

Dr. Camille Harris, San Diego Unified School Board Candidate, District D

Question #1: How will you resolve the projected budget deficits pending for the next three years and maintain adequate staffing and educational programs along with school safety?

A very complicated question. Given the complexity, I'll provide my executive approach.

My number one priority, if elected, is safety. All schools must be safe schools for students, teachers, administrators, and the community.

First, I would call for an immediate disaster recovery plan by bringing local, state, and federal agencies together, with funding, to comprehensively address the various components to student and teacher safety. Too often, we hear campaigns promising to solve the problems after it becomes a national crisis. The board must demand a comprehensive disaster recovery plan that includes all forms of emergency preparedness, whether human or nature caused. Education is an essential service. Students depend on us to continue their education, especially in times like these. San Diego has a plan to deal with wildfires, thanks in no small way to the devastating impacts of the Witch and Cedar fires. In light of continued school closures and little in the form of getting back to normal, I will tackle this vital need so that the essential services provided by our public education systems never again impact our students and community in such a debilitating way.

I would lead and collaborate first with my local community and include district, state, and federal partners to implement a full-court-press and comprehensive evaluation of every district-owned property to create a roadmap for student and teacher safety. Safety precautions must be in place immediately to protect our students from social media predators recruiting San Diego students. San Diego has an enormous underground economy of nearly \$1B annually in sex trafficking. There is nothing of greater importance to me than the safety and security of our most vulnerable.

I would call for the immediate reassessment of how SDUSD is spending facility bond funds. With schools closed and the future of SDUSD enrollment projected to plummet, we must consider how to redeploy existing facility bonds to build new administrative offices and sports complexes, auditoriums, and commercial real estate that lay dormant and pivot to address the COVID demand. Multi-million dollar administrative offices should take a backseat to the needs of students today. Voters have been generous in providing SDUSD with nearly \$10B in facility bonds over the last 14 years, with a whopping \$3.5B added to the \$2.2B just in 2018 alone. Tap the brakes and turn the ship.

I would call for an independent audit of San Diego Unified financials. San Diego property owners experience the bulk of their taxes going to fund facility improvements to the tune of \$10B. These funds, paid thru increased property taxes that affect housing affordability, will cost San Diego taxpayers nearly \$19B to repay over several decades. San Diego has been generous in providing more money to 'fix bad faucets and deal with asbestos cleanup' spread over no more than 200 school sites. That's an enormous amount of money per facility. In light of the need to get back to school and the status quo of asking for more, we must expect the district to be fully transparent and accountable.

San Diego Unified had realized a steady decline in student enrollment as parents were already seeking other options to address the only modest gains in academic achievement for Hispanic and Latino/Latina

students. And San Diego Unified has received increased funding each year despite decreases in enrollment.

Without Federal funding, the State of California, already hurting in terms of revenue, will feel the pain in higher taxes. At the same time, Latinx students continue to fail to meet state testing standards by unconscionable numbers. Academic achievement, the very heart of education, sadly has taken a backseat to building projects. That didn't work at the \$125M Lincoln High school that now has less than half their capacity due to the abysmal failure to address African American academic achievement, which sits at the bottom of San Diego Unified in terms of academic readiness.

Question #2: What is your position on public school choice – i.e., public charter schools, homeschools, learning pods?

I believe families have the ultimate decision on whether their child attends a district-run school or a public charter school—choice results in a healthy competition that then drives innovation and change. Without it, we force parents into solutions that may not work for their child.

Take Gompers Preparatory Academy as a prime example. In 2005, community leaders, parents, and teachers banded together to create a public charter that would change the trajectory of opportunities for GPA students. Under the district-run system, Gompers was one of the lowest-performing schools serving a high concentration of Hispanic students in the lower socio-economic range. Under the leadership of Vince Riveroll, Gompers charter school sits alone as the shining example of what a community-run school can achieve. Nearly ALL students graduating GPA today go on to college, while district-run schools in the same district experience academic outcomes at the bottom of the achievement scale, according to the California Department of Education. It's a shame that there is an effort to unionize GPA and bring them back to the days of abject failure. In the case of many parents and teachers that have chosen Gompers, losing a school of choice that works is like sending their children back to a failed system. Unconscionable.

Good schools demand greater accountability, not less. Statistically, charter schools have outperformed district-run schools for improved academic outcomes, according to a recent national study. And public charters are required to follow the same rules for public meetings and educational results that district-run schools must follow. District-run schools get privileged treatment, as is the case for Porter Elementary that has yet to serve their community adequately. As a board trustee, I will demand that all schools under the authority of the SDUSD adhere to the same rigorous standards that students need and taxpayers demand.

I will take care of implementing a holistic approach to determine what is best for students. As with any product or service to the community, I believe a healthy public school environment provides competition for the sake of our kids.

As to homeschools, I believe they work for some students and families and should always be an option. However, I recognize that a socio-economic problem exists that does not afford homeschooling as a choice for many parents that must work to survive. Students in communities north of the 8 are more affluent than students in District D. I will not accept a "one size fits all" education model.

Promoting life skills, character education, and advocating for career readiness at the elementary educational level should continue throughout high school. All of these require a steady hand at leadership, strategy, collaboration, and data analysis to provide a reasonable expectation to fund and implement.

Question #3: If elected, what are your top priorities, and how do you expect to implement them?

My top priorities are accountability, school safety, and student success/career readiness. And I am prepared to lead in the mission of San Diego Unified so that all students will graduate with the skills, motivation, curiosity, and resilience to “Succeed in their choice of college and career to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow.”