

**Potrero Hill Democratic Club
Board of Education Candidate Forum
Tuesday, September 13, 2022
Potrero Hill Neighborhood House**

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate name: Gabriela López
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*Please write a brief response (up to 200 words) to each question. **Please email the completed questionnaire to contact_us@phdemclub.org by Monday, September 5.** The questionnaires will be made available online to club members.*

If elected, what are your top 3 goals for SFUSD? Specifically, how do you plan to accomplish these goals?

I am the candidate with the most knowledge of our schools, classrooms, school district systems. I know our budget and how it translates to classroom and school services. Our children's education and well-being should be the district's top priority. My top three issues and solutions to address this include:

- Increasing School Funding and Resources - changing state funding formula for schools (repealing prop 13.) Locally, supporting the public enrichment fund and ensuring all education related dollars (ERAF and any additional bonds) from the city is managed well and directed toward school.
- Improving Special Education Supports - developing a plan to consolidate services, reduce lawsuits and ensure our students' learning needs are getting met with the resources we do have while advocating for state and federal dollars to bridge the gap in staffing, training and type of services and opportunities available to students to address dyslexia, autism and other learning differences.
- Expanded Math, Reading and Science Opportunities - This is about ensuring all students get similar resources across programs/schools by working with CCSF, the City and County of San Francisco and nonprofits to allow our students to take college courses and have paid internships that give them access to various trades/industries.

What are the specific skills/expertise that you have that you think will help you achieve these goals?

I am a lifelong educator and learner. I have served as a classroom teacher, prison educator, former School Board President and currently as an adjunct professor, a teacher of future educators. My experience ranges from early childhood education to graduate level and this will inspire and inform my work on the San Francisco Board of Education. I believe that our public schools can uplift each and every one of our students. When the COVID pandemic began, I worked to ensure our city's children were fed and had the technology they needed to continue their learning and re-opened schools when it was safe to do so. I constantly put the needs of students and families at the center, as I did in my own classroom. Currently as a teacher educator I am actively preparing and supporting a new generation of educators to come into our schools as prepared as possible to help generate the outcomes we want for students.

If you are an incumbent, please tell us what you are most proud of. If you are the challenger, describe something the incumbent(s) did that you would have done

differently.

As a member and president of the San Francisco Board of Education I lead and oversaw the successful implementation of:

- Online Learning Program (OLP), a program for medically fragile students or students whose health would be put at risk, and On Demand Learning Program (ODLP), available to students who do not meet the criteria for the OLP but whose parent/legal guardian is requesting a remote learning option
- Provided a robust crisis distance learning program for all students during the first year of the pandemic
- Provided over 1.2 million meals to families in need during the pandemic
- Distributed over 15,000 Laptops and WiFi to ensure families had consistent access to online learning
- Distributed over 3,000 Learning Kits to students and families
- Prioritized in person instruction during the spring 2021 for students with special needs and students who would benefit from in-person instruction
- Conducted multiple cycles of wellness checks to support families
- Ensured all school workers continued to be paid during school closures due to health orders
- Supported front line workers with additional pay and supplemental sick leave when impacted by Covid-19

I am proud of the activism and work my colleagues and I supported during my time.

Families Abandoning SFUSD: Do you believe SFUSD should be doing more to attract and retain families who have alternative options to SFUSD and why? What do you believe SFUSD is not doing now and could be doing differently to attract or retain these families?

SFUSD's student enrollment numbers have been declining for over a decade, and recently due to the COVID pandemic. I recognize the many factors that contribute to these issues, including housing stability, safe schools and access to transportation. What I know SFUSD can and is working on is their ability to share the great work happening within our schools by dedicated educators and the strong, long-lasting relationships being built in communities across San Francisco. It's important to highlight the work being done in public schools and help families who are choosing between charter, private or parochial schools have access to that information as well.

School Assignment System: What role should the Board of Education play in the changes planned for elementary school assignment? What metrics would define the new system as a success?

While on the Board of Education, I was on the Student Assignment committee as President, overseeing the work our district was doing to create more integrated school environments that have been lacking historically in San Francisco public schools. It is common knowledge that in San Francisco, schools are now more segregated than when it was law, and I fully support the work being done to address and change that reality. While serving, I joined multiple community in-person and online meetings, helped gather data and input from students, educators and families, and worked with district staff and outside entities that were supporting this research in order to best educate the public on what we were doing to address this issue in our school district.

Middle School Redesign: Has this initiative been successful? What resources, plans or changes for our middle schools would you advocate for on the school board, if elected?

While on the board, I know our district was working toward the full implementation of the Middle School Redesign and provided public updates. During the pandemic, many initiatives were unfortunately halted, as it was difficult to initiate changes virtually. If elected again, I will continue to support efforts that bring more Visual and Performing Arts opportunities to all students who will be able to explore and build the foundation before entering high school.

High Schools: What resources, plans or changes for our high schools would you advocate for on the school board, if elected? Please weigh in but do not limit your answer to Lowell.

We are fortunate to have many dynamic high schools across the district that provide a specialty area which better supports our students' work/life experience while in high school. These unique pathways offer more opportunities for students to explore different careers and areas of interest, and we must continue to ensure these initiatives are provided and funded. Many students have benefitted from the real-life work experience and connections they've made, setting them up for success post-graduation.

Opportunity / Achievement Gap: Please name one SFUSD strategy at closing the opportunity / achievement gap that has failed and explain why and one strategy that has either succeeded or has the potential to succeed and explain why.

Former Superintendent Dr. Matthews rightly called for more diverse and more experienced school leaders and teachers in schools that serve black and minority students. The first step in accomplishing this goal is to pay school leaders and teachers competitively with surrounding districts. The "high potential" bonus that some teachers receive does not do enough. We need to leverage salary gains to bring focus on hiring, supporting and retaining more African American and Latino educators in our high potential schools.

I think we should look to fundamentally change classroom support, ensuring that classrooms have more paraeducator support, and that every school has a full-time social worker, nurse and counselors. I believe we need more community based initiatives that address, not just the quality of instruction, but poverty. I am inspired by initiatives like community schools and the Mission Promise Neighborhood. As a board member I would continue to look closely at how we can expand and strengthen the most successful aspects of such programs.

Teacher Retention: How has the Board of Education failed SFUSD teachers and what can it do to support and retain them?

As a former teacher, I recognize the issues that make it harder to stay in our positions. Coming out of the virtual learning space during the height of the pandemic and back into in-person learning was not an easy adjustment for many, and educators felt disrespected throughout this process. On top of the issue with teacher pay.

It is important we bring that focus back to teachers, elevating their voices and needs at the district level, educating people around the steps being taken to correct problems, and immediately fixing the problem with payroll.

Describe your views on the role of charter schools in San Francisco. Do you support an equitable allocation of resources to charter schools relative to district schools - why or why not?

We have to keep public funding with public schools. It is well established that on the whole,

Charter Schools do not outperform public schools and that is despite the overwhelming emphasis many charters place on test scores. Through experience, I know charter schools have inequitable pay schools, no union representation and have occupied space within public schools taking more opportunities away from our students. As a school board member, I did not support charters taking space within San Francisco and as an educator could only soundly agree with school spaces that provided unique services that our schools do not, such as housing. We have an obligation to do right by our students and we undermine us all when we give into the narrative of charters and privatize our most valuable resource in creating equity, our public schools.

Budget: What allocations in the current budget are higher/lower than needed and why? Please describe your current or previous experience with budgetary oversight.

As a former educator and commissioner, it was evident that a higher amount of budget allocations in our district was dedicated to services that were outside of the classroom. If we want to have successful learning environments, we have to prioritize education in our budgeting choices.

My previous work as the only teacher on the Public Education Enrichment Fund Committee gives me the experience of working with the now \$89 million dollar budget focusing on arts, sports and libraries in public school and holding these programs and policies accountable. And as a member and president of the Board of Education, I oversaw our district's budget while undergoing an important and community-driven zero-based budgeting process.