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San Francisco Parent Action Questions for SFUSD School Board Candidates 2022

Alida Fisher

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Thriving and Equitable Public Schools	Level of Agreement
1. I support the <i>SF Parent Coalition Parent Priorities Platform</i>. A focus on equity and excellence going hand-in-hand, improving student outcomes in our district, regaining trust and rebuilding community morale, improving the fiscal health of SFUSD, and overall good governance should be the top priorities of the School Board going into 2022-23.	3
2. QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: San Francisco should not have two tiers of education quality. We need to hold all SFUSD schools accountable to high-quality instruction and related supports for students. The Board of Education has responsibility for the success of all students attending San Francisco public schools.	4
3. TRANSPARENCY: I support increased transparency of school performance that enables San Francisco to evaluate and improve the quality of our public schools, starting with a public dashboard that shares math and reading assessment data at the school level to be shared publicly, updated at least twice a year.	4
4. LITERACY: I believe in the urgency of improving literacy outcomes for all student demographic populations at SFUSD. I commit to supporting staff's literacy improvement plan and recommendations, and making the necessary changes to our literacy curricula, tools, and instruction methods that will follow an evidence- and standards-based core literacy curriculum.	4
5. GOVERNANCE: An effective School Board follows the lead of and supports the superintendent and staff, letting them be the experts and making recommendations for the direction of the district.	3
6. BUDGET HEALTH: I commit to governing in accordance with nationally-established best financial practices. District leadership should be held accountable for presenting their budget in a clear, student-centered way at public board meetings that allows parents, community members, and board members alike to understand and engage. As a board member I will demand this level of transparency from district staff and follow their lead, supporting their recommendations.	4

Open-Ended:

1. **Optional: Expand on any of your responses to the statements above.**

As a special education advocate and parent advisory committee leader, I have experienced instances when district staff, including leadership, benefit from hearing the perspective of families. Very often, well-intentioned policies and practices do not have the intended impact on student outcomes. Collaboration is key to our commitment to be student centered.

I don't always agree with "following the lead" of the superintendent and staff. I think it's very important to acknowledge the great work happening in our district.

2. **What are your priorities in terms of fixing SFUSD's budget deficit, and how would those priorities impact students, families, and our schools?**

Fighting to increase special education funding! I am actively working with District and City leaders to increase state funding. The District's special education budget increased by 35 percent between 2016-17 and 2020-21. However, State and federal special education funding increased by only six percent during that time. This means that a very large portion of our unrestricted general fund is used to meet the legal obligations associated with IEPs.

I have been advocating with parent and District leaders for increased education funding for years! Budgets are value statements: we need to fund what we value. My past and current advocacy includes:

- Allocating ERAF (Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund) money to schools, not the City's general fund.
- Lobbying the state legislature for funding formula increases (LCFF).

Determine program effectiveness. For example, we are spending a lot of money to implement our current reading curriculum, yet less than half of SFUSD students are proficient readers; what instructional practices do we need to shift to ensure that all students are proficient and joyful readers by third grade? If we had the effective resources and programs to teach all children to read in the general education classroom, we would prevent many referrals to special education and we wouldn't need as many Tier 2 and 3 literacy supports. How amazing would it be to have these highly trained personnel available to support social emotional learning and other areas of need as well?

3. What should SFUSD do to increase enrollment and to attract more students and families to San Francisco Unified School District?

Decreased enrollment is a state-wide issue, but particularly challenging here in San Francisco. I'm excited to see legislation that adjusts State funding formulas to hold districts harmless for reduction in enrollment, as this decline currently has a huge impact on our budget.

As Kevin Costner's character said in *Field of Dreams*: "if you build it, they will come." If we provide the programming and resources that our families want (language pathways, STEM programs, inclusion, etc) at under-enrolled schools, families will be more likely to consider these schools.

SFUSD must:

- Support an expansion of Universal Prekindergarten and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) programs. SFUSD's Early Education classrooms are some of the most inclusive in the district and an underutilized recruiting tool. In fact, 10 additional school sites are being added in the 2022-2023 school year due to high demand.
- Reform the Student Assignment System. Any enrollment system redesign must be paired with an equitable review of school resources. Back in 2018, when Resolution 189-25A1 was introduced, I raised questions that have still gone unanswered today: How are we going to ensure the quality of the educational experience in schools across the district? What is the plan to make sure all SF public schools have the necessary resources to serve their students? What is being done to renovate the existing under-enrolled and under-requested schools?

4. What are your top three concerns on the current state of the district and what do you plan to do as a commissioner to address those concerns?

I am very concerned about:

1. Staffing shortages in our district
2. Lack of mental health and wellness supports in our schools, and
3. Poor reading scores amongst our students

Before COVID-19, our education system was underfunded and impacted. Now, our students are facing serious challenges. Our educators faced one of the hardest years ever to be an educator. We need to meet our students' and teachers' basic social emotional needs before any learning can happen. Now more than ever, it's important to prioritize the mental and physical health of students and teachers.

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We need to work to re-engage students. That means hiring more social workers, nurses, school counselors, and school psychologists. Many schools are collaborating with agencies and bringing resources into their public schools. I'd like to see more of these partnerships to support students and their families.

With new grants, extending the community school model into additional SFUSD sites brings supports and services to the school, and then the needs of the student as a whole can be taken into consideration. *This allows the student to more fully engage in learning.* Family engagement is an important component of the community school model. Schools and families working together to support each student has been shown to improve outcomes.

We need a holistic review of our current reading curriculum. Serious shifts are needed to improve student outcomes, and quickly. We need to implement a structured literacy curriculum that includes a systemic and sequential structured literacy approach and provide decodable texts.

5. How can SFUSD increase academic outcomes for the most marginalized students? How can SFUSD challenge and create learning opportunities for higher achieving students?

As a special education advocate, I know that research shows that diversity helps us become more thoughtful and innovative. It helps us become better problem solvers. And for those of us raising kids in San Francisco, it helps prepare our kids for the reality of our city.

I often run into the mentality of "encroachment." Some families fear that funding initiatives to support children with disabilities, English learners, or students of color will negatively impact other children by taking away resources from their child(ren)'s learning environment.

I have found the opposite to be true. Training an educator to differentiate instruction for a struggling second grader also helps that teacher understand how to support the child who is reading at a fifth grade level.

Providing an educator with positive behavior intervention strategies helps that teacher manage his or her entire classroom, not just the students identified with behavior challenges.

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This allows more time to be spent on instruction for all students. While teachers and paras are asking for more training, this isn't the only answer.

We need to reduce class sizes and caseloads plus provide more classroom and wraparound supports in all schools. All teachers need more prep periods and collaboration time.

I firmly believe in Universal Design for Learning and targeted universalism: by providing support and services that target our students with the highest needs, all students will benefit. As John F. Kennedy said, "a rising tide lifts all boats."

6. What was your position on the school board recall of February 2022, and why?

I was against the school board recall because:

- I was very worried that a recall would distract us from the urgent challenges ahead: working together to keep schools open while COVID surges continued to impact our community; bringing much-needed mental health supports into schools; and repairing the harm and learning loss brought on by the pandemic.
- Our district was on the brink of insolvency. The state's FCMAT (Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team) was perilously close to recommending that SFUSD be placed in receivership due to our structural budget deficit, yet the district was slated to absorb the multi-million dollar cost of the recall.
- The three commissioners were up for reelection in November, mere months away, so why not wait until then instead of wasting all of the resources that were expended on a special election? Holding a special election felt like an end-run around our democratic process.

Now it's time for us to find a path forward together. Politics, not just here in San Francisco but throughout the country, have felt divisive and toxic for many years. It's time to focus on what unites us rather than divides us. All San Franciscans want the best outcomes for SFUSD students. We all want to see each and every SFUSD student thrive in our schools. We want to see all students live up to their full potential and leave our district prepared for postsecondary success.

7. What are some specific ways that you will work with the SFUSD parent community and invite their participation/feedback as a board member?

This is the work I have been doing for years, and why I am running for the Board. I will continue to hold SFUSD's superintendent and leadership team accountable to

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data-driven, budget-aligned priorities as well as specific and concrete strategies and action items to attain those priorities.

The core values, mission, and vision of the district are not just esoteric ideas to me; they are principles that guide my interactions with district personnel on a daily basis. In my 16 years as an SFUSD parent, I've been an active member and leader in PTAs, SSCs, and school site affinity groups at seven schools. I have chaired the Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC) and am a member of the African American Parent Advisory Council (AAPAC), the Charter School Oversight Committee, LCAP Task Force, and Equity Studies Task Force. I am part of the Joint Advisory Alignment Committee, in which the leadership teams from the parent advisory committees work together to elevate and amplify common goals: inclusion and support for each and every student. As a special education advocate, I attend hundreds of meetings at dozens of school sites each year. Family engagement and community participation is CRITICAL to student success. As a commissioner, I will prioritize visiting families in their communities. Why not hold committee meetings at school sites rather than at 555 Franklin? If we truly want family engagement, we must meet our families where they are, not ask them to come to us.