

LPoV Board of Ed Questionnaire Nov 2022

General Questions

Candidate Name *

Lisa Weissman-Ward

Candidate Website

www.LisaforSFBOE.com

Why are you running for *this* office?

I am the product of public education and have two SFUSD public school children. I am the daughter of educators and am an educator myself. I believe that public education is an essential and indispensable social institution. I believe that quality public education for all can close opportunity gaps and help lay the foundation to reverse economic inequities through access to higher education and/or career opportunities.

I was appointed to the Board of Education in March. I am running for a four year term because our school district is at a crossroads and I believe that I have the necessary skill sets, expertise, and personality to move us forward in our goal of centering student outcomes and closing opportunity gaps.

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

Yes

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

I am a bi-racial mother of two SFUSD public-school children, a daughter of educators and a civil rights advocate, a twin-sister (to a doctor specializing in addiction medicine and trans healthcare), and a spouse (to a labor and workforce development advocate). That's to say that I've grown up with- and chose- to surround myself with people who, like me, are committed to improving the lives of others. My values involve pursuing justice, pushing conversations around equity, centering my work around those who are directly impacted by systemic harms, listening and engaging with humility, and being open to growth. I am committed to being authentic and transparent.

I have been able to grow, hone, and develop an even greater commitment to these values and to teaching these values through my work as Associate Director of the Stanford Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic.

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

In my professional career as the Associate Director of the Immigrants' Rights Clinic, I represent and work with immigrant communities and their allies.

In my role as a Board of Education Commissioner, my obligation and duty is to represent the entire SFUSD community. The SFUSD community is large and diverse and my mandate is to center our students and their ability to achieve an education that is rooted in equity and excellence. The SFUSD community will hold me accountable through voting. I hope that the community will also hold me and my colleagues accountable by pushing each and every one of us to center students in every conversation and by pointing out when it doesn't appear that we are doing so.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

As of August 12, 2022, I have been endorsed by a range of elected representatives and unions. This list includes: Mayor London Breed, Senator Scott Wiener, Assemblymember Matt Haney, Assemblymember Phil Ting, Supervisor Hillary Ronen, Supervisor Myrna Melgar, Supervisor Ahsha Safaí, Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, Supervisor Catherine Stefani, San Francisco Labor Council, United Educators of San Francisco (UESF), and Laborers' Union Local 261(LiUNA!) I am particularly proud of my UESF endorsement given that I am running for a four year term following my appointment to the Board of Education this past March. It is an honor to have this endorsement. I am also proud of the range of elected officials who have endorsed me thus far. I believe that the range of skills, leadership styles, priority areas, and ideological leanings of those who have endorsed me reflects that I am a consensus builder who appreciates thoughtful discourse and opportunities to work with and learn from differing perspectives.

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

As a School Board Commissioner, my top three priorities include:

1. Addressing the work of the Board with a student-centered laser focus on equity and excellence: In working towards this priority, we must first acknowledge the systems of harm and oppression upon which the education system is built. As Monique Morris describes, education allows for a renegotiation of power. Despite the fact that this process started decades ago, the process remains ongoing because the renegotiation of power is often perceived as a threat to the original power structures. After acknowledging the role of the systems of power, the next step towards achieving equity and excellence for all students requires obtaining and allocating resources to students to address educational inequities in ways that are culturally responsive and take into account the decades of oppression and systemic barriers that many students of color, most particularly, Black students face. In addition to obtaining and allocating resources for students, it is also important to allocate resources to our educators and those who support our educators to work towards the goal of equity and excellence for all students. Finally, we must ensure that there are accountability measures in place to assess whether we are moving towards these goals.

2. Building trust through clear, accessible, and transparent communication: I am committed to working to build and rebuild trust in SFUSD. In order to do this, I have been listening and learning and soliciting information and expertise from all of our stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, unions, advisory committees, and community partners. I believe this is critical in order to establish methodological integrity related to assessing the best interests of the students.

As the Associate Director of the Stanford Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic, I spend my days teaching, mentoring, and supervising law students engaged in the challenging and important work of defending the rights of non-citizens. In this work, I teach the importance of process and communication. This is why I am connecting with parents, teachers, students, and advocates to learn about their experiences with our schools and with the District. It is clear to me that many of the most significant challenges facing the District result from a breakdown in communication and lack of trust.

3. Creating financial stability for the School District: I joined the BOE while the District was facing a significant structural deficit with a projected \$125 million shortfall for Fiscal Year 2022-23. I am proud that my colleagues and I passed a balanced budget. While we are in a much better position than we were a few months ago, we continue to be at risk of deficit spending and face a continued structural deficit if we are not more strategic and intentional with our spending. We must ensure that our budget aligns with our priorities and that every line item can be explained as it relates to improving student outcomes and closing the opportunity gap. Additionally, I am thrilled that we will be able to expand our community schools model thanks to the State's separate (and additional funding) and I am excited to support the Student Success Charter measure, which will allow us to recover excess ERAF funds and put them towards improving student outcomes and supporting the "whole child" model.

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

I was on the Board of Directors for Dolores Street Community Services for six years (two terms of three years, which was the maximum).

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

N/A

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

Please see responses to questions below (re: deportation and white supremacy). As it relates to my work on the Board of Education, I will continue to listen and work with my colleagues to create policies that ensure that each and every one of our students has meaningful access to an education that is rooted in both equity and excellence.

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

I have dedicated my entire career (over 15 years) to advancing immigrants' rights and working on behalf of noncitizens. 95% of my work entails representing noncitizens facing deportation. My work involves representation before the Immigration Court, the Board of Immigration Appeals, and the Ninth Circuit. I also represent individuals seeking asylum before the Asylum Office. Finally, I do long term systemic advocacy work around issues relating to access to counsel and detention. My work also entails supervising and mentoring law students in this work. For more information about my work, please visit:

<https://law.stanford.edu/directory/lisa-weissman-ward/>

As it relates to how I intend to support our SFUSD noncitizen community members, I am committed to making sure that all of our students, no matter what immigration status they have, feel comfortable, safe, and supported in school. Fortunately, both SFUSD and the City and County of San Francisco have important protections in place to safeguard against ICE accessing our schools. Specific initial plans that I would like to explore include:

1. Expanding partnerships with our amazing Bay Area Nonprofit immigrants' rights organizations;
2. Providing trainings for social workers, nurses, educators, and site leaders on how to provide initial (non-legal) advice and referrals; and
3. Increasing communication to families regarding the availability of local (low/no cost resources) and information regarding the fact that schools are protected sites under local federal ICE enforcement rules.

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

In my employment with the Stanford Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic, I focus on the intersection of immigration with racial justice, economic inequity, and racial profiling. I teach about the racist, classist and xenophobic underpinnings of our immigration system. My work also focuses on the immigration detention system, which disproportionately detains Black and Brown immigrants. I teach about the disparities in local/state/federal criminal law enforcement profiling which results in certain noncitizens being at higher risk for deportation.

I am also actively involved in improving and supporting racial justice pedagogy for the Law School's clinical programs more generally. I co-chaired our Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion work which involved work ranging from identifying and creating specific teaching materials to implementation work.

I have been bringing this critical lens and commitment to elevating these discussions to my work on the School Board.

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.

As a School Board member, I am fiercely and unequivocally committed to ensuring that our LGBTQ2S+ students and educators are able to learn and teach in a safe and supportive environment.

For nearly two decades, I have worked to protect the rights of the LGBTQ2S+ noncitizen community. This work includes representing LGBTQ2S+ asylum seekers who are fleeing their home countries because of persecution and threats of persecution on account of their gender identity and/or sexuality.

Supporting LGBTQ2S+ San Franciscans (and the LGBTQ2S+ community, more generally) is also extremely personal to me. My twin- who is my absolute best friend and my closest confidant- is trans. He came out as queer when we were in high school. We lived together in San Francisco when he transitioned. I have seen first hand the impact of both harmful and ugly transphobia/homophobia and also the impact of unconditional love and support (from individuals and systems).

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?

Access to stable housing for our students and their families is critical to closing the opportunity gap. SFUSD should actively pursue new funding and programs offered by the federal and state government and join advocacy efforts to help create new funding. The San Francisco Housing Accelerator Fund is an example of a successful public-private partnership that has helped generate over \$350 million dollars to fund over 1,500 affordable homes since it was launched nearly 10 years ago.

In addition to advocating for more affordable housing, I am a proponent of Community Schools and am actively supporting the Student Success Fund Ballot measure, which will support our vision of centering the whole child and improving student outcomes. For students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, support should include facilitated wrap-around services with experienced and trusted community based partners who can address the time-sensitive and important needs of our students experiencing homelessness.

What is your favorite park, and why?

I love this question. There are so many parks that I have enjoyed with my family and friends. If I had to choose just one, I would say Golden Gate Park. The options for entertainment and/or relaxation are endless!

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

As a Board of Education Commissioner, I am running to represent all students and their families, irrespective of their political views. I appreciate that the League of Pissed Off Voters represents the views and values of many San Franciscans. This includes a subset of families and students that I am committed to ensuring have access to an excellent and equitable education.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

In answering these questions, I focused on my role as a Board of Education Commissioner and the relevance and impact of these important questions on SFUSD and our educational policies. Thank you for your consideration.

What experience do you have with SFUSD or the BoE?

I was appointed to the Board of Education in March of 2022. Since that time, I have participated in dozens of meetings, including meetings on Saturdays and Sundays. I also participated in a three day national Board of Education governance conference, where I learned from facilitators and other Commissioners/Trustees from around the country. In addition to the meetings, I have spent hundreds of hours in the last five months learning about the operations and the substance of SFUSD.

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

There are a number of amazing things about SFUSD that are not discussed enough. In addition to discussing the strengths, I have included some thoughts on how we need to do a better job at highlighting those strengths.

First, we have an amazing and brilliant pool of educators at SFUSD. Not only do we need to celebrate and appreciate and fairly compensate them, we need to support them and create space for their own continued growth and development.

Second, we have an amazing set of programs and schools, including, but not limited dual language pathways, academies, and community schools. I believe we need to do more to tell the story of the success of these programs and to recruit additional students to participate.

Third, we are educating our children in a city where the electorate overwhelmingly supports bond and parcel tax measures which directly benefit our schools. This support is not commonplace and I think it is important to elevate and further cultivate the relationship between the school district and the community at large. By highlighting our great educators and programs, by reminding one another about the mutual support for our students, and by putting our money (resources) where our mouth is, I believe that we can flip the narrative and achieve an equitable and excellent educational system.

As it relates to challenges, I believe that they generally center around the loss of trust. Here are three specific concerns that I believe have contributed to this. (*I should note that I am thrilled with our selection of Dr. Matt Wayne as Superintendent. I am optimistic that with him at the helm and with a commitment from the Board to focusing on governance and centering our desire to improve student outcomes, these concerns will soon be in the rearview mirror!

- 1) Lack of student-centered focus: We must focus on tools, programs and staff that will actually improve student outcomes. We must hold ourselves accountable by using metrics for our goals and measuring our performance. We must work with experts and learn from other school districts that have student-centered strategies which have resulted in improved literacy and math levels.
 - 2) Lack of inclusion of diverse and informed voices: One wonderful thing about SFUSD is that it is made up of diverse communities with incredible knowledge and expertise. As an educator myself, I love to listen and learn. I approach challenging conversations from points of commonality rather than points of difference. I am committed to hearing from all stakeholders. Although I am a full-time working parent in addition to my work on the School Board, I make a point of regularly meeting with and listening to parents.
 - 3) Inadequate Fiscal Leadership: See earlier response regarding budget concerns. SFUSD has a structural deficit which I believe is in large part due to our lack of alignment of the priority to our student outcomes and a lack of measurable outcomes to hold the District accountable.
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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?

While SFUSD is fortunate to receive generous funding from the City and County of San Francisco and from the voter base that has consistently shown a willingness to pass bonds and parcel taxes to support the District, the ultimate funding and policy decisions should come from the District. To be clear, those decisions can and should be made in conversation and in collaboration with the City and County (when that is the funding source).

One immediate step already taken by our new Superintendent is engaging in a more thoughtful and intentional dialogue between the District and the City and County of San Francisco. A wonderful example of this was the inspiring collaboration around the Student Success Fund Charter Amendment. The charter amendment is an exciting, strong, well-thought out measure that centers student outcomes. With Supervisor Ronen at the help, it is the result of collaboration between the Board of Supervisors, the Mayor's office, Department of Children, students and their families, community groups, and of course, the District. Each came together with the common goal of bringing more resources to our schools. My hope is that this can serve as a model for future partnership.

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

It is clear that COVID-19 is endemic and no longer a pandemic. It is also clear that, for the most part, our students do better when they are in school. The learning loss and deterioration in our students' mental health is real and alarming. At this point, I believe it is appropriate for SFUSD to follow the guidance of our City and County's health experts.

Do you support a moratorium on charter schools?

My family and I are products of the public school system. I believe in our public schools and the value of public education- one of the only free social institutions that exists. I do not support the privatization of public education. The privatization of education, and specifically, a growing attraction to charter schools has a number of root causes, one of which is dissatisfaction with the public-school options and a sense that the public schools are not providing the high-quality education that each and every student deserves. In response to this root cause, the answer is to increase and improve our public-school options and hold our system accountable when it does not provide high quality education for each and every student. While working to increase and grow the resources of the district and ensure equitable distribution of those resources, it is just as important that we don't lose additional resources. I believe that resources allocated toward new or expanded charter schools are resources lost from our public schools. I prefer that charter school funders work with San Francisco Unified to improve outcomes and enrollment at public schools.

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

See above.

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 do support increasing the investment, and particularly by increasing the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) money that the District receives from the City and County. I strongly support the proposed Student Success Fund Charter Amendment that will be on the November ballot. This measure earmarks \$70 million a year for grants to SFUSD schools and is intended to be a long term funding source. It prioritizes the "whole child" model and focuses on the same goals that I have as a Commissioner: improving student outcomes and closing the opportunity gap.

I believe that we can continue to partner with and seek increased investments with the City and County of San Francisco by making wise and impactful choices when it comes to our budget and demonstrating that we have the ability to improve student outcomes.

I think we should also look for other opportunities to increase revenue for our schools. For example, I support revisiting the 2020 Proposition 13 reform measure Schools and Communities First in order to unlock up to \$12 billion in additional funding for public schools.

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

I believe the biggest factors attributing to the teacher shortage and teacher retention are: salaries, housing affordability and low morale.

Salaries: I believe our educators should be paid [PERIOD]! To ensure SFUSD fulfills its commitment to fully compensate all staff, and given the exorbitant cost of living in the Bay Area, our educators deserve higher wages. Salary is a demonstration of respect. An increased salary will attract new educators to enter the profession and experienced educators will have the wages to remain. In my first weeks on the Board of Education, I was presented with stabilization payment contracts, which I enthusiastically supported. While these are important and can be useful, I do not think they are a substitute for salary increases.

Housing affordability: I support the building of more affordable teacher housing.

Low Morale: We have a brilliant pool of educators at SFUSD. We need to fairly compensate them, celebrate them, and create space for their continued growth and development. I don't think it is a coincidence that we are seeing elevated rates of both students and educators leaving the district. When teachers aren't sufficiently supported, the students aren't either. The opposite is also true: when students aren't sufficiently supported, the teachers aren't either.

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

I mentioned that I do not support the privatization of public education and prefer to see those supporting or funding privatization efforts to instead work with San Francisco Unified to improve outcomes and enrollment at public schools.

For example, this year we secured \$34 million in state funding to support Community Schools. I strongly support the community schools model as a proven strategy to craft services and support that match a neighborhood's needs, led by families, educators, community partners and students who collectively know best what students need. Community schools can be tailored in terms of both student teaching and learning as well as wrap-around services to support positive and healthy learning environments. A study by the National Education Association found that at San Francisco's MLK Middle School reading and math scores rose by 9% after embracing the community school approach, while increasing free breakfast by 89% and decreasing suspensions by 85%.

I support additional funding for community schools proposed at the state and federal levels. These resources provide the District the opportunity to support additional community-led efforts to realize the student achievement, health, social services, leadership, and engagement benefits of community schools.

Community schools are also part of the SFUSD District, meaning that teachers and staff benefit from collectively bargained wages, benefits, and working conditions as well as union representation. For these reasons, I strongly support community schools.

I do not support the contracting out of school district services when our district workforce is available to perform that work or when workers, particularly SFUSD graduates, can be recruited to perform that work in-house.

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

I want to be SFUSD's hype woman when it comes to bringing students and families not only back into the District, but back to the table.

Unfortunately, the podium in the Board meeting room at 555 Franklin Street has become one of the only ways for community members to participate and provide input and feedback. Not only is this an inefficient way of engaging, but it is exclusionary and leaves out many members of our SFUSD parent community who likely have thoughtful and brilliant contributions to make. This fall, under the leadership of our new Superintendent, Dr. Matt Wayne, I (along with my fellow Commissioners) will embark on strategic and intentional engagement sessions in the community. These won't be focused just on global vision and values conversations, but will also include opportunities for feedback and discussion around what improvements (small or big) the SFUSD parent community (among others) would like to see from District Staff and the members of the Board of Education.

Another way to put it is this way: if we want more students and their families at the table, we must set more tables, we must bring those tables to the community where our students and families are, we must provide comfortable and safe seating at the table, and we must offer a variety of options for them to have once they are at the table.

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

- 1) Whether we have improved student outcomes in literacy and math across the District.
- 2) Whether we have closed opportunity gaps in literacy and math in significant ways.
- 3) Whether our college/career preparedness matches our graduation rates.
- 4) Whether we are completely out of a structural deficit and no longer deficit spending.
- 5) Whether our educator morale is higher.

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