



Questionnaire for Board of Education candidates

General Election, November 4, 2008

Candidate/Campaign Information:

Candidate name:	Emily Murase
Office sought:	SF Board of Education
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Anticipated Budget:	As a first-time candidate, I am not sure. Dependent on how much I can raise. Many supporters are donating to a candidate for the first time.
Funds raised to date:	\$36,000
Percentage of donations under \$50:	52%

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 because **I am committed to public education. I am a proud product of San Francisco public education.** This education formed the basis for everything I have been able to achieve. Every day, San Francisco families take their kids to school with the expectation that the education will open doors. I want to make sure that this continues to happen, not just for my 2 children who are in the 1st and 4th grades at Rosa Parks Elementary School, but for all children in our public school system.

2. What sets you apart from your opponents?

As Executive Director of the Department on the Status of Women, my job is to **address the needs of some of the most vulnerable women in our community**, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. My agency collaborates closely with community-based organizations, criminal justice agencies, and some foundation support to provide crisis services and policy reform. My strength is bringing folks from varying backgrounds together to work towards a common goal.

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

Addressing the achievement gap: We need to expand options for students with different learning styles and goals to receive a meaningful education. There is an opportunity for the school district to partner with labor unions to develop vocational training to make students workforce-ready.

Improving enrollment: There are currently 90,000 seats in the school district and only 55,000 students. Reasons for declining enrollment include the high cost of living and housing, and a declining child population. We need to reverse this trend by making the schools more attractive for more families. Each school should have a strategic plan to develop a unique identity for the purpose of attracting prospective families.

Ensuring teacher retention & recruitment: According to the San Francisco Education Fund, 1 out of 5 new teachers leave the district, at an estimated loss of \$3 million per year. We need to pay teachers a competitive salary and reward teachers who take on tough assignments.

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

As the Executive Director of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women, I have maintained a balanced budget for each of the past 4 years since I assumed this position. A large majority of our budget is dedicated to direct services to women survivors of violence and I have personally absorbed some of the required budget cuts in order to **protect these services** (my union agreed to a 5-day unpaid furlough this year for all its members to contribute to a budget solution).

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

I have championed the **human rights of women and all San Franciscans.** After conducting gender analyses of selected City Departments, I worked with my colleagues to improve working conditions for women city employees. We are now applying gender

analyses to private sector entities. I have also worked closely with victim advocates to reform the criminal justice response to domestic violence.

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?

Cuts that have a direct impact on education in the classroom, teaching staff for example, must be a last resort. In reviewing school board agendas this past year, I observed that the school district contracts out many professional services. Some of these contracts seemed **inordinately expensive** for services that appeared to be routine or common for a school district. To cut costs, I would strongly favor identifying or training existing staff to undertake routine or common services that are being contracted out.

In terms of tax increases, I served on the Prop A Steering Committee for the historic parcel tax that was adopted in June which creates a local funding stream to improve teacher salaries. Incremental increases to this parcel tax should be considered to address funding shortfalls. Our per pupil spending in California, at roughly \$8,500, is an embarrassment compared to New York and New Jersey that spend **75% more**. The success of Prop A shows public support for local funding of our schools.

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?

In my view, the difficulty is not meeting the goals, the difficulty is that the goals are too narrow to measure broad-based learning. That is, federally mandated achievement goals that are limited to English and math do not adequately capture the level of education among our students. The school district should explore ways to **measure broad-based learning** such as review of student-created portfolios of their best work.

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?

See answer 3. above regarding the achievement gap and improving enrollment.

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?

See 3. above regarding the achievement gap. Strategies to address the achievement gap must account for the fact that children have **different learning styles**. To address special needs students, class size must be kept small.

To increase enrollment, I propose that each school organize stakeholders to develop and implement a **strategic plan** focused on attracting families to the school. These stakeholders should include the teachers, staff, families, afterschool providers, local businesses, volunteers, and neighbors. Given that our system is based on school choice, each school is essentially competing for enrollment, not only for other public schools, but

also private schools. Therefore each school should develop a **unique identity** for the purpose of attracting prospective families to enroll.

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 reality is that the current system has resulted in more not less segregation in our schools. And, the groundswell of support for neighborhood school assignments has been expanding. Currently, school assignments are determined by lottery, with no preference for proximity to the home. However, I would propose that **enrollment be split between students who live within close proximity to the school and those who do not**. In this hybrid model, families would be assigned a number of schools within a reasonable distance but also have the option of applying to any other school city-wide. This model provides families the choice of attending a nearby school or going further away to attend, for example, a language program.

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! It is very challenging to be running for a city-wide office that has no public financing.

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 XXX Oppose Reason:

While I am also strongly against the war in Iraq and condemn the military's exclusion of those who are outwardly gay, I feel that the school board vote to terminate JROTC mostly punishes students. I also learned that there are **gay students and gay leaders** in the JROTC, which is probably something that does not happen anywhere else in the country. I respect the fact that gay youth feel a sense of belonging in the JROTC, and it is very important that they see gay leaders. Could it not be the case that welcoming gay youth in the San Francisco JROTC, like gay marriage in San Francisco, begins a process of **real change** to achieve equity and inclusiveness in some of our oldest social institutions? Finally, I cannot say that engaging in JROTC is a wrong choice for all students. With a 90-year history and 1,200 students enrolled last year, the program which offers leadership development and organizational skills without requiring a military commitment is clearly meaningful to many students and their families.

• 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 XXX Reason:

This proposition seeks **to curb a woman's right to choose**. The parental notification requirement is likely to cause young women to avoid physicians thereby forcing them to unlicensed, unsafe abortions. According to the UN Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, women have a right to adequate healthcare. Access to family planning services constitutes a basic human right which this proposition seeks to deny.

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

Support XXX Oppose Reason:

This proposition allocates almost \$70 million in annual funding for a **system of care** for at-risk youth that includes family therapy, mental health interventions, educational and employment stipends. The youth of San Francisco, including some of those in our public schools, would benefit from these services.

- 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 XXX Reason:

This measure focuses exclusively on the downstream impacts of poverty, racism, and violence, and provides **no support for preventive strategies**. Already our state spending on prisons is far ahead of education. In order to address crime, prevention and early intervention are much better investments than expanding prison and parole operations. Moreover, this measure would deplete the already chronically underfunded General Fund and further jeopardize safety net services to the state's most vulnerable populations such as seniors, the disabled, and foster children.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.