

Marguerite Meade

Bayside Council of PTAs

WCCUSD Candidate Questions

RESPONSES OF MARGUERITE MEADE CANDIDATE FOR THE WCCUSD BOARD

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?

One of the reasons that I am running for the School Board is because I do not think the needs of students are being met. In addition to regular class work, high achieving students should be able to pursue individual projects, with teacher oversight, at an advanced level. Middle achieving students should be encouraged to challenge themselves. Low achieving students should receive intervention to get them to grade level work. What students of all levels need are teachers who recognize their different skill levels. Teachers are trained to reach students of all levels in their classes but have not been able to do so because the District has required them to follow a set formula without regard to the needs of their students. This needs to change.

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?

Charter school applications should be carefully scrutinized for several reasons. First, charter schools take District money that would otherwise be used for District schools. Second, charter schools are selective in terms of which students can attend. Charter schools operate more like private schools in that there is an application process and only certain students are chosen to attend. Students living within blocks of a charter school might be unable to attend because they were not selected.

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?

The best the WCCUSD or any school district can do is prepare all students, regardless of their background, for the responsibilities of adulthood. Inequalities can be minimized or erased through education. Education provides opportunity.

4. 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?

We already have one K-8 school in our District (Stewart) so the concept of K-8's is not without precedent. I am open to the idea of more K-8 schools in our District, however, we need more data to determine the fiscal impact on the District, the impact of K-8's on feeder schools and the impact on educational quality.

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?

In general, the middle schools seem safe. I can only speak from my experience with Portola Middle School. My daughter attended Portola in the 7th and 8th grade. I felt that my daughter was safe, however, there was disruptive conduct on the campus. I feel that the disruptive conduct was caused by students experiencing some freedom in going to different classrooms during the day for the first time, and who were not as mature as adults would like. Disruptive conduct also was caused by some students who try to solve disagreements with physical force. The District discipline rules were not uniformly enforced, and should have been, for the protection of the vast majority of other students who do not engage in such behavior.

Many of the students in middle school seemed to thrive because of the availability of elective classes, such as music, art and drama. Advanced classes are available to all students and were challenging.

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?

The Board should engage in more long-term fiscal planning so that the District is not always on the brink of a financial crisis of one kind or another. Cutting programs such as music, art and organized sports is not an acceptable way to allocate resources. Our District is losing students to private and out-of-district schools, which affects the District's bottom line, and cutting basic programs will only cause more students to leave our District.

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?
- b. 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. The proper role of the School Board is to ensure that the District spends its money in the most efficient and equitable manner possible. Board members must remember that they serve at the will of the community and that part of their job is to be responsive to the wants and needs of community. Board members should carefully oversee the work of the Superintendent and not just provide unfettered approval.

b. The exit exam is required by California law and Board members should ensure that students receive an education that prepares them for this exam. Although I am personally opposed to the exit exam, it does not help our students to give them diplomas if they do not pass the exam, when all other high schools in California require passing the exit exam. However, it should be noted that there are students who fail the test-not because they don't know the material-but because English is their second language. There are quite a number of students in our District for whom English is a second language.

Board members should advocate for new or different regulations if they will help the students in our District.

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

9.

I do not have enough information to comment specifically on what happened at Downer, however, I can comment on the issues raised. Teachers should be consulted about changes in teaching practices before they are implemented and should be able to freely voice their opinions regarding the changes. Teachers should not be disciplined for expressing opinions regarding teaching practices. Retaliating against any teacher for merely expressing opinions should not be tolerated.

One of my biggest concerns about our District is that teachers are allowed to use their experience and education to make decisions about how to teach in their classrooms. Of course, oversight is necessary to make sure that teachers are competent and doing their job, but teachers—not District administrators--need to determine how best to present material to their students.

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?

District schools are generally safe for students. However, there are a number of disciplinary problems which affect students who are ready and eager to learn. Disruptive conduct by students should not be tolerated. The District has disciplinary rules, but they are often not enforced. Parents need to be held accountable for the conduct of their children. In addition, the root cause of disorderly conduct needs to be addressed. Offering education for students of all levels, such as vocational classes, intervention, music, art and options for high achievers, will allow all students to feel invested in their school and less discipline problems will occur.

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? Are there any changes in approach you would make for the program? Are you satisfied with the roles that have been played by the Board, the staff, the Facilities Subcommittee, and the Bond Oversight Committee?

Many of the schools in our District are outdated and unsafe and there is no question that new buildings are needed. New schools are a source of pride for members of the community and exciting for students. There have been cost overruns and delays, however, that is not unusual for any large building project. My concern is that some of the schools that most need to be rebuilt may not be because they will not be enough bond money. I am concerned about how the schools were prioritized in terms of which were built first. It seems logical to rebuild the schools in the worst condition first.

12. *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?

I do not support a District-wide policy requiring students to wear uniforms. If, in a particular school, the parents, teachers and staff overwhelmingly agree that uniforms is something that they want for their students, then adopting a uniform policy is appropriate. However, because our schools are public, parents must always be able to opt-out of the policy.

13. **Additional Issue.** There are many more issues for this District, but we need to stop somewhere. Please address one question that you feel was left out that you think is important.

Return to charley@cowens.net by September 23d.