

LPoV Board of Ed Questionnaire Nov 2022

General Questions

Candidate Name *

Alida Fisher

Candidate Website

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Why are you running for *this* office?

As a special education advocate, former foster parent and mother of four African American children, the issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion are very personal to me.

I have been an active member in school site and district level governance for more than 15 years. I've been a PTA and SSC member and leader at eight schools. However, it was my experience working to get services for my own children that transformed me from an active parent into a parent activist.

I have chaired the Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC) and am a member of the African American Parent Advisory Committee (AAPAC), the Charter School Oversight Committee, the LCAP Task Force, and the Equity Studies Task Force. I am a founding member of the Joint Advisory Alignment Committee, in which the leadership teams from the parent advisory committees (CAC, AAPAC, District English Learners Advisory Committee, Parent Advisory Council, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Parent Advisory Council, and leaders from Early Ed, Indian and Migrant Education, and Foster Youth Services) work together to elevate and amplify our common goals: inclusion and support all students.

I am a collaborative partner who works to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable students and, in some cases, hold the district accountable when we're not providing the support our students need. I spend my days fighting alongside families to help students succeed in school. Every day, I see how our schools marginalize people who think and learn differently. Education is a civil right - we can do better!

I am an outside-the-box thinker who brings creative thinking to difficult problems. I've spent the past ten years attending Board of Education meetings and committee meetings, participating in committees and working groups, and presenting to the Board. Now it's time to take my work to the next level: Instead of commenting on the policies and practices, I am ready to develop budgets that prioritize programs that improve outcomes for all students and help everyone reach their potential.

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If elected, do you commit to completing your entire term?

I do

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What are your values, and how did you get them?

My key values are social justice, diversity, inclusion, equity, allyship, responsibility, and integrity. My values come from my lived experiences.

One of my core values is respect; I think it's important to honor differences. As Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, "Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that makes others want to join you." My dad, a Republican, jokes that he votes to cancel out my mother, a Democrat. They have been married for more than 50 years. As far apart as their political ideology may be, they both center their love for each other and their family above all other differences. I follow this same value in my interactions with my community members. I see Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Asian, and White parents working together to build a stronger and better school system for our children. Progressives and moderates can and do work together in support of our communities. We are all united in the desire for the best possible outcomes for our children.

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What communities do you represent, and how do they hold you accountable?

I am a vocal and passionate ally, particularly to the Black and disability communities. Much of the work I do as a parent and special education advocate centers on the intersectionality of the two.

As I white woman, allyship is very important to me. I support and elevate the voices of my fellow parents and community members where I can; As far as representing these voices, I work hard to speak **with** a community, but not **for** a community. I also must be very careful not to make stereotypical assumptions about communities with whom I have no personal experience. For example, I am a parent of Black children. While this has opened a window into the experiences of many BIPOC students in our schools, I recognize that I bring my white privilege into meetings and other school interactions.

My fellow Joint Advisory Alignment Committee members, particularly my AAPAC mom friends, are kind and supportive in holding me accountable when I need to do better. I think that is because they understand that I know I still have much to learn. It is my job to do the work to reach out into communities and learn the strengths and challenges; I cannot expect anyone to do the work of educating me.

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What three endorsements are you most proud of?

Our teachers (UESF), members of our Board of Supervisors (President Walton, Gordon Mar, Myrna Melgar, and Hillary Ronen), and my family

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What are the top three issues you will work on, and how will you implement solutions in a timely manner?

My top 3 priorities are:

- Support SFUSD staff: fix the payroll and benefits systems; fill staff vacancies; invest in professional development
- Bring our reading curriculum and how we teach reading into the 21st century
- Create a budget that's a reflection of our values: increase decision making accountability and transparency; ensure our budget reflects the needs of our students

Priority #1, hands down, must be to fix our payroll and benefits systems. All educators and staff deserve to be paid! They deserve restitution for any expenses related to SFUSD errors. All central office resources should be focused on this issue. It should be an item on every board meeting agenda until all issues are resolved. Short term, we should be leveraging every city agency and partner who could provide support and expertise in this area.

We are spending a lot of money to implement our current reading curriculum, yet less than half of SFUSD students are proficient readers; what instructional practices do we need to shift to ensure that all students are proficient and joyful readers by third grade? If we had the effective resources and programs to teach all children to read in the general education classroom, we would prevent many referrals to special education and we wouldn't need as many Tier 2 and 3 literacy supports. How amazing would it be to have these highly trained personnel available to support social emotional learning and other areas of need as well?

Before COVID-19, our education system was underfunded and impacted. Now, our students are facing serious challenges. Our educators have just faced one of the hardest years ever to be in the field. We need to meet our students' and teachers' basic social emotional needs before any learning can happen. Now more than ever, it's important to prioritize the mental and physical health of students and teachers. We need to work to re-engage students. That means hiring more social workers, nurses, school counselors, and school psychologists. Many schools are collaborating with agencies and bringing resources into their public schools. I'd like to see more of these partnerships to support students and their families. With new grants, extending the community school model into additional SFUSD sites brings supports and services to the school, and then the needs of the student as a whole can be taken into consideration and allow students to more fully engage in learning.

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What for-profit or non-profit boards do you serve on, including political organizations?

I am the Executive Director of CASE, the Community Alliance for Special Education. While not technically on the board, I work regularly with our board. I'm the president of the SF District 11 Democratic Club and a member of the Alice B. Toklas, Harvey Milk, and SF Latinx Democratic Clubs.

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What local and state commissions or policy bodies do you serve on?

I have not served on state commissions, but I attend and provide public comment during multiple Advisory Commission for Special Education meetings annually. I have attended State Board of Education meetings as well. In my role as Chair and Advocacy Chair of the CAC, I attended all but 3 SF Board of Education meetings over the past four years, as well as a majority of committee meetings. I am also a member of the African American Parent Advisory Committee (AAPAC), the Charter School Oversight Committee, the LCAP Task Force, and the Equity Studies Task Force.

Please describe specific accomplishments in your activism. What did you get done, and what was your role?

I have been fighting to increase special education funding for years!!! I am actively working with District and City leaders to increase state funding. The District's special education budget increased by 35 percent between 2016-17 and 2020-21. However, State and federal special education funding increased by only six percent during that time. This means that a very large portion of our unrestricted general fund is used to meet the legal obligations associated with IEPs. I have been advocating with parent and District leaders for increased education funding for years! Budgets are value statements: we need to fund what we value. My past and current advocacy includes:

- Allocating ERAF (Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund) money to schools, not the City's general fund.
- Lobbying the state legislature for funding formula increases (LCFF).
- Working with the CDE Department of Finance to provide policy suggestions related to proposed policy changes for special education financing during the 2017 state budget cycle. CAC members' advocacy under my leadership not only helped prevent the proposed changes from being implemented, but was also responsible for an additional \$100 million dollars being added to the special education budget (earmarked for special education teacher recruitment, training, and retention).

I have been collaborating with a diverse group of parents, educators, school psychologists, literacy coaches, and other professionals to review the current SFUSD reading curriculum. We are seeing real benefits from our aligned work in the area of reading instruction. For example, Tier 2 and 3 reading intervention programs such as SPIRE and Wilson have been brought into all schools. This year, the district is investing in decodable readers and is developing a task force. When we work together, we achieve great things. I look forward to continued partnership on behalf of our students!

Please list specific ways you have shown up for immigrants at risk of deportation.

As a special education advocate, I do much work with immigrant families, many of whom speak languages other than English. I help families learn their rights so they can successfully advocate for their children. I also work with young adults to help them understand their disabilities and self advocate.

Public education is a civil right. Within SFUSD, 24% students enrolled as of 2020 were English-language learners, and 33% of SFUSD students have an immigrant parent. We need an adequate and appropriate curriculum for ELD and English Language Learners, in all languages represented by our SFUSD families. We need more translation and interpretation services! We also need to provide all English Language Learners access to tutoring and after-school programs. As we learned through the LCAP Stakeholder Engagement process, many families rely on - or would benefit from - homework support provided through an after-school program because navigating English language materials is a barrier.

Families also feel that students aren't receiving the support necessary to reach reclassification goals, and teachers have expressed confusion about the reclassification process. We need to ensure that all administrators understand the reclassification process in detail.

Representation matters. Students should have access to books about historical and current events as well as role models that are relatable and engaging to them. Curriculum must represent the heritage and/or identity of our students of color in a positive and empowering manner. Ethnic Studies programs need to be expanded for our Latinx students. We need more educators of color. We need to expand mentorship programs.

Please list specific ways you have fought against racism and white supremacy.

As the parent to four African American students, this issue is near and dear to my heart. We need to start having some very real conversations about perceptions, stereotypes, and racial bias. SFUSD must allocate resources towards robust implementation of policies such as Restorative Practices (RP). All personnel need to be trained in cultural humility. Educators must understand the impact of trauma on our students. The resources required to fully implement a large-scale initiative such as RP are significant, and would require a massive focus on training, and a shift of practices at some schools. But these steps are necessary to improve outcomes for our most underserved students. Partnering with the City and County to re-allocate SFPD resources towards preventative programs such as RP, implicit bias training, de-escalation training, UDL training, mental health supports, and academic reading interventions would lead to improved outcomes for our Black students. First responders in schools need to show up with cultural competence and love, not handcuffs and guns.

Please give us some examples of situations you've encountered where gender and LGBTQ inequity was evident and what you did or would do to address it.

I've been a vocal supporter of the QT PAC, the newly formed district advisory committee for LGBTQ families. We have advisory committees for African American families, Pacific Islander families, families of students receiving special education services, and more. LGBTQ+ families deserve a voice as well. Representation matters, and as School Board Commissioner I will work to ensure students have access to books about historical and current events as well as role models that are relatable and engaging to them. Curriculum must represent the heritage and/or identity of our students in a positive and empowering manner, which is why I joined the Equity Studies Task Force. We need to cultivate a learning environment that is open to all identities by having educators adopt gender neutral language when appropriate. We need strong protections against bullying.

Amid a homelessness crisis, how can the City and County of San Francisco improve the effectiveness of our city's homelessness and supportive housing services?

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

To address immediate housing concerns that have been exasperated by the pandemic, I believe supportive social housing needs to be expedited. In my capacity as commissioner, I will advocate for more educator-specific housing like the Shirley Chisholm Village. In the long term, I believe that we need to reevaluate our budget priorities as a city. There is a lack of public health and mental health support in San Francisco. The pandemic highlighted many holes in our public health system that continue to be exacerbated by monkeypox. The work of SF DPH in conjunction with community groups such as the Latino Task Force and the OMI Community Collaborative helped create more resources in neighborhoods during the pandemic, and it's promising to see the work of Community Wellness Hubs continue and collaborate with local schools. I would like to see them expanded and funding made permanent.

As the adage goes, "those who are closest to the problem are also closest to the solution." I also recognize that they are also often farthest from the resources and positions of power to actually drive change. We must prioritize the voice the most marginalized in the conversation - and implement their requests and demands in the city's budget process. After all, budgets are value statements.

What is your favorite park, and why?

I love Minnie and Lovie Ward Rec Center and the Oceanview Park. Not only is it my neighborhood park, but it is always full of community events and resources. From pick-up basketball and soccer games to picnic tables and benches for relaxing, playgrounds and open spaces, it has a bit of everything. The views of the southern hills are fantastic, and it's a fun place to run into neighbors.

Why do you want the League of Pissed Off Voters' endorsement?

I am always impressed by the thoughtful analysis that the League puts into their endorsements. I appreciate the detailed writeups that come with a touch of snarkiness. Okay maybe more than a touch. But hey, game recognizes game. Mad props to you all.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

I have loads more that I could write, and I'm impressed by and grateful for anyone who's still reading at this point. I'll just close by stating that now more than ever it's really important to have someone who understands the intricacies of special education on our board.

Collaboration is key - we all want the best for our students. Education isn't a zero sum prospect. Many families fear that supporting children with disabilities will take resources away from their child(ren)'s education; the opposite is true. As John F. Kennedy is quoted as saying, "a rising tide lifts all boats." Training an educator to differentiate instruction helps that teacher support all students. Providing an educator with positive behavior intervention strategies helps that teacher manage his or her entire classroom, not just the students identified with challenges. This allows more time to be spent on instruction for all students. Research shows that diversity helps us become more thoughtful and innovative. It helps us become better problem solvers. And for those of us raising kids in San Francisco, it helps prepare our kids for the reality of our 21st century San Francisco.

Board of Education

What experience do you have with SFUSD or the BoE?

I attended all but 3 SF Board of Education meetings over the past four years, as well as many committee meetings. As a member of various district-level advisory committees, I present and make recommendations to the board multiple times a year and comment on matters on each agenda. I have collaborated with board members on resolutions related to assessments and reading instruction.

Now it's time to take it to the next level: Instead of commenting on the policies, I am ready to help write policies that put inclusion and support at the forefront. I will develop budgets that prioritize programs that improve outcomes for all students and help everyone reach their potential.

What do you see as the district's greatest strengths and challenges?

The greatest strengths of SFUSD are our staff and students. The greatest challenges are our staffing shortages and budget shortfalls.

Given that many of the policy and funding decisions for SFUSD are made by other entities, what is your vision for fully funding SFUSD, and what actions can the BoE take to that end?

I am actively working with SFUSD Special Education leaders as well as Supervisors Ronen, Safaí, and Melgar to increase special education funding at the State level. The District's special education budget increased by 35 percent between 2016-17 and 2020-21. However, State and federal special education funding increased by only six percent during that time. This means that a very large portion of our unrestricted general fund is used to meet the legal obligations associated with IEPs. Additional collaboration and lobbying is needed in order to fully fund special education.

We also need to do a better job of examining the programs we are already funding to determine their effectiveness. For example, we are spending a lot of money to implement our current reading curriculum, yet less than half of SFUSD students are proficient readers; what instructional practices do we need to shift to ensure that all students are proficient and joyful readers by third grade? If we had the resources and programs to teach all children to read in the general education classroom, we would prevent many referrals to special education and we wouldn't need as many Tier 2 and 3 literacy supports. How amazing would it be to have these highly trained personnel available to support social emotional learning and other areas of need as well?

How do you think SFUSD should be responding to the COVID-19 pandemic at this point?

COVID still exists in our community. Schools must be prepared to provide hand sanitizer, masks, and COVID tests (both rapid antigen and PCR) for students and staff in order to prevent school-based outbreaks at the beginning of the year.

SFUSD has many medically fragile and immunocompromised students who cannot return to school. Last year's OLP (Online Learning Program) and ODLP (On Demand Learning Program) were very successful. I would like to see SFUSD expand these programs into the proposed Virtual Learning Academy in order to provide robust learning opportunities for students who cannot yet return to school.

Do you support a moratorium on charter schools?

I agree with the NAACP's 2016 resolution that called for a moratorium on charter school expansions. I find the lack of oversight and accountability worrisome. Charter schools don't offer the full continuum of special education pathways and programs that SFUSD schools do . I would much rather see charter school funders work collaboratively with SFUSD to improve outcomes at our existing (and often under-enrolled) schools rather than open new schools. Charter schools cause budgetary stress for districts. The Public Interest found that, in the 2016-2017 school year, charter schools cost Oakland Unified \$57.3 million. This reduction coupled with Prop 39 has strained many school districts to the brink of insolvency. It's also important to recognize that charter schools are attractive to many SF families because of the inequitable resources available across SFUSD schools. All public schools must have the necessary resources to serve their students and attract new families.

Do you think that all SF charter schools should join SFUSD?

I would like to see this happen! While this would create governance challenges for organizations that have schools in multiple cities, I think it's important for SF families to attend schools that have local accountability and oversight.

Have you ever had a role at a charter school in SF (including parent, student, staff, volunteer, or paid organizer)?

I am a member of the SFUSD Charter School Oversight Committee, but have not had any role in a charter school.

Right now, only 8% of San Francisco's general fund goes toward SFUSD. Do you support increasing that investment? How would you propose to do that?

I absolutely support increasing the amount of support SFUSD gets from the city! I am in favor of the Student Success Fund ballot measure. I am excited that ERAF funds are being allocated to schools in an equitable manner. However, I wish it allocated more than a fraction of the funding to our schools.

ERAF, the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund, is a state property tax that was implemented in the 1990's to augment school funding. Excess ERAF funding, totaling \$182 - \$300 million (and anticipated to increase over the next few years) can be redirected by counties to support non-educational programs. I have advocated alongside UESF for many years to demand that the City allocate all ERAF funding to public education.

The ERAF example is indicative of a larger problem within the State budgeting process. Many of the bills passed by the State legislature over the past few years that would increase education funding are written as one-time grants or pilot programs rather than ongoing increases to funding sources. School districts shouldn't have to hire grant writers to receive state funding, and they shouldn't have to beg their county offices for money that was intended to support schools.

What can SFUSD do to increase teacher retention, and what policies would you support to do so?

First and foremost, FIX OUR PAYROLL AND BENEFITS SYSTEMS! Our teachers and staff deserve to be paid, full stop.

Secondly, we need to prioritize filling our vacancies. We are sorely understaffed. We cannot expect teachers to continue to work multiple jobs. We also need to pay our teachers more. In 2018, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development defined San Francisco low income limits, which are based on Area Median Income, at \$82,200 for an individual and \$117,400 for a family of four. Considering that the average educator salary in SFUSD is \$70,000-\$90,000, we are creating a structure where our teachers live in poverty. We need higher pay and student loan forgiveness programs for teachers. San Francisco has a 100% track record of passing bonds to support schools and teachers - I think we should explore that option more often.

While this question is focused specifically at educators, there is also a huge inequity in the pay and number of hours we offer paraeducators. This must also be addressed, as paras are often the backbone of the school support networks and instrumental to the success of not only students, but their fellow educators.

Philosophically, I believe that educators are more important than professional athletes and other celebrities, and should be paid more than either!

What is your plan to fight the privatization of schools and the district workforce?

We must fully fund public education and prioritize full staffing of our schools.

As a special education advocate, I help families gain access to school-based supports and services for their children. Very often, we rely on outside agencies to provide specialized staff that is not available in our schools, such as behavior technicians and therapists.

Contracts with outside agencies are very expensive, and very often staff are not unionized.

Our underfunding of public education has created a dependence on outside agencies and contractors for core functions. We need to break this cycle and bring the funds needed to educate our students back into the public school system.

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How can SFUSD bring students and their families to the table more fully?

I would reframe this question. SFUSD already has many students and families at the table: Student Advisory Council, Community Advisory Council for Special Education, African American Parent Advisory Council, District English Learners Advisory Committee, Parent Advisory Council, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Parent Advisory Council, and leaders from Early Ed, Indian and Migrant Education, and Foster Youth Services, and more. These groups all report to the Board of Education regularly, and offer their recommendations to better meet the needs of families. Yet, many of these recommendations go nowhere. No action is taken, nothing is done to prioritize family voice. The question we really need to ask is, how do we demonstrate to families that their input is valuable? We must take concrete actions to address the concerns that families raise.

In order to make families feel welcome and included at their schools, we must hire more family liaisons, particularly multilingual liaisons who can engage families in their home language. We must invest in the Office of Family Voice, so that families have an accountability mechanism when they need help at their schools. The Office of Family Voice must have the authority to address issues as they arise.

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What metrics would you use to determine your success as Board Member in four years?

In four years, we must:

-be fully staffed, and all teachers should be fully credentialed! HR systems must function appropriately. We must have the staff in place to support teachers through the credentialing process and increase our professional development opportunities for all staff.

-close the equity gap: address the disparity in resources and outcomes between schools. Provide more support and wraparound services at schools, including psychologists, social workers, family liaisons, literacy coaches, nurses, and more paraeducators.

-make students joyful and proficient readers by 3rd grade: implement a structured literacy curriculum that includes a systemic and sequential structured literacy approach.

Fully implementing our priorities to reach these goals will be challenging with our current budget. As I've stated before, budgets are value statements. We must ensure we are funding our priorities first and foremost.

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