

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

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate name: Lisa Weissman-ward
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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.*

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

1) Addressing the work with a student-centered laser focus on equity and excellence: In working towards this priority, we must first acknowledge the systems of harm and oppression upon which the education system is built. After acknowledging the role of the systems of power, the next step towards achieving equity and excellence for all students requires obtaining and allocating resources to students to address educational inequities in ways that are culturally responsive and take into account the decades of oppression and systemic barriers.

2) Building trust through accessible, and transparent communication: I am committed to working to build and rebuild trust in SFUSD. In order to do this, I have been listening and learning and soliciting information and expertise from all of our stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, unions, advisory committees, and community partners.

3) Creating financial stability for the School District: I joined the BOE while the District was facing a significant structural deficit with a projected \$125 million shortfall for Fiscal Year 2022-23. I am proud that my colleagues and I passed a balanced budget. We must ensure that our budget aligns with our priorities and that every line item improves student outcomes and closes opportunity gaps.

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

As the Associate Director of Stanford Law School's Immigrants' Rights Clinic, I have two roles. Wearing my attorney hat, I represent individuals facing deportation, asylum seekers fleeing persecution, and undocumented individuals with limited legalization options. I study the law and draw upon my skills as an advocate for justice and fairness. I work to facilitate outcomes that

advance equity and opportunity for my clients, just as we seek to advance for all SFUSD students.

Wearing my educator hat, I oversee and mentor law students. Working under the supervision of my law license, students have an opportunity to represent clients before the immigration courts and asylum office. I teach them how to engage in critical discourse, negotiation, and consensus building, and how to interview clients with a cultural humility and trauma informed lens. My work has shown me the value of meeting each individual where he/she/they are and the importance of starting conversations from a point of commonality rather than a point of difference.

I will use my professional skill sets to navigate the challenging, but important conversations and move us forward to improve student outcomes. I will seek to avoid and redirect when the conversations become focused on adult-centric arguments.

3. 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.

I am not technically either. I was appointed in March and am running for the first time. However, I am happy to speak about the things I am most proud of in my five months as a sitting commissioner. In five short months, my colleagues and I have:

- passed a balanced budget,
- rescinded teacher and staff layoff notices,
- hired a student-centered new Superintendent,
- helped bring new revenue to the District,
- created a transparent and community-driven framework to improve high schools citywide, and
- engaged in intensive work to improve our processes and governance structures so that we can focus on improving student outcomes and closing the opportunity gap.

4. 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?

I want to be SFUSD's hype woman when it comes to our students, educators, and schools. In order to attract more families to our schools, we need to ensure that we are providing phenomenal learning opportunities to all of our students.

First, SFUSD must provide much better transparent and accessible communication to families.

Second, SFUSD must work to recognize and support its brilliant educators at SFUSD. I don't think it is a coincidence that we are seeing elevated rates of both students and educators leaving the district. It is cyclical. When teachers aren't sufficiently supported, the students aren't either. The opposite is also true: when students aren't sufficiently supported, the teachers aren't either. By increasing the rate of teacher retention, we will also increase the enrollment of students.

Third, SFUSD staff and the Board must elevate the quality of *all* of our schools so that our families do not experience anxiety and uncertainty when it comes to school selection. We must also do a much better job of showcasing and celebrating the amazing programs and schools that we do have. By showcasing the great and turning the “not-so-great” into great, we will attract more students to the district.

5. 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?

I believe that the school assignment system needs reform. I am thrilled to be on the ad hoc student assignment committee. I have met with the SFUSD staff who are tasked with leading this process. I have also met with the Stanford data team that is responsible for the demographic data and studies about possible new geographic zones. I am looking forward to receiving and analyzing the forthcoming data from our Stanford partners regarding the options for creating a zone-based system that ensures students can attend diverse and integrated schools close to their homes that allow them full and meaningful access to things should as: before and after care programs, language programs; arts programs, science programs, experienced teachers, and strong PTA programs.

6. 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?

Unfortunately, as a Board member, I have not yet been presented with data or updates describing how and whether the middle school redesign has yet had any meaningful impacts. The three main changes for the redesign included a modified block schedule, universal learning experiences for all middle schoolers (consistent offering of core course), and district-wide professional learning time. The average pre-pandemic data for 2018-19 and 2019-20 shows that pre-pandemic, only 60% of our eighth graders were considered “high school ready.” This past year, the average for all SFUSD was 47.2%. There were drastic differences among demographics, including 71% of Asian students were considered high school ready while only 15% of African Americans were considered high school ready. One of the factors used for computation in high school readiness is attendance rates. Therefore, it is not a surprise given the continued COVID-19 pandemic that numbers average over-all numbers went down. But the fact that there is such a large demographic gap is very likely an indicator of a more serious problem that the redesign is not successfully addressing.

Just next week, I am scheduled to visit a number of middle schools who have already begun implementing the redesign features. I am looking forward to viewing these schools in action and asking questions to our central office staff as well as the school site staff.

7. 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.

In June I voted to support the creation of a task force to develop community-led recommendations to improve all of high schools. For far too long we have been operating from a scarcity mindset and it is shameful that we are focused on a single high school and not working to elevate all of our high schools. This task force is also tasked with examining the current admissions process for both Lowell and SOTA and we expect it to issue recommendations regarding future admissions processes that promote both equity and excellence from an academically rigorous perspective. In a city like San Francisco, we should have an abundance of high schools with reputations for excellence. I look forward to receiving recommendations from the task force about how we can grow and expand our rigorous academic programs. I also look forward to receiving recommendations about how we can explore additional opportunities for students who are interested in STEM, the arts, and trade school programs.

8. 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.

I am very hopeful that the city, district, and state's investment in the community school model will help close the opportunity gaps. I am a proponent of Community Schools and am actively supporting the Student Success Fund Ballot measure (Proposition G), which will support our vision of centering the whole child and improving student outcomes. This measure earmarks \$ 65 million a year for grants to SFUSD schools and is intended to be a long-term funding source. It prioritizes the "whole child" model and focuses on the same goals that I have as a Commissioner: improving student outcomes and closing the opportunity gap. For example, for students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, support could include facilitated wrap-around services with experienced and trusted community-based partners who can address the time-sensitive and important needs of our students who are experiencing homelessness. All of these supports would make it possible and likely that the student would remain in school with the necessary supports to allow them to thrive.

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

I believe the biggest factors attributing to the teacher shortage are: salaries, housing affordability and low morale.

Salaries: I believe our educators should be paid [PERIOD]! To ensure SFUSD fulfills its commitment to fully compensate all staff, and given the exorbitant cost of living in the Bay Area, our educators deserve higher wages. Salary is a demonstration of respect. An increased salary will attract new educators to enter the profession and experienced educators will have the wages to remain. In my first weeks on the BOE, I was presented with stabilization payment contracts, which I enthusiastically supported. While these are important and can be useful, I do not think they are a substitute for salary increases.

Housing affordability: I support the building of more affordable teacher housing.

Low Morale: We have a brilliant pool of educators at SFUSD. We need to fairly compensate them, celebrate them, and create space for their continued growth and development. I don't think it is a coincidence that we are seeing elevated rates of both students and educators leaving the district. When teachers aren't sufficiently supported, the students aren't either. The opposite is also true: when students aren't sufficiently supported, the teachers aren't either.

10. 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?

My family and I are products of the public school system. I believe in our public schools and the value of public education- one of the only free social institutions that exists. I do not support the privatization of public education. The privatization of education, and specifically, a growing attraction to charter schools has a number of root causes, one of which is dissatisfaction with the public-school options and a sense that the public schools are not providing the high-quality education that each and every student deserves. In response to this root cause, the answer is to increase our public-school options and hold our system accountable when it does not provide high quality education for each and every student. While working to increase and grow the resources of the district and ensure equitable distribution of those assets, it is just as important that we don't lose additional resources. I believe that resources allocated toward new or expanded charter schools are resources lost from our public schools. I prefer that charter school funders work with San Francisco Unified to improve outcomes and enrollment at public schools.

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

I joined the BOE while the District was facing a significant structural deficit with a projected \$125 million shortfall for Fiscal Year 2022-23. There are a number of actions/decisions that I believe created this crisis. First, we are experiencing a significant loss in student enrollment numbers. With this loss of student enrollment, our state funding decreases significantly. Second, the District has not been strategic with its use of one time versus ongoing funding sources. The use of one-time funding money may give an initial appearance of the budget being stable, but it is temporary at best, and often results in future deficit funding or having to make hard cuts later. Finally, we have not done a strategic job of directing our funding to programs that will provide meaningful improvements to our District's delivery of public education.

One of my first Board meetings involved approving the budget. I participated in a special meeting which involved a training by our State FCMAT partners. I also had meetings with our Finance department to learn about how the District engaged in its budgeting.

I am proud that my colleagues and I have passed a balanced budget. When we adopted our 2022-2023 budget, our projected shortfall for the unrestricted general fund was \$21,972,186 with zero dollars in our unassigned balanced fund. Our revised budget has now brought that shortfall (for the unrestricted fund) to \$1,427,402 with an additional \$20,544,783 in our unassigned balance fund. Our projected budget for 2023-24 shows a surplus of \$14,031,251!

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