

# South Bay Progressive Alliance Candidate Questionnaire For School District



Please download and complete the questionnaire and email the completed document to [info@SouthBayPA.org](mailto:info@SouthBayPA.org). By submitting your responses to this questionnaire to the South Bay Progressive Alliance (SBPA), you agree that your responses are public and that we may share your responses with others.

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Line of Work: Public School Classroom Teacher

## Candidate Pledge:

*If you cannot not make the following 4 affirmative pledges, the SBPA cannot endorse you at this time.*

**CORPORATE-FREE.** As a corporate-free candidate I commit to refuse donations from corporations, industry lobbyists, corporate representatives, political bundlers, and Political Action Committees (except for unions) and publicize that I am a corporate free candidate in my campaign literature. YES x NO

**PLEDGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY.** I commit to publicize and hold regular listening sessions with my constituents, to stay in touch with their needs and concerns. YES x NO

**PROGRESSIVE POLICIES.** I commit to author, co-author, support, promote and defend people-focused progressive policies and practices that incorporate SBPA core values to improve communities and the quality of life for my constituents. YES x NO

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.** I commit to help level the playing field for ALL people and prioritize the development of leadership among under-represented communities. YES x NO

## General Questions:

1. **Endorsements—**
  - a. Who are you endorsing, from national races all the way down ballot to local races?

Claudia Rossi - Santa Clara County Board of Education, Trustee #7  
Peter Ortiz - Santa Clara County Board of Education, Trustee #6  
Kristin Rivers - Eastside Union High School District Board of Education  
Brian Wheatley - San Jose Unified District Board of Trustees, TA4  
Raymond Mueller - Alum Rock School Board  
Tami Moore - Oak Grove School District Board of Trustees, TA2

b. Are you endorsing anyone else in your own race?

No, the district is divided into trustee areas.

c. Who has endorsed you?

Oak Grove Educators Association (CTA affiliate in OGSD)  
Claudia Rossi - Santa Clara County Board of Education Trustee #7  
John Mackey - Oak Grove School District Trustee, TA4  
Peter Ortiz - Governing Board Member Mount Pleasant School District  
Shay Franco-Clausen - SCV Open Space Authority Director-Elect District 5  
Kristin Rivers - Candidate for Eastside Union High School District Governing Board  
Brian Wheatley - Candidate for San Jose Unified School District, Trustee Area 4  
Raymond Mueller - Candidate for Alum Rock School District Governing Board  
Tami Moore - Candidate for Oak Grove School District, Trustee Area 2

d. Whose endorsements are you seeking or expect to receive?

314 Action (Science Advocacy)  
NPE Action (Public school advocacy)  
South Bay Labor Council  
Anna Song - Santa Clara County Board of Education  
Rosemary Kamei - Santa Clara County Board of Education  
Ash Kalra - State Assembly  
Jim Beall - State Senate  
Bob Wieckowski - State Senate

2. **Campaign Funding** —How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any). How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

We have raised \$2200 so far. We hope to raise another \$4000. Contributions are from labor union sources and personal donations. I will refuse all charter school affiliated money in any form. I will refuse all corporate donations in any form.

### Office-Specific Questions:

1. **Motivation**—Why did you choose to run for the School Board?

I am running for OGSD board because I believe we can do better. I will work to ensure that all district decisions focus on what is best to improve teaching and learning. We must provide a warm, accepting, and safe learning experience for both teachers and students to improve student success. I have the invaluable classroom experience to know what it takes for all students to succeed.

2. **Program and Priorities**—Elected office provides the opportunity to proactively lead by placing new ideas on the agenda for consideration and development. What are some specific ideas you intend to pursue if elected? What do you believe are the main priorities for the School Board?

I intend to pursue class size reduction at our Title 1 schools. Class size reduction is one of the few proven methods of improving student success. I intend to pursue policies to attract and retain quality teachers and staff by improving compensation and benefits. I intend to provide meaningful science curriculum for teachers and students in OGSD.

The main priorities of the School Board should be to provide our students with the opportunities they need to grow as people and to prepare them for the next levels of educational success.

3. **Qualifications**—Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of School Board. If you are an incumbent, what issues can you point to in your time as an incumbent that have had a positive impact? As an incumbent what can you tell us about your service on the school board, and share with us the decisions you have made in this capacity that you believe made a difference in the functioning of the school district?

I've spent the last 15 years working in California public schools as a classroom teacher and know first hand how to use our limited resources to give our students the education they deserve, not just the education we can spare them. I am the only candidate in trustee area 5 with full-time classroom experience. I served as president of the Gilroy Teachers Association in 2014 and in that capacity learned about teaching at all levels. In my time as GTA president I also learned how electing progressive governing board members changes the school district for the better almost overnight.

4. **School Climate, Engagement**—What is your understanding of the kinds of changes that most schools are making to improve school climate and school discipline policies? What are your views on school suspensions? What are your views on restorative practices and restorative justice in schools? What are your suggestions to support students who are chronically absent, students who have dropped out or left school or are on the verge of leaving or dropping out?

Many of the school districts in the county are trying to implement PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports) in some form or another. The results are as mixed as the implementation strategies. Some implementations seem to be working well and others seem to be an attempt by school administrators to shirk their responsibilities in maintaining school culture.

School suspensions are a necessary part of ed code for what amount to on campus criminal activity. It's clear that the use of school suspension has a long dark history when the racial disparities in enforcement are looked at. This needs to be addressed from the classroom to the boardroom. I'm an advocate of restorative justice approaches in most discipline situations in school.

Students with chronic absence issues require us to use our array of alternative placement options to help them complete their schooling. Community liaison and counseling resources are also needed to support students with chronic absentee issues. I have worked after school and during the summer for the past several years to help high school students recover credits in an effort to help them complete their diploma requirements while still enrolled in high school.

5. **Inclusion**—What are your views on special education? What changes, if any, need to be implemented? Should special education students be included in general education classes? Why or why not?

Special education is a federal mandate that is a set of important safeguards for some of our most vulnerable students. The biggest change that we need to make at a federal level is to fully fund the mandate to help local school districts with the encroachment issues on their budgets. Special education students should be included in the general education setting if at all possible. The current term guiding placement of students with IEP is “least restrictive environment”. In my experience that is usually the general education setting. I was a founding staff member at Christopher High School in Gilroy CA which is a full-inclusion public school.

6. **Charter Schools**—What are your views on charter schools and charter school expansion? What is your understanding of the controversies surrounding the privatization of public education? Would you support measures that would strengthen transparency and oversight of charter schools?

Charter school expansion is a threat to locally controlled and directed public schools. It’s an attempt to steal public funds and re-segregate our schools along class lines. I’m deeply committed to fight the expansion of charter schools and to roll back and revoke the charters currently in place. I support all measures to strengthen transparency and oversight of charter schools.

7. **Testing and Teacher Evaluations**—What should our policy be around Student Testing and Teacher Evaluation? Do you see alternatives to the use of mandated standardized tests in meeting local, state and national education goals? How much are we teaching to the test now, and what should we be doing differently if you feel it should be different?

Student testing and teacher evaluation should never be linked. Both are important functions but should be carefully examined and revamped to make sure we are doing what we say is our goal. On the student testing side we do need to measure how our students are progressing to help guide our efforts to provide the best education we can. However, the tests need to be developmentally appropriate to the age group and the results need to be used to help improve our efforts in the classroom. Testing does not have to be done in Math and Language Arts for all students every year, starting in 3rd grade. In addition to mandated testing, the OGSD additionally tests all students (K-8) 3 times a year in Math and Language Arts to predict how the students will do on the state test. This is a huge waste of valuable class time and is unfair to students. Teacher evaluation should never include student test scores.

An alternative to top-down mandated testing, that is already allowed by State Ed. Code, would be for local districts to develop their own guiding assessments that assess growth in students and use the results only to guide future instruction. The amount of teaching to the test would decrease as administrators would feel less pressure to reach a goal set by outside agencies, like an API of 800. Instead of absolute goals set by outside forces we could use a growth model to encourage all schools to get better instead of punishing the lower performing schools.

8. **Common Core**—What are your views on the use of the proposed Common Core curriculum?

It is no longer proposed, but now is the adopted curriculum of California. California had some of the best standards in the nation before adopting common core. We regressed in the name of the profits of book publishers. It's sad really.

9. **Budgetary Priorities**—Imagine in the year after your election to the school board, due to a shortfall your annual budget is reduced by 10%. Where would you make cuts? What would you try to shield from cuts?

I would start with the perspective that the cuts should have the smallest impact on the classroom possible. I would look at what contractors are employed by the district and ask if those services are necessary and if we could bring that work back in house. I would look to try and find economies at the district office and streamline processes there. In OGSD the superintendent makes about \$350,000, which is more than the governor or a small district of 17 schools, I think that is a great place to cut.

10. **Governance**—What concerns, if any, do you have relative to the current School Board? What policy changes would you make? What solutions would you propose to address and prevent conflicts of interest and misuse of public funds such as those recently exposed in the Alum Rock School district?

The trustee in my area has a long history of inappropriate behavior in office. She has been censured twice and her title of board president was removed. This is problematic to say the least. I also want to target LCFF funds toward the title 1 schools in the district and reduce class size at the sites with the most student needs. OGSD needs a full independent audit to find out how the money is being used at this point. A current board member has asked for it many times, but he needs additional like-minded members on the board to stand with him to get it done. I'm not happy about the lack of information and oversight that is currently available to voters. I don't feel we even really know what is going on at the OGSD district office. That has to change.

11. **Accountability**—Concretely and specifically, how will you make yourself accountable to the voters who elect you? How can the voters participate in holding you accountable if you are elected?

I plan to have quarterly open meetings to talk with voters and residents in the community. All voters should attend board meetings and address the board on items that impact them. I plan to use non-district email to allow voters and other stakeholders to share their concerns. OGSD has a policy of monitoring board member communications and I think that has a chilling effect on the flow of information to elected trustees. The superintendent currently opens and reads everything written to them, either on paper or email. I think all board members should seek out other perspectives besides what is presented in their board packets. To that end I plan to hold town halls and to reach out to different groups at times and places that work for them.

12. **Anything Else?** — Is there anything else you would like to share?

I would also like to investigate moving district banking services to locally owned credit unions or public banking options.

## Positions on Issues

**Please answer YES or NO for each statement.**

- Do you support a living wage? YES x NO
- Do you support participatory budgeting (citizen involvement in school board budgeting)? YES x NO
- Do you support free public education from pre-school through graduate studies? YES x NO
- Would you support allowing undocumented immigrants to vote in school board elections? YES x NO
- Do you support the right of transgendered individuals to use the restroom of their choice? YES x NO
- Do you support the use of city funds to develop worker-owned co-operatives? YES x NO
- Do you support a policy to place school board funds in a Public Bank? YES x NO
- Do you support single-payer healthcare? YES x NO