

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

Candidate/Campaign Information:

Candidate name:	Kimberly Wicoff
Office sought:	Board of Education
Contact person:	Kimberly Wicoff
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Anticipated Budget:	\$40,000
Funds raised to date:	\$3,000
Percentage of donations under \$50	0%

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 the product of public schools and believe that every child has the right to a great education. San Francisco has fulfilled that promise for thousands of students, yet we face a growing inequality between our highest-performing schools and our lowest. Closing this achievement gap must be our number one priority and I am willing to make tough decisions to support progressive reforms to make that happen.

I also see more and more of my peers leaving the city because they worry about public education. While there are many fantastic schools, the uneven quality coupled with an opaque school assignment process makes signing up for the public school lottery a risk they are not willing to take. If we wish to preserve San Francisco as a city for families we must improve our schools in every neighborhood. I will stand up for the progressive reforms required to make that happen.

2. What sets you apart from your opponents?

Since graduating from Stanford Business School, I have been working on issues of equity and social change. I began as a consultant to nonprofits that provided alternative educational options and sought to influence district reform. But driving change from the outside is difficult, so two years ago I joined Communities of Opportunity, a public/private partnership to fight poverty and inequality in our most disconnected neighborhoods.

Through my work I have learned first hand what it takes to move bureaucratic systems and align the right players to get things done. I bring a unique combination of personal passion and practical work experience that will enable me to not just fight for progressive reform but help make it happen.

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

Closing the achievement gap – I am proud to live in a city with some of the best urban schools in the state. San Francisco has demonstrated what is possible with the outstanding results of many of our schools. But I'm outraged that in the very same city our African American students get even lower scores than special education students on standardized tests in elementary school. It doesn't matter whether you have kids in our school system or not – as a city that prides itself on being one of the most progressive places in the country this is simply not acceptable. But changing these results will be difficult and the work cannot be done by the schools alone. To create lasting change we must work both within the schools to improve curriculum and cultural relevance and work with parents and communities to help them nurture and support our students.

Increasing quality across all schools – Quality requires resources. But even in tough times there are creative ways to bring resources to schools. To do this we must make budget choices that prioritize putting our money into the schools sites and build partnerships with the city and funders who can bring resources and services to our students. We must also target those resources to schools, teachers, administrators, and communities who try innovative approaches and get breakthrough results.

Engaging families – schools cannot do this work alone and neither can parents. We must work on plans that continually bring together the voices and experiences of the parents with those of the schools. We must create an environment where every parent feels welcome and engaged in the success of their kids and their schools.

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

My background is the marriage of these two concepts. I have a degree in business administration and have done extensive work with budget and audits over my 10 year career. I believe in transparency and accountability when it comes to finance and all aspects of my campaign.

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

Through-out business school and in my career since, I have put my skills to work fighting for social change. I have worked with a number of socially progressive organizations including the National Council of La Raza and the Los Angeles Urban League helping them develop strategies for growth and increased impact in their communities and have

spent the last two years working on issues of poverty and inequality in Bayview Hunters Point and Visitacion Valley.

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?

Quality requires money and we must prioritize getting our limited funds to schools sites and teachers who deliver high quality instruction to our kids. That in turn will help convince families to stay in San Francisco and through their ADA bring more resources to our schools. This year alone we will lose over \$2 million due to decreased enrollment in our schools. In addition, we need to focus on new sources of resources, such as Prop 13 reform and partnerships with city and private funders to diversify our funding sources. Budget cuts are not the answer, creative use of our existing funds and expanding the base of funding for schools and students will help us break this vicious cycle.

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?

We all believe in high standards and do not shy away from difficult goals, but it is hard to meet the requirements of NCLB without providing teachers and schools the tools they need to engage all students in high quality education. Teacher training, school site accountability and district support of school based efforts will be critical. It is also vital to engage parents and the community. Teachers and schools cannot do this work alone and we will need to provide tools and resources for parents to help support their children's education both at home and in the classroom.

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?

The overall drop-out statistics mask a much larger problem in our city, African American, Latino, and low-income students drop out at much higher rates than Asian and White peers. In the Southeast some drop out estimates are as high as 50%. We cannot see ourselves as a city of opportunity when this level of disparity exists. To solve this problem we must work on two levels. First, we must try to engage students and families before they drop out. This can be done in part through improving the school experience for students so that they become the "joyful learners" the district seeks to engage. But we also must work with our community partners to engage the families of chronically truant students to help them through the issues that make it difficult to keep their kids in schools. Second, we must provide alternatives for our students who have dropped out of the traditional system. Young adults who did not succeed in high school are unlikely to do better when brought back to that environment. Creative models that meet them where they are and leverage partners like our Community Colleges can provide new ways for them to learn and get reconnected to their education

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?

We have the highest performing urban district in the state, yet we are the only district where African American and Samoan students underperform special needs students. No matter what neighborhood you live in or whether or not you have kids you should be

outraged by that statistic. But solving a problem that has taken decades to create will not be easy. It will take a creative combination of approaches such as providing incentives for great teachers to take positions in our worst schools and bringing new programs and resources to those schools to begin to turn the tide. And we must truly see this as a rising tide that will lift all boats, keeping our great schools great and using lessons from their success to bring up our lowest performing schools

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?

If we spent the resources that are put into the school assignment system on improving the quality of all schools this would not be an issue. The only real answer to this question is to make every school a school parents would be happy to send their kids to. But while we are working to make that vision a reality, we must do more to make the assignment process work for our families. This will take many steps. First, it is important to improve the outreach and communication to families about both the process and the schools. Many families make decisions based on rumors and reputations without having good information about the many wonderful schools that are available to them. But many families also make no decisions at all, and by not participating in the lottery they are left with the low performing schools. We must do more to engage parents particularly on the east side of the city so that all students participate equally in the system. Second we must adjust the criteria to better reflect what parents want, for some that is a geographic preference, for some that is a preference for a type of school, and for others it is a particular program that meets the needs of their kids. Currently our system does not allow parents to provide additional weight for any of these factors which are critical in choosing the right school for their kids. Every student and family's needs are different and we need a process that respects those preferences while preserving equity

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, this is the only real way to level the playing field and focus campaigns on the issues rather than on fundraising.

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 X Oppose Why?

While the anti-gay and pro-war nature of our military is troubling, the JROTC program provides positive leadership training, discipline, and peer support to students that helps them grow as individuals and stay engaged in their education. In voting to phase out this program the Board and district promised to develop alternative programs to meet those needs. They have failed to do so. Cutting a program that benefits so many students without providing alternatives is detrimental to both students and schools. Until

viable options are created I think it is important to continue to support these students, just as I support our troops while vehemently opposing the war.

- 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 X Why?

I believe it is important to encourage students to discuss health issues and major life decisions with their parents, and most do, but not all students have a supportive adult in their lives. And in particular in situations where there is abuse, it may be extremely difficult for them to talk about these issues with any adult family member. We must support the right of those students to seek health advice from doctors and make decisions that are right for them and their situation while continuing a dialogue with both students and parents about these critical issues

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

Support X Oppose ____ Reason:

I have seen the cycles of poverty and hopelessness that result from the huge numbers of our population – and in particular African American men – that we lock up for minor offences. We need kids to grow up with fathers in the community and we need to focus on providing support for those men to change rather than put them in jails where the cycles repeat.

- 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 X Reason:

Locking kids up is simply not the answer. Just as in my answer above, we need to focus our resources on re-engaging this kids in their lives, their communities, and their EDUCATION, rather than dooming them to a lifetime cycle of prison and poverty.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.