

LPoV Board of Ed Questionnaire Nov 2022

General Questions

Candidate Name *

Gabriela López

Candidate Website

Why are you running for *this* office?

My responsibility as a teacher is to learn from experience and grow. The meaning of this last year is that we need to bring our communities together to face difficult issues, not let them become aggressive spaces. But that is what is happening today. It's hurting our schools and our City. I am running for a seat on the Board of Education to bring us together, to continue to listen, to care and to ensure that these spaces are welcoming for all of our families.

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

I absolutely commit to completing my entire term. I do not have aspirations for higher office, and have expressed this through my work on the Board of Education. My dedication is to our students, families, teachers and community members.

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

I have always been a person who has stood by their values. This was instilled in me early on in my life while seeing my parents work tirelessly to give me and my siblings the opportunities I am benefitting from today. My work has always been dedicated to serving others and giving back, especially communities who understand all too often, the pain we have to endure because our representatives don't understand these experiences. During my time on the Board of Education, I felt proud of the work we accomplished because I was able to stand by what I believed in.

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

I am a Latinx woman of color in leadership. I am a first-generation Mexican-American and English Language Learner, who grew up in public schools and then taught in them as a bilingual educator and union rep. I know what it's like to have parents who have to overcome barriers of language and poverty to support their children's learning. I am accountable to my various communities and the people I serve because I am on the ground with our students, teachers and families everyday and work tirelessly to meet their needs. I work with them, not just for them. I listen and center their voices as I engage and create policy. I listen and follow up. Most importantly I want to be accountable. I don't see myself as separate from the people I serve. I am with them. Our struggles are shared across communities. I live and face the same struggles of affordability, institutional and personal racism and sexism on a daily basis like many of the students, families and educators I work with. I want to know from them how my activism and the things I do impact them and learn what their needs are, and do my best with all my position and power to uplift their voice and share power.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

Tom Ammiano, Shaman Walton and my colleagues in Teacher 4 Social Justice

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

I am the candidate with the most knowledge of our schools and classrooms, school district systems and mechanisms for change. I know our budget and how it translates to classroom and school services. Our children's education and well-being should be the district's top priorities. The top three issues and solutions to address this include:

Increasing School Funding and Resources - changing state funding formula for schools (repealing prop 13) and prioritizing education. Locally, supporting the public enrichment fund and ensuring all education related dollars (ERAF and any additional bonds) from the city is managed well and directed toward classrooms, their educators and students.

Improving Special Education Supports - developing a plan to consolidate services, reduce lawsuits and ensure our students' learning needs are getting met with the resources we do have while advocating for state and federal dollars to bridge the gap in staffing, training and type of services and opportunities available to students to address dyslexia, autism and other learning differences.

Expanded Math, Reading and Science Opportunities - This is about ensuring all students get similar resources and opportunities across programs/school and working with CCSF, the City and County of San Francisco, nonprofits and businesses to allow our students to take college courses and have paid internships that give them access to various trades and industries.

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

I currently serve as one of the core leadership at Teachers 4 Social Justice. I also serve on the Mission Promise Neighborhood Advisory Board. I previously served on the executive board of the San Francisco Latino Democratic Club as VP of Communications.

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

In 2018 I was elected as a commissioner for the San Francisco Board of Education, where I served as the President of the SF Board of Education, (selected two years in a row by my board colleagues as the youngest in the history of the SF Board of Education), I have served as chair of the Curriculum & Program Committee of the Board of Education, as well as have been a member of the Budget Committee. Prior to that I served on the Public Enrichment Education Fund Community Advisory Committee for the San Francisco Unified School District. At the school site level I was on the School Site Council and the Union Building Committee. I also served as a labor delegate at the National Education Association Representative Assembly for the California Teachers Association.

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

As a member and president of the San Francisco Board of Education I lead and oversaw the successful implementation of:

Online Learning Program (OLP), a program for medically fragile students or students whose health would be put at risk, and On Demand Learning Program (ODLP), available to students who do not meet the criteria for the OLP but whose parent/legal guardian is requesting a remote learning option for the Fall of 2021.

Provided a robust crisis distance learning program for all students during the first year of the pandemic

Provided over 1.2 million meals to families in need during the pandemic

Distributed over 15,000 Laptops and WiFi to ensure families had consistent access to online learning

Distributed over 3000 Learning Kits to students and families

Prioritized in person instruction during the spring 2020 for students with special needs and students who would benefit from in-person instruction while giving families the option to remain online

Conducted multiple cycles of wellness checks to support families

Ensured all school workers continued to be paid during school closures due to health orders

Supported front line workers with additional pay and supplemental sick leave to allow workers to take care of themselves and family when impacted by Covid-19

Successfully removed armed police officers from SFUSD campuses

I am proud of the activism and work my colleagues and I supported in my time on the board of education.

As a teacher activist I worked with Teachers 4 Social Justice to host a free national conference (our 20th), that address issues such as building solidarity during crisis and uprising, centering black lives in education, unsettling settler colonialism and building a vision for our public schools that is inclusive of learning differences, healing spaces, addressing issues of racism, ableism and other social justice freedom dreaming.

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

I worked directly with many families in their own language and often met them where they were. I supported and encouraged our sanctuary schools policy and refused to cooperate with ICE or any law enforcement seeking to target immigrants and people of color, regardless of citizenship status. My students and their families have always been welcomed to my classroom space, and with the trust that was built I am able to help provide outside resources and support through other programs. My work on the Executive Committee of the Latino Task Force is rooted in this.

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

I supported expanded language services for non-english speaking families, including support for the implementation of Arabic and Vietnamese language pathways. We also bring equity by initiating and implementing resolutions in support of Black Achievement, Latinx Achievement, Indigenous and Native American Education, Pacific Islander Achievement. We expanded ethnic studies through the budget allocations and the adoption of the Equity Studies resolution. I also supported the removal of racist and harmful images and names in our public schools.

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.

Gender and LGBTQ inequity was evident almost weekly in my experience. From the reports of bullying and harassment we address as a board through disciplinary action toward staff, rooting out and addressing flaws in curriculum choices of educators and libraries, I sought to create policy and systems that would be responsive to concerns. For me personally, I experience differential treatment, being ignored/invisibilized, or targeted for toxic attacks online and personally against my character and physical person because I am a woman of color in leadership. I also participated in healing work and practiced self care (which honestly is still a work in progress). Most importantly, I haven't given into the fear and hatred, I have not given up on doing this work and being of service to my community and being a strong voice and advocate for our city's most vulnerable. I will not be silenced. I will not give up. I will persist in trying to be and make the changes I feel we need to uplift all people.

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?

We have to care about the dignity and wellbeing of all our unhoused people. We have to have policies and invest in a social service safety net that addresses the current crisis but also and most importantly is preventative. Prevention and rapid response to quickly address homelessness for an individual or family so that they don't develop into chronic issues. We know the longer someone is unhoused the more difficult and expensive it becomes to address their issues, since being unhoused can quickly lead to other mental and physical health issues that make it harder to find stability and housing.

What is your favorite park, and why?

Oracle Park. I love baseball stadiums and I try to visit them whenever I travel. My goal is to attend a game at all 30 stadiums, and so far I have been to 23. Oracle is the best park in SF and has all the best elements of San Francisco – green space, bayviews, and a place for the community with good (even if sometimes unhealthy) eats, and generally is a place of joy for most people who visit there.

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

I feel I have a moral responsibility to represent all students, especially low-income immigrant students, who like me, consistently face barriers when advocating for a quality education. I know the league shares many of my values and wants and fights for many of the same things I do. It would be an honor to have The League's endorsement again.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

I am a lifelong educator and learner. I have served as a classroom teacher, prison educator, former School Board President and currently as an adjunct professor, a teacher of future educators. My experience ranges from early childhood education to graduate level and this will inspire and inform my work on the San Francisco Board of Education. I believe that our public schools can uplift each and every one of our students. When the COVID pandemic began, I worked to ensure our city's children were fed and had the technology they needed to continue their learning and re-opened schools when it was safe to do so. I constantly put the needs of students and families at the center, as I did in my own classroom. Currently as a teacher educator I am actively preparing and supporting a new generation of educators to come into our schools as prepared as possible to help generate the outcomes we want for students. Thank you so much for your endorsement consideration.

Board of Education

What experience do you have with SFUSD or the BoE?

I was previously elected in 2018 to the Board of Education, becoming the youngest person ever elected to the BOE. I served as the Curriculum chair before becoming Vice-President after serving for one year. Soon after, I was elected president for two terms, which has historically been done twice, both times by men. Prior to that, I worked as a public school teacher in SFUSD in the Mission District.

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

As an educator, I am often proud of the numerous learning opportunities our school district has offered ranging from arts and creativity, outdoor education and unique sports offerings in addition to the academic learning they gain from dedicated and diverse teachers. We are a school district that has a diverse student body, whose families speak over 70 languages and are proud of that diversity.

Currently, the problem with our district is the unfortunate handling of numerous important issues that are pushing more of our teachers and families away. The mishandling of teacher pay in no way helps educators feel respected, honored for their work or included in school district decision making. The racial tensions within our schools are now surfacing in the boardroom, where there is modeling of unacceptable behavior for our young people.

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 will continue be a champion for school funding. If elected to the SF Board of Education I will work with the city to maintain and expand their support for schools. I will work with UESF and our other labor partners to find creative solutions to increase revenues for schools. I will be a leader in pushing our state legislators to value education and take the steps they need to transform prop 13 and increase school funding from the state level.

Being on the School Site Council at my school I worked closely with school budgets that don't even begin to meet the needs of the students we serve. As the Arts Coordinator, I was also part of funding decisions using the Elementary Arts Program site allocations, among other site funds and reports on how students are getting access to an enriching educational experience through the arts. I understand categorical funds and how important it is to take a close look at how schools are funded. It is important to include all educators, administrators, staff, families and students and make funding information accessible to everyone. In addition to my work on the school board driving budget decisions and getting our school district out of the deficit.

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

I believe safety is important above all, especially in our learning environments. I led our school district during the worst of the pandemic ensuring all students, teachers and staff had access to face masks, tests and adequate ventilation in the classroom. I believe these practices should continue and are a way to continue protecting our most vulnerable students and families in school.

Do you support a moratorium on charter schools?

Yes I do. We have to keep public funding with public schools. It is well established that on the whole, Charter Schools do not outperform public schools and that is despite the overwhelming emphasis many charters place on test scores. Through experience, I know charter schools have inequitable pay schools, no union representation and have occupied space within public schools taking more opportunities away from our students.

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

As a school board member, I did not support charters taking space within San Francisco and as an educator could only soundly agree with school spaces that provided unique services that our schools do not, such as housing. We have an obligation to do right by our students and we undermine us all when we give into the narrative of charters and privatize our most valuable resource in creating equity, our public schools.

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

My first year of teaching I had to work in a charter school because the school district was offering no positions to new teachers as they were not prioritizing educators in pay or treatment. In that, I was on an inequitable pay scale, working with educators who had not gotten raises in over ten years, I had no union representation and I was the only teacher in my grade-level creating curriculum to meet the standards I had to teach. Our school rented space from a local church that had no playground, no sinks in the classroom and room dividers separating classrooms. Students deserve to have thoughtful spaces for learning where they could play, make art and learn in a proper educational setting that is provided for them.

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 do support an increase in funding, but also want to push the understanding that many of our city's programs and services could directly benefit our students, teachers and their families if we had a better relationship and trust built among San Francisco residents. Student learning can be negatively impacted if they don't have access to safe transportation, adequate healthcare, quality food and stable housing. I do fully support the proposed Student Success Fund ballot measure and any attempt to bring in more funding into our public schools. I also feel it is important for all advocates to ensure funding designed for public education, such as the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) that comes from the State into San Francisco's general fund should go to where it rightfully belongs, our school district.

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

As a former teacher, I recognize the issues that make it harder to stay in our positions. Coming out of the virtual learning space during the height of the pandemic and back into in-person learning was not an easy adjustment for many, and educators felt disrespected throughout this process. On top of the issue with teacher pay.

It is important we bring that focus back to teachers, elevating their voices and needs at the district level, educating people around the steps being taken to correct problems, and immediately fixing the problem with payroll.

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

I constantly fight to keep privatization away from SFUSD as an educator and while serving on the school board. It is important we inform the public and educate people around the issues and real impact on public schools.

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

This is what my strengths were as a board commissioner and school board president. My work was always bringing in all people who are historically not in these spaces, to the table. Any resolutions written were in partnership with the people. I ensured all work was translated and any information I share out is always available in Spanish, my native language. I know through my work on the board, more families gained access and became advocates because they felt empowered to do so.

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

Setting up goals and standards is what I am accustomed to in my work. As a former board member, there were timelines and attainable goals that I would lay out in order to see progress and examples of that success. I also worked closely with community leaders who were directly impacted and could speak to our decision making to help ensure they are part of the conversation and can guide our work as well. There are many examples where people who were doing the work, could lead it and as board members creating space where we can listen and learn.

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