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Bayside Council of PTAs

WCCUSD Candidate Questions

Alphabetical Order Mostly

1. ***Achievement.*** There are many different kinds of students in the District in terms of achievement. To simplify things, let's say there are high-achieving, middle-achieving, and low-achieving students. How do you think the District is meeting the needs of each type of student? What changes, if any, do you think should be done to meet these needs?

I believe we can all agree that the numbers show that our district is failing to meet the needs of our students – all our students.

Our “highest achieving” students need greater challenges. Our District GATE Committee has developed a comprehensive plan to address their needs – we need to implement the plan.

Our “middle achieving” students need to be motivated to achieve beyond mediocrity. More programs need to be in place to motivate students and their families to understand how connected success in school is to success in life.

Our “low achieving” students need serious attention. They and their families need to be assessed and supported to determine the reasons for their struggle. Classrooms with “low achieving” students need additional adult support – both as aides and tutors.

2. ***Charter Schools.*** In recent years, charter school applications have not been successful in the District. Do you think charter schools have a positive or a negative role to play in WCCUSD? Do you believe the District should be more accommodating to charter school applications, should be even more scrutinizing, or should maintain the current approach?

The proliferation of charter school applications indicates to me that there is a great deal of interest in exploring a variety of new educational techniques. Each charter school brings with it a different approach. I think the opportunity to be open to new approaches is positive.

Unfortunately, the negative aspect of charter schools is that they place a drain on already strained budgets by the way they are funded. They are also, by their nature, able to be exclusive in their admissions policy and place requirements on their parents (e.g., mandatory volunteer hours) and staff that would not be permissible elsewhere.

I think our District would be best served if we could incorporate the new

techniques which the charter schools hope to utilize into our existing classrooms.

I believe the District's current approach to charter school applications should be maintained.

- 3. Equity.** Our schools are part of a society based on a significant amount of inequality, yet at the same time our schools are widely expected to reduce or eliminate the effect of the social background of students on their chances for success in life. These differences are reflected in both the individual students and in the schools in different neighborhoods. How far do you think the educational system can and should go in remedying these differences? Where do you think this District is in terms of meeting your expectations in this area? If there is a mismatch, what do you propose to do about it as a Board member?

Equity is about meeting needs. I think the educational system should look to its own strengths when attempting to "remedy the differences." I think the educational system can and should address as many of these issues – both on its own and collaboratively – as possible.

My expectations of the District are beginning to be met – particularly with respect to the increased focus on offering mental health support to our students and families.

To me the current "mismatch" is in two areas that I would propose to address:

- 1. Parent Education.** *I believe we need to institute a strong Parent Education program into our elementary schools. This program would be operated through our Adult Ed Parent Education office – and address identified parenting needs at specific schools (e.g., classes for parents dealing with teens, classes to teach parents how to help their children study, classes for single moms, classes to help your children understand and stay out of gangs, etc.) These classes could be instituted in a very short period of time and provide an almost immediate impact.*
- 2. Digital Divide.** *A big part of the differences in our neighborhoods has to do with access to technology. I would propose creating Technology Centers in our lower income neighborhoods – allowing our families there to have computer/internet access and training in*

their own neighborhoods. These centers could be housed within our elementary schools where the parents could also be taught to use technology.

- 4. *K-8.*** Most students in WCCUSD go to middle schools for 7th and 8th grade and many for 6th grade. There is currently one K-8 school (Stewart). At the instigation of a group of parents, the Board asked for an official study involving community participation to research the desirability and feasibility of using a K-8 configuration for all or some of the elementary schools in the District. This K-8 committee recommended a pilot plan for K-8 at some schools. This plan was rejected by the Board. What do you think of this plan and, generally, what do you think of the adoption of a K-8 grade configuration for some or all the elementary schools in the District?

The K-8 Committee represented an extraordinary effort by a group of very committed parents. It's very existence highlighted the need to examine our middle school offerings. I think it is imperative that we create the best possible education for our students in grades 6-8. I think before we revisit the pilot plan we need to invest our energy in creating middle schools that rival those in Orinda, Albany and Walnut Creek – the schools that our families are fleeing to.

- 5. *Middle School Improvements.*** Part of the impetus for K-8 is the idea that the District's middle schools are deficient in terms of safety and in terms of the academic program of the schools. Do you agree with this assessment? If so, what improvements do you think should be made in our middle schools?

I don't believe our middle schools are "deficient in terms of safety." I believe the safety program that is now in place serves our children well. I do believe our academic and extracurricular program needs to be dramatically improved. We need to increase music and art offerings, foreign language offerings and use of the GATE program. We also need to "raise the bar" across the board in what our expectations are of our students and families at the middle school level.

- 6. *Operating Budget.*** The determination of how much money can be added or should be subtracted from the operations budget (separate from bond/construction budget) will vary from year-to-

year, but, for any given level of funding, decisions need be made about allocating resources. What areas do you think the District should spend more on? In what areas should funding be cut? Do you think the whole process should be overhauled? For example, should we adopt a site-based budgeting system like in Oakland?

As a classroom teacher myself, I believe the District should spend as much as possible directly in the classroom – teacher salaries, supplies, textbooks, etc. Student achievement results from strong teachers – so for both recruitment and retention, salaries will always remain a priority. The least important area to me would be the “consultant” budget.

I don’t think the whole process needs to be overhauled. I think site-based budgeting brings on a whole new set of problems – creating a myriad of budgets that would have to be monitored – also at additional cost.

7. Proper Role of School Board.

- a. **The School Board is an elected body of part-time trustees who have no dedicated staff except a Counsel. It operates subject to State authority and under a Fiscal Trustee who still has a budgetary veto. It also has a Superintendent reporting to it who manages most of the business of the District. It's always possible to go too far in either the direction of micromanagement or the opposite direction of negligence. How would you characterize the proper level of involvement for the Board in the running of the District and do you think the current Board is at that level?**

I would characterize the “proper level of involvement” for the Board in the running of the District as “attentive but not intrusive”. I think Board members need to be involved enough to understand all the issues and who is responsible for them – but also respectful of the role of the professionals hired to educate our children. I think the current Board is, essentially, at that level.

- a. **The School Board often takes positions on different general education issues like State propositions. Recently the Board considered granting diplomas to students who did not pass the State-required High School Exit Exam. Would you have voted for this act of opposition to the State if you disagreed with the High School Exit Exam itself? In general, how much should the Board be involved in advocacy over education issues?**

A school board member takes an oath to uphold state law. If I had disagreed with the High School Exit Exam, I would have personally expressed that opposition (through personally joining in a lawsuit, etc.) but I would not have used my office as an act of opposition to the state.

In general, I believe it is the duty of the Board to be leaders in advocating for educational issues – they should advocate for legislation, contribute to discussion surround the Master Plan, etc. – but not violate State law.

- 8. *Role of Teachers.* One of the recent controversies in the District involved a group of mostly experienced teachers known as the "Downer 5" who were disciplined (including forcible transfers and reprimands) after they expressed their opposition to how certain changes in teaching practices were being implemented. These teaching practices involved using a much more scripted closely regulated approach overseen by District mentors. What do you think the Board should do, if anything, to ensure that teachers are not being disciplined for their opinions about policies at their schools?**

As a classroom teacher for the past 26 years, I believe all teachers have the right to their opinions about policies at their schools. I believe the UTR contract covers discipline and any grievances that would stem from discipline policies and that the contract must be followed.

- 9. Also, how much control should teachers have over how they teach in their classrooms and how much oversight should there be?**

As a teacher, I believe we do our best with as much independence as possible. We should not try to fix something that is not broken. I think "oversight" is there for feedback. The amount of "oversight" necessary is determined by how successful your outcomes are. Teachers who are struggling clearly need more support and we need to have a system that offers that support.

- 10. *Safety and Order.* Everyone would probably agree that schools should be places where everyone should be safe from physical threats and where education can proceed in a reasonably orderly fashion in the classroom, in the hallways, and throughout the school and school grounds. Do you think WCCUSD schools are safe**

and orderly? If not, what do you think should be done to make them safer and more orderly?

I think the safety programs initiated in the last year at the secondary schools have made our schools more "safe and orderly." This is a work in progress. I think instituting "Challenge Days" and supporting conflict resolution programs are an important aspect. As a teacher, I believe "safety and order" begin in the classroom. This means that we must support our teachers in their efforts at managing their classrooms and make sure that disruptive students are given the support they need to address their personal issues.

11. ***School Building Program.*** WCCUSD is in the midst of the second largest school construction program in the State. How successful do you think the program has been?

I think it has been extremely successful.

12. **Are there any changes in approach you would make for the program?**

I believe we have had a chronic problem of "over-promising" our voters. I would make sure that we had realistic expectations.

13. **Are you satisfied with the roles that have been played by the Board, the staff, the Facilities Subcommittee, and the Bond Oversight Committee?** Yes.

14. ***Uniforms.*** In the past, individual schools within the District have been allowed to adopt mandatory school uniforms. Only a few had done this. For this year, mandatory school uniforms have been extended by the Board to all elementary and middle schools in the District. Do you approve of this change, do you want a return to the previous school "opt-in" system, or do you support some modification like extending uniforms further to high schools or establishing a school "opt-out" procedure?

From what I have seen by visiting many school sites and attending the uniform sales, the overall reaction to the policy has been extremely positive. The program will be reviewed in six months when there will be an opportunity to see if it has been effective and make any modifications. Meanwhile, the individual "opt-out" provision accommodates each family's individual needs.

Additional Issue.