

Central Valley Progressive Political Action Committee
Endorsement Questionnaire for FUSD School Board Candidates

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Name of Campaign Committee **The Committee to Elect Terri Edwards for FUSD
Trustee Area 7-2018**
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Date **8-29-18**

Please limit your responses to no more than 300 words per question.

1. Educational outcomes in the Fresno Unified School District are significantly impacted by poverty, segregation, and school funding inequities. As a school board member, how will you combat these issues to improve public education in Fresno Unified?

As a board member, addressing these inequities would require using an equity & access lens. Unfortunately, societal concerns like poverty and segregation are often addressed by implementing programmatic changes across the board based on making all things equal. I would argue that any services that we provide our students and schools in Fresno Unified should be based on their specific inequities and needs that exist at that particular school. Each school would be analyzed by their existing student demographic data, including social-emotional data (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) with a needs assessment. I would also create stronger partnerships between community resources and our schools.

An example of how Fresno Unified is addressing this is the African American Academic Acceleration Academy which is funded to focus on academic excellence of this particular subgroup. For the first time, we now have an academic blueprint that serves as a long-term plan to strategically implement programming for our African American student population. We are in partnership with community groups, such as Fresno Street Saints, to ensure our success in the community. As the leader of the FUSD African American Network Group and administrator of Parent University, I have coordinated the annual family conference and have been afforded the opportunity to participate on the District Work Team for our students.

2. Recent studies conducted by the non-profit organization In the Public Interest have shown that the unrestricted growth of charter schools takes away resources from public schools. As a school board member, what are your solutions to curb charter expansion within Fresno Unified?

To curb charter expansion, we need internal accountability-looking within ourselves as district leaders to determine how we improve the academic and personal lives of our students and families. I will ensure that all charter schools are abiding by the statutes and policies that exist for charters. When we consider our demographic and educational landscape in Fresno Unified, we cannot ignore the facts (e.g., achievement and behavior gaps, a graduation rate of 82%, etc.). While there have been some improvements and shifts to decrease inequities, as a school system we need to continue to ensure that we are held accountable to our students and their families. In this current climate of divisiveness, this is a time for mutual understanding and partnership. We're at a critical time in Fresno Unified where we are being challenged to be better. As a former teacher and principal, I understand the challenges that face our students. However, I also understand that pressure and challenge stimulates growth. In my experiences with families, I have found that we all want the same outcomes—excellent education that prepares our kids to be college and career ready.

3. Evidence-based, comprehensive sex education has been shown to decrease teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates. As a school board member, will you support the use of evidence-based sex education in Fresno Unified?

Yes, it is important to provide a comprehensive sexual health education for our students.

In fact, through one of our community partners, Fresno Unified is currently providing student curriculum (e.g., the Positive Prevention Plus and Sex Can Wait curriculum guides). Teachers are trained to provide the curriculum through lessons and topics, such as healthy relationships and peer pressure.

As we work with our students, it is critical that we as a board determine the curriculum needed to address sex education, including input from the families of the students we serve. Although comprehensive sex education is a strong preventative step, it is also important that we respond to our current pregnancy rates in Fresno and provide district interventions based on this data. Again, a blanket approach to needs at specific school sites and within specific communities is not the best approach. As a board member, I would ensure that we approach this issue with an equity and access lens, ensuring that interventions and services are appropriately administered in schools and their communities.

4. Go Public Schools Fresno is predominately funded by corporate billionaires who have significant ties to the charter school industry, and a strong history of promoting the privatization of public schools. As a school board member, what will you do to evaluate and limit the influence of such an organization on Fresno Unified?

As a former principal, I have been a strong evaluator of programs and organizations designed to influence the education of my students. I will ensure that the Fresno Unified evaluation process of charter schools is adhered to and performed with fidelity. As a school board member with oversight of charter schools, it would be my responsibility to

determine the effectiveness of academic curriculum and programs, and make decisions based on what's best for our students.

5. Despite the many positive effects they have had on funding and program development, public sector unions have come under attack. What role do you think FTA and other FUSD labor partners has in supporting the growth of students and schools in Fresno Unified?

Our labor partners play a vital role in Fresno Unified. They work with the district to ensure the equality and fair treatment of its members that enhances the working environment of all employees. As a former FTA member, I was supported and provided resources and information related to my job. I was also encouraged to pursue leadership and increase my capacity to impact change on a school-wide level. Being a part of FTA challenged me to be a stronger educator and collaborator with my other colleagues, and I strongly believe that my positive experiences with unions are representative of the majority of union members.

6. FUSD serves an ethnic student population that is nearly 90%; however, ethnic site principals comprise less than 50% of that workforce. Studies have shown academic achievement improves when students of color see people reflecting their background in leadership positions, like school principals. Will you commit to hiring policies that encourage the appointment of principals who are more representative of FUSD's student population?

As an African American administrator and former school principal in Fresno Unified, I can speak firsthand about the importance of being a reflection of the students we serve. I will absolutely commit to hiring processes and policies that prioritize school leaders representing our student populations. In fact, I had the pleasure of hiring several African American and Hispanic teachers for my primary and intermediate students. They provided the needed care and support, cultural competence, as well as a community environment that enhanced their student's social-emotional growth. A couple of those teachers took on leadership roles in their grade levels and pursued district level positions. I believe that this not only impacts student achievement but is also critical for our school communities.

7. Community based schools that offer wrap-around services, such as health clinics and social workers, have been shown to decrease the achievement gap, especially in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities like Fresno. What will you do to increase the availability of services to students and their families on campuses in Fresno?

I will continue to mobilize community partnerships that offer wrap-around services by influencing our board members to partner with and hire community organizations that support our vision and district goals. One of our district goals is that our students will graduate being career and college ready. If our students come to school with social/emotional/physical needs, we have to meet these needs. I will support initiatives that

target specific services for our most needy populations. I will continue to support wrap-around services that will increase student achievement for our students who need it the most.

8. FTA and FUSD have recently agreed to create a work team to explore a special tax with the aim of decreasing class sizes in Fresno. Would you support such a tax?

As a former Fresno Unified Kindergarten, First & Second grade teacher, as well as a district Vice Principal and Principal, I understand the importance of having smaller class sizes to meet the individual learning needs of students in a classroom. The ability to create a positive classroom environment for student learning will be impacted by smaller classroom sizes. Even as a substitute teacher, I experienced the challenges and benefits of working with students in classrooms that were overcrowded and those that had an effective teacher-to-student ratio. As a board member, I would definitely support such a tax, considering the implications on school communities, and would encourage the other board members to do so.

9. What does your dream public high school look like?

My dream public high school is a place where educational excellence is expected by its leaders and the entire staff. Titles do not matter in this school because all are respected as a part of student academic learning and feel safe to take risks in their field of expertise. Funding needs are met based on an analysis of student needs, and the families and community are involved stakeholders as part of the process.

The community is engaged and motivated to support student achievement as they feel welcomed and encouraged to participate as active members of the school community. High quality instruction and leadership is evident based on high academic achievement, high graduation rates, a wide array of postgraduate choices for students, as well as positive collaborative relationships throughout the school.

Safety is not an issue since the school staff, students and parents feel a sense of community and value their relationships.

10. What is the purpose of public education?

The purpose of public education is to provide every student with the opportunity to have competitive options for post-secondary education and careers. Ultimately, effective public education produces a society that is capable of positively impacting the communities they work and live in and, in turn, further build their social-cultural capital.

The purpose of public education is to positively impact community change and build communities that thrive.

Thank you so much for your time and energy in completing this questionnaire. Your answers will be distributed to our members prior to the September 8 endorsement meeting through the CVPPAC Website.

Please return this questionnaire by email to Mike Rhodes < mikerhodes@comcast.net >. The deadline is Sunday, September 2 at 11:59 p.m. If you have any questions, call CVPPAC president Pam Whalen at (559) 994-9390.