

Richard Barrera

Response to Parents for Quality Education Questions

September 21st, 2020

Question 1 – Approach to Budget – Now in my 12th year on the San Diego Unified School Board, I have a proven track record of balancing the budget every year while improving student outcomes. Eighty percent of the District’s revenue comes from the State of California budget, and until we as Californians fundamentally improve public school funding, school districts throughout the state will face budget shortfalls every year. This has been the case in San Diego Unified whether the State experiences record deficits (as it did in my first few years on the Board), or record surpluses. My budget priorities will always be:

- Preserving funding for classrooms and schools, particularly our highest poverty schools, while first identifying budget solutions at the administrative level;
- Avoiding the destabilizing impact of layoffs, while instead searching for budget solutions through natural attrition and early retirement incentives;
- Keeping class sizes low, and preserving arts, music, science and a full and balanced curriculum, while developing creative budget solutions including savings from sustainable energy strategies achieved through capital (bond funded) expenditures;
- Recruiting and retaining talented teachers, principals and support staff.

In order to meet these budget priorities, I have approached every budget cycle with a consistent approach, including:

- Developing a deep understanding of the entire budget process, including a detailed and rigorous analysis of the District’s budget, as well as a comprehensive political and policy level understanding of the State budget process;
- Staying patient through the process and constantly creating and exploring alternatives to devastating cuts. Every budget cycle, the District’s numbers will evolve from the First Interim Report in December, through the Second and Third Interim Reports and the Superintendent’s final budget recommendations. At the same time, the State budget will continually evolve from the release of the Governor’s proposed budget in January, through the May revise and final State budget in June;
- Maintaining constant and open communication with stakeholders, including parents, community organizations and unions, so that solutions grounded in trusting relationships can open up, rather than be shut down by people backing themselves into corners;
- Organizing stakeholders to work together to fight for public schools in the State’s budget process.

Question 2 – School Choice – San Diego Unified is a diverse and complex district, and parents and students should always have a broad range of choices available to them. I will always support the current practice in our District that any student can enroll in any District run school, and that for schools with a waiting list, a fair process of placement on the waiting list be available. I will also always respect and support the choice of parents to enroll their students in charter schools, while holding charter schools accountable to sound fiscal management, appropriate student outcomes and anti discrimination, conflict of interest and open meeting laws.

But I will also fight to ensure that a student’s neighborhood school has the resources, support and accountability necessary to be a good choice for any family. Particularly in District D, where most neighborhood schools have high percentages of students in poverty, I am proud of the investment we have made in the physical transformations of schools like the Logan-Memorial Education Center, Hoover High School, Wilson Middle School and many others. I am proud to have led the campaign with students, teachers, parents, alumni and community supporters to save San Diego High School. I am proud to have been a strong advocate to protect the International Baccalaureate network of schools from Birney, McKinley and Jefferson Elementary schools to Roosevelt Middle school to San Diego High. I am proud of the decisions we have made at the district level to allow schools in City Heights like Edison, Central and Cherokee Point Elementary schools to thrive. And I am proud to have worked with community stakeholders to co-author with Dr. Whitehurst Payne the district’s resolution in support of Community Schools, which will help anchor our schools as centers of community and resources for families in need.

Question 3 – Top 3 Priorities

- Eliminate the Opportunity Gap by continuing to expand arts, music, science, ethnic studies, career pathways, bilingual education and dual enrollment in college courses for high school students, as well as building community partnerships to provide social, emotional and mental health supports for students and families;
- Develop a future teacher pipeline, in partnership with community colleges and local four year universities, to diversify the District’s teaching force and attract talented students from our schools into the teaching profession; and
- Fight for the resources our students deserve, by developing necessary investments in public schools from federal, state and local sources.