



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

Tom Panas
Voting District #5

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

I am running for the WCCUSD Board because I want every child to get a great education regardless of the color of their skin or their ZIP Code. Unfortunately that's not the reality in our district. We need to raise the achievement of all students, reduce the gap between the highest and lowest performing students, and eliminate the disproportionality we see in student discipline and academic outcomes. We have made real progress working to center all conversations on students and student outcomes, supported by analysis of fully disaggregated data. I want the entire community to have a stronger voice in decisions that District makes. I want equity to permeate every discussion that the Board has. Every person in the District needs to commit to an anti-racist mindset and combat the racial injustice and inequities that racism has fostered in our community.

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?

The key concept here is "Listen." I will balance the needs of the entire community by continuing to spend as much time at sites outside of my district as sites in my district. My continuous contact with a wide range of administrators, teachers, parents, and students provides great information and feedback. I have made hundreds and hundreds of school visits since 2016. I have volunteered in schools outside of my district so that I have a clear view of what is happening on the ground outside of my district. I regularly attend AASAT, DLCAPS, MDAC, and Stege Redesign meetings so I can engage parents; plus whenever possible I support the activities of Healthy Richmond, WCRG, and the Latina Center. I engage students and foster student voice by attending Youth Commission, Student ELAC, and RYSE meetings and events.

Building Board culture is real work. We took a measurable step when I instituted using a talking piece at Board meetings. The Board and staff need to be willing to attend regular Board retreats focused on DEI; it will difficult to come to agreement about the underlying nature of the work but I have a deep understanding of how to get this done.

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?

I am in favor of, and since I first joined the board have advocated for, basing the Superintendent's evaluation on a set of clearly measurable metrics. In the three years that I have been on the Board I have proposed several systems of metrics for evaluating the Superintendent. My suggestions have included defining metrics for visioning, educational outcomes, adult leadership outcomes, finance outcomes, facilities outcomes, parent engagement outcomes, and community outcomes.

Implicit in the creation of these metrics is that the Superintendent must then establish metrics and outcomes for each member of the Cabinet. The Cabinet members should in turn establish metrics and outcomes for each member of their direct reports. However, without enough like-minded people on the board it's very difficult to implement this kind of evaluation system. If I am on the board when the next superintendent is selected I will make it crystal clear to that superintendent before they are hired that this is how I expect evaluations will work because I want to drive change. If we create a strong culture of accountability then we will be breaking apart the racist system we all inhabit and pushing equity forward.

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?

First of all, I would like to thank all the teachers, staff, parents, and administrators who have worked tirelessly to ensure our students are able to continue their education. Still, we need to decide what our true objective is as we begin planning to restart schools. It still rings in my ears how staff couldn't answer definitively when I asked, at the first Board meeting after the school closures began, what our objective was for student learning during the school closures. As we evaluate options for restarting education in the fall, if we are going to be equity-focused we have to prioritize the educational needs of the students most likely to have experienced learning loss since the school closures. These are our high-needs students and our students of color.

Since many students missed considerable learning at the end of the 2019-20 school year, we need to assess everyone to understand which Common Core standards from 2019-20 each individual student wasn't taught. We shouldn't re-teach to the entire class the standards that some students weren't taught. Instead we should analyze the standards mastery data collected during the assessment of returning students and work to provide additional supports to students who weren't taught all the standards that underlie the new standard the teacher will be introducing. We cannot allow the school closures push our most vulnerable students further off track. Instead we need to actively intervene to support their success.

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?

The budget for FY 2021-22 should be created, in partnership with the community, as a new document focused on students. Budget development should start from scratch, adding back the programming, staffing, and materials that have been proven to directly increase student achievement, versus simply rolling forward existing contracts and partnerships that have failed to produce outcomes. "Does this Drive Equity?" should be the first question we ask about every budget decision. Unfortunately, equity tends to get pushed aside when money gets short. As we move forward in our budget-constrained, COVID world, we cannot decide that equity is expendable!

A huge source of uncertainty in the budget crisis has been Position Control. It became clear this winter that the precise funding for each position in the district was often unclear. For this reason an updated position control

report should be posted on our Web site every month. This report should include every position in the District, who fills the position, the base salary for the position, where the position is located, and the funding that pays for the position.

I support placing a parcel tax measure on the ballot and I will actively support it. I have endorsed the SCF measure, have donated to the campaign, am bringing it up in conversations, and have committed to volunteering on it. I have started lobbying my state elected officials about increased funding for education and am ready to support any federal proposals that are introduced to better support the education community.