

# **Charles Ramsey**

# 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?

Our school district has made significant progress during the last five years in making gains on the Academic Progress Index. No longer do we have schools at or below 500 on the API. In addition, we have expanded the number of programs that assist GATE Students.

With our continuing effort to improve secondary school scores the district has taken the initiative to expand the number of after school programs and create more rewarding programs by not having any program cuts or teacher layoffs. Some important changes include expanding class size reduction for fourth grade, adding more educational programs at the middle school and engaging our teachers in expanded professional development. These are some key components to continuing our movement upward in improving student achievement.

Finally, the implementation of a restructured safety plan for our high schools will hopefully result in an increased emphasis on academics by the site administrators rather than constantly having to deal with disruptions during the school day.

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?

Although, I have voted for Charter Schools in the past, I have some reservations about their effectiveness. However, I believe that Charter Schools can provide some additional information about the needs for students and what motivates parents to give Charter Schools a chance for their children.

Our district has a responsibility to scrutinize all Charter schools application. Education is a serious business and we cannot allow less than stellar applications to pass muster and potentially put our children in harms way.

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 an overused term in our society. The reality is that social-economic status plays a large role in how a student performs in the classroom. The educational system should look to partner with outside agencies that have the training and experience to handle needs that are not germane to student teaching and learning. Too often, school board members and educators look to solve a person's problems, but statistics demonstrate that when a school district focuses on its main mission, it has a better chance of making a difference. Notwithstanding these realities, it is important that we understand the needs of families and do our very best to help them so they can reach their potential.

- 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?**

I am glad that the board has moved forward to implement a plan to improve its middle schools. The reality is that families flee our district at the secondary level because we have not met their expectations with respect to our middle school programs and many fear that our middle schools are unsafe. Until we convince the community that we have high level middle schools, they will flee our district. A change in grade level configuration will not change this reality.

- 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?**

No I do not agree with this assessment. I believe we have some good, but not great middle schools, but for the most part students can receive a solid education. We have too many families who are unwilling to give our middle schools a chance. So our responsibility is to expand the number of course offerings and do more comprehensive outreach to the parent community to ensure that they feel comfortable with our middle school curriculum as well as feel that the campus is a safe and secure place to send their child.

- 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?**

No. we do not need a site-based budgeting system for our schools. We have a responsibility to ensure a full funding system for all of our schools. Leaving budget decisions to the site will only result in an inequitable system. Further, if a school makes mistakes with their budget, other schools will suffer because we must ensure that all students receive an equal and fair education. In California, we do not have enough funding for any program. I would not advocate for cuts to any areas. We need more money for the classroom, but we have a small downtown administration and it hurts the support needed to make the classroom thrive in these trying times.

## **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?**

As a long-term board member, I feel the current board has a proper level of involvement in the decisions that affect the operations of the district. We all make personal choices, we set policy for the educational program, we oversee and make decisions that support technology in the classroom and at the central office. We also make decisions about the use of the bond money and how it is allocated for the schools. I am happy that we have a state trustee, however, I am not happy that we still have to pay on the debt. We have paid the entire principal on the loan so now having to pay the interest on the principal is unfair. However, we will continue to pay as required under state law. Even with all of the difficulty in making the annual debt payments, the school district has balanced its budget for the last 14 years.

- 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?**

I voted against defying the state by granting high school diplomas to those who had not met state requirements. In addition, I voted against

joining the lawsuit to sue the Department of Education in the case alleging that the statute violated the State Constitution. In the end, the state ruled that the statute was constitutional and thus the exit exam still is valid and a requirement for students to receive a high school diploma.

School boards should always advocate and promote on issues that impact their ability to provide educational excellence.

- 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? Teachers have the right to file grievances if they feel that they are being silenced for their opinions about curriculum. The UTR Collective bargaining agreement must be respected. As an attorney, I would disapprove of any efforts to silence classroom teachers who have feelings about what they are being asked to teach our students in the classroom.**

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

Principals have an obligation to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher. However, a teacher should not feel that someone is being overly controlling in how they deliver the instructional material. Principals must use common sense when they evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher. Further, we do have veteran teachers who serve as interns. These retired teachers, who work through Cal State East Bay, are effective advocates, who working closely with principals can make a big difference in helping improve classroom instruction.

- 9. *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?**

In the past our schools suffered from the reality that we had serious behavior problems at our secondary schools. This past year, we restructured our school safety program in response to parent complaints. I strongly believe this was the right decision to contract directly with local law enforcement agencies to improve campus safety. Further, we have initiated a new school based mental health program to provide students with outlets in dealing with their problems.

This past year, I co-founded the "Ivy League Connection" program that

sends deserving students to summer enrichment programs at some of our top universities. These programs offer studies in leadership and conflict resolution. Many of the students who participated in the program are currently working with school counselors on "pilot projects" to have them go to elementary schools and make presentations to younger students on how to avoid conflicts.

10. **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?** The program has been very successful. With a skeleton staff, we have successfully built 17 elementary schools and now are in the process of doing another elementary school and just recently started work on El Cerrito High School. By the end of the year, we will continue our program and start construction on Pinole Middle School and Helms Middle School.

**Are there any changes in approach you would make for the program?** The only change I would make is to make sure that we address the entire site needs for the school. In the past, we failed to include landscaping and kitchens, which upset parents and the community. We no longer have that problem and we now have the appropriate scope for each school.

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

11. **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?**

No. I am glad that we have implemented a mandatory school uniform policy. Parents, students, staff and the community have expressed satisfaction with the policy. For those families who do not desire to have their child wear uniforms, they still have the "opt-out" option. This is a win-win situation.

**Additional Issue.** There are many more issues for this District, but we need to stop somewhere.

The issue that many people who run for the school board are unaware of is the time commitment necessary to perform the job. It is very time consuming and one that requires a lot of time with those in the community. Further, with the need to renew the parcel tax in two years, future board members will have to spend a great many hours explaining why the parcel tax is needed and must be reauthorized.