

LPoV Board of Ed Questionnaire Nov 2022

General Questions

Candidate Name *

Karen Fleshman (she her hers)

Candidate Website

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Why are you running for *this* office?

I am running for SFUSD's Board of Education to unify San Francisco for SF Unified. I will focus the Board on students' and educators' social-emotional wellbeing and academics, budget and operational transparency and accountability, and collaborative decision-making, applying my 20+ years in local government and nonprofits preparing and mentoring young people for success in college and their careers.

In a city where people come from all over the globe to access limitless career opportunities, SFUSD graduates should be first in line and thoroughly prepared to compete in any and every market. Equitable access to a high quality education is the key to building a brighter future for SF and the world. A pipeline of local professionals with high earning potential will develop generational wealth and reduce the stress on social services and homelessness in our community.

Currently only 57.5% of SFUSD graduates are college and career ready. It's unacceptable that some students are cared for and challenged while others are warehoused. This two-tier public education system both contributes to, and is a result of gentrification, displacement, and racism. I am running to be a part of the solution to improving our education system and our city as a whole.

To get there, we must do the following:

Start early with all students enrolling in transitional kindergarten

Deploy supports that ensure all students read at grade level by 2nd grade

Stop over-referring Black and Brown children to special education

Stop criminalizing Black and Brown students and their families' passion for education,

Prepare our middle schoolers for high school by eighth grade

Support all students from ninth grade through graduation with an individualized plan for their future

Paid summer jobs and enrichment activities for all high school students.

Attract and retain educators with improved contract terms and pay them on time, everytime.

Operate safe, quality facilities.

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

yes

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

My values are love, learning, action and accountability. I got them working for women of color in organizations serving communities of color. The women of color I worked for are great mentors and role models. I learned from them how to see and connect with the humanity in everyone, relate across differences as equals, give and receive feedback with grace, apologize when I cause harm, treat people kindly when they make a mistake, stand up when I see injustice, and fight like hell. Through women of color's grace I learned how to be a white woman contributor to a multiracial society.

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

I represent:

San Franciscans who are outraged by racism, gentrification, and displacement. They hold me to account in our frequent conversations, joint actions, and online.

Parents and other caretakers of students who, like me, are trying to do all we can to support our kids and our educators. They hold me to account in our many conversations at school and community events.

Youth development workers, because I was one for 20+ years in both nonprofits and local government. They hold me to account in conversations, at community events, on social media.

Young people, including my children, their friends, and my mentees. They hold me to account by pointing out when I am not learning, cause harm, or act contrary to my values.

My mentors, primarily Black and Indigenous women. They hold me to account by guiding my decision-making and pointing out my strengths and growth areas.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

Harvey Milk PAC because Harvey Milk is a hero. It took guts to go from activist and small business owner to become the first openly gay elected official in America and he opened the door for many to follow. Gloria Berry of the DCCC for her work on reparations and Carolina Morales of the DCCC for her work organizing community-driven efforts to prevent violence and create solutions in historically Black and Latinx neighborhoods. I look up to them both and their support means the world to me.

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

Invest in students' and educators' social-emotional wellbeing and academics

Creating a safe and positive learning environment for all students is foundational to mastering core skills. I will bring my knowledge of youth development to SFUSD.

Adults who work to create safe and positive learning environments need care, too. I will listen to our educators and work tirelessly to provide them with the pay, supports and professional development they need to care for themselves and their families while they educate and nurture students.

Provide budget and operational transparency and accountability

As an Assistant General Counsel and Director of Internal Review to the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, I managed audits, oversaw programs, contracts, and budgets, ensuring our programs served young people well and spent their budgets correctly. I will bring those skills to SFUSD BOE to make sure every dollar is adding value to students, families and educators.

Promote collaborative decision-making

I will unite the community, parents, union, and administrators to understand the current and projected SFUSD budget and build consensus on priorities, vision, equity and co-create a multi-year plan so people know what to expect. We need cultural competence in the way we engage communities and to source solutions from those who are closest to the problem.

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

I don't serve on any. I serve on the leadership team of Moms Allyship Against Racism, a volunteer group.

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

I previously served on the workgroup overseeing implementation of the US Department of Justice recommendations on ending bias at SFPD.

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

As a founding member of the Justice for Mario Woods Coalition and supporter of other police accountability groups we successfully advocated for the following:

Mayor Ed Lee to fire Chief Suhr and hire an outside Chief

US Department of Justice to review SFPD

SF Police Commission to adopt a new use of force policy

Against SFPD's adoption of TASERS

We also advocated for District Attorney George Gascon to charge SFPD officers for use of excessive force and killing San Franciscans. Until these officers are held accountable, we will continue our advocacy.

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

For 10+ years I worked helping people fleeing violence to apply for asylum and immigrants to apply for US citizenship.

In NYC I have shown up for immigrants by connecting them with attorneys who taught them how to avoid situations that can lead to deportation. We partnered with immigration attorneys to visit high schools and educate young people on how minor infractions can result in deportation.

In 2018 I was arrested at Women Disobey, organized by Women's March, for protesting family separation, which at that time, was the largest act of civil disobedience organized by women in US history.

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

For 20+ years I prepared and mentored young people of color for success in college, careers, and life. From my mentees I learned everything that I had learned about race and racism growing up is harmful, inaccurate and racist. They also taught me how crucial it was for me to change so that I could go from contributing to the problem to contributing to the solution.

In 2014, my life changed after watching the aftermath of Mike Brown's murder, and protests in Ferguson and nationwide. On November 24, 2014, when the grand jury announced Darren Wilson would not face trial for killing Mike Brown, something in me shifted. That is when I deeply looked at myself in the mirror and I decided to make fighting against racism and white supremacy my mission.

Since then I have co-facilitated workshops at hundreds of workplaces, organized and co-hosted dozens of conversations to heal racial divides, including at my children's SFUSD school. I host a weekly livestream, "Collect Our Cousins: Engaging White People in the Struggle for Full Democracy." I practice what I preach, continuously working on unlearning my racism, being an upstander when I see racism and white supremacy, collecting my cousins, and fighting to change racist policies and practices. I was the person who noticed that BOE Commissioner Ann Hsu expressed racist beliefs in her candidate questionnaire and called it out. Many people have been conditioned to believe the same and we need to work collectively to unlearn. <https://medium.com/@commonsensekaren/may-ann-hsus-words-lead-to-understanding-healing-and-growth-2bdb74d29c7f>

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.

My life has been profoundly changed by my life experiences of gender and LGBTQ+ inequities. In high school, my queer friend, who was bullied, committed suicide. I was devastated and vowed to be a lifelong ally to LGBTQ people.

I share an altogether too common history with many youth: a popular athlete in my high school raped me. Sexual assault is an oppressive act rooted in the aggressor holding power and silencing their victims.

Throughout my life I have stood up against hate and violence and worked on unlearning my conditioning. Since the 2016 Presidential election I have worked to heal the relationship between women of color and white women. I was arrested multiple times disrupting the confirmations of Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. I facilitate sexual harassment workshops and am raising my children to love and embrace people of all sexualities and genders.

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?

Build more supportive housing across the city for families to provide stability to students and educators, pass the empty homes tax, and build more housing cooperatives.

I support SFUSD developing surplus property for educator housing, like the Shirley Chisholm Village, as a part of a long-term solution to address housing insecurity.

I believe SFUSD can support the city's effort to address homelessness by serving unhoused students and their families with dignity and respect.

What is your favorite park, and why?

My favorite park is Mary Ellen Pleasant Park. Mary Ellen Pleasant was the first Black millionaire in the United States. She used her wealth to fund the Underground Railroad and John Brown. It's my favorite park because I feel her spirit there and it makes me feel connected to the abolitionist movement. It is a short walk from my home, and I can get there in no time. It is a good place to enjoy open space and clear my head.

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

I am a pissed-off voter who has and will continue use your guide as a source to inform my personal and professional decisions. The values that the League represents closely align with my own. I greatly value the service you provide to our community and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to earn your endorsement. And for you to hold me accountable when I serve on the BOE. If you're not pissed off, you're not paying attention.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

We all have a stake in making all young people feel seen, heard, respected, valued, loved, and connected to all San Francisco offers. When SFUSD students and educators succeed, all of San Francisco benefits, and their success requires all of San Francisco. That's why I am running to unify SF for SF unified. Thank you for your consideration and endorsement.

What experience do you have with SFUSD or the BoE?

I'm an SFUSD parent and volunteer, public school graduate, and retired educator's daughter. My children have attended SFUSD schools since kindergarten and they are developing beautifully. As a consultant to Year Up Bay Area and other youth-serving nonprofits in San Francisco, including Third Street Youth Center and Clinic, Inneract Project, and SEO Scholars San Francisco, a college access program, I have visited nearly every SFUSD school.

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

Strengths: There is so much good at SFUSD that we can build on. I am proud and grateful for the education my kids are receiving at SFUSD. We have amazing brave educators, diverse beautiful schools, and many community organizations supporting our students. I love my kids' friends and their families. And this is San Francisco, which despite all its contradictions, I love. I am confident that we can do great things together.

Challenges:

Student outcomes are unacceptable, and 28% of students are chronically absent.

https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/CG5V977F8741/%24file/6_28_22%20-%20SFUSD%20Student%20Performance%20Analysis.pdf

We are not paying our educators and workers on time and their benefits are messed up, too.

Students, adults, schools, and marginalized communities are pitted against each other causing trauma, there is poor budget oversight, and inconsistent or no operational accountability.

Racism, classism, bullying by students and adults, physical and sexual assault of students is ignored, and the over-criminalization of marginalized students has created toxicity in the current SFUSD climate.

Communities and schools compete for dwindling resources as enrollment drops and resources are inequitably distributed. Families are leaving San Francisco, we are in the midst of a national teacher shortage, and as school starts we have many open positions unfilled. Principals are resigning too. Due to SF's high cost of living, teachers face exhausting commutes. It's hard to staff the most marginalized schools in the best of circumstances, now made worse, and there's not enough substitutes.

Youth mental health is in crisis, during COVID and monkeypox pandemics, political upheaval, racism, and gun violence. Students are experiencing a lot of anxiety as they return to school and adjust to being together again, they are in very different stages of development, and the preexisting gaps, already present at kindergarten, widened during COVID. Some students are acting out, bullying each other, sexually harassing and assaulting each other, and fighting with each other. Parents are divided too, with the recall and stances on Lowell admissions policy and Ann Hsu's candidate questionnaire. Nefarious people are trying to destroy San Francisco and destroy public education in America, and are spending a lot of money to bring us down. SFUSD's operations are in disarray. Previous Boards have been lax in budget oversight, there's looming challenges to funding pensions, and threat of state takeover. There is an organization called Spark* that is fundraising for the schools but no one's really clear on where the money it raises goes. In the innovation capital of the world, SFUSD's technology, including use of educational technology, is abysmal. And we have one of the highest rates of families choosing private schools.

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?

We need to bring the community, parents, union, and administrators together to understand the current and projected SFUSD budget and build consensus on priorities, vision, equity and co-create a multi-year plan so people know what to expect.

We need to draw on San Francisco's tremendous resources to provide excellent afterschool and summer experiences for younger students and connect every high school student to internships, apprenticeships, mentors, jobs, college access and college classes for those who want it and career and technical education for those who want it.

We need to work with other stakeholders around the state to reform Proposition 13 to increase public funding for schools throughout California.

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

I think we should require masking and provide masks and tests to families and encourage vaccinations. My children and their educators are stressed about returning without a mask mandate.

Do you support a moratorium on charter schools?

Yes. I encourage innovation within the existing public schools. I don't support charter school expansion because I believe they drain resources from public schools.

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

I don't have a fully formed opinion on that. I would listen to UESF and educators and parents at charter schools to form an opinion.

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

No

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 think the Student Success Fund is a good model. To increase revenue, we need to address how existing dollars are being spent, and we need to come to taxpayers and/or philanthropy with a detailed proposal for how we will use additional revenue and what results to expect, and hold ourselves accountable to achieving those results.

As a cofounder of Ladders for Leaders and staff to the NYC Youth Board and Youth Council, I built partnerships with corporations, nonprofits and government agencies to place young people in paid summer employment where they developed lifelong skills and connections to professional networks. I will work towards every SFUSD student having paid summer jobs and enrichment activities from 9th grade through graduation, drawing on employers, unions, nonprofit organizations, universities, colleges, government agencies and cultural institutions, DCYF, OEWD, Parks and Rec to provide paid summer jobs and learning opportunities.

I want SFUSD to work with every ninth grader to create a roadmap to achieve their dreams. What are they passionate about and good at, and how can we connect them to what they need to succeed, including college access partnerships, career and technical education, apprenticeships with unions, paid summer jobs with employers, college level coursework and visits to colleges while in high school etc.

There's 16,000 high school students in SFUSD and I want all of them in paid summer employment every summer. Not everyone loves learning sitting in a classroom. On the job learning is so valuable, you learn so much about yourself, what you're good at and like doing and what you're not so good at and don't like doing, and develop soft skills and connections that last a lifetime.

My work on the BOE will be to build the partnerships and get the resources to the schools to make this possible

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

First we need to ask educators what they want and need, and then provide it. Paying them well and on time, offering good benefits, time to adequately prepare, space to innovate and apply their passions, amazing professional development experiences that they love, and providing supports like paras, nurses, social workers, librarians and other youth development workers, recess workers, are what come up most frequently in my conversations with educators. Also maintaining schools well so they are safe and healthy, and professional development for principals so they can be effective leaders is very important. Training in restorative practices and positive approaches to student behavior, time to slow down and develop caring relationships with students.

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

I will fight to keep schools public and to support unions and join forces with other stakeholders.

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

I would love to see a parent liaison in every school. I worked for many years conducting community outreach and it requires intention and customization. How we engage Chinese immigrant parents is not the same as how we engage Yemeni immigrant parents. Oftentimes only the most privileged parents show up for meetings because they know about them and feel comfortable in the school. Some parents might feel alienated by the privileged parents and not want to come. Other parents might be immigrants who come from cultures where you drop your kid at school and don't engage in the school. So we need to go to where parents are already gathered, in houses of worship or community organizations and invite them to come to the school. And we need to reach out to more of our young people and encourage them to get involved by serving on the SF Youth Council or in other leadership roles.

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

Did the percent of students reporting they feel safe and connected at school increase, and did fighting and sexual harassment decrease? Did the percent of educators and principals we retained increase, and did educators and principals express increase in their job satisfaction? Did the number of schools in good physical condition increase?

Has the percent of SFUSD graduates who are college and career ready increased? Has the percent reading at grade level, leaving elementary for middle school ready, leaving middle school ready for high school increased?

Where we able to get personal success plans and paid summer jobs and enrichment activities for a significant number of SFUSD high school students, and is that number significantly increasing each summer?

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