

Potrero Hill Democratic Club
Questionnaire for Board of Education candidates
General Election, November 4, 2008

Candidate/Campaign Information:

Candidate name: Jaynry Mak

Office sought: Board of Education

Contact person: Jaynry Mak

Mail address: 2043 Lawton Street
San Francisco, CA 94122

Telephone: (415) 307-9783

Email address: Jaynry.mak@gmail.com

Web address:

Anticipated Budget: \$50,000+

Funds raised to date: Campaign account pending

Percentage of donations under \$50: N/A

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 San Francisco Board of Education because I believe we can and must do more to improve our public schools and offer quality education to every child in San Francisco.

As Chairwoman of Community Youth Center in San Francisco, I lead a non-profit organization that provides counseling, violence prevention and leadership development to 3,000 youth, ages 5 to 25, at 15 public schools. I have been active with this organization for over ten years – first, as a teenage volunteer and later providing pro bono legal services while in law school. I have been a member of the SFUSD Hardship Appeals Board for Student Assignment and Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center Community Council. Additionally, I served San Francisco as staff for the late Congressman Tom Lantos and Assemblymember Fiona Ma.

As a native San Franciscan with four generations of my family here, I am personally invested in

improving our public school system for all children, including my two and a half year old son.

2. What sets you apart from your opponents?

As a mother of a two and a half year old son, I have a personal stake in our schools. Additionally, I offer a unique perspective as a prospective SFUSD family.

When elected, I will be one of the only, if not the only bilingual member on the Board of Education. In a district where more than 40% of the students are Asian, I will utilize my bilingual skills to engage parents in the educational community. In addition, I will use my bilingual skills and my experience performing community outreach to work with the African American and Latino communities as well so that we can reach out to those students and their families.

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

- Increase funding for our schools and per pupil spending

When elected, I will use my bilingual and outreach skills to engage parents in the education community. It is critical to attract students to increase enrollment and the dollars tied to those students. I will be an advocate for public education funding at the State level and I will work with our local legislators in their efforts to maintain and secure additional funding for public education in California.

- Retaining and recruiting quality teachers and classified staff

The SFUSD must establish, maintain and improve programs and efforts to create a positive environment for teachers so that new teachers will stay in the profession, veteran teachers will remain active and engaged and the district's reputation itself will help to attract teachers. The SFUSD must have a quality new teacher induction program so that beginning teachers understand the challenges they will face and have access to veteran teachers to advise and support their efforts. In addition, new teachers should be provided collaborative professional development opportunities such as common planning periods, team teaching opportunities and more regular contact with other teachers and administrators.

- Closing the achievement gap

In order to address the achievement gap the school district and each school site must ensure that many approaches happen simultaneously in order to address both the internal and external factors that may be hindering student learning.

First and foremost our schools must be safe and secure havens so that students are able to learn in a stable environment. This requires consistent leadership, external assistance from a variety of social service and other public agencies as well as regular parent involvement and communication.

The district must also maintain and increase the existing pool of experienced and qualified teachers so that all students have the opportunity to learn from the best the profession has to offer. Attracting such professionals requires resources as well programs to ensure that new teachers are supported and mentored and veteran teachers are utilized to provide such support and offered opportunities for professional development and variety in their duties.

Beyond such efforts, there is a great deal of research that indicates that if schools were able to make some simple internal changes and leverage some external resources, many gains are possible. Much of the basis for such research is derived from the work of Dr. James Comer, a former Yale University Psychologist who proposed a framework for a more holistic approach to child education.

This includes such simple changes as ensuring that a child's progress is closely monitored and overseen by professional teams comprised of teachers, administrators, counselors etc through regular meetings to discuss and work on specific problems with student behavior and how to remove obstacles to learning by creating a caring and nurturing school environment with close links to parents. Many districts and schools have such programs but a comprehensive approach would improve the results.

Involving parents is critical to student success both at home and, if possible, within the school setting as volunteers as well so that parents can fully appreciate what students require and what the school environment is like.

Under the Comer model, schools also employ a full-time social worker who can act as liaison to a variety of external resources and provide assessments of children in need.

In the past two legislative sessions, State Senator Leland Yee, who has endorsed my candidacy, has proposed "comprehensive pupil support" legislation that would have established a pilot program through the SFUSD to, with some state funding, develop a comprehensive network of local public agency and other service providers to work directly with schools on site to provide critical services to students and their families. This would have included a range of options to help students and stabilize families. Unfortunately, this legislation was vetoed by the Governor but as a school board member I will advocate for such an approach.

School districts can and do provide a range of services for students but the district operates with limited resources. If the district could leverage such external resources, have them close at hand, students would be provided a direct benefit and many immediate and long-term obstacles to learning could be addressed.

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

I would describe myself as fiscally responsible. When I first joined the Board of Directors of Community Youth Center in San Francisco, the agency was operating under a deficit. Under my leadership, the agency is no longer operating under a deficit; we have almost doubled our

annual budget, hired more staff, and perhaps, most importantly, expanded the services we provide to our underrepresented youth

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

As a progressive, I believe in and have worked to implement progressive policies and have worked for progressive leaders, including the late Congressman Tom Lantos. As can be ascertained by my policy proposals, I firmly believe in progressive principles as a means to address the many challenges we will face with our schools and beyond.

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?

The State of California has already made deep cuts over the past few years due to recurring deficits. While I realize it is unlikely that the State will balance the budget solely by developing new revenues, I am concerned about the potential for deeper cuts in our critical services. Nonetheless, I realize that all areas, including education as the largest state budget expense must share the burden.

That having been said, I would advocate the restoration of the Vehicle License Fee that the Governor cut when he was elected in 2003. That fee alone would restore as much as \$6 billion in annual revenues – essentially what the structural deficit has been for many years.

I would advocate a modest tax on services such as accounting or legal services. In the long term, I would advocate to, over time, end the artificially depressed property tax rates for commercial properties. Such a “split roll” approach has been discussed for many years but no serious effort has been undertaken.

Finally, California must end the practice of extending special tax breaks for numerous commodities such as yachts and private planes. Although closing these loopholes would not provide billions of dollars, it would provide tens of millions of additional revenues that could be used for education and other services.

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?

The algebra requirement, while approved by the State Board of Education, has yet to be implemented and the challenges it would create are substantial. The State Superintendent of public instruction has already warned the Governor and the BOE that in order to implement the requirement, as much as \$3 billion for new math teachers, curriculum development and

developing the new standards and exam would be required. As of yet the State has offered no such resources. If the district were to be required to implement the new algebra requirement, the district would likely be forced to reduce investment in other programs in order to hire additional instructors or pay for existing instructors to receive training.

The district already has many programs in place to meet the NCLB requirements and is working to ever improve test scores. Again, by adopting such changes as suggested, for example, by Dr. Comer or Senator Yee, it is my hope that the district will be able to close the achievement gap and thereby improve student performance to meet the NCLB standards.

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?

When elected, I will be the one of the only, if not the only bilingual speaker on the Board of Education. I will use my bilingual skills and my experience outreaching to become a spokesperson for the district and encourage parents to enroll their children in the district. To retain students, we need to identify and address truant students early. We must provide support to those students and their families. Again, by addressing the holistic needs of the students, it is my hope that both truancy and dropout rates will be reduced by identifying problems early and addressing them quickly.

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?

To address the achievement gap, we need to retain and recruit quality teachers and classified staff to educate and support our children. We need to ensure that the teachers and staff have the support and resources necessary so that they can best carry out their responsibilities. In addition, we need to engage parents into the educational community. Again, a holistic approach to student learning and early interventions are the best options.

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?

An area we need to improve in the school assignment process is the diversity index. The diversity index only goes into effect when there are more students who would like to enroll in a school than there are available seats. In the Asian community, more than 70% of the families list choices in their seven choice preferences. However, in the African American and Latino communities, less than 20% of the families even list one choice. We need to outreach and educate parents on how to fill-out the forms so that every child has equal access to all schools.

This issue has been extremely divisive in recent years and although the existing process is cumbersome, it is a fair compromise in terms of meeting the demand for neighborhood schools while providing open and equitable access for students and families in a single, unified district.

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?

I support a voluntary system of Clean Elections. I would participate in such a system if it were available.

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: I support leadership programs for youth, including JROTC.

- 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: As an advisory board member of San Francisco Women's Political Committee, we are dedicated to protecting a women's right to choose.

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

Support Oppose Reason: I believe in rehabilitation, not punishment for nonviolent drug offenders.

- 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: This initiative would result in cuts to schools and other vital services. It would cost the State General Fund upwards of \$1 billion in FY 2009-2010, \$500 million in the subsequent year, and more each year thereafter for prisons, jails, and law enforcement costs, resulting in cuts to locally funded programs. It would also increase incarceration rates at the state and local level, especially among minors and young persons from communities of color. It would prosecute more 14-year-olds as adults and send more adults to prison for drug use.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

