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San Francisco Parent Action
www.sfparentaction.org

Questions for SFUSD School Board Candidates 2024 JOHN JERSIN

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

<i>Excellent and Equitable Public Schools</i>	<i>Level of Agreement</i>
1. I SUPPORT the SF Parent Coalition Parent Priorities Platform. 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 2024-25.	4
2. TRANSPARENCY: I support increased transparency of school performance that enables San Francisco to evaluate and improve the quality of our public schools. This should include a public dashboard that shares math and reading assessment data at the school level, updated at least twice a year.	4
3. LITERACY AND MATH: I believe in the urgency of improving student outcomes in literacy and math at SFUSD. I commit to ensuring that SFUSD adopts a comprehensive and fully funded plan , and makes the necessary changes to our curricula, tools, and instruction methods that will follow an evidence- and standards-based instructional approach.	4
4. 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
5. BUDGET HEALTH: I commit to governing in accordance with nationally-established best financial practices . I will hold District leadership accountable for presenting the budget clearly. When fixing our budget deficit, I support SF Parents' call for minimizing negative impacts to our most vulnerable students while ensuring a baseline of excellence across all schools.	4

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OPEN-ENDED: (all responses should be 250 words or fewer)

1) Optional: Expand on any of your responses to the statements above, in 250 words or fewer.

Regarding short question #4 on Governance:

I have spent my career leading teams, small and large, and building services that help people get jobs. I have been a CEO, executive, and board member of several companies, and have mostly operated in what would be widely considered governance roles.

I largely agree with the statement on governance, however, I believe an effective board also holds the superintendent and staff accountable. There are times at which accountability is at odds with merely allowing the superintendent and staff to lead and providing recommendations. The linked document includes accountability, but the statement as written in the questionnaire does not.

2) *Why are you running for the Board of Education? Within this response, please describe a) your connection to SFUSD students and families, and b) a description of your leadership style, experience, and/or training.*

My two daughters are the center of my life. As they are about to spend 13 years in SFUSD, now is the time for me to get involved for them, and for the nearly 50,000 other students who aren't getting the education they deserve. Our public schools are a key pillar of the city, a key influence for other districts in California, and even other states. We must set a better example and serve students better.

I am also motivated because my experience and skill set match the core challenges the district faces. While SFUSD recently projected a \$421 million budget deficit, I would bring needed financial experience to the board. I have led organizations with budgets into the billions of dollars, and have already found millions of dollars of savings for SFUSD in my role on CBOC which oversees a piece of SFUSD's spending.

Our schools face a recruiting crisis with many teaching, paraeducator, and other positions not filled by qualified staff quickly enough. This places unreasonable demands on teachers and staff, and hurts students. My experience running the world's largest professional recruiting platform as an executive at LinkedIn, would enable me to implement best practices in recruiting to ease these painful issues.

As a leader, my style is inspirational and collaborative, while pragmatic and analytical. I invite people into the process, and craft a vision that motivates people. My analytical background helps me ensure that a strategy is grounded in reality.

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3) Do you support the superintendent's [plan](#) to fix SFUSD's budget deficit, including but not limited to classroom consolidations and school closures?

At the time of this writing, there is little “plan” to agree or disagree with. The superintendent and staff have recently stated that fiscal responsibility cannot be restored without the incredibly painful and distressing closing of schools, though little data has been shared to justify that position. In my oversight role as a member of SFUSD's Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee, I have found millions of dollars in potential budget savings, demonstrating that closing schools is happening before the budget has been fully and competently reviewed. This fiscal mismanagement and resulting stress on families is part of what I intend to fix as a member of the Board of Education.

Further, I believe this moment of numerous potential school closures was avoidable if we had addressed fiscal mismanagement earlier. I strongly disagree with the way the district and board have led us to this point. The constant budget management failures have cost us the opportunity to approach school closures using best practices. Specifically, if closures are necessary the district should start with a single test case and engage deeply with the community before, during, and after to craft a shared closure plan and to study unforeseen impacts during the process. These lessons could be applied to the second school and so on. Instead, the district appears to be planning to close numerous schools all at once, causing unnecessary errors and harm that I would have avoided.

4) How can SFUSD increase academic [outcomes](#) for the most underserved students and close the racially predictable achievement gap?

The district has failed to approach equity seriously, failing so many students and families who have not been supported well. The most visible equity related effort - banning Algebra 1 in 8th grade - was a failure for students it claimed to help, and a disaster for students overall. Such politically flashy moves don't help, and get in the way of real solutions.

More recently, the district has relied on an ad hoc set of organizations to promote equity through an eclectic mix of mechanisms such as learning certain students by name, or surveying certain parental groups about feelings on the district. These efforts may help, but they utterly fail to provide a coherent, strategic, and systematic approach to addressing the harm to students whom the district leaves behind.

A serious strategy to improve equity must start with early childhood development. Studies show that achievement gaps already exist on a student's very first day of school. Some families can afford support such as private nannies, daycare, and enrichment programs well before TK, while many families are not as privileged. Engaging students

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early and providing strong consistent support during early childhood is a scientifically sound, pragmatic, and high impact means of addressing achievement gaps where they start. The district's current "Facts at a Glance" sheet shows preK is under enrolled by at least 85%, meaning the vast majority of preK students are not getting this support. This is a huge and mostly ignored issue essential to improving the lives of so many students.

5) How can SFUSD challenge and create learning opportunities for higher achieving students?

In my many years of public school, I grew to love my classes, found joy in learning, and thrived. My public schools fostered and celebrated excellence. I see too many students aren't getting the same from SFUSD right now.

Most importantly, the Board of Education maintains a set of goals and guardrails which define the priorities for the entire school system. Each of the 12 primary and interim goals are about getting students to some minimum level of achievement- e.g. getting 70% of 3rd graders to read at grade level. There are no goals related to students achieving their full potential. By adding goals focused on higher achievement, we can ensure it will become a focus. A simple but imperfect example would be a measure of how many AP classes students pass. This example goal would naturally drive availability of AP classes, and effort to prepare students for them.

We must also ensure that there are merit based pathways for high achieving students, including at Lowell. We must ensure that advanced classes such as compression courses are available options, and that the implementation of Algebra 1 in 8th grade works for students. Finally, we should work to ensure achievement is recognized by stopping grade inflation which effectively lowers the bar for an A and therefore fails to challenge students who are eager to to achieve. All of these goals require cultural change away from only looking at who is behind to helping more kids get ahead.

6) What should SFUSD do to increase enrollment and to attract more students and families to the San Francisco Unified School District, at elementary, middle, and/or high school entry points?

I know public school is right for my two young daughters. Public schools are more diverse, and big enough to support more varied opportunities from sports to science fairs. Yet the harsh reality is that *three times* as many families choose private school in SF compared to elsewhere, and SF public schools have lost students to private schools for many years. Yet these depressing facts point to hopeful truths - it wasn't always this way in SF, it's not like this elsewhere, and it doesn't have to be this way anymore.

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First, we must fix the budget. SFUSD recently projected a \$421,000,000 deficit. I hear stories of schools without a nurse, students hating the low quality meals, and principals teaching classes to cover for our teacher shortage. These frustrating problems simply don't happen at well funded private schools, and they scare families away from public school. My financial experience can help prevent these issues from happening at our public schools too.

Second, we must improve hiring. We don't hire teachers, paraeducators, and other staff fast enough, often taking months to reply when quality teachers apply to SFUSD jobs. My experience running the world's largest professional recruiting platform can significantly improve our process to hire quality teachers and staff faster, so students get the support and instruction they deserve.

Finally, with improved finances and staffing, we can focus on things private schools tend to market to families, such as plans for high achieving students (see related question).

7) What do you think of SFUSD's lottery system of enrollment?

The lottery (aka school assignment policy) is broken. I see the stress it causes for each of my friends going through it; it stresses me out too. The district has acknowledged there are significant problems by announcing changes starting in 2026, which unfortunately don't address most of the issues.

As the nickname "the lottery" suggests, many parents feel like they are gambling with their child's future. I've heard stories of how siblings end up in different schools far apart, or how families aren't considered "in the neighborhood" of a school three blocks away. Many community members aren't inclined to help their nearest school because they feel it isn't really a neighborhood school.

The upcoming changes won't solve these problems. In fact, they may make some problems worse by prioritizing mixing students geographically, meaning the likelihood that a family gets into their nearest school or top choice school will likely go down.

Sadly, there have been better solutions available. In 2009 a group from Harvard, Stanford, Duke and MIT, and including a Nobel Prize winner, offered to redesign the lottery for free, which could have led to massive improvements. The board accepted the offer, but district staff turned it down and implemented their own system, leading to the broken system we have today. The board should have held staff to the offer, and as a board member I would look to reopen this or similar opportunity to engage with leading experts to improve school assignment.

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8) How did you vote on Prop G (8th Grade Algebra) and why? What are the top three areas to focus on in math currently to improve math outcomes for kids at SFUSD?

I voted yes. I was a leading supporter of Prop G and played a role on the “Bring Algebra Back 2024” campaign. When I was in 5th and 6th grade I attended a public school that enabled students to learn math at their own pace. By the end of 6th grade I had reached precalculus. Yet when I transitioned to my public middle school I was put back in Algebra 1 in 7th grade. I recall my love of math diminishing with years of boredom while retaking math I had already learned. I supported Prop G because we need to foster love of math, not dampen it, and we should celebrate and encourage students taking advanced classes, not force them to stop. From my analysis published in the SF Voter Information Pamphlet, 53% of students were directly hurt from the policy Prop G helped stop.

First, in light of the recent audit, I would continue the existing effort to find new math curriculum to ensure we are teaching quality material. Second, SFUSD is already piloting Lesson Study, a professional development structure, in some elementary schools and it shows promise. With new curriculum coming, I would double down on professional development and expand to the rest of our schools. Finally, SFUSD schools currently spend a variable number of minutes on math, and often too few for such an important subject. Improvements have been made, but we need to ensure students have ample time to learn.

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

I supported the recall effort. Among my reasons was the board's frustrating failure to prioritize students. Regardless of whether renaming schools, and spending more than \$500,000 to cover up art were good or bad ideas, they were a distraction from what mattered to families when schools were closed. The delay from board resistance to a contractor to craft a reopening plan caused families great stress. Schools educate, but also provide a safe supervised environment, nutrition, firstline healthcare through nurses, and counseling services. Many types of education such as performance, art, and physical education are not possible remotely. The board failed to realize and prioritize these impacts on students and families.

The board also implemented bad policy. Historic merit based admissions policies have enabled specialization in schools, such as the Ruth Asawa School of the Arts. This specialization enables the district to better serve specific groups of students without spending more or less money on any one group. By breaking with historic merit based admissions policies, the board stopped serving students as well, and broke dearly held plans of hardworking students.

Even further, the board failed in its budget oversight role. In addition to a budget shortfall of over \$100 million, the board put off making required budget cuts until a single day before the state deadline and potential state takeover. This is exactly the “kick the

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can down the road" attitude that has led us to school closures, and that I would stop as a board member.

10) Who will you look to as your trusted sources of feedback, information, and advice as you make decisions as a BOE Commissioner? In what ways will you engage with and solicit feedback from community members?

Having been a leader of an organization of thousands of people, I'm familiar with the need to use a mix of official and unofficial channels to build a complete perspective. Surveys, town halls, and organized meetings have their place, but so do direct lightweight relationships with staff and families. These kinds of interactions have already broadened my perspective well beyond that public discourse and my peer group. From my neighbors, to old college friends, to teachers I've visited in their classrooms, I greatly value the trust and openness I've already experienced from SFUSD staff and families.

Any member of the Board of Education will end up representing hundreds of schools and groups they have no direct connection with, and recognizing this and working to build connections is vital work. Thoughtful care and consideration of students and families hopes and pains is the most important aspect of the role.

While I already have a set of relationships with teachers, including my own brother-in-law, and others, as well as parents who I am personally connected to, it's the role of a BoE member to continually work to understand the views and priorities of the community they represent. To that end, I aim to work with existing organizations including SF Parents Coalition, and others such as AAALI, in addition to fostering my own direct contact with students, staff, parents, and community members.