



A California Non-Profit PAC

**PDA-CA CANDIDATE
QUESTIONNAIRE for the
SAN FRANCISCO NOV. 2020
SCHOOL BOARD RACE**

NAME OF CANDIDATE: Matt Alexander

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Date of the Election : November 3, 2020

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PDA-CA is non-profit state political action committee formed in 2018 by grassroots progressives active in Progressive Democrats of America (PDA) in California. The primary objective of PDA-CA is to identify highly progressive Democratic Candidates within the state for statewide offices including, but not limited to, Governor, State Assembly and State Senate, and for offices at the county and municipal levels. Candidates may be invited to apply for the Endorsement of PDA-CA. If that occurs, the candidate may enjoy grassroots help from the activists within PDA-CA to include walking precincts, phone banking and other activities, to assist that candidate to win election to the office sought.

We ask that the candidate observe the format of this questionnaire, and have it back to the requestor in PDF format by the time designated in the cover letter, in order to be eligible for endorsement.

NOTICE: YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WILL BE PUBLISHED ON THE PDA-CA WEBSITE AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC VIEWING AND USE.

1. How will you work to ensure underserved or impoverished children in SF have access to computers and wifi as well as quality education during COVID-19, whether learning from home or in school with social distancing?

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated opportunity gaps that already existed within SFUSD. I have 20 years of experience working in San Francisco public schools, including a decade as a teacher and a decade as a high school principal. During that time, there has been a consistent pattern of SFUSD under-serving Black students, Latinx students, Pacific Islander students, Native/Indigenous students, students with learning differences, as well as Chinese and Filipino immigrant youth. I know what it takes to close these opportunity gaps: When I was principal of June Jordan School for Equity, our student body was nearly all students of color, and 80% of Black and Latinx students graduated in four years (compared to 50% district-wide) and their college eligibility rates were double those of SFUSD as a whole.

Since March, SFUSD has successfully provided computers to most families who did not have them. However, inconsistent wifi access, crowded housing conditions, and a lack of child care make remote learning very challenging for students from low-income families. It's important to follow public safety guidelines, and at the same time, we simply must find in-person solutions for younger children, students with special needs, and students in SROs and other overcrowded living situations--or we are abandoning them to a year without learning. The City's Department of Public Health has approved the learning hubs as a starting point, but they will only serve a few thousand children. SFUSD should support the development of equitable in-person cohorts of children and work with public health officials to ensure that they are implemented safely.

In the longer term, specific action steps to address opportunity gaps district-wide include:

- Increasing the percentage of resources spent in classrooms and schools, and targeting resources more intensively toward schools serving marginalized students
- Paying educators adequately so they can afford to stay in San Francisco and build expertise and community relationships
- Hiring more Black and Brown educators, and more educators from San Francisco
- Training all educators in antiracist and trauma-informed practices
- Creating Community Schools with wrap-around mental and physical health and social services
- Encouraging SFUSD to take a leadership role in addressing the housing crisis that has been driving Black and Brown families out of the City

2. What is your position on police officers on school grounds and/or inside school buildings? Can you imagine student participation in the creation of new rules for the safety of all and can you see them playing a role in helping others follow them?

In general, law enforcement should only enter SFUSD schools for real emergencies (e.g., active shooter or other immediate danger to life). In the few non-emergency cases where law

enforcement may be needed, I agree with the language in the new Board policy passed June 23: “In the event law enforcement is needed on school grounds, interactions will be limited as much as possible to only adult staff and scheduled before or after school, with no or as few children as possible present, and if students are involved, law enforcement will only be involved after parents/caregivers and the Public Defender's office are notified.”

I know student participation in the creation of safety rules is possible because I led a school where we did it. When I was principal of June Jordan School for Equity, we prioritized restorative practices and a trauma-informed approach to student discipline, and a key component was student leadership. For example, we had four school-wide values--Respect, Integrity, Courage, and Humility (“RICH”)--and each year, students led a process of interpreting these values and teaching their peers what daily classroom and hallway interactions should look like. We trained students to run peer mediations, so students could resolve conflicts themselves before they escalated. We supported students to facilitate restorative circles to discuss issues that impacted a whole class or grade level. I know first-hand how effective these approaches are in creating a positive school climate and establishing a safe environment where students can focus on learning.

On the School Board, I will prioritize implementing student-led restorative practices like these district-wide: For the sake of all our students, and especially our Black and Brown students, we must make these proven approaches the norm rather than the exception.

3. What will you do as a Board Member to help students who are homeless and hungry?

I have two decades of experience working with low-income families as a teacher and principal in the San Francisco public schools, so I understand how hunger and a lack of stable housing make it incredibly difficult for young people to learn.

There are approximately 2000 homeless students in SFUSD, and the district has been trying for years to improve services to these youth and their families, including developing the Stay Over Program at Buena Vista Horace Mann, which is a model that could be expanded. The economic crisis wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased hunger among SFUSD families, and we should continue our food distributions and make them available with as few eligibility requirements as possible. Unhoused and hungry students also need more social-emotional supports, and I will fight for increased funding for Wellness services and establishing Community Schools coordinators at every school.

In the longer term, we need to move from a reactive approach to addressing the root cause of homelessness among SFUSD students, which is that housing is too expensive. SFUSD is a powerful civic institution and the second-largest landowner in the city. We should push the City to increase eviction prohibitions and rental subsidies. And we must address the fact that 70% of the housing built in recent years has been priced for people making over \$100,000 a year, and

that we allow 30,000 housing units to sit empty as investment properties. We should ask the City to purchase hotels and apartment buildings and also offer SFUSD land to begin to create a system of social housing. If we want our students and their families--not to mention our educators--to be able to live in San Francisco, SFUSD must engage more actively to make dignified housing affordable to all.

4. How can you see incorporating the principles of the Green New Deal into school learning and activities?

Five years ago, when I was principal at June Jordan School for Equity, I supported our teaching staff to develop and implement a school-wide, interdisciplinary, project-based unit on climate change. This was the first time all classrooms in the school had engaged in studying the same topic at the same time, and we did it because we knew that climate justice was the biggest collective challenge facing our society--and that we needed the youth to lead us all to a better future.

As the Green New Deal becomes more popular nationally, I believe San Francisco needs to live up to its progressive values and create a local model of a Green New Deal, including a more rapid transition to carbon neutrality (the current goal of 2050 is too slow), coupled with guaranteed housing, jobs, health care, and basic income. We live in one of the wealthiest cities on the planet, and we have the resources to show the nation and the world what a better future could look like. The City government needs to lead on this but SFUSD can play a key role as a large public institution, employer, and landowner. As a first step in this process, I'm proposing a district-wide interdisciplinary unit of study culminating in a Green New Deal summit, where SFUSD students of all ages would present their collective vision for a San Francisco Green New Deal.

Thank you for participating--Shirley Golub, PDA-CA Chair, SF Chapter