

South Bay Progressive Alliance Candidate Questionnaire For SCC Board of Education

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.

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San Jose Unified Area 4

School District Name:

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Line of Work: Data Scientist

Candidate Pledge:

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

CORPORATE-FREE. I commit to be a corporate-free candidate and publicize that I am a corporate free candidate in my campaign literature. YES ☐ NO ☐ YES

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 ☐ YES

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 ☐ YES

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 ☐ YES

General Questions:

1. 1. Endorsements—

- a. a. Who are you endorsing, from national races, all the way down from ballot to local races? Are you endorsing anyone else in your own race?

Fiona Ma, Eleni Kounalakis, Malia Cohen, Richard Barrera, Aisha Wahab, Michael Masuda, Richard Pan, Gordon Chester, Gail Pellerin. I am not endorsing anyone else in my own race.

- a. a. Who has endorsed you?

Malia Cohen, California State Controller; Fiona Ma, California State Treasurer; David Cohen, San José City Councilmember; Jeremy Barousse, Trustee, Evergreen School District; Richard Barrera, Trustee, San Diego Unified School District; Vicky Chon, President, Santa Clara County Board of Education; Don Rocha, Trustee, Santa Clara County Board of Education; The School Board Project; 314 Action; and the Moms Demand Action Gun Sense Candidate designation.

- a. a. Whose endorsements are you seeking or expect to receive?

Endorsement processes are underway with the South Bay Labor Council, the Santa Clara County Democratic Party, the Silicon Valley Young Democrats, DAWN (Democratic Activists for Women Now), Democrats for Public Education, BAYMEC, Planned Parenthood Advocates Mar Monte, the Jewish Democratic Coalition of the Bay Area, the Silicon Valley Asian Pacific American Democratic Club, and the California Working Families Party.

Campaign Funding — How much money do you plan to raise for your campaign? 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?

I have raised approximately \$17,000 with a goal budget of \$30,000. The money has come from a combination of my own contribution and individual donors that I know personally and/or live in the San Jose area. I am rejecting corporate PACs, charter association, landlord/ Realtor association, law enforcement, oil/utility money

- a. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from oil companies, oil company associations, public utilities, and PACs which take money from any of the above including, but not limited to, Chevron, Valero, Western States Petroleum Association, and Sempra Energy? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES
- b. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from law enforcement groups? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES
- c. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from the Apartment Association of the Association of Realtors? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES
- d. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from for-profit health care entities and insurance companies? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES
- e. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from charter school associations? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES
- f. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from corporate PACs? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES

Board of Education Questions:

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

For ten years I have done this district's work in every form it takes: PTA member, Library and Early Education Commission Chair, appointed Trustee for this very seat in 2018, Citizens Bond Oversight Committee Chair, COVID reopening task force member, co-chair of the Measure R bond campaign, chair of the Measure A campaign, School Site Council secretary, and education foundation president. But my motivation walks through Pioneer High School's doors every morning: my two children. Being their parent is what turns a decade of service into passion, because every student in this district deserves what I want for my own kids. And our potential is enormous: with the combination of stable Basic Aid funding and a \$1.15 billion bond, we have the money to upgrade our schools, pay our teachers, and drastically improve student outcomes. I am running to return to the Board and turn that potential into results for every student.

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

First, student outcomes, starting with the students who need it most: measurable reading and math goals reported in plain language, early intervention specialists in grades TK-2, and a guarantee that dollars budgeted for our highest-need students, the kids with the fewest resources at home, are actually spent on them. Second, student safety and emotional well-being: fully funded campus wellness centers so mental health support is staffed, open, and reachable when a student needs it, alongside a district-wide safety committee focused on safe arrival and departure from our campuses. Third, rebuilding trust: Board meetings streamed and archived on video, ongoing Measure R reporting, and real community input before closures, major purchases, or boundary changes.

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?

A district screen time policy modeled on San Diego and Los Angeles Unified: less screen time in the earliest grades and safe internet education before the first social media account is created, building on the success of our high school cellphone bans. A comprehensive safety committee focused on safe arrival at and departure from our campuses, because multiple pedestrians are hit by cars every year at our secondary schools. Live video streaming of Board and committee

meetings, because attending in person at 6 PM on a weeknight is a position of privilege. Getting our employee housing plan built: more than 300 units already in the permitting process, with bedroom sizes driven by a district-wide employee survey. And a public outcomes dashboard, because you cannot fix what you refuse to measure.

1. **1. 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?

I live and breathe the work of this district, and I have for ten years. It started in 2016, when I joined the PTA and the San Jose Library and Early Education Commission, which I went on to chair, bringing the library and the district together to put a library card in every student's hands. In 2018, the Board of Trustees appointed me to fill a vacancy in the very seat I now seek, and I learned how this district is governed from the inside. From there I chaired the Citizens Bond Oversight Committee, watching how every bond dollar was spent. When the pandemic closed our schools, I served on the district's reopening task force. I co-chaired the 2024 Measure R campaign that secured \$1.15 billion for our schools, chaired the 2025 Measure A campaign, served as secretary of Castillero's School Site Council, and lead the Pioneer High School Education Foundation as president. In my career, I have spent twenty years as a data scientist at Apple, so the district's budgets and outcome data are second nature to me.

1. **1. 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?

The best districts are moving from punishment-first to relationship-first: restorative practices that repair harm instead of just excluding students, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which many of our campuses already run, and trauma-informed approaches backed by real investment in counselors and wellness staff, so behavior is treated as a signal rather than a crime. The most important shift is the community school model: the school as a neighborhood hub where health care, mental health support,

family services, and expanded learning wrap around students and their families. School climate improves when a school stops being a building families visit and becomes a community they belong to; my wellness center and family engagement commitments are steps down exactly that road.

Suspensions should be a last resort, not a management tool. Every suspension is a student pushed away from the adults and structure they need most, and the data is clear that exclusionary discipline falls hardest on students of color and students with disabilities, feeding the school-to-prison pipeline. Restorative practices, done with real resources, produce better outcomes for both the student and the classroom.

Start by asking why they are absent: housing instability, mental health, unsafe routes to school, and family work schedules are the usual answers, and none of them is solved by a truancy letter. My platform meets each one: fully staffed wellness centers, safe routes to school, communication with families in their home languages, and support that follows displaced students to their receiving schools. For students on the edge of leaving, every campus should have a safe adult every student can name, and re-engagement should come with real options, including career technical pathways that make school worth returning to.

I do not support a permanent police presence on our campuses. Crises on campus should be met with counselors, fully staffed wellness centers, de-escalation training for school staff, and non-police crisis response. When law enforcement is genuinely needed, clear protocols should govern it, and immigration enforcement should be kept away from our campuses and student records entirely.

1. 1. **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.

On digital access, I hold two positions at once, and they are not in tension. Every student and family that needs a device and reliable home connectivity should have them at no cost, because homework, district communication, and opportunity now run through the internet, and no student should be cut off by a family's budget. At the same time, I will push to return classroom curriculum away from screens and back to books, paper, and pencil, where students learn best, especially in the youngest grades. Equity means every

family can reach the digital front door of their school; it does not mean children learning to read from a tablet.

- 1. 1. 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?

I support inclusion, done right. Roughly one in eight San Jose Unified students has a disability, and their outcomes are declining in reading and math. Inclusion works when general education settings are genuinely resourced: co-teaching, trained support staff, and class sizes that allow individual attention. Should special education students be included in general education classes? Yes, wherever the student's needs can be met there, because separate should never be the default. And belonging cannot end at the classroom door: even when a student's instructional day is separate, full inclusion in assemblies, field trips, and after-school activities tells every child they are part of one school community. I will also push to re-form our Community Advisory Committee for Special Education so parents have a real voice.

- 1. 1. 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 oppose approving new charter petitions or expansions that have negative fiscal or community impacts on our districts. (b) Authorizers owe the public rigorous oversight: existing charters must meet the same transparency, accountability, and special education obligations as every district school, and oversight should be continuous, not a box checked at renewal. (c) Yes, I support the right of charter educators to unionize, and authorizers should protect that right through the conditions and oversight of the charters they approve. (d) Yes, community members should serve on the boards of charter schools; public dollars deserve public voices.

- 1. 1. 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) I measure things for a living, and the first rule of measurement is that it should illuminate, not distort. Testing policy should emphasize low-stakes, frequent, formative assessment that tells teachers what a student needs next week, over annual tests that prescribe what needs to be taught. On teacher evaluation, San Jose Unified already has an answer worth bragging about: our Teacher Evaluation System was developed jointly by the district and the San Jose Teachers Association, and it pairs specific feedback and goal setting focused on student outcomes with the professional development to actually meet those goals. It is a very well regarded system, and I will evangelize it: protect it, fund it, and share it with districts still evaluating teachers on checklists and test scores alone. (b) Yes, there are alternatives to mandated standardized tests: growth measures, portfolios and performance tasks, and California's own dashboard indicators, which capture more than a single test week. (c) Wherever stakes are high, some teaching to the test is inevitable; the fix is lowering the stakes and broadening what we value, so teaching to the test and teaching the subject become the same thing.

- 1. 1. Curriculum—**What are your views on the use of the proposed Ethnic Studies Curriculum? Do you support the teaching of Critical Race Theory in schools within your district?

I support the Ethnic Studies graduation requirement, and I am proud my daughter chose it as a sophomore. Students engage more when they see themselves in what they learn, and I will defend this curriculum against the national campaigns trying to censor it.

As for Critical Race Theory, it is a graduate-level legal framework, not a K-12 curriculum, and it is not taught in our schools. What I support is honest, inclusive instruction in history and literature, and I will oppose book bans and censorship in our district, full stop.

1. 1. **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, where I would cut) My standard in any shortfall is simple: classrooms and the students furthest behind are protected first, and administration tightens before children do. I would start with central office spending, consultant contracts, and the categories that have grown fastest outside the classroom.

(b, what I would shield) First, campus wellness centers and mental health staffing: the youth mental health crisis does not pause for budget cycles. Second, early intervention in TK-2: reading and math help in the youngest grades is the cheapest, most effective money we spend, and cutting it converts small gaps into permanent ones. Third, the classroom guarantee for our highest-need students: dollars budgeted for them must reach them.

1. 1. **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) My primary concern is that a sitting member of our school board is aligned with Moms for Liberty, the movement behind book bans and identity-based attacks on students. Our Board needs a reliable majority that will defend inclusive schools against that agenda, and I will be a reliable vote for it. (b) The policy changes I will push for: live video streaming and archives of Board and committee meetings. (c) On conflicts of interest and misuse of public funds: open books, independent oversight committees with real access, and plain-language reporting the public can actually follow. The district could create a conflicts of interest advisory committee that meets quarterly to discuss and investigate complaints made by the community.

1. 1. **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? **c.** Would you support hybrid in-person and online meetings once in-person meetings can resume?

I will regularly host listening sessions at the schools in my area, scheduled in coordination with existing events such as PTA meetings, so participating is convenient for families instead of one more trip on the calendar. I already attend many of the neighborhood association meetings in my area, which keeps me accessible to residents who do not have a direct connection to our schools but still deserve a voice in decisions that impact our community.

(b) Voters can hold me accountable because the evidence will be public: outcomes published by student group, spending reported in plain language, and Board meetings streamed and archived on video so anyone can check what I said and how I voted.

(c) Yes, I support hybrid in-person and online meetings; attending a weeknight meeting in person is a position of privilege, and access to district decisions should never depend on who can be in the room.

1. 1. **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) Schools can lead by example. I will push to use our bond funds to modernize campuses in ways that are more energy efficient and greener: electrified buildings, solar where feasible, and planting additional trees across our properties to grow natural shade for our students and support the natural ecosystem.

(b) To reduce the district's carbon footprint: first, get our employee housing built. Our plan puts more than 300 units on Hillsdale within walking distance of our VTA light rail station, which means teachers and staff who can live where they serve and commute by foot, bike, or train instead of an hour each way on the freeway. Transit-oriented employee housing is the single biggest carbon reduction a school district can deliver. Second, pair solar with battery storage during Measure R modernization so our campuses can double as community resilience hubs during outages and heat waves.

1. 1. Does your campaign commit to engage substantial numbers of new voters? If yes, what is your plan to make it happen?

Yes. As a school board candidate I will register voters where other campaigns never look: tabling at high school voter registration events and partnering with AP Government and civics teachers to

promote pre-registration for juniors and seniors. My campaign also specifically targets young registered voters living at home with their parents, runs digital-first outreach including TikTok content created with my son and daughter, and recruits young volunteers into real campaign roles, not just sign-holding.

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

What I offer is the combination of experience and passion. I know how this district operates, in detail: how a budget translates to the classroom, how a bond dollar becomes a building, how a policy moves from proposal to implementation, because I have spent ten years learning the system from every seat, including this exact Board seat in 2018. And my passion for our students, all 24,000 of them, starting with my own two at Pioneer High School, gives me the energy and motivation to put that experience to work. I have been doing this work for years and I will keep doing it; I am not looking for a hobby, I want the job. With stable funding and a generational facilities bond, this district's potential is enormous, and I am asking for the chance to return to the Board and turn it into results for every student.

Positions on Issues

Please answer YES or NO for each statement.

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

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

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

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

Do you support the right of transgendered individuals to use the restroom of their choice? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES

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

Do you support Medicare for all? YES ☐ NO ☐ YES

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