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Questions for November 2026 SFUSD School Board Candidates
Reina Tello

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

<i>Excellent and Equitable Public Schools</i>	<i>Level of Agreement</i>
<p>1. I SUPPORT the SF Parents Parent Priorities: A focus on equity and excellence going hand-in-hand, improving student outcomes in our district, building 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 2026-27.</p>	4
<p>2. DISTRICT 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.</p>	4
<p>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 continues to implement and fully support a comprehensive plan, and makes the necessary adjustments to curricula, tools, and instructional methods that follow an evidence- and standards-based approach.</p>	4
<p>4. EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE: An effective School Board centers on 1) supporting the superintendent and cabinet to ensure student-focused leadership, 2) setting a clear, shared vision, and 3) defining goals rather than managing day-to-day operations or unnecessary interference in implementation or policy execution.</p>	4
<p>5. BUDGET HEALTH: I commit to governing in accordance with nationally-established best financial practice. 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.</p>	4

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

I strongly support increased accountability and transparency, but public school-level dashboards based on standardized test scores may be harmful because test scores correlate most strongly with socio-economic status, and could lead to schools pushing out lower-performing students and English learners as this has happened in other states where such dashboards are required. So we need to be thoughtful about how we use data to improve outcomes for all students without unintended consequences.

2. *Why are you running for the Board of Education, and why now? Within your response, please describe:*

- ***Your connection to SFUSD students and families***
- ***The leadership experience that prepares you to govern a public education system***
- ***Your views on both academic excellence and equity in education***

a. I spent 13 years at SFUSD as a student. I've also spent the last 13 years as a parent at SFUSD. I am mother to a 7th grader at James Lick with an IEP, and a 12th grader at June Jordan School for Equity. I also work with an active multigenerational group of community members, that include SFUSD families.

b. As a community organizer, I've spent decades advocating for good governance of our public school system and our city. Good governance means ensuring that government works for everyone, especially impacted communities.

c. Academic excellence and equity support each other. When students who need the most support have their needs met, the students already excelling aren't held back. Equity means all students have the support necessary so everyone achieves academic excellence.

3. *Why do you want the SF Parents endorsement? How will you uplift the voices of parents across SFUSD as a Board of Education decisionmaker?*

As a parent of a high needs student I know there is a wealth of expertise and knowledge parents carry, and that understanding is invaluable to achieve academic excellence. I have a real track record of working well with others to achieve a goal. I would love to have as many working relationships as possible in order to achieve the good governance I demand from SFUSD. I would be thrilled to have the endorsement of the SF Parents Coalition.

4. *What's your perspective on the teacher strike that happened in February,*

including what could have been handled differently by 1) SFUSD leadership, 2) Board of Education, and 3) the Teacher's Union? What can the School Board do to promote a more collaborative relationship between the teacher's union and the district going forward?

1. I was disappointed that there were 11 months of failed attempts at negotiation before the strike. SFUSD Leadership had ample time to negotiate in good faith, but the District waited until the last moment to take it seriously, which led to the strike.

2. Although it's not the job of the Board of Education to negotiate directly with the union, the Board could have intervened sooner and told SFUSD staff to responsibly spend down the \$400 million reserve and make a deal for fully staffed schools.

3. The demands of the union were reasonable. Educators did not want to strike but had to do so when SFUSD staff would not negotiate seriously. After the strike, the Superintendent certified that SFUSD can afford the cost of the agreement and said that fully funded benefits would be a great recruitment tool for the positions at SFUSD that have been a challenge to fill.

4. With my track record of working in coalitions, I will use my skills to make sure we can have good communication. Good communication leads to understanding and compromise.

5. What does effective Board governance look like in practice? In your response, describe how you would:

- ***Work with the Superintendent while maintaining appropriate oversight***
- ***Ensure Board decisions are followed through on, without overstepping into staff work***

Good oversight includes good communication and mutual understanding, while respecting roles (so no micromanaging from the Board). Working together and keeping each other accountable is key to success when working as a team. The board and superintendent must have a good working relationship built on trust. Board decisions must be followed in order to build the trust. Staff is paid to dedicate the necessary time to do the work to achieve the goals set by the governance team.

6. Board decisions often face strong public criticism. How would you respond if a decision you supported was met with significant pushback from: 1) families? 2) teachers? What would you say, and what would you do next?

Strong criticism is a good indicator to pause, reflect, bring those voices in to truly understand why there is pushback. Sometimes decisions move so fast they come at

the expense of unintended consequences. An open door and open mind are a good solution for understanding. As a community organizer, I have been trained and developed my skills at listening and building relationships across differences; this is a skill set I will bring to the Board.

7. Does the district need to close schools, and if so, why? To what extent should community input, equity, and enrollment demand shape these processes and final decisions?

Every decision SFUSD makes—including decisions whether to close schools—must be made with community input and equity at the center. Closing schools does not save much money, so they should only be done if there is a clear benefit to students, especially the most vulnerable and at-risk students.

Decisions about school closures need to be made in accordance with Guardrail One (meaningful consultation in decision making) and in line with the community guidelines expressed by the community engagement ad hoc committee: [https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/DTUKY5541830/\\$file/Recommendations%20from%20the%20Ad-hoc%20Committee%20on%20Public%20Engagement_05.07.26.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/DTUKY5541830/$file/Recommendations%20from%20the%20Ad-hoc%20Committee%20on%20Public%20Engagement_05.07.26.pdf)

8. What are the biggest challenges and opportunities you see with the district's current student assignment ("lottery") system?

For many years, there have been valid critiques of the current "lottery" enrollment system, and in 2019-2020 the Board of Education made a commitment to fix the enrollment system. I am disappointed that the current school board has been unable to follow through on that commitment. I see an opportunity to make neighborhood schools work for students and avoid the unnecessary anxiety and travel time, and when I am on the Board I will push to make sure it actually happens.

9. SFUSD is facing structural budget challenges, including declining enrollment, rising costs, and pressure on reserves. What do you see as the root causes of this situation, and how should the Board respond within its governance role?

The structural budget challenges faced by SFUSD have their root causes in the high cost of living, which is driving families out of the city, and the state of California's unwillingness to invest adequately in our public schools, even though we have the 4th largest economy in the world. These challenges are happening across the Bay Area and the state.

In addition to advocating for state-level changes, what we can do locally is to have a clear vision of the thriving school district we want, and then use the resources we have today to create the path. We can responsibly spend down our \$400 million reserve to improve SFUSD and attract more families. At the same time, we must look for every opportunity to bring in new dollars, find misspent dollars to serve all students at SFUSD, especially those in most need. We have a real opportunity to be creative with solutions that bridge the gap to a better future for SFUSD.

10. The Board's 2014 decision to change 8th grade algebra policy did not produce the intended results, and the current Board's recent revisions have drawn mixed reactions from teachers and families. What does this case reveal about how the San Francisco Board of Education should handle decisions around academic policy? If elected, what specific, measurable actions would you take to: 1) expand access to advanced coursework, and 2) improve outcomes for historically underserved students?

The mistake our current Board made on the 8th grade Algebra policy was not following the recommendations of educators, backed by research from Stanford, about what works best to improve student outcomes. Instead, the Board re-wrote a convoluted placement policy during the meeting—an example of micro-management that removes accountability from the Superintendent and makes it harder for educators to do their jobs.

To expand access to advanced coursework and improve outcomes for historically underserved students, the most important thing we can do is listen to educators and what outcomes data tells us. A good example is ethnic studies, where 15 years of data shows that SFUSD's year-long ethnic studies course is linked to higher grades and UC eligibility, especially for students of color. We should continue to follow educators' recommendations and support programs like this that promote equity and academic excellence.