DEI consultants, and helped reshape the board of directors to be more reflective of the communities the organizations serves.

In the end, we transitioned into a more mature governance model, recruited and hired new members for the leadership team, stabilized our finances and our staff, and

emerged a stronger organization to serve low-income, first-generation students of color in pursuing college.

3. What past or current Board of Education initiatives **align with your vision** and goals for SFUSD?

My vision for SFUSD is that every student has access to an excellent and equitable education, including all of the supports and enrichment opportunities they deserve. Although no one wants school closures, I am hopeful and determined to ensure that the Resource Alignment Initiative will get us closer to this vision. I will push to ensure that resource alignment results in fully-staffed, fully-funded schools in historically underserved neighborhoods, especially those in the southeast. We need to invest in these schools and build them up.

I also support the district's recent adoption of a new evidence-based literacy curriculum and anticipated adoption of a new math curriculum next year. The Superintendent's focus on ensuring each school has a literacy and numeracy coach to help educators learn and adopt the new curricula is the type of coordinated execution that I'd like to see more of across the district.

4. What relevant background and experience do you have in supporting families, students, teachers, and staff through the **school closure/merger** process?

I've never been through a process like this before—and I doubt many in the district have. I do have experience, however, as an LGBTQ-rights movement lawyer, representing families free of charge during some of the most challenging and stressful times in their lives. As a litigator, generally, my clients are not happy to be in a situation where they need my services. But it's my job to take on the stress so that they don't have to—to guide them through the process, answer their questions, see the potential pitfalls, and work to avoid them.

I've counseled people through the fear of losing parentage of their children, or having their family separated across borders. My experience being able to empathize and explain, while delivering difficult or scary news, will, unfortunately, be an asset on the school board.

5. Beyond paying educators adequately, competitively, accurately, and on time, what should SFUSD do to **recruit and retain highly qualified educators**?

The best thing we can do to recruit educators is to pay them better. Our pay scale needs to account for the high cost of living in San Francisco and recognize that we're competing for talent on a regional basis with other districts that pay better. The recent pay increases were just a first step toward accomplishing that goal.

I'll also push the district to continue to modernize our HR systems and hiring processes, so that we can move quickly to recruit and hire top talent. We're making too many

unforced errors that result in vacancies in budgeted positions, contributing to burnout among our existing workers.

6. What steps should SFUSD take to **attract - and retain - families** who have the option to choose private education? Please go beyond the issue of 8th-grade algebra in your response.

We know that the lottery system hasn't reduced segregation, but it has driven families away from the district. Sometimes, the lottery drives families out of San Francisco entirely. The district's homework of moving to a zone assignment system is now four years late. It's not equitable to have a school assignment system that feels like you need a law degree to understand it.

We need a simple, predictable system. Families need to know that they're going to be assigned to a school that they can get to and has a schedule that works for them.

I will push the district to move as quickly as feasible to the zone assignment system of school assignment that was approved by the board years ago. We ask students and parents to white-knuckle it through the second week of classes, hoping that they'll get into the school they want, and to commit to a school without guaranteed before or aftercare. How can we act surprised when we have declining enrollment?

Beyond our school assignment system, we also need to look at our policies around accelerated learning. I will advocate for the district to evaluate its policies, curricula, and staffing models to see where we can create more flexibility for teachers and schools to meet students where they are, including providing them with above-grade-level opportunities.

Accelerated learning opportunities may help retain families who might otherwise choose private education, but they benefit students who don't have those resources as well. Too often, debates about opportunities for accelerated learning and academic excellence in SFUSD are framed as if only white and Asian families want or benefit from such programs. I firmly disagree with that. It's profoundly inequitable to say that only kids whose families can pay for private school are capable and deserving of advanced learning.

And, rather than fighting over limited spots at Lowell High School, we need to create more hubs for academic excellence equitably located throughout the city, and expand access to AP classes in the eastern and southern neighborhoods.

7. What challenges and opportunities does **SFUSD Early Education** face in rolling out the Transitional Kindergarten (TK) expansion Universal Pre-Kindergarten?

One significant challenge SFUSD has in rolling out TK is finding the space for new

classrooms at school sites, especially once we have a portfolio of fully-enrolled elementary schools. If the new bond passes—and I hope it does—we may have an opportunity to modernize some of our school sites to create expansion room for TKs at schools where it is highly desired.

While there are TK sites that are not part of larger elementary school ecosystems, SFUSD has an opportunity to expand enrollment if it can effectively use free TK as a chance for families to “try out” SFUSD and then get funneled into K-5. Overall, the district is much like Congress in that while Congress has a perpetually low approval rating, everyone loves their individual representative. In SFUSD, the district has a bad reputation, but families love their individual schools. TK is a great way to allow more families exposure to SFUSD and allow them to fall in love with a school community and remain in the district when they might have otherwise applied to private school for Kindergarten.

TK is also a great opportunity for SFUSD to lower the racial gap in kindergarten readiness and improve early literacy achievement.

8. What priorities, initiatives, or funding would you support for **Special Education** and/or unmet needs in the classroom?

The district is not meeting its legal obligations to special education students and their families, and we pay for it on the back end. Instead of investing in giving kids the education they are entitled to, we pay for some to leave the district and seek private education and pay settlements to others.

In connection with the resource alignment initiative, I will work to ensure all of our school sites are fully-staffed to meet special education students’ needs, and are receiving adequate early literacy support that can alleviate the need for IEPs later for some students. I will also advocate to provide teachers and paraeducators with more coordination and prep time to ensure all of a students’ team, including parents, are communicating to meet their needs.

9. Please share your **personal experience with SFUSD**.

I’m the mom of a second-grader in a Spanish-immersion school and a toddler who will be eligible for the TK expansion.

I’m a member of the Dolores Huerta Elementary PTA. While on maternity leave with my youngest, I was a regular parent volunteer to help run the *tiendita*--the school store where students can trade *plumas* they have earned for small prizes, teaching them financial literacy, numeracy, and supporting our social-emotional curriculum. I also chaperone field trips, volunteer in the classroom, and provide classroom snacks and supplies.

10. **What else** would you like Potrero Hill Democratic Club to know about you? Please include any aspects of your background and experience that have not already been touched upon, or endorsements you are proud to share.

I'm the daughter of a conservative car salesman and a working-class Latina who raised me with liberal Catholic values. My parents raised me to value education, but I doubt they ever imagined I'd become the first lawyer in our family.

When I was in sixth grade, a chance encounter changed the course of my education and my life, leading me to Stanford Law School. I'm the first woman in my mother's family to graduate from a four-year college. Even as I did well in school, my parents didn't fully understand how to help me on my academic path. I want to make sure all SFUSD students have the chance to succeed in ways their ancestors could only dream about. I see the potential in my kids and all of our SFUSD students, and I'm ready to be the champion they deserve.

I've spent my entire career fighting to protect San Francisco and its residents. I moved to San Francisco nearly twenty years ago, and I've been a public servant for over a decade. I have deep local government experience advising elected and appointed officials, department heads, and City employees.

I'm proud to have garnered perhaps the most—and most diverse—endorsements in this race, based on my experience and focus on governance and results. I am proud to be endorsed by groups as wide-ranging as SF Parent Action, United Educators of San Francisco, Grow SF, Together SF, the League of Pissed Off Voters, and the San Francisco Women's Political Committee, in addition to many Democratic Clubs. And, I've got the endorsements of *six* SF Supervisors—Dorsey, Mandelman, Engardio, Melgar, Ronen, and Chan—if I were an ordinance, I would pass!

Thank you for answering our questions, and thank you for running for office! Please submit the completed questionnaire as a pdf to contact_us@phdemclub.org no later than Monday, August 26.