



**West Contra Costa Unified School District Board of Education**  
Candidate Questionnaire, Leadership and Candidacy

**Estela DePaz**  
Voting District #1

**1. Why are you running for the West Contra Costa School Board?**

My family migrated to the United States because my parents believed that my brothers and I would receive the best education in the world. I truly believe in the excellence of the American educational system. However, I also feel that it is currently suffering from a number of problems – the foremost of which are economic.

I received my BS in Business from SFSU, and, more recently, an MS in Project Management from the University of Wisconsin. I have worked at a large financial institution in San Francisco for 25+ years during which I've earned a first-hand managerial experience in financial services and information technology.

I have also been an active school volunteer in our district where I've served 10+ years leading multiple School Site Councils and district-level advisory committees. I am running to ensure District 1 is effectively represented in the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

**2. As a school board member, you will be required to manage competing interests and inputs. How do you plan to balance the needs of your individual voting district and the entire WCCUSD? How do you plan to research and gather feedback from your community when making important decisions? How would you support a healthy team culture among school board members that promotes dialog?**

With a school district that covers 5 cities and several unincorporated areas of the county, the demands are varied and complex. I strongly believe in "global policy, with effective local implementation." I believe in balancing stakeholder needs which require proactive communication and dialogue with all stakeholder groups.

Besides effective stakeholder engagement, there are best practices in project management that can be leveraged in managing competing priorities, ensuring that agreements are moving forward as planned, measuring effectiveness of outcomes, and ultimately, assessing whether resources were invested wisely for the benefit of our students and families.

With my 10+ years of experience as a project manager, I can help craft policy that provides the education services and value for our students and families in the community. These policies need to be supported by processes with resources that can be "localized" by each school site. The school sites can then craft their own procedures to accommodate their unique needs. Policy cannot be effectively implemented without knowing and understanding the unique culture and needs of our different schools. Only after balancing

policy with a site's unique needs can programs be effectively implemented and standard metrics be measured.

**3. As a board member you have one employee. How will you hold the superintendent accountable for day-to-day operations, the decisions and actions of his team, and overall student outcomes?**

Superintendents are equivalent to the quarterback in football or the pitcher in baseball. They are the critical path for which policy and direction from the school board flows through to the rest of the organization. Managing this one person (this one critical role) is a very delicate balance that starts with alignment of core values, organizational goals, as well as complimentary management styles between the board members, the superintendent, and his/her team.

After addressing these areas of alignment, it is important that the board provide clear policy direction and support so that the superintendent can execute plans to deliver expected educational outcomes. It is also important that the board and the superintendent are in agreement and have common understanding of processes and procedures that will be utilized to attain educational goals. Processes and procedures necessary to deliver goals should be monitored by metrics, so that operational data can be collected. This is a best practice in how to ensure day-to-day operations oversight.

**4. COVID-19 highlighted the inequities in our district, as we saw students receiving very different educational experiences, even between classrooms at the same school. What will you do to ensure more consistent delivery of high-quality instruction and student supports throughout the COVID crisis and beyond?**

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed and exacerbated inequalities in our education system as well as our society. My on-going communications about distance learning with parents and students in our schools showed me significant variances in their experiences. During these challenging times, the district must be sure-footed and confident about the organizations' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). More than ever, communication and cooperation between all parts of the district - from downtown leadership to local school sites - must be fully functioning.

To ensure that each student is receiving a rich and engaging education, I recommend the following:

- 1) We need to start by collecting data about the student's educational experiences in the last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year.
- 2) We need to analyze the information to understand what worked and what didn't work to identify the best practices.
- 3) These best practices must be compared to County and State mandates.
- 4) Other school districts' best practices should be polled.
- 5) The difference between best practices and the mandates is a gap in compliance and should be the focus of district efforts.
- 6) This gap must be bridged and managed. It should drive initiatives and projects for the staff to coordinate, plan, and execute.
- 7) Initiatives and projects to address the gap should be managed under one program "umbrella" where oversight on cost, compliance, and effectiveness is reported and communicated (on a regular basis) to the board, all district staff, and the community at large.

**5. The WCCUSD budget is in a clear crisis. What would your process look like to gather the key information you need to make decisions to move the district out of a position of deficit? What key actions would you take locally and at the state and federal levels to improve WCCUSD's fiscal situation?**

I believe decisions should not be made without reliable data. In order to make effective decisions that move the district out of deficit, I recommend the following;

- 1) Gather baseline costs information - what is the baseline cost of current operations? What is the cost of operating a "required only" streamlined operation?
- 2) Understand what areas of operations, programs, partnerships, processes, etc. are working well.
- 3) Document and understand what programs, partnerships, and processes are necessary.
- 4) Inventory organizational competencies that are essential to delivering required educational outcomes.
- 5) Perform a cost-benefit-analysis of all organizational areas that do not fall under the required category.
- 6) Analyze risks that may get in the way of the district delivering required educational outcomes.

After this analysis is done, information must be respectfully and transparently shared with all stakeholders. From my district experience, I would say this is best achieved through local level townhalls that focus the discussion on how the school community should manage impacts. Becoming financially healthy means ensuring organizational efficiencies to support and ensure that our students will continue to receive a rich and engaging instruction.

Change is always hard. This is why it is critical that information is shared and communication is open. There are challenging times in front of us and we need to continue to engage in constructive dialogue and community partnerships. The state's Community and Schools ballot initiative and federal funds may provide some relief; however, we must continue to actively lobby State and Fed decision makers.