

**South Bay Progressive Alliance
Candidate Questionnaire
For School District**



Please download and complete the questionnaire and email the completed document to 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.

Name: Ali Sapirman

School District Name: San José-Evergreen Community College Board, Area 7

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Line of Work: COVID-19 Assistance Navigation Team Leader at Working Partnerships USA

Candidate Pledge:

If you cannot 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, Charter Schools Associations (except for union PACs and PACs that refuse corporate donations), and publicize that “I am a corporate free candidate” in my campaign literature. YES 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 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 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 NO

General Questions:

1. Endorsements—

- a. Who are you endorsing, from national races, all the way down from ballot to local races?
 - President - Joe Biden (I supported Bernie Sanders in the primary)
 - Congress CA-19 - Zoe Lofgren
 - State Assembly D27 - Ash Kalra
 - State Assembly D25 - Alex Lee
 - County Supervisor D3 - Otto Lee
 - San José City Council D4 - David Cohen (I supported Huy Tran in the primary)
 - San José City Council D6 - Jake Tonkel
 - Sunnyvale City Council D2 - Alysa Cisneros
 - Sunnyvale Mayor - Larry Klein
 - Campbell City Council D2 - Sergio Lopez
 - Cupertino City Council - Joseph Fruen
 - Lodi City Council - Hector Madrigal

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

No. San José-Evergreen trustees are elected by trustee area, so my race is for just one seat.

- c. Who has endorsed you?

My endorsements include:

- Foothill-De Anza Community College District Faculty Association PAC
- Silicon Valley Stonewall Democratic Club
- Silicon Valley Young Democrats
- Dean Democratic Club of Silicon Valley
- Paul Fong, Fmr. CA Assemblymember, Dist. 28
- Alex Lee, Candidate for CA Assembly, Dist. 25
- Otto Lee, CA DNC Member, Fmr. Sunnyvale Mayor & Candidate for County Supervisor, Dist. 3
- Larry Klein, Sunnyvale Mayor
- Claudia Rossi, County Board of Education President
- Brian Wheatley, San José Unified School Board VP
- Patrick Ahrens, Foothill-De Anza Community College Trustee
- David Cohen, Berryessa Union School Board VP & Candidate for San José City Council, Dist. 4
- Jake Tonkel, Candidate for San José City Council, Dist. 6
- Huy Tran, Fmr. San José Housing Commissioner
- Rich Tran, Milpitas Mayor
- Karina Dominguez, Milpitas City Councilmember
- Debbie Klein, President, Faculty Association of California Community Colleges

- Evan Hawkins, Executive Director, Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
- Tim Shively, President, Foothill-De Anza Faculty Association
- Ya'Mese Alijè Johnson, Vice President of Communications, Student Senate for California Community Colleges

You can view a more comprehensive list at Ali4Trustee.com/endorsements.

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

I am seeking the following endorsements:

- South Bay Progressive Alliance
- San José/Evergreen Federation of Teachers
- Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
- South Bay Labor Council
- Santa Clara County Democratic Party
- Supervisor Cindy Chavez
- Supervisor Dave Cortese
- Assemblymember Evan Low
- Assemblymember Marc Berman
- BAYMEC
- Silicon Valley Democratic Club
- Silicon Valley Asian Pacific American Democratic Club
- Avalanche Democratic Club of Silicon Valley
- Democratic Activists for Women Now
- Santa Clara County High School Democrats
- Jeffrey Levin

2. **Campaign Funding** — a. How much money have you raised so far? b. How much do you plan to raise for your campaign? c. Where will the money come from? d. Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

- I have raised \$10,500 so far.
- \$15,000 is the minimum to win, but my goal is \$30,000.
- So far most of my fundraising has been small-dollar contributions from friends, family, students, faculty, and people and organizations that have endorsed me. I intend to continue aggressively fundraising for the entire campaign from similar sources.
- In addition to the sources mentioned in the candidate pledge, I will not accept contributions from people or organizations that don't hold progressive values or that promote hate. I doubt they would want to give me money in the first place.

Office-Specific Questions:

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

I'm a recent community college graduate—and the community colleges saved my life. I had an experience that's all too common in higher education: I did all the "right things" in high school, got a scholarship and admission into my top-four year school in my home state of Florida, and then was sexually assaulted on campus. My university mishandled my case and found my assailant not responsible. I didn't want that school's name on my degree, so I withdrew. Knowing California colleges are the best in the country, I moved here and continued my education in community college. Faculty and staff invested in me and enabled my success, and I was able to become a bigger part of the San José community, recognize my identity and come out as queer non-binary, and have a home I felt safe in.

California community colleges are particularly vulnerable right now. The Faculty Association of California Community Colleges' yearly budget request included funding for student basic needs like food, housing, and mental health; and for parity for part-time faculty. The state Senate dropped those from the budget because of COVID-19's impact on state revenues.

I'm running because our community colleges need a champion who understands the budget well and who understands the experiences of students, faculty, and staff. I've grown tired of candidates who run for school boards as a stepping stone for higher office. Our community colleges deserve better and our students deserve better. I'm fully committed to being a community college trustee and I'm excited to help guide our campuses into the future.

2. Program and Priorities—a. What do you believe are the main priorities for the School Board?

The current board's priorities are:

- Passing a bond measure to provide funding for updated technology for distance learning, transfer to local four-year universities, job training, and facilities improvements, especially for disability access
- COVID-19 relief, including remote mental health counseling and drive-through food distribution
- Defunding the San José-Evergreen Community College Police Department

Elected office provides the opportunity to proactively lead by placing new ideas on the agenda for consideration and development. **b.** What are some specific ideas you intend to pursue if elected?

As a trustee my top priorities for San José City College and Evergreen Valley College are:

- Creating affordable below-market-rate housing for students and faculty
- Working with VTA to improve public transportation to the campuses, as it's currently more convenient for district residents to bus to De Anza College instead of the San José City College and Evergreen Valley College campuses that their tax dollars are already paying for
- Improve mental health services offered by the campuses

- Expand student internship opportunities, because studies show that students' success rates improve when they are completing their educational goals alongside working with their faculty advisors.

3. **Qualifications**—**a.** Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of School Board. **b.** If you are an incumbent, what issues have you worked on that have made a positive impact? As an incumbent tell us about your service on the school board, and share with us the decisions you have led, which have impacted the school district?

- a. As a recent community college graduate I'm proud of where I came from. I'm a first generation student and experienced significant income and housing insecurity, having to move 7 times in the past 3 years. I proudly identify as a queer non-binary person and I am a survivor of sexual assault. I'm excited to potentially be the first non-binary community college trustee in the country. I'll also be the first non-binary person elected to any office in Santa Clara County, and I recognize that I can play a pivotal role in breaking down stereotypes and ending discrimination.

I have applied my experience, perspective, and values to champion education policy for students, faculty and staff. At the local level, I initiated a successful campaign to fund affordable housing and facilities improvements at Foothill and De Anza Colleges. As the first student engagement intern at the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges I created a student engagement task force, which entailed traveling to community colleges across the state and working with faculty to focus circula on professional development and increase student engagement opportunities.

I worked with students and faculty statewide on a variety of campaigns and initiatives to protect the interests of community college districts. I have organized against Calbright, the fully online community college, because it has poor student learning outcomes and draws funding away from traditional community colleges. I also advocated for state funding for part time faculty, a cost-of-living-adjustment for per-student funding, and fought against a proposed student funding formula that failed to adequately address barriers to student success.

- b. This is my first time running for office.

4. **School Climate, Engagement**— **a.** What is your understanding of the kinds of changes that most schools are making to improve school climate and school discipline policies? **b.** What are your views on school suspensions? **c.** 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? **d.** Where do you stand on police presence in schools?

- a. The most direct way to create a safe and welcoming campus climate for students is to make sure that their faculty are properly equipped to teach them. Diversity training and implicit bias training are a starting point and a bare minimum. But beyond that we also need to make sure that students are supported when they feel unsafe at home, especially in light of shelter-in-place.

We need to make students aware of the resources available to them when they face challenges like depression and domestic violence, and train faculty to recognize indicators of those issues. We need to make sure students don't feel isolated as they continue their studies from home, connect them with academic and psychological counseling, and equip equity centers for situations of crisis and non-crisis.

- b. I understand that in K-12 education, suspensions are often disproportionately applied to students of color, and can be the first step in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Suspensions at the community college level are handled very differently than in K-12 schools. Suspensions are generally reserved for high-level infractions like honor code violations, violence, and Title IX cases.

In regards to honor code violations, we don't do enough to create a campus climate or provide the preventative services so that students won't be in that position in the first place. For example, many honor code violations happen because students don't have enough learning support or are burdened with trying to manage their courseload and a full-time job. This of course isn't true for all honor code violations—but we need to consider that there are more reasons than just “the student doesn't care” or “the student doesn't try.” Suspending a student who's struggling is purely punitive and doesn't solve any problems.

There are generally very few Title IX cases in community colleges, compared to universities. This is in part because we don't have Greek life or on-campus housing, but I'm concerned that there may be underreporting in this area and we need to make sure our campuses' Title IX process are trauma-informed so survivors feel comfortable reporting.

- c. This is a particularly relevant issue for our community college students. Community colleges have higher dropout rates than four-year universities, and are among the lowest graduation rates. This is not a reflection of our students; it's a result of our campuses not investing enough in our students.

I'm a recent community college graduate, and there were many times that I considered dropping out. I moved seven times in the past three years, and was often working 80+ hours per week to support myself. Many students, including myself, are survivors of sexual assault, and many do not have safe home environments (which is even more problematic now that the pandemic forces many to spend most of their time at home).

The best way to address student retention is to expand the mission of our community colleges to include basic student needs like on-campus affordable housing, food security, and mental health services.

- d. I'm thankful that the San José-Evergreen Community College Board has already voted to defund the district police department. This is a crucial step towards helping Black students and other students of color feel safe on campus, and more broadly shows them that the district stands by them and is willing to take a leadership role on national issues on behalf of students and faculty. San José City College's ethnic studies department has also begun a series of webinars to continue and promote the conversation of the inequities our students of color face and how we can better support them. This is a phenomenal series and I want to ensure it continues.

- 5. **Equity & Access** - The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the severe equity issues in education in communities of color. **a.** As a board member, what ideas and strategies will you bring forward to close the equity gap for students facing challenges of digital access and facing difficulties with remote learning.

- a. The most important thing San José-Evergreen can do as a district to be anti-racist is to make sure that faculty are properly equipped to be actively anti-racist and be sensitive to the issues communities of color face. I've lobbied in Sacramento for sufficient funding to equip local community college districts to hire diverse faculty and to provide faculty equity training, and I've lobbied districts to not cancel course offerings that cover the history and issues of marginalized groups, and to include diverse perspectives from faculty and students when making major decisions.

Making spaces inclusive, open to diverse perspectives, and respectful of identities is important to making civic engagement accessible to underserved and underrepresented communities. Especially in the current moment, we and our organizations need to stand against police brutality, acknowledge the reality of institutional racism, and question how they can be actively anti-racist.

Community colleges also have an education gap because many community college students have life challenges that can be barriers to academic success. These gaps are only worsened by COVID-19, and with my work as a COVID-19 resource navigator at Working Partnerships USA, I know how we can best help our students and educators.

We need to make sure that students are supported when they feel unsafe at home, especially in light of shelter-in-place. We need to make students aware of the resources available to them when they face challenges like depression and domestic violence, and train faculty to recognize indicators of those issues. We need to make sure students don't feel isolated as they continue their studies from home, connect them with academic and psychological counseling, and equip equity centers for situations of crisis and non-crisis.

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

a. Special education as seen in K-12 education does not exist at the community college level.

However, higher education institutions are legally required to provide accommodations for students with disabilities, which includes many students who would have been in special education programs during their K-12 education. San José City College's [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\) Program](#) and Evergreen Valley College's [Disabilities Support Program \(DSP\)](#) provide this function.

b. I'm concerned that our campuses' disability accommodation programs were already difficult for some students to access before the pandemic, because of stigma and the amount of bureaucracy and paperwork involved. Campus mental health services don't always refer students to these programs even when they have challenges that make them eligible for accommodations, and many forms of disability accommodation require a medical diagnosis, which students with limited healthcare access may be unable to obtain.

The necessary pivot to all-online education during the pandemic has only made these challenges greater, and it's crucial that we ensure our campuses' disability accommodation programs are still accessible and easy to work with while students are continuing their educations from home. I want to build greater integration between all our student support systems so that students who need multiple forms of support can be connected to them, and as much as possible work to make

accommodations available to all who need them, regardless of their access to healthcare.

- c. Community college students with disability accommodations take the same courses as their peers.

7. **Charter Schools**—**a.** Beginning July 2020, districts have begun considering the fiscal impacts a charter will have on programs and students in any given district. As a board member, what will be your position when considering a new charter school petition or request to expand (either by a countywide charter, or on appeal) that will have negative fiscal or community impacts on one or more districts in the county? **b.** What level of oversight and accountability do you believe the Board of Education must provide \after approving a charter school application? In your opinion, has the County Board done an adequate job providing such oversight and accountability? If not, what do you think should be done? **c.** Do you support the right of charter educators to unionize? How will you enforce that right? **d.** Do you support appointing community members to the boards of charter schools that are authorized by the county?

- a. I'm not a supporter of charter schools because their stated purpose—alternative education approaches to address needs unmet by traditional public schools—rarely reflects reality. In most cases, charter schools at best duplicate services and are an inefficient use of public funds, and at worst are a modern form of school segregation. Less than 20% of charter schools outperform public schools, while also siphoning away public education funds.

Charter schools do not exist at the community college level. But their closest analogue is Calbright, the fully online community college. Calbright has a high per-student cost compared to traditional community colleges and siphons their funding, duplicates existing programs, and lacks accreditation. Through my role at the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges I organized opposition to Calbright, and the legislature redirected much of its funding back to traditional community colleges.

- b. Where charter schools do exist it's vital that districts and the Santa Clara County Board of Education exercise strong oversight to ensure that charters are actually providing services that would otherwise be missing.

However, because the Board of Education does not have jurisdiction over community colleges and because there are no charter schools in the community college system, this is not an issue I have followed closely, so I can't say for certain whether or not the Board of Education is properly exercising its oversight role.

- c. I support the right of **all** workers to unionize. While this is not an issue my district will have a say in, I would be happy to use my voice as a trustee to support local charter educators if they start a unionization effort. I've actively worked with K-12

and community college faculty unions in the past.

- d. I agree with the [California Democratic Party's position that when charter schools exist, they should have publicly elected boards.](#)

8. Testing and Teacher Evaluations—a. What should policy be around student testing, and teacher evaluation? b. Do you see alternatives to the use of mandated standardized tests in meeting local, state and national education goals? c. How much are we teaching to the test now, and what should we be doing differently, if you feel it should be different?

- a. Student test scores should not play a role in determining teachers pay ever. Student success should not be a part in determining compensation; this is actually one of the main flaws in the student centered funding formula.

- Performance-based funding leaves students behind by foreclosing opportunities to those unable to obtain a degree or certificate in a short time frame. It widens the difference between districts that already succeed in granting the degrees and certificates against those which do not.

- Some colleges are “gaming the system” by awarding excessive degrees and certificates to current and former students to maximize Student Success Allocation points. Thankfully this isn’t a problem in my district; however, there has been pressure put on by the chancellor that forces a lot of districts to consider this option. As a Trustee, I will make sure SJECCD will not.

- b. We don’t have standardized testing at the community college level. Faculty have wide latitude in how they assess students, and the priority is making sure that students are mastering the material.

- c. N/A

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

Common Core is specific to K-12 education and is not used at the community college level.

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

- a. I believe that all public institutions should maintain healthy reserve funds to soften the impact of revenue shortfalls.

Our first solution to revenue problems should be pursuing avenues to increase revenues. San José-Evergreen is currently doing just that by running Measure I & J on the November ballot to provide funding for faculty, transfer programs, food and housing support, and facilities improvements.

Additionally, it's the role of trustees to explore every grant avenue, especially from our community partners. When we're losing revenues, we need to find innovative ways to fund the colleges. In my past community college advocacy work in Sacramento I lobbied for community colleges to receive additional state funding by expanding bills that originally only funded K-12. An example is AB 2884 authored by Assemblymember Marc Berman, which allows community colleges to receive funding from California State Lottery revenues.

It's important to shield classrooms from cuts as much as possible. I would limit course cuts to low-enrollment courses that are not required for transfer programs.

- b. Due to the pandemic, health care services and distance learning will be the most prescient areas to support during a budgetary crisis, which is looming. I also will work to proactively protect our “classrooms” (educators/resources) from being cut.

Currently, we must prioritize retaining employees. Layoffs may relieve budget pressures in the short term, but hiring replacements down the line is expensive and reduced staffing sabotages the campuses’ ability to provide quality service. Equity is another priority we must preserve; the circumstances that lead to budget shortfalls often impact other areas of society and have disproportionate impacts on underrepresented groups, so cutting programs meant to better serve them would further disenfranchise them. Finally, it’s critical to not cut student services, such as mental health and academic counseling, as these are vital to student success. In any financial climate, we need to ensure we have robust services so that every student is provided an opportunity at the community colleges to be successful.

11. **Governance**—a. What concerns, if any, do you have relative to the current School Board?
b. What policy changes would you make? c. What solutions would you propose to address and prevent conflicts of interest and misuse of public funds?

- a. Many board members don't do much work in the district and they are disconnected from the students and the faculty. All the work is carried by one or two board members and that's not sustainable. Also, the board refuses to be bold for our students and seek funding for affordable, below-market-rate housing. While I support Measure J, I'm disappointed that it's the third bond measure the district has run in the past decade and it still doesn't include funding for student and faculty housing.

- b. Community college students who don't pay their tuition on time—including those who are on payment plans and miss a payment—are immediately, automatically dropped from all their courses without exception.

Low income California resident students are generally eligible to have their enrollment fees waived by the California College Promise, but the application process can be daunting, especially for first generation students, and international students are ineligible for this program. Both groups are predominantly of color.

As a trustee I want to create a policy that allows exceptions so that students with low income or other hardships don't lose their class enrollments, and provide more assistance to ensure that all students who are eligible for the California College Promise are in the program.

- c. San José-Evergreen Community College District does not currently have any contribution limits for trustee campaigns. A new state law will take effect in 2021 that limits local contributions to no more than \$4,700, the cap for state legislative races. But I believe that is still way too high for a community college district and we should adopt our own local contribution limit.

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

- a. As a trustee I plan to hold regular town halls to ensure the voices of all constituencies (students, faculty, staff, and community members) are heard. It's important to get everyone together in the same room (or Zoom) to have an open dialogue of ideas, grievances, and solutions—and so I can better understand what's working, what's not, and how I can better serve them and their needs. I also want to do meetings with smaller groups as necessary because I know large settings don't always encompass all voices.

I also plan to regularly engage with existing stakeholder groups like the faculty association, student government, and student organizations.

- b. I lay out very clear, concrete stances in my campaign platform and have filled out nearly a dozen questionnaires like this for various organizations. Voters can hold me accountable to being bold and true to the issues and positions I've run my campaign on.

13. Environment: **a.** What policies would you put in place to protect our environment? **b.** What would you do to reduce your district's carbon footprint?

- a. Automobiles are our largest polluter, and the San José City College and Evergreen Valley College campuses are currently not well-served by public transportation. I'll work with VTA to increase bus routes to the campuses so that public transportation is a viable way to commute to campus. I'll also make sure the contract is renewed for the district's Eco Pass program, which subsidizes VTA Clipper Cards for students.
- b. Two years ago, [the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) warned that we have less than 12 years to limit global warming to an increase of no more than 1.5C](#) and that failure to do so would exponentially exacerbate global food insecurity, mass migration, and catastrophic weather events.

As a Trustee I'll be a fierce advocate for the environment and serve with a long term vision of reducing our carbon footprint. I'll hold the district accountable for sustainability. The district is running Measure J on the November ballot to fund facilities improvements. I'll make it a priority that we're LEED certified and use photovoltaic technology (solar power) so we can build sustainably.

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

I admire many of the candidates that South Bay Progressive Alliance has endorsed in the past and I would be honored to have your endorsement.

Positions on Issues

Please answer YES or NO for each statement.

Do you support Proposition 15 Schools and Communities First? YES NO

Do you support a living wage for all district employees? YES NO

Do you support participatory budgeting (citizen involvement in school board budgeting)? YES NO

Do you support free public education from preschool through graduate studies? YES NO

Would you support allowing undocumented immigrants to vote in school board elections? YES NO

Do you support the right of transgendered individuals to use the restroom of their choice?

YES NO

Do you support the use of city funds to develop worker-owned co-operatives?

YES NO

Do you support a policy to place school board funds in a public bank? YES NO

Do you support Medicare for all? YES NO

Do you support building or subsidizing affordable housing for faculty and staff?
YES NO