

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

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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?

I will strongly advocate for equity in funding and services from my position on the board. In addition, I will increase engagement with parents and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Southwest and Downtown, so that residents will have greater power to push for equity in funding and services at the board and city levels. In addition, I plan to increase hiring of school psychologists, counselors, and social workers. Students from marginalized populations are often dealing with significant stressors outside the classroom, which need to be addressed if these students are to succeed within the classroom.

One of my priorities as a school board member will be educational equity, and in particular closing the achievement gap between African-American students and English-language learners and the student population as a whole. In this regard, I plan to increase investment and support for FUSD's dual immersion language programs. Studies are clear that dual immersion programs are critical to promoting the tripartite goals of bilingualism, biliteracy, and overall academic achievement. In addition, I plan to increase outreach to non-English speaking parents and African-American parents, with engagement that is culturally competent. Partnerships with CBOs are vital in this regard, since they have preexisting ties to community members. Lastly, I plan to increase investment and support for FUSD's programs on academic and social-emotional advancement of Black students, families, and employees. If we are to close the achievement gap, then we must directly tailor our programs and funding.

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?

I believe that charter schools can serve as incubators for innovation, and thus believe that charter schools and traditional public schools should engage in increased information sharing. However, I do not believe that FUSD should be investing more in charter schools; thus, I would oppose the authorization of new charters.

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. Providing evidence-based sex education is not only good policy, it is required by California law. (See California Education Code sections 51930-51939.)

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?

I welcome the involvement of community organizations in education, and efforts to involve parents, students, and community members in school board decision-making.

As stated above, I do not support the authorization of new charters or the privatization of public schools. I believe that if we want to transform education, we must recommit to our public-educational infrastructure.

With regard to outsized influence, I believe that for significant policy or budgetary decisions, the school board should consult with all major stakeholders, such as the Fresno Teachers Association (FTA), the California School Employees Association (CSEA) 125 and 143, SEIU Local 521, parent groups, and students. I believe it is the role of the school board to compile the ideas and concerns of diverse stakeholders when crafting policies, programs, and budgets.

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?

I believe that the FTA and other labor partners—such as CSEA 125 and 143, SEIU Local 521, and our building and construction trade unions—have a vital role in supporting the growth of our students and schools. As stated above, if a new district policy or budget decision will affect the members of one or more labor groups, then they should be consulted prior to that decision being made.

Relatedly, I support increased investment in career technical educational (CTE) programs and vocational training. In this regard, I believe that we should strengthen FUSD's partnerships with trade unions to ensure that students are learning skills that are actually being utilized in the workplace, as well as to create pathways to apprenticeships and on-the-job training.

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?

Yes, wholeheartedly.

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 advocate for increased funding for wrap-around services, as well as the hiring of increased social workers, nurses, psychologists, and counselors at school sites. This is also an area where increased partnerships would be beneficial. Thus, I would look for ways in which the school district can partner with the city, CBOs, and community health clinics to expand the reach of health and other services for our student population.

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?

In theory, yes, I would support such a tax. However, if the tax is a parcel tax, then it is necessarily regressive (i.e., parcel taxes do not consider property values or the incomes of homeowners). Thus, I would want to discuss such a tax with my constituents to ensure that it is affordable for our working-class communities. However, I support creating a work team to explore a special tax, and I am committed to finding a way to fund smaller class sizes.

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

My dream public high school would provide expansive opportunities for every student that walks through its doors. It would have small class sizes that allow each student the individual attention she deserves. It would have high-quality college-preparatory courses, as well as resources for first-generation, college-bound students, including training on how to apply to college and transitioning from a high school to a college environment. It would have career technical education programs that provide pipelines to apprenticeships with local trade unions, and the chance for on-the-job training at district construction projects. It would have a dual immersion language program, a continuation of the program from the elementary school level, that allows English-language learners to thrive while also providing an opportunity for native English speakers to become bilingual. It would have a school psychologist, school nurse, social worker, and other resources that aid students in addressing the significant stressors that they are experiencing outside the classroom, so that they can succeed within the classroom. And, most of all, it would make each and every student feel welcome, valued, and ready to face the world.

10. What is the purpose of public education?

The purpose of publicly-funded education is to provide access to quality schools to all members of society, regardless of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, or any other classification. Public education is critical not only to ensure that our young people are equipped with the tools they need to succeed in the 21st century economy, but also the knowledge to contribute meaningfully to our democracy at the local and national levels.

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.