

**Dr. Crystal Trull, Candidate for San Diego Unified School Board of Trustees, District A
PQE Candidate Forum Question Responses**

#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?

San Diego Unified is stuck between a rock and hard place. With declining enrollment and administrative costs increasing, it faces significant budget deficits despite receiving funding increases over the past several years and record funding for 2019/2020.

Some say that additional funding will solve the budget problem. But, as we saw with previous funding promises like the lottery and school bond measures, more money may not be the magic pill that we all think it is. While additional money in theory may help, it won't address the fundamental behavioral problems that plague San Diego Unified: spending beyond its means, the lack of a long-term strategy, and allocating resources using a "one size fits all" approach.

As Trustee, I am committed to improving the District's fiscal health by engaging parents, teachers, staff, district leadership, and my fellow board members, through transparent conversations in order to find creative budget solutions that put students first. Now is the time to deeply examine how San Diego Unified uses its resources, identify strategic options, and openly discuss the budgeting process.

Not only would these conversations provide transparency into the budgeting process, but they also provide opportunities to educate the community about where funding comes from, what commitments have already been made, and how the District spends its money. Additionally, these conversations foster collaboration, which is a necessary in order to ensure that resources are being used to support student success.

I am also committed to partnering with local agencies and organizations, the philanthropic community, and volunteers to identify cost-savings. This also means greater advocacy at the local and state levels. I would like to build on the success we had over the summer advocating with the state to maintain current budget levels despite COVID-19. As such, I will be a strong proponent to ensure that San Diego Unified has a seat at the table, partnering with legislators, when it comes to decisions about school funding.

Our current fiscal situation was years in the making. The solutions required to provide our children with a quality education will take time and creative solutions utilizing multiple perspectives. We can't continue with "business as usual" and expect change. As Trustee I am committed to approaching the budget intentionally and strategically by putting the mission of educating students at the forefront.

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

I believe in parent choice and in their ability to choose the right learning environment and/or approach for their child. Furthermore, I believe charter schools are complementary, not the competition. San Diego Unified oversees at least 50 charter schools that operate as public schools within its boundaries. What these charter schools provide are alternative learning approaches that support different learning styles, thus filling the gaps of what traditional district schools cannot offer for some students.

I think we can learn a lot from charter schools. Every five years, charters are required to meet well-defined criteria in order to renew their charter. Given that accountability and transparency are two of my priority areas, as Trustee I would begin discussions about how to hold district-run schools to similar accountability criteria that is required of charter schools.

In terms of learning pods, I believe they present equity issues. Because San Diego Unified's mission is to all educate students, I believe that schools should be the centers for learning, not private homes or private organizations. As Trustee, I would work toward giving individual school sites flexibility to open their campuses as safely as possible so that District teachers can provide much-needed instruction for those families who believe their child would benefit more from an on-campus environment. By opening campuses and continuing to offer the option of remote learning, San Diego Unified can counteract the negative effects that COVID-19 has made on student learning so that ALL children are equipped to be the future leaders of our communities.

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

As Trustee, my priority is to fulfill the mission of San Diego Unified which is that “all students will graduate with the skills, motivation, curiosity, and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow”. I will accomplish this by focusing on three areas that synergistically work together. They are collaboration, prioritizing resources, and accountability.

First, I will foster collaboration by meeting with parents, teachers, administrators, the unions, and my fellow board Trustees to identify the immediate needs so that we can work together to develop solutions. I will hold regular meetings virtually and in-person (when allowable), send out surveys and emails, and utilize Facebook to engage as many stakeholders as possible.

In my experience as a nonprofit professional, the best solutions come from those who are directly impacted by services and those who provide services. Through the collaborative efforts previously mentioned, I will understand how to prioritize resources by listening to parents and families who utilize school services and teachers, staff, and administrators who provide the services. I believe that the most innovative ideas and creative solutions to pressing issues that impact student success can be found in our school communities.

Finally, through collaboration and prioritizing resources, I will be accountable. I will engage in thoughtful two-way communication which is more than just informing. What this looks like is ongoing communication with stakeholders about what’s being done, how it’s being done, and what the expected outcomes are to facilitate further discussions about next steps at each stage of the process. For me, accountability also means acknowledging when things aren’t working and recognizing the need for change.

As Trustee, I know the road ahead may be difficult. And, I acknowledge that because San Diego Unified represents a wide variety of students and needs that solutions won’t come easily. Despite the challenges, I believe that focusing on the mission creates a solid foundation to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead and is the cornerstone for collaboration.