

Sabrina Bazzo, San Diego Unified School Board Candidate, District A

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?*

I will always do whatever it takes to approve a balanced budget. Proposals would include providing early retirement and other opportunities to encourage natural attrition where possible. Keeping cuts away from students, particularly those with the highest needs and the least amount of resources, should always be the most important priority to keep in mind. It's also important to have a thorough understanding of the entire budget process in order to be able to explore all alternatives. Examples of programs utilized to offset cuts include the following:

- During the 6 years I served as Foundation President at Mira Mesa High School, the largest school in San Diego Unified, I was also coordinator of the Taste of Mira Mesa. This event was the largest school cluster fundraiser of its kind in the district. We raised thousands of dollars each year for Mira Mesa schools to offset budget cuts by providing funding for performing arts programs, extra classroom supplies and enrichment programs. Ultimately, we were able to fund a teacher position for one year in order to avoid layoffs.
- Early during the COVID crisis I worked with educators in the district to develop a volunteer tutoring program. Our goal in working with teachers and principals in Mira Mesa was to identify those students most in need of support and team them up with high achieving high school students at no cost to families. We started with just a handful of tutors and students and have now expanded to over 20 volunteers and close to 50 students that have been supported in less than six months.

These are both examples of successful programs that I am proud to have coordinated in order to support our students at no cost to the district. However, the fact that San Diego Unified is in a constant state of dealing with chronic budget deficit from year to year shows that we aren't doing enough. A long-term solution for comprehensive budget reform is required so that we are not in a state of constant crisis year after year. California ranks in the bottom 12 states in the country when it comes to how much we spend per pupil in our public schools. This is wrong and we need to do better. Therefore, my #1 task as a school board member would be to lobby the new federal administration in January 2021 to provide stimulus funds for public schools for the next two years by working in collaboration with other urban school districts nationwide in order to dramatically increase education funding. , I also strongly support the Schools and Communities First Initiative that will be on the November ballot. It is not a complete solution to the budget shortfall but would go a long way in supporting this effort. Finally, when it comes to school safety I have been a public health educator in the San Diego community for the past 25

years. One of our biggest priorities in the next coming months is going to be safe reopening of our schools and I have the ideal background in order to coordinate this effort.

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

I support choice within the district. I understand that the education of our children is a very personal decision based on our own background and experiences and every parent should have the opportunity to be able to do what they feel is best for their child. Along these same lines, I support charter schools that are offered as innovative alternatives in order to compliment traditional community schools rather than those that are simply a parallel system offering identical programs and ultimately draining funds from neighborhood schools. First and foremost, it is vital that we have a quality public school in every community. Charter schools should be expected to have the same transparency when it comes to student achievement as other public schools in addition to providing strong fiscal management. They also need to pay their teachers at the same level as other public schools and provide them the right to unionize if they desire to do so. Furthermore, it is imperative that charter schools be open to ALL, including students of color and those requiring special education as opposed to being selective based on who they think should attend their school. There are successful charter schools that are seen as success stories within the district which I support, as well as others that aren't. All of our public schools need to be held to the same level of accountability, charter or not. That being said, I believe the primary focus needs to be on having strong public schools in every neighborhood. Our schools are not just a place for learning, many are the heart of the community offering places for families to come together. While the board has had some success in improving our local schools, we still have a long way to go to ensure that all students have quality schools in their neighborhoods, regardless of zip code.

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

- **Equal Opportunity for ALL Students:** My daughters attended K-12 public schools in Mira Mesa where I have been a strong parent leader for the past 18 years, starting as PTA President at the elementary school, middle school and ultimately serving 6 years as President for the Mira Mesa High School Foundation. We are fortunate to have strong neighborhood schools; I would like all students to have an equally great experience regardless of where they live in San Diego. As a health educator I believe very strongly in the importance of the whole child concept. If our students aren't able to be balanced in one area it affects them elsewhere. This concept is being explored by the district as part of the larger framework of community schools but much more needs to be done. Only by nurturing all aspects that impact a child's life including health and social services as well as family and community will we ultimately have academic success across all neighborhoods.

- **Comprehensive Budget Reform:** Having more money does not guarantee success. But being in the bottom twelve of states when it comes to per pupil funding for our public schools is not okay. We have seen many pockets of success, but the district cannot take these programs to scale without full and fair funding as opposed to ongoing budget cuts. I plan to be a strong parent voice in this movement by forming a coalition of the top largest urban school districts in the state as well as nationwide to include school board, community stakeholders, administrative staff, unions and PTA/parent volunteers in order to demand dramatically increase education funding.
- **Safe Reopening of Our Schools:** In this current climate it's more important than ever to have leaders with public health knowledge to help our schools move forward with a plan that will be safe and effective for students. I hold my Master's Degree in Public Health from SDSU and as a health educator with 25 years of experience in San Diego I will strongly support health initiatives in our schools including enhanced resources for nurses and counselors in addition to adequate PPE supplies as well as increased custodial staff to ensure daily cleaning of classrooms. I am the only candidate in this race with extensive background and knowledge in the public health field.