

SF DCCC Questionnaire: Parts I & III
Li Miao Lovett, Candidate for Board of Education

PART I: GENERAL QUESTIONS

Why are you committed to serving on the School Board? What stake do you have in decisions made at the School Board (e.g. parent, student, educator, etc.)?

Our public schools bring us closer to a vision of an inclusive, diverse society with opportunities for all. I grew up in Chinatown but felt isolated from other communities in SF until I came back to work in the Bayview, Mission and other neighborhoods. I got my degree at Stanford in 1990, where I developed my passion for public service. During that time, I learned about politics from working with an alliance of ethnic groups to seek demands for change from the administration. That's the foundation for my twenty years working with students, starting and running programs in public education.

I am a public school parent interested in addressing needs across our diverse city. As an immigrant, I've seen this city open doors for many families like mine; our young people today deserve no less. I am concerned about the growing divide between rich and poor; our public schools give students the opportunities their parents did not have, and our educators do the hard work of supporting their academic growth, and just as critically, social and emotional development. I am invested in shaping priorities that will lift up all our students.

Please describe your contributions to the Democratic Party and/or increasing civic engagement in the democratic process at the local, state and or/national level in the recent years.

As an elected ADEM delegate, I've worked with people in both AD 19 and 17 to advocate for single payer health care locally and in Sacramento; meet with legislators and form a new coalition to support affordable housing and infrastructure; organize meetings and a town hall to engage the public. I have been knocking on doors and phone banking for the Democratic Party for almost two decades. This spring I organized volunteers in my district for the Prop C campaign, whose passage is a credit to grassroots engagement despite the large sums spent against the childcare measure.

As an AFT 2121 leader I advocated for Prop W with our supervisors, and worked with community groups to promote Free City once these funds were committed. During the accreditation crisis that nearly shut down City College, I led the media and communications work, reaching out regularly to reporters. I also worked on engaging with supervisors, state legislators and the City Attorney's office on legislative, legal and fiscal developments to defend the college at the local and state levels.

Are there any other civic causes or organizations that you are involved with? Please describe.

Since 2001 I have written about environmental policy and activism. In 2013 I began working on a radio documentary to cover the health impacts of a World War II-era pesticide on children in farmworking communities. Chlorpyrifos is toxic to the developing brain and has profound effects on learning and memory in children. I found local activists in Tulare County willing to talk about risks to farmworkers and their children, and their advocacy efforts. I was able to do in-depth reporting on the Central Coast, working with teachers, students, and the principal of a Salinas school where air monitoring for pesticides was being conducted. I found the U.S. EPA unwilling to answer my detailed questions. I discovered documents on industry studies using human subjects without proper consent, and found growing evidence against the agriculture use of chlorpyrifos.

I produced this report in 2014, even though the mainstream media had stopped paying attention to languishing court cases. In 2015 the Obama administration moved to ban agricultural use of chlorpyrifos—until Trump came along. Just last week, an appeals court challenged Trump’s EPA and ordered Dow Chemical to stop selling chlorpyrifos in the U.S., a historic decision after a decades-long fight.

Please summarize your qualifications and experience for the office you are seeking.

I’ve worked in public education for two decades. In the nineties I started a mentoring program in two Bayview schools and ran an after-school and Beacon program in the Mission. As an academic counselor, I’ve supported thousands of students on their college paths. Most recently, I worked with the entire senior class from two SFUSD high schools enrolled in CCSF’s Early College. As mentioned, I worked on the front lines as an AFT 2121 leader to defend City College’s accreditation and advocate for Free City.

Working on the AFT 2121 contract negotiations team, I analyzed district enrollment projections and proposals for hiring conditions, employee and management roles, and faculty pay within a \$200 million (unrestricted) annual budget. Our team made the case for raising salaries and improving equity for workers after nearly a decade of declining wages. This was a protracted contract campaign settled after declaring impasse and going through factfinding. This role has given me great insight into the needs and challenges of allocating resources to fully support educators and students within the scope of SFUSD’s budget.

Please list any organizations or elected officials who have endorsed you. (You may attach a list and exceed the word count limit).

United Educators of San Francisco (UESF)

Phil Ting, CA Assemblymember *

Aaron Peskin, SF Supervisor D3*
Norman Yee, SF Supervisor D7*
Eric Mar, former Supervisor D1*

David Campos, Chair, SF Democratic Party*
Frances Hsieh, DCCC member*
Jen Low, DCCC member*
Kelly Groth, DCCC member*

Brigitte Davila, president, CCSF Board of Trustees*
John Rizzo, CCSF Trustee*
Thea Selby, CCSF Trustee*

*Titles for identification purposes only

** Other endorsements by SF supervisors, BOE commissioners, Democratic clubs, labor groups, and organizations awaiting confirmation.

[If you are elected, what are your top concerns? How would you address these concerns?](#)

Achievement gap: These disparities are most evident with African American and Latino students, among other groups struggling with poverty, discrimination, and systemic barriers. Teachers need adequate resources to create engaging curriculum. We should train all educators on culturally relevant teaching methods and recruit educators from the communities they serve. I plan to work with DCYF, OEWD, and other agencies on expanding youth-supporting programs, especially through the new and existing Beacon Centers; ramp up social-emotional learning strategies for secondary schools; broaden the reach of high school CTE academies; address income inequality through jobs training for parents; connect students and families with social services in a systematic way; and design instructional settings that help every student feel capable in a classroom setting.

Educator retention: The primary reason that teachers, paras, and other staff are leaving SFUSD is the affordability crisis. Teachers' salaries are still behind that of many CA districts. I'd want to ensure that pay is above the state average and factors in local affordability (AMI). I plan to examine trends in growth or decline of administrative, certificated and classified positions over time. I want to support new teachers with an effective mentoring system, also by minimizing bureaucracy and improving technology platforms.

[The California Democratic Party Platform mentions building health, livable, and sustainable communities, what does this mean to you?](#)

I support communities that are inclusive and diverse, where we take care of one another, especially the most vulnerable. Our dwellings should be affordable for people at all income levels, from college graduates to the retired. Our neighborhoods should be safe from environmental pollution and hazards. In an ideal world, we would not have a homeless crisis

propelled by market forces and a history of housing disinvestment. But given the realities, we need to extend compassion to those on the streets through creative, comprehensive solutions and prevent more displacement, especially for families.

Here is how I envision our communities in the context of serving our youth and families as school board commissioner: Through the expanded Beacon initiative (\$50 million), we can maximize use of our public spaces like school buildings to serve as community centers in the evenings and on weekends. SFUSD's community schools framework can be taken to the next level, focused on critical resources for neighborhoods, cultural programming, health education, internships and summer job opportunities, support for children of working parents and those with special needs, as well as activities for toddlers through seniors.

Would you support the idea of school districts using local accountability plans to grant funds to reach students with the greatest needs for whom they are most needed? Why or why not?

Yes. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was enacted in 2013-14 when my son entered kindergarten at Alamo. Through the LCAP process, this has streamlined the allocation of supplemental funds to school districts, and boosted support for low-income and disadvantaged students. I support these changes and want to refine the process, especially in SFUSD where you see a diverse range of needs.

As a plan crafted by many stakeholders, LCAP provides a well-rounded picture of what students need to thrive in school. But it may not hit hard enough at identifying the ways that certain policies like Restorative Practices have been inadequately implemented, or addressing the instability in schools due to teacher retention challenges. Identifying trends in loss of personnel by school site may be more critical than lauding the allocation of dollars to implementation and delivery of various programs. For example, the 12% 'actual' increase in teacher retention gives me little confidence in the data when you don't know where the losses are taking place – and what the previous or multi-year average retention rate has been. I support greater clarity in presenting data so that we can make informed decisions about allocating funds in the future.

PART III: SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS ON ISSUES

1) What programs or initiatives would you undertake to address the educational disparities for SFUSD students?

I have volunteered for several years and student taught in SFUSD classrooms. This is a four-pronged approach adapted from findings of the California Federation of Teachers.

- I support the recruitment and retention of teachers of color through programs that assist them in attaining the credential and giving them resources for affordable housing, as well as PD and mentoring in the high-needs schools where they may serve.

- Provide cultural competency training to all teachers. These efforts should foster a school culture where we can build trust to have real conversations about race and social injustices.
- Strengthen the partnerships being developed between trade and industry groups with SFUSD and City College to train young people from underrepresented communities. I would extend this to STEM programs, based on my experience as a counselor dedicated to these programs and my work on the steering committee with industry partners. Let's magnify those gems which give young people the tools to succeed. Programs like Next Gene Girls, which serves Black and Latina girls with science internships, can be introduced and expanded.
- Address school discipline practices; per my response in the next question, we need a robust system of case management and resources for students and families so that behavioral issues are handled as *symptoms* of the root problems that we must work with the community to tackle.

2) What would be your budget priorities for the School District?

- Training and resources for an engaged, supportive classroom:
Upgrade teaching texts and materials aligned with the new curriculum. Ensure that educators have training and resources on how to utilize culturally relevant teaching methods, create group dynamics that foster learning, and provide implicit bias and sensitivity training.
- Educator salaries and retention:
SFUSD continues to lose experienced educators at a tremendous rate and fails to attract new teachers and paras due to the affordability crisis. Here is my approach:
 - Raise salaries so that mid-career teachers can make wages at AMI (currently \$82,900) in the next contract cycle. Provide training stipends for teachers low on the salary schedule.
 - Paraprofessional pay is a critical priority, since paras typically work 6 hours or less for much lower wages than even ECE teachers. They play crucial roles in serving special ed students; their support in the classroom makes it possible for all students to learn.
- Homeless students support:
One in every 25 students is homeless, and more than half are English language learners. With the passage of Commissioner Matt Haney's resolution last fall to bolster tracking and services for homeless students in alignment with federal policy, money will be allocated toward transportation and other resources. I will ensure that protocols are in place, because we need specific actions to carry out resolutions.

3) Do you believe that SFUSD's school assignment system needs reform? If not, why? If so, how would you change it?

As a public school parent, I spent hours poring over SFUSD's demographic data and maps in their Student Assignment reports as I was keenly interested in seeing the distributions of requested choices and assignments by ethnic group (and dismayed to see lack of diversity in many schools). As we can see from recent reports, the diversity challenge has not been addressed. We've seen increased numbers of schools with >60% of any ethnic group, as well as percentage increases at these schools. Putting area attendance over CTIP 1 as the priority for enrollment would slightly decrease diversity, while increasing the achievement gap. This is not the solution.

I think one possible approach to revamping the enrollment system is to divide the city into 3 to 5 large zones, which demographers have modeled based on Berkeley Unified School District's system. These would capture the socioeconomic diversity beyond local residential patterns, as you see in some of our supervisorial districts, while diminishing the distances some families would travel. Here's the big change: families would only be able to apply to schools within their zones. CTIP 1 would still be a top priority within each zone, but low-income families have the option of submitting financial statements that would trump their CTIP area.

4) What is your belief on Common Core Standards? In recent years, there has been controversy that the new methodology is placing some students at a disadvantage for high achievement and college preparation. How would you address this concern?

We need to support new strategies for teaching and learning. Common Core is designed to orient students toward critical thinking, hands-on learning and problem solving. In high school, students have different options for getting through the college-prep math classes. That's not the real issue. I have worked with many students who came *back* to City College with a BS/BA degree – but lacked real experience to get jobs. I would like to hold public forums to give parents a better understanding around the 21st century skills that students need.

The concern is more focused on the math curriculum than language arts. I've seen my son's workbooks over the last five years and reviewed the high school curriculum binders on Common Core math. As a parent who has been in a teacher training program myself, I see the need for more professional development (PD) and resources for teachers.

I want to address concerns about the standardized testing connected to Common Core. When I took the beta version of the "Smarter Balanced" test for 3rd graders a few years back, it appeared to be a leveled version of the SAT! My chief concern is that the new state assessments could exacerbate the achievement gap for poor students who've had less access to technology and for those who don't do well on standardized tests. We should give teachers more time for the district assessments that do help students in math, reading, and writing, not these large-scale tests.

5) What do you think are the factors attributing to the teacher shortage in SFUSD? How would you address this?

The primary reason that teachers are leaving SFUSD is the affordability crisis. Teachers cannot afford to live in San Francisco if renting an apartment costs more than the take-home pay for new teachers. While it's great news that Prop G has passed, teachers' salaries are still behind that of many CA districts. I'd want to ensure that pay is above the state median in the next two contract cycles. However, we have much more work to do. New York's per pupil spending is twice that of California's—yet our budget rivals that of industrialized countries. I want to work with other school boards around the state and key legislators to push for new funding sources that give our public schools what our students need.

The district needs to attract new teachers. I know first-hand how demanding the credential program is. SFUSD can expand its Pathway to Teaching program for aspiring middle and high school teachers. This is a tremendous opportunity for recruiting quality teachers, by allowing interns to earn a competitive wage while student teaching in SFUSD classrooms.

Educators face challenging conditions in the classroom. Our teachers and staff do not shirk from these challenges; they rise to the occasion daily to work with our students. Yet they don't have enough paras in the classroom, support from administrators, and they even have to pay to take maternity leave. These are conditions I want to address through enforcing staff ratios and policy changes.

6) What is your perspective about charter schools and their role in San Francisco? How would you advocate differently than SFUSD's current policies?

A concerted expansion by for-profit charter corporations has been documented nationwide. It's not about serving our neediest kids and communities. Using digital instruction to replace or reduce the teaching staff does a disservice to these students. In fact, it neglects high-needs students who need caring adults in their lives. Charter schools need to be scrutinized on policies excluding special needs and at-risk students, as well as their practices in teacher hiring, due process, and contracts. The passage of AB406 gives us a clear signal that for profits do not belong in education.

The intentions of nonprofit charters can also be suspect, especially when bankrolled by billionaires. Innovate has conducted a campaign to criticize SFUSD on outcomes for its Black students, while drumming up support in the Black community using practices that NAACP education chair Juan Vasquez Heilig calls "astroturfing." I do not see data indicating that they will serve SFUSD students any better. The main goal of Innovate is to build more charter schools. In June the school board unanimously denied their application for a new school in the Bayview. I support a moratorium on opening new charter schools in SF. We can maintain and improve upon the schools we have, and create deeper engagement with families from disenfranchised communities.

7) Do you support the Safe and Supportive Schools Policy at SFUSD? How would you further these goals as a School Board member?

I support the Safe and Supportive Schools Policy and its proper implementation. I think that board members should have oversight and work with the superintendent to ensure that personnel and resources are appropriately allocated, systems are in place for delivery of services and course correction where protocols aren't working. I first learned about the policy as a parent of an entering kindergartner, also from volunteering at Mission High as I made preparations toward a teaching credential program.

What's on paper hasn't been implemented systematically at the school sites, so turning policy into practice should be a shared responsibility of the board, administration, and school site personnel. What we've seen, however, is that protocols aren't in place to make the "Tiered Behavioral Discipline Matrix" effective. We need to work with central office to provide PD using role playing and discussion of case studies and incident response. On the latter, we can adapt models from first responder training on critical, high stress situations – but with a student-centered equity framework. And we need to support school site administrators, teachers, and staff so that there is case management and follow-up for students. Again, we can look to effective models in other fields where the highest risk students are identified early in the school year for focused interventions such as mentoring, counseling, and social services.

8) What role do you feel the Board of Education should play in sexual harassment and assault cases involving students? If elected, how will you address this concern?

Whether these cases involve SFUSD employees or students, the board has a role in ensuring that our protocols protect students under Title IX. Although new light has been shed on sexual assault nationwide, we need to create local and cultural norms and conditions that allow victims to feel safe to report. Here is the district's Title IX policy, which provides a coordinator's contact but very little information about school site protocols -- <http://www.sfusd.edu/en/assets/sfusdstaff/Equity/2016%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Notice.pdf>. I'd want the board to create a task force working with schools to ensure that a) health centers, counselors, learning specialists, athletic staff and others are trained on protocols, b) students feel safe to speak up, and c) reports are vetted, communicated through the right channels, and acted upon.

9) There is a perception that parent-led fundraising has widened the educational inequality gap among schools. What are your thoughts on this issue and how would you address distribution of school funds districtwide?

Parent fundraising does lead to significant inequities. One possible strategy is to create school-to-school partnerships involving exchange of ideas, joint programming, technical assistance and fundraising to boost less resourced schools in a spirit of collaboration. I would be interested in

conducting a study of schools across a range of income sectors to identify the levels of enrichment activities, teacher support and extra resources available based on the distribution of LCFF funding, PEEF monies going to sports, libraries, arts & music, and PTA fundraising. From this assessment, it may be possible to rebalance the distribution of LCFF funding in the Local Control and Accountability Plan.

10) What role do you believe SFUSD should play in the City's housing crisis? How would you address the needs of homeless or underhoused students and their families?

We can build more housing for teachers and paras on surplus property, modeled on the project being developed at the Frances Scott Key annex not far from where I live. There are additional sites being considered in the Inner Sunset, Bayview, and Mission Bay. I'd want to make sure that developers are chosen based on experience with building affordable housing, that transportation needs and impacts are taken into account, and that stakeholders are consulted each step of the way: educators and UESF, affordable housing advocates, community groups and neighbors.

The city and district can do so much more to support thousands of other teachers and paras. Some options include: broadening the reach of Teacher Next Door, encouraging philanthropic initiatives to provide teacher support toward home ownership, structuring educator loans for TICs (tenancies in common) which tend to be priced lower than market rate, exploring cooperative housing options for educators, and acquiring properties for rentals to teachers with families.

11) Beyond reforming school assignment program, what do you see as the greatest barriers or major issues for families and youth getting to school safely while reducing traffic congestion?

Pedestrian safety is a huge concern. We do not have enough crossing guards before and after school (these are part-time jobs that provide minimal hours). I have seen parents at Hoover attempting to direct traffic on a Friday afternoon while hundreds of students are running across the street –sometimes diagonally—to catch the bus and streetcar.

To decrease traffic, school sites can develop more carpooling resources and reach out to incoming students so that these practices can take hold early on. Families can receive more education on bike and pedestrian safety.

We need Muni to run on time, and we need to educate both streetcar riders and drivers around safety at these stops. I've seen riders on the N-Judah routinely run across the road despite ongoing traffic. Our streets are congested with construction and ride hailing vehicles; can we implement a quota for drivers as New York City has recently done? Also, we need to create restrictions for out-of-town drivers who are incentivized to drive in San Francisco because it's more lucrative to come here.

