

District 6 Candidates

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1. Why do you want to be on the School Board?

MA: I have been with the district for 13 years as a mother of three students. During those years I've faced variety of issues, including academic underperformance and bullying. After my daughter was transferred from middle school to high school with four "F" grades, I had to ask myself, "If I were on the School Board, could I make a difference for our students and families?" I looked back at my own cumulative and academic experience as a public administrator and a former Pasadena Commissioner, and the answer was "Yes".

CC: I believe education is the number one equalizer. I attended public school from head start through graduation and was a member of one of a few families of color in the rural school district. I come from a lower social economic family that did not understand or see the value of education. As I made my way through school, it was public school teachers that changed my life. A few key teachers helped me to understand the value of education and how education could give me a life with choices. By high school, I was a star athlete and top academic achiever.

Since then I have received three college degrees and I'm close to completing a PhD in Organizational Leadership. I became a credentialed teacher and then as a School Enrollment and Distance Learning Expert. I have seen first hand how the power of education can change lives.

I want to be a PUSD board member because I believe in public education and I think I can make it better.

TWF: I want to advocate for structural policy changes at the district, municipal, state and federal levels to support the goals stated in my platform which directly improves the quality of education

- Smaller class sizes
- Hiring more teachers and staff
- Librarian, nurse, custodian, and counselor in every school
- The highest safety standards for reopening schools

2. What qualities do you have that will make you an effective board member?

TWF: I've held various Board positions for multiple terms both on Willard Elementary PTA Board and President of the board of Democrats of Pasadena Foothills. I'm an active participant at PUSD school board meetings. I am experienced with parliamentary procedure, am able to facilitate discussion of a wide range of views, present and communicate ideas effectively, build consensus, and propose paths forward. I understand that showing respect and listening to all stakeholders is critical to making progress.

I believe my teaching experience as an in classroom K-12 public school teacher would complement the current Board. I have a degree in Mathematics from UC San Diego and CA teaching credential. I've taught at all three levels: elementary, middle and high school. As a credentialed classroom math teacher, I taught middle school and high school. I have experience working with the diverse student demographic at PUSD, as a third grade teacher assistant at Willard Elementary and summer LEARNs teacher at San Rafael Elementary School.

After years of political advocacy work and organizing legislative visits on issues including healthcare, tenants rights, and environmental justice, I will direct my experience as an advocate toward fighting for policy changes to increase funding for our public schools.

MA: Based on my professional experience combined with my natural abilities, I possess the following qualities: I am extremely analytical, independent thinker with skills to debate and persuade. I am a visionary and a team player, my strength has been in building consensus when needed.

I am an immigrant from Russia and a single mother of four, which gives me a very broad perspective and in depth understanding of diverse families. While I achieved success, I also know what's it like to live in poverty, stay in line at foodbanks and not know how your rent will be paid. Those experiences taught me compassionate and humility, I believe having these qualities for an effective public servant is equally important.

CC: I am the best qualified and most experienced candidate to help guide PUSD through the big changes in teaching practices and the use of technology the PUSD now faces. With nearly 20 years of experience in education, specializing in enrollment growth and online education. I am uniquely experienced and qualified to help build our public school system.

- 3. Two of the attributes of an effective board member are: 1) an understanding of the importance of parent involvement and support in public education; and 2) an understanding of the need to seek parent and community input in the decision-making process. Describe how you would try to ensure that your decisions reflect input not just from the most vocal parents, but also from parents whose voices are not always heard?**

CC: My priority as a school board member is to represent the residences of my district. I will increase the two-way communication with the residence of my district through meetings, town halls, and newsletters that will provide updates and allow for the community to voice concerns and ideas.

I will avoid the divisive nature of partisan politics.

TWF: If there were more focus on data driven decision making and making that data transparent to the public, it will be clear whether resources were spent in an equitable way. That way, decisions would be made based on data and less on the loudest voice in the room. Parents and teachers often ask Board members to come visit their child's school. I think the Board can do better to represent all schools in the district by visiting them, especially those that are underenrolled. Unless you walk the halls of a school and see the children in their learning environment will Board members truly understand the strengths and challenges of the school. I will visit and engage with the teachers and staff of schools which are underenrolled to understand how we can better support them.

One way parents can be involved in the decision-making process is by participating in the School Consolidation and Boundary Committee. According to Closing A School Best Practice Guide published by the California Department of Education, this committee's job is to gather facts. "The job of the superintendent and board members is to evaluate facts, not gather them. And the process of gathering the facts must be as credible, transparent and non-political as possible."

MA: Much of my experience of working with parents and parent involvement came through my time with Head Start. I served as a Chair and Vice Chair of the Parent Policy Council in the local Head Start and later worked as a Family Service Associate. Successful parent involvement comes through ongoing dialogue and continuous interaction with parents, making sure that they feel welcomed, engaged and considered. Of course, there are always very vocal parents, but they are not the majority. To hear from everyone a board member must be present and approachable. It's also important to have a relationship with staff at school sight. They frequently establish relationships with parents whose voices are rarely heard. School Board can also participate and organize community events where board members will interact with district staff and board members. Finally, setting up an office for complaints and concerns outside of school sites can be a great way to give parents and community members opportunities to speak in a more intimate setting where it will feel comfortable.

- 4. A characteristic of an effective school board is that it allocates resources to needs. Given the ongoing budget concerns and declining enrollment, what are your top funding priorities?**

MA: My top priority is academics. Students need academic interventions now more than ever. For us to be able to attract new families we need to show that our schools deliver. With economy crashing further down, there will be families who could no longer afford private schools and will be looking at public schools as a viable option. This includes families residing in the district and outside of it. With covid19 forcing us into a remote learning environment we have a

unique opportunity to address areas of deficit and identify new instructional tools that we can continue using moving forward.

My second priority is preparing campuses for students' return. If the bond passes in November, with students being away, much of the needed construction can be done prior to their return.

My third priority is reforming high schools, including moving them to the quarterly system to help students with credit recovery, offer more classes and prepare them better for college or trade education. Those who are eligible would be able to take summer quarter off, everyone else can go to school year around.

CC: It's easy for a candidate to say they want to reduce class sizes and hire more teachers and staff but they often have no plan to pay for it. However, until we create school structures that remove the threat of school closures and our schools are increasing enrollment, we will struggle to have the funds to do so.

As Vice President for Enrollment Management for Pasadena's Pacific Oaks College, I helped lead the school out of troubled times, bringing in large enrollment increases and growing their online school. I have been a pioneer in working to establish online learning at multiple public high schools serving students who have fallen behind in school or were looking to get ahead and graduate early or simply desired what was then a non-traditional learning environment.

I have spent my career successfully building and saving schools who have struggled with enrollment and faced perspective closure. I will use my expertise to encourage PUSD to do the same.

TWF: My funding priority is to direct more resources at the school sites which would directly support students' learning environment on a daily basis. I would prioritize funding towards hiring more teachers to reduce class size. I spoke to constituents who have put their kids in private or charter school. Many of them say that small class size is most important to them. If we can achieve smaller class sizes, we increase the chance of competing with private schools.

Budgets are proposed once a year. Advocating for more funding can happen year-round. I will proactively, actively organize fellow Board members, the PUSD community, public education stakeholders to demand more funding for our public schools. I will advocate for increased funding at the state and federal level so that we do not continue to make the difficult decision year after year of which teachers, staff, and programs to cut and which schools to close. I believe the cycle of cutting causes a decline in the quality of education and further decline in enrollment.

The state funding model of basing funding on average daily attendance (ADA) is not sustainable when our enrollment number is not able to cover the operation of our current number of schools. If consolidating schools results in increasing the number of students per classroom beyond a level that prevents teachers from giving each student the attention they need, then I am against this. Cutting cost by closing schools to the detriment of a quality education is solving a problem that creates a new one. As a future Board member, I will advocate for evaluating all the PUSD programs, determine which programs support the most students and the most high-need students, which programs are giving more students the opportunity for higher education. PUSD needs to decide what its priorities are as a whole. This way we can use our funding more efficiently and impact the most students in an equitable way.

5. Another attribute of an effective board member is that he/she is committed to high standards of achievement for all students. How do you see your role as a board member in ensuring the district closes the achievement gap while challenging higher achievers AND offering a well-rounded education for all?

TWF: A well-rounded education requires hiring more teachers and the supplies for those programs (instruments, sports gear, art supplies). Our state continues to underfund schools and give them less every year. You can't do more with less. As I already mentioned, I will advocate for increased funding that goes beyond what average daily attendance will provide. Additionally, I will reach out to other districts of similar size, demographic, and budgets and share ideas on how to address these common challenges.

A good start on addressing equity is for the PUSD Board to first define what inequity and equity means based on measurable data and communicate it clearly throughout the district and community. To make equity a priority, I will

propose that the Board make equity an ongoing agenda item, providing space for not only board members, but also staff, parents, and community stakeholders to engage in conversations that can lead to progress in policy and practice designed to close opportunity and achievement gaps. This can result in implementing policy to bring about systemic change.

MA:

- Reviewing existing policies that mandate accountability for underperforming students.
- Setting up tangible short-term and long-term goals for the district in achievement increases across the student bodies, then asking district staff to come up with a plan for accomplishing these goals.
- Developing policies that would support this plan and ensure schools have what they need to be successful in implementation.
- Establish measures and timelines for accountability and make sure that the Board is updates regularly on the process.

CC: My own children attend our neighborhood PUSD school, I fully support open enrollment. I will never vote to end it. My understanding is that one or more opponents oppose open enrollment. I will continue to reinforce the board policies that have high expectations and program choices for all students.

6. What do you see as PUSD’s greatest opportunities and challenges?

CC: Our greatest challenges are our greatest opportunities- Enrollment Growth and Distance Education. I have spent nearly twenty years working in education, both as a credentialed teacher and then as a School Enrollment and Distance Learning Expert. I have worked to help schools build their brand, market their programs, and recruit the highest quality students and to establish multiple online school programs.

With the pandemic, we are in unprecedented times which will create unforeseen enrollment challenges and continue to create new opportunities for distance learning and the use of technology in education. No other candidate is more qualified to take on these issues and turn them into opportunities than I am.

TWF: As diverse as the members of the PUSD community are, whether we have children or not, whether we put our kids in public or not, many of them strongly believe in public schools. Our greatest opportunity is to leverage that shared value. The challenge is how to inspire this community which largely believes in public schools to support it. PUSD has to make the case and that takes work, planning, and including this diverse range of stakeholders in the process, including community members who don’t have children or have children in private schools. I will urge the PUSD Board to lead the community in building a long-term vision and plan, not of cutting but for building something that brings all schools together in a cohesive vision.

MA: The greatest opportunities I see for PUSD is in Pasadena community and its resources. By resources I mean families with school age children who chose not to enroll and local businesses and organizations. The greatest challenges are in being able to access and utilize those resources because of the broken trust after years of academic underperformance. PUSD has been blessed with grants and local institutional support, yet many of our students are not flourishing.

7. Where do your children attend school, or if they’ve graduated from high school, where did they attend school?

MA: Three of my four children attended the following PUSD schools: Norma Coombs Alternative, Wilson, Sierra Madre Middle School, McKinley Middle School, Pasadena High School and Rose City High School. My daughter is in the 10th grade at PHS and my youngest son is finishing Rose City.

CC: I have first grade twins that attend PUSD’s Sierra Madre Elementary

TWF: My 5th grade daughter attends Willard Elementary School. My 13 year old daughter attended McKinley Middle School/Math Academy. This past summer she got accepted to Cal State Los Angeles, Early Entrance Program, where she currently attends.