



Questionnaire for Board of Education candidates

General Election, November 4, 2008

Candidate/Campaign Information:

Candidate name:	Marigrace Cohen
Office sought:	Commissioner, Bd. Of Education
Contact person:	Matthew Cohen
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Web address:	None yet
Anticipated Budget:	\$25,000
Funds raised to date:	\$340
Percentage of donations under \$50:	NA

General Questions: Please write a brief response (less than 150 words) to each question. Please return this questionnaire electronically to contactus@phdemclub.org We will make these questionnaires available to our members before the endorsement meeting.

1. Why are you running? Why should we vote for you?

I am running for the Bd. Of Education because I want to improve the academic program offered by our public schools. You should vote for me because I am the candidate with the most experience as a 44 year employee of the school district (retired 6/08) with no other agenda or ambition but to give a great city a great school system.

2. What sets you apart from your opponents?

As stated above I was employed by the SFUSD for 44 as a teacher, counselor, assistant principle, summer school principle and supervisor of the school to career department (last 6 years). I know how initiate and support educational programs and understand the complexities of school management. I have managed state and federal budgets. I have dealt with every other department of the school district.

3. What are the top three issues facing San Francisco's schools? What will you do about those issues?

The primary responsibility of the Board is to provide an excellent academic education to all SF children by recruiting and retaining a highly qualified teaching and support staff, a solid comprehensive program, and by providing a safe and nurturing environment in which to learn, An education that prepares them for post-secondary education, careers, and citizenship in a democracy.

4. Would you describe yourself as fiscally responsible? Please give an example to support your answer.

I managed two multi-million dollar budgets as Supervisor of the School to Career Department. My budgets reflected the district's priorities, supported the vocational education program of the SFUSD, and was for many teachers the only source of instructional resources.

As an assistant principal at two high schools, I was responsible for staffing the school within the site's allocation. I had to be sure the staffing reflected the student's required course work, both for graduation and college entrance requirements.

5. Would you describe yourself as socially progressive? Please give an example to support your answer.

My definition of a social progressive is one who believes that while all people have certain inalienable rights, those rights embody responsibilities in a society and world that are constantly changing. We need different tools to confront these changes, and I have been seriously engaged in bringing technology to classrooms that previously had none.

Issue Questions:

1. Given the very real probability of reduced state funding for SF schools in the coming years, what combination of budget cuts and tax increases would you suggest to address budgetary shortfalls?

There's no way around closing schools, consolidating schools, leasing SFUSD properties not presently utilized or adequately utilized, better allocation of available funds, and selecting programs that are proven. A greater reliance on technology for instruction. While the District can never rely on private sources, we can make much better use of our proximity to and intimacy with the major technology giants in the Bay Area. As far as tax increases, we should be exploring different sources of tax funds so as not to be forever constrained by Proposition 13, which I don't believe is going away anytime soon. Parcel taxes are a temporary stopgap, but are necessary. Federally mandated programs should be supported by federal funding. The constant decline in our school population means continued losses of state funds, thus every effort should be made to not only keep our public school population in the public schools, but induce our other families to return to the SFUSD.

2. Absent radical changes, state and federal mandates (like 8th grade algebra and No Child Left Behind) have laid out difficult goals for our schools to meet. What steps do you think the SF schools should take to meet those achievement goals?

Focus on improving the instructional program by recruiting and retaining an outstanding teaching/counseling staff. Keep effective programs that work, like JROTC, in place. Use technology to supplement and support our teaching staff, and maintain a good working relationship between the Board and the Administration.

3. While SF's dropout rate of 21% is not as bad as the state average of 24%, it is far from ideal. How should the SF schools improve enrollment, recruitment, and retention?

Truancy is directly related to the dropout rate. The SFUSD plan must begin with the primary grades. Early on, we observe patterns of tardiness and poor attendance. The more students fall behind in their studies, the more inclined they are to truancy and dropping out. Parents must be motivated to appreciate the advantages of a good education and take greater responsibility for keeping their children in school. The earlier we address this problem and counter the kinds of behavior that lead to dropping out, the lower the dropout rate will be. Thus, early intervention is a most effective strategy.

4. How should the SF schools address the achievement gaps correlated with race, class, and special needs students? How should we address the long-standing gaps between East side and West side schools?

The SFUSD has attempted to address the "achievement gap" in many ways with varying degrees of success. The Balanced Score Card and the new Strategic Plan are the latest efforts

in this direction. This is a significant educational and social issue, to which there are no easy answers. I will support all serious, sensible attempts to address this issue.

5. How should the SF school assignment process work, given our goals of race and class diversity (and our current shortcomings in that area), the difficulties parents have dealing with a complex system, and questions of constitutionality arising from the recent Supreme Court decision?

The Grand Jury Report has recommended simplifying the enrollment process. Our community wants its children to attend neighborhood schools. I believe the school assignment process must satisfy this objective. If we want our children to stay in public school, we need the option of the school staying in the neighborhood.

6. Do you support a voluntary system of Clean Elections – full public financing – of candidates for citywide offices? Would you participate in such a system if it were available?

Yes, I support full public financing, and I would participate.

7. Do you support or oppose the following propositions on the November ballot? Please explain why or why not.

- SF Declaration of Policy in support of SF public high school students participating in JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps)

Support Oppose Reason: It worked and there's no substitute for success.

- CA Proposition 4: Amends California Constitution to prohibit abortion for a non-emancipated minor until 48 hours after physician notifies minor's parent, legal guardian or, if parental abuse reported, an adult family member

Support Oppose Reason: This is a most difficult issue.. The dependent youth's situation needs to be put in a long term context and the minor's family relationships must be dealt with openly and honestly.

- CA Proposition 5: Provides rehabilitation as an alternative to prison for nonviolent drug offenders

Support Oppose Reason: Cheaper and more effective.

- CA Proposition 6: Requires increased penalties for youths convicted of gang-related crimes, including the possibility that 14-year-olds will be tried as adults; increases spending for prison and parole operations, which would come from California's General Fund.

Support ____ Oppose ____ Reason: I don't want 14 year olds tried as adults. I believe the 14 year old is still in the developmental stage emotionally, socially, physically and mentally.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.