



**Questionnaire for candidates for the office of SFUSD School Board
General Election, November 2, 2010**

*Please return this questionnaire electronically to contact_us@phdemclub.org no later than **Monday, August 30**, to confirm your speaking slot.*

Candidate name: Winifred Dajani
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Please write a brief response (≤ 150 words) to each question. We will make these questionnaires available to our members before the endorsement meeting.

1. Why are you running for office?

I am running for the SF Board of Education because in my capacity as a parent, teacher, and student (I obtained two Master's degrees for SFSU), I have had direct experience with every phase of the public education process from kindergarten up through community and 4-year college. During this time, I've reflected on ways in which our school district could better serve the needs of our future generation. I also believe strongly that education is the single most important means of social transformation in our society and want to do what I can to help preserve this opportunity for the future.

2. What are your qualifications for this position?

I am a California credentialed teacher with experience teaching in public school and community college, who understands the challenge of meeting the needs of our diverse student population. I am also a former SFUSD parent who was actively involved for many

years. I understand parents are passionate about their children receiving a stimulating and challenging education and understand their concerns. I am also a successful business owner who knows good ideas can only be realized with solid planning and funding logistics.

In addition to what I answered in question 11, I would add that I have lived in my district for over 20 years and sent my son to our neighborhood public school.

4. What are the top three challenges facing public education in San Francisco? What will you do to meet these challenges?

- Addressing the student achievement gap early on before it widens (elementary school)

It has been proven that the first years of education can have the greatest influence on a person's success later on stretching far into adulthood. If students do not have a solid foundation in literacy and other skills early on in elementary school, what starts as a small achievement gap can stretch to a year or two in high school and put students on a remedial track when they reach college. It lowers their self confidence and belief in their ability to succeed. I would like to make it a clear district priority for children to be proficient in literacy and math skills when they enter fourth grade. When it becomes a district priority, school site councils align their priorities with this as well and make a more concerted effort to bring it tutoring and other resources to meet this benchmark. I believe that by committing to this, in the long run, resources used for remedial work later on will be saved.

-Helping dual language learners acquire the English proficiency necessary for academic and professional competitiveness (relative to the above issue)

Dual language/or English language learners now represent 30% of SFUSD students. If you sincerely want to close the achievement gap, language is a critical component of the process. I would recommend that ELAC and other dual language learner committees develop a task force to study data driven findings about new pedagogy available that has proven most effective in getting students to understand and use appropriate English language genres in the right circumstances. This means, know the academic English for specific subject matter, the difference between formal and informal English, etc. Language acquisition is my area of expertise, and I have attended various seminars related to this. There are some very exciting pedagogical methods that are available, and I want to see SFUSD avail themselves of these.

Keeping families and communities engaged in our public schools

The district should fund and move forward on plans recommended by parent action committees to make schools more engaging and inclusive of all parents. There are a variety of ways that schools can involve parents and make them feel that there is a need and place for them to contribute and participate in the school culture, but they need district support to be consistently implemented. The district should be proactive in working with the PAC to find funding for at least some of the initial ideas and follow up to assess and introduce the additional measures or new ones discovered through assessment.

5. If you are an incumbent, please describe your major accomplishments while in office.
I am not an incumbent.

6. How do you propose lessening the achievement gap between students of different backgrounds?

To lessen the achievement gap between students of different backgrounds, I recommend using more student centered teaching that draws on methods proven to be most successful in engaging students from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. African American and Latino students are frequently at disadvantage because they are not given the skills they need to negotiate the mainstream discourse and academic environment in a successful way. Part of this can be cultural and part of it can be socioeconomic, which also plays a big factor in the achievement gap.

Therefore, as I stated above, first, teaching methods must be relevant to their background and culture, while also challenging them in the same way that it challenges students at the high end of the achievement gap. In addition to this, resources from the central district office and CBOs should be available to these students to help them reach and maintain proficiency in their subjects. This support should come in the form of tutoring, family outreach, counseling.

7. What are your views on charter schools?

I think charter schools have a place and can be successful in serving certain groups of students whose needs school districts have not succeeded in addressing. One example of this is KIP and International High School. They should be viewed as a supplement to the public education system, and in fact that is what the original intent was when they were first conceived of more than 20 years. However, I believe strongly that we as a nation should be committed to building and sustaining a strong public education system, and not be moving towards privatization of our schools. One reason for this is that there is no consistency in quality or curriculum across charter schools and overall their success rate has not been superior to that of public schools. New York City schools is a perfect example of this.

8. What are your views on the current school assignment system?

I'm happy that the SFUSD is at least revisiting the whole assignment system, which is just as abominable now as when my son was in school. The question is, why did they wait so long? It has become a very complex issue now with demographic and population changes make old attendance areas obsolete.

I have mixed feelings about it and how the elementary school "tiebreaker" system is going to work to improve school quality in underperforming schools. Will they influence priority in such a way that will make this assignment plan meet its goal of equity in education and access? As far as the neighborhood school issue, I support the shift towards families having more priority to attend their neighborhood schools, but at the same time, in order for this to work, schools across the district have to be uniformly good. The same parents that complain about not having priority to attend their neighborhood school might think differently if their neighborhood school was one that they didn't care for. The same thing holds true for the feeder paths to middle school, which determine where students will go to middle school. Again, it's great to have the stability and predictability that the new system offers, but if all schools aren't equally good, some parents will feel shortchanged and not served equitably by the system at all.

There are so many variables in the new assignment system, and the long range intent of these variables is to increase education equity and access. How it all plays out and what the district does to address unforeseen snafus remains to be seen. I do commend the architects of the plan for going and meeting with the school communities. I have been attending these meetings, and a lot of interesting questions are being raised that will hopefully be taken into serious consideration.

9. How would you address the problem of truancy among high school students?
I don't think there is a "one size fits all solution", as students stop going to school for a variety of reasons. I believe you need a coalition of different services and resources working together to identify truants and reengage them in the education system. I am very encouraged by the new initiative taken by San Francisco and the establishment of TARC which aims to do just that with the help of small businesses to report truants and a variety of community groups, the SF police, SF juvenile probation working to find ways to assess each student's situation and get him or her reinvolved in the education process. With the emphasis on prevention and solutions to help refocus our youth on constructive behavior, we can avoid most of the punitive measures and damaging consequences of habitual truancy.

Do you support or oppose the following Propositions on the November ballot?

Proposition 19 support oppose

Proposition 23 support oppose

Proposition 26 support oppose

Thank you for your time, and your commitment to the children of San Francisco. We look forward to seeing you on September 7th.