

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

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate name: Alida Fisher
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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?

- 1. Fully staff our district!*
- 2. Align our priorities with our budget: Provide wraparound mental health and wellness supports in all schools*
- 3. Ensure all students are joyful and proficient readers by third grade*

Before COVID-19, our education system was underfunded and our district was understaffed. Now, we are in a crisis.

We need to meet our students' and teachers' basic social emotional needs before any learning can happen. Now more than ever, it's important to prioritize mental and physical health interventions. We need to work to re-engage students. That means hiring more social workers, nurses, school counselors, and school psychologists.

We are spending a lot of money to implement our current reading curriculum, yet less than half of SFUSD students are proficient readers; if we had the effective resources and programs to teach all children to read in the general education classroom, we would prevent many referrals to special education and we wouldn't need as many Tier 2 and 3 literacy supports. How amazing would it be to have these highly trained personnel available to support social emotional learning and other areas of need as well?

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

I'm a special education advocate. Day after day, meeting after meeting, I fight alongside families for supports and services that help children succeed in school. I know what needs to be done to provide a more inclusive education for all SFUSD students.

I'm a policy wonk and data nerd who has more than a decade of experience on district-level committees. As the past Chair of the SFUSD Community Advisory Committee for Special Education, and member of many other advisory boards, committees, and working groups, I have been a collaborative partner and coalition builder. I work with our teachers, our district administrators, and our city leaders to increase funding for our schools and improve outcomes for our students. Now more than ever, we need school board commissioners with a proven track record of collaboration on behalf of our most marginalized students.

I am an outside-the-box thinker who brings creative solutions to difficult problems. I've spent the past ten years attending board meetings and presenting to the board. Now it's time to take my work to the next

level: I'm ready to develop budgets that prioritize programs that improve outcomes for all students and help everyone reach their potential.

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 commissioner, one of my first priorities will be to implement an evidence-based reading curriculum district-wide, and provide our educators the training and ongoing professional development needed to implement it with fidelity. Serious shifts are needed to improve student outcomes, and quickly. We need a structured literacy curriculum that includes a systemic and sequential structured literacy approach, including decodable texts.

We are spending a lot of money to implement our current reading curriculum, yet less than half of SFUSD students are proficient readers. We must ensure that all students are proficient and joyful readers by third grade. If we had the effective resources and programs to teach all children to read in the general education classroom, we would prevent many referrals to special education and we wouldn't need as many Tier 2 and 3 literacy supports. How amazing would it be to have these highly trained personnel available to support social emotional learning and other areas of need as well?

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?

Decreased enrollment is a state-wide issue, but particularly challenging here in San Francisco. I was excited to see proposed legislation that would adjust State funding formulas to hold districts harmless for reduction in enrollment, as this decline currently has a huge impact on our budget. As Kevin Costner's character said in Field of Dreams: "if you build it, they will come." If we provide the programming and resources that our families want (language pathways, STEM programs, inclusion, etc) at under-enrolled schools, families will be more likely to consider these schools.

SFUSD must:

- *Support an expansion of Universal Prekindergarten and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) programs. SFUSD's Early Education classrooms are some of the most inclusive in the district and an underutilized recruiting tool. In fact, 10 additional school sites are being added in the 2022-2023 school year due to high demand.*
- *Reform the Student Assignment System. More information about this is in the next question.*

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?

Any enrollment system redesign must be paired with an equitable review of school resources. Back in 2018, when Resolution 189-25A1 was introduced, I raised questions that have still gone unanswered today: How are we going to ensure the quality of the educational experience in schools across the district? What is the plan to make sure all SF public schools have the necessary resources to serve their students? What is being done to renovate the existing under-enrolled and under-requested schools?

As we have seen in the past, when we provide the programming and resources that our families have prioritized (language pathways, STEM programs, inclusion, etc) at under-enrolled schools, families are more likely to consider these schools.

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?

I appreciate the thoughtful redesign, ranging from start times to programming to wraparound supports. Middle schoolers having access to more elective periods provides more equitable access for many students. No student should have to decide between an ELD or study skills class and an elective.

The middle school math sequence was redesigned to align with common core and undo decades of inequities. Historically, 8th grade algebra classrooms were racially segregated. I appreciate that algebraic concepts are introduced earlier. The focus has shifted to complex instruction, which has been proven to improve outcomes. Being part of a diverse learning environment helps our students develop strong problem solving and collaboration skills.

Providing thoughtful pathways for students to take a wide variety of higher level math classes in high school, including AP Calculus and Statistics, sets our students up for success beyond high school. If we want to consider changes to curriculum, we need to make significant investments in our teacher coaching and credentialing programs. Right now, SFUSD doesn't have enough credentialed math teachers to offer 8th grade algebra.

We should work with SF MTA Community Transit Ambassadors during Step Up to teach incoming middle schoolers to safely and independently ride public transportation.

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.

I take issue with merit and lottery-based enrollment being framed as opposites. I don't believe that an enrollment system can ever drive merit or high achievement - it's the students, educators, resources, programs, and support at a school that impact student success. In 2020, Lowell offered 130 AP classes while Lincoln offered 30. Considering that there are 2700 students at Lowell and 2100 students at Lincoln, this seems like a huge disparity to me. I think we need to offer more AP and Honors classes at all high schools, more CTE pathways, more clubs and extracurricular activities, and more sports. All high schools should have robust visual and performing arts programs like Ruth Asawa SOTA.

As John F. Kennedy said, a rising tide lifts all boats. Let's change the narrative and focus from watering down our schools to lifting all students to reach their full potential. And let's make sure we have the funds from our City, state and federal government, to add AP and Honors classes, CTE pathways, sports, extracurricular programs, and robust performing arts at ALL schools!

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.

We need to start talking about the systemic inequities within San Francisco public schools that continue to disadvantage our most historically underserved students. In my work with the LCAP Task Force Stakeholder Engagement team, we found that families and school staff want the same thing: professional development in the areas of cultural humility, implicit bias, restorative practices, positive classroom management strategies, trauma informed practices, ability awareness training, and universal design for learning. Everyone wants consistently quality experiences for our children, regardless of the school they attend. Everyone wants the district to build upon our successes and share best practices between schools.

A huge opportunity for improvement is our reading curriculum, as previously mentioned. Ethnic Studies programs have proven successful at the schools that have implemented them. Curriculum must represent the heritage and identity of our students in a positive and empowering manner. Representation matters.

Extending the community school model into additional SFUSD sites brings supports to the school, which helps address the needs of the student as a whole. This allows the student to more fully engage in learning. Family engagement is an important component of the community school model. Schools and families working together improves student outcomes.

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

First and foremost, FIX OUR PAYROLL AND BENEFITS SYSTEMS! Our teachers and staff deserve to be paid, full stop.

Secondly, we need to prioritize filling our vacancies. We are sorely understaffed. We cannot expect teachers to continue to work multiple jobs. Year after year, we have reduced the number of support personnel at schools. This is accelerating our teacher retention challenges; our teachers are asking for more resources in their schools. We need additional social workers, school psychologists, nurses, literacy coaches and more!

We also need to pay our teachers more - we are creating a structure where our teachers live in poverty. We need higher pay and student loan forgiveness programs for teachers.

While this question is focused specifically at educators, there is also a huge inequity in the pay and number of hours we offer paraeducators. Paraeducators in particular are underpaid and undervalued, yet paras are the backbone of the school support networks. They're instrumental to the success of not only students, but their fellow educators. If we want to demonstrate how important paraeducators are to the success of our students, we must increase their work hours and pay scale.

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?

I agree with the NAACP's 2016 resolution that called for a moratorium on charter school expansions. I find the lack of oversight and accountability worrisome. Charter schools don't offer the full continuum of special education pathways and programs that SFUSD schools do. I would much rather see charter school funders work collaboratively with SFUSD to improve outcomes at our existing (and often under-enrolled) schools rather than look to open new schools.

Charter schools provide a layer of budgetary stress for many districts, including many in the Bay Area. The Public Interest released a report titled, "The Cost of Charter Schools for Public School Districts." The report found that, in the 2016-2017 school year, charter schools cost Oakland Unified \$57.3 million. This reduction coupled with Prop 39 has strained many school districts to the brink of insolvency. These are the reasons I joined the Charter School Oversight Committee.

It's also important to recognize that the charter schools are attractive to many San Francisco families because of the inequitable resources available across SFUSD schools. We need to ensure all SF public schools have the necessary resources to serve their students and attract new families.

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 the CAC Chair and special education advocate, I have spend the past ten years fighting to increase education funding, with a specific focus on special education funding. I am actively working with District and City leaders to increase state funding. The District's special education budget increased by 35 percent

between 2016-17 and 2020-21. However, State and federal special education funding increased by only six percent during that time. This means that a very large portion of our unrestricted general fund is used to meet the legal obligations associated with IEPs.

As a member of the LCAP Task Force for the past five years, I have worked to tie our district's priorities to our budget. Budgets are value statements: we need to fund what we value. My past and current advocacy includes:

- Allocating ERAF (Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund) money to schools, not the City's general fund.*
- Lobbying the state legislature for funding formula increases (LCFF).*
- Lobbying the state legislature and Department of Finance to reverse proposed changes to special education funding structure and instead allocate more than \$100M to special education teacher recruitment, training, and retention programs.*
- Advocating for more effective programs in our schools.*

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out, and thanks for running!