

# **Santa Monica Democratic Club**

## **2022 School Board Candidate Questionnaire**

Thank you for your interest in the Santa Monica Democratic Club endorsement. Candidates seeking the endorsement of our Club must complete and return the following questionnaire. Note that only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration.

**Please send the completed questionnaire to [smdemocrats@gmail.com](mailto:smdemocrats@gmail.com) by 11:59pm on August 26, 2022.** Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis as the questionnaires are returned.

Submitting this questionnaire constitutes acknowledgment that its contents are now part of the public record and may be reproduced and distributed by the Santa Monica Democratic Club.

### **General Information**

**Candidate Name:** Alicia Mignano

**Email Address:** [aliciaforsmmusd@gmail.com](mailto:aliciaforsmmusd@gmail.com)

**Phone Number:** 503.962.0703

**Candidate's Current Occupation:** Self Employed, Business Owner

**Candidate's Employer:** Taqueria Los Gorditos Co

**Campaign Contact Person** (if other than candidate):

**What qualifications do you bring to this office?** I am a small business owner/operator, immigrant, and renter in Santa Monica's Pico neighborhood, where I work and live with my husband and our son, an Edison student.

I have 16 years of experience in building a successful, family-Mexican restaurant chain from scratch. I have a degree in Business Administration.

My business career gives me the working knowledge of budgets, timelines, and understanding construction plans from design to completion. I've managed conflicts and come to satisfactory resolutions in all of these areas.

I am an active district volunteer.

I am proud to be a part of the SMMUSD community, and dedicate my time to ensure that all students receive an excellent public education, especially our vulnerable students. I've served on DELAC, LCAP PAC, and PTA Council.

### **Why are you running?**

I'm running for School Board to offer a fresh perspective. I am a parent of a second grader at Edison and was an "at risk" and English learner student who attended public schools, including schools in South Central LA. I am proud to be a part of the SMMUSD community, and dedicate my time to ensure that all students receive an excellent public education, especially our vulnerable students. I am a strong supporter of diversity, equity

and inclusion in our schools. I have a proven track record of hard work and dedication directed towards improving student outcomes and experience. I am a strong advocate for our students and a committed parent volunteer. I decided to run for School Board to continue my efforts to support all students at the district level, and to help facilitate constructive change.

**What are the top issues of your campaign? How do you plan to address those issues once elected?**

I am a strong supporter of public education and believe that every child is entitled to a quality education. I support diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools, and have been a strong parent advocate in these areas. If elected to the SMMUSD school board, the top 3 things I hope to achieve is:

- Continued progress in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools
- Increased parent engagement and communication
- More resources focused on students, especially to address learning loss, mental health and the achievement gap

**Please list all of your individual and/or organizational endorsements.**

Tony Vazquez, State Board of Equalization

Ted Winterer, former Mayor

Kristin McCowan, Mayor Pro Tem, City Council Member

Gleam Davis, City Council Member

Maria Leon-Vazquez, SMMUSD, President

Laurie Lieberman, SMMUSD, Board Member

Jennifer Smith, SMMUSD, Board Member

Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein, SMMUSD, Board Vice President

Dr. Margaret Quiñones-Perez, Santa Monica Community College Trustee

Barry Snell, Santa Monica Community College Trustee

Ralph Mechur, former SMMUSD, Board Member

Patricia Hoffman, former SMMUSD, Board Member and President

Caroline M. Torosis, Commissioner, Santa Monica Rent Control Board

Melissa Goodman, McKinley Parent

Nicole Faries, Education Advocate/ SMMUSD Parent

Patti Braun, Arts and Education Advocate

Laura Hernandez, Community Leader/SMMUSD Parent

Rosario Guzman, Community Leader

Diana Maruri, Muir Parent

Maria Becerra, Grant Elementary Parent

Hugo Lopez, Grant Elementary Parent

Danielle Borgia, SMMUSD Parent

Michelle Crandlemire, Grant Elementary Parent

Costa Bargeliotis, LAUSD Retired Teacher & SMMUSD Parent  
Alana Fineo, Will Rogers Parent  
Perla Garcia, SMMUSD Parent  
Mariana Diaz, Edison Parent  
Albert Decall, Edison Parent  
Jason Islas, Pico Neighborhood Resident and SMMUSD Alumnus  
Mark Fairies MD, SMMUSD Parent  
Chris Harding, Santa Monica Resident

### **Organizations**

I've been endorsed by Santa Monica Forward.

I am seeking endorsements from CEPS, LACDP, SMRR, SMDC, Stonewall Democratic Club, SEIU Local 99, SMMCTA, LA/OC Building & Construction Trades Council AFL-CIO.

### **How long have you lived in Santa Monica?**

I've lived in Santa Monica since July 2020.

### **Where else have you lived, and why did you live there?**

I was born in Mexico. I moved to south central Los Angeles with my mother, father, and younger brother in the 90's. We eventually left LA on a greyhound bus for Portland Oregon. I lived in Portland longer than anywhere else. It was the first place I experienced stability, good public schools, and where I met the love of my life.

My husband, and I chose Santa Monica as our home, so that our son could benefit from really good schools with lots of enrichment opportunities.

### **Will you pledge to serve on the SMMUSD School Board of Education for your entire four year term? Yes**

### **Party / Activism**

#### **How long have you been a registered Democrat?**

I've been registered as a Democrat since July 31, 2019, when I became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

#### **Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State?**

No, I've never been registered as a member of another political party. I've always believed in the work that Democrats do, and am proud to be a member of the Democratic party and to vote Democrat.

**If so, which party and why?** N/A

**What is your experience with political activism?**

I have volunteered for several immigrant rights rallies, protests, and conferences.

**Have you ever volunteered or worked for a political campaign other than your own, and if so, in what capacity were you involved?** Yes, mostly by postcarding, phone banking, and canvassing.

**Which political candidates have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible.**

The SMDC slate for 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom, Jay Chen, AOC, and Rick Chavez Zbur. During my residence in Portland, Oregon, I actively supported Democrats Joann Hardesty for Portland City Council, Oregon Governor Kate Brown, Rep. Diego Hernandez (Portland), and State Senator Michael Dembrow (Portland).

**Have you ever signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office?** No

**If so, please list the name(s) of the officials and why you felt they should be recalled.** N/A

**Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization.**

**SMDC and SMRR**

**SMMUSD**

- District English Learners Advisory Committee, Secretary (2020 - Current)
- LCAP Parent Advisory Committee, Member (2020 - 2022)

**SMMPTA Council of PTA's**

- VP of Health and Safety (Current)
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee, Member (2021 - Current)
- Historian (2021 - 2022)

**EDISON LANGUAGE ACADEMY**

- PTA Executive Board, Member (Current)
- PTA Room Representative Coordinator (Current)
- ELAC/DELAC Representative (Current)
- Garden Volunteer

**Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found here:**

<https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CDP-Platform-2022-FINAL-1-1.pdf>

Yes, I have read and agree with the CDP platform.

**List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree. (This is in no way a litmus test for our endorsement; however, because the party delegates have worked so hard on every word of this platform document, we believe it will be a helpful guide to comprehend the policy differences between each candidate.)**

There are no items in the CDP platform with which I disagree. I'm a democrat because I share the fundamental values of the democratic party. I am an immigrant, woman of color and resident of the Pico neighborhood of Santa Monica. The democratic party supports minority rights, women's rights, immigrant's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and organized labor. It exists under the principle ALL Americans have certain fundamental rights, and that, as a society, we need to protect and ensure equal access to those rights. One of those rights is the right to free education for all children.

## **Campaign Finance**

**Please indicate Yes or No to the following statements:**

- 1. I pledge not to take contributions from oil, gas, and coal industry executives, lobbyists, and PACs.** Yes
- 2. I pledge not to take contributions from police or law enforcement unions, lobbyists, and PACs.** Yes
- 3. I pledge not to take contributions from development firms, lobbyists, and PACs.** No

**If you answered No to any of the above contribution questions, please explain here:** I believe I understand, and commit to upholding, the spirit of statement 3. I am running for office to represent School District voters and am deeply committed to the values of the Democratic Party. Individual contributors to my campaign do so on a personal basis. These are people who know me and believe in the campaign. I will reject any offer of support that even hints of strings attached.

## **SMMUSD**

**What kind of approach should SMMUSD be taking in regard to COVID safety at this point in the pandemic?**

When it comes to COVID, I always believed that we should follow the science. We have learned that vaccines are effective in reducing hospitalizations and deaths, and that masking is an effective means for reducing the spread of COVID in indoor settings. The district improved the filtration systems in schools. The district has moved from mandatory PCR testing to voluntary at home antigen testing, and from mandated indoor masking to strongly recommending indoor masking. Most of our community is ready to

move forward past COVID protocols. However, there are vulnerable members of our community who are at serious risk if they get COVID. The district could provide upgraded masks at no cost for our vulnerable students.

**What are your top priorities for SMMUSD which you plan to address in this four year term?** I am a strong supporter of public education and believe that every child is entitled to a quality education. I support diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools, and have been a strong parent advocate in these areas. If elected to the SMMUSD school board, the top 3 things I hope to achieve is:

- Continued progress in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in our schools
- Increased parent engagement and communication
- More resources devoted to addressing learning loss, mental health and the achievement gap

**Given the district's Basic Aid status, what are the biggest impacts to the district as a result? How does this affect your funding priorities?** As a Basic Aid District, SMMUSD receives funding based upon property taxes, not on a per pupil basis. So, essentially, we receive more funding than most districts. While that provides SMMUSD with greater opportunities to offer unique programs and services that other districts can't, I believe that we need to ensure that we have adequate reserves. I have been involved in a small family owned restaurant business for many years. Currently, I handle administrative matters and payroll. For 14 years, the business was expanding. However, like many small businesses, we were significantly impacted by the pandemic. If we did not have reserves, the business would never have survived. This is why I believe it's important for the district to have adequate reserves. In terms of priorities, more resources devoted to addressing learning loss, mental health and the achievement gap.

**Do you support the petition to transition the SMMUSD Board into district elections, or do you believe the Board should continue in its current form of seven at-large seats?** As a strong Democrat, I support the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA). I believe that all votes should count and that we need to address the suppression of minority votes in communities where minority representation has been suppressed. Based upon the past and current composition of the city council, college board, and the school board, minority representation on city council, college board, and school board has been strong. For that reason, I do not support district elections in Santa Monica. I especially have serious concerns over the gerrymandered map recently proposed in a petition for district elections for the school board. A map designed to give Malibu (a predominantly white, affluent city) two board seats and split Sunset Park, effectively unseating SMMUSD's only current Latina board member, does not further the purposes of the CVRA.

**What can SMMUSD do to further reduce the achievement gap?**

We must use a multi-pronged approach to address the factors that influence the

achievement gap. I support the district efforts in trying to reduce the achievement gap. That is why I decided to become a DELAC member. What I have learned from my time on DELAC and LCAP PAC is that in order to achieve true equity and to make any meaningful progress in closing the achievement gap, we need to understand the unique circumstances and needs of the communities we are trying to help. I believe that parent engagement and participation, and teacher/staff buy-in, are essential components for the success of any targeted initiatives in our schools. Once we have an understanding of what our “at risk” students need, we need to try to level the playing field. In other words, we need to offer our at-risk students services that are targeted toward student achievement in the same way that a large portion of our parents are doing by supplementing through tutors, private courses and college admission consultants.

**What can SMMUSD do to better implement social justice instruction and otherwise address equity issues?** The district has adopted social justice standards with the hope that our students will grow by learning the history and experiences of all groups of people. Our geographic location makes our region the perfect place to incorporate social justice standards. I support the use of restorative policies and practices whenever possible. Hopefully, our district can focus more closely on the implementation of our Social Justice Standards. Dr. Satinder Hawkins did an amazing job showcasing the work of the District Teaching and Learning Council (TLC).

**What do you believe is the role of the District in providing high quality early childhood education and how will you fund expansion and quality improvement while maintaining accessibility and affordability?** Quality early childhood education is an essential policy tool for closing the achievement gap. We must look beyond the traditional k-12 model. We need to expand access to quality early childhood education to our youngest learners. We know that children from different income brackets start kindergarten with gaps in reading skills, math skills, attention, and behavior, and that these gaps usually grow larger as children move up in grades. The state of California has mandated transitional kindergarten and has budgeted funds for the expansion of the program.

**How do you see your role on the School Board in relationship to different stakeholders: parents, students, credentialed teachers, classified staff, CTA, LACOE, Sacramento, the City of SM, etc?** The role of a school board member is to serve as a representative of the community, especially in terms of oversight. In order to best serve the interests of my community, I will always try to listen to our parents, students, teachers, and staff. I will seek to collaborate with LACOE, Sacramento, and the cities of SM, and Malibu. The board as a whole adopts policy, and is responsible for hiring and evaluating the Superintendent.

**What is your plan to deal with Malibu's petition to unify (ie, separate from) the school district, and what would an equitable solution look like?** Any reorganization needs to ensure that our vulnerable community is protected. In other words, any separation agreement needs to ensure that the two remaining districts have the financial means to offer the programs and services necessary for their vulnerable communities.

## **Student Concerns**

**What is your idea of the perfect learning environment?** Students attend schools that are safe, secure, and sustainable. Students are engaged by the curriculum, and feel welcome. Teachers and staff are well paid, well trained, and have opportunities to collaborate. Administrators support teachers, and staff. Administrators look for ways to improve school systems, and policies. Parents and families have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support the academic instruction received and engage with educators and administrators.

**What can SMMUSD do to better address student mental health needs?** I believe that we should continue to expand our efforts in the area of mental health. The pandemic brought national attention to issues of mental health and well-being of children. SMMUSD has made available certain mental health resources for students. While I believe these resources are of great benefit, I think that continued efforts in the area of diversity and inclusion are also essential for our students' mental health. SMMUSD has developed a district/community-wide network of partners that provide no cost/low cost options to our students. We need to ensure that all of our students and families have access to mental health resources at the time of need.

### **How do you feel about campus surveillance?**

I'm against campus surveillance. Cameras are used to record the perimeter of school grounds.

**What is your position on gun safety at school? What steps can the School Board take to prevent violent shootings?** I am for gun control and the elimination of assault weapons. We must continually work on securing all entrances to our school grounds. We must annually review our safety plans and protocols. The school board is providing mental health support to our students. Strong relationships between students and school staff are essential to building trust which makes it easier for students to report threats.

**Do you support SMPD officers in the schools?** No, other than during a bona fide emergency response or investigation, I do not support the presence of SMPD officers on any of our campuses.

**Do you support legislative efforts to limit unnecessary police involvement in schools?** Yes

**How will you support our students to be critical thinkers, leaders, and activists, starting in elementary school?** I think that we should encourage our students to ask questions, and to spend time looking for answers. Not knowing is not failure, it is the first step to understanding. We should look for ways to incorporate play in our instruction. Our instruction should be differentiated and student centered.

**Would you support student activism such as the student walkouts in support of gun control, racial justice, climate strike, etc.? How can these ideals be incorporated into the curriculum?** Yes, I support student activism. The district is adopting the State Seal of Civic Engagement.

## **Social Justice**

**In what ways can SMMUSD ensure that, in a real, practical sense, Black Lives Matter in our school community?** While the Santa Monica-Malibu School District is overall high achieving, a wide disparity still exists for Black students. We must do better for Black students. Our district can ensure that we encourage parent engagement, provide resources for social emotional support, address and change all inequitable grading practices and policies, strengthen and promote the tiered intervention system, advocate for diverse hiring practices, professional development on cultural competency, and implement social justice standards.

**In what ways can SMMUSD best protect the undocumented residents of Santa Monica?** All of our school campuses are a sanctuary for all students regardless of immigration status or documentation. We should add resources to the district websites for our immigrant students and families.

**How would you use your position on the School Board to assist BIPOC and other disadvantaged residents of Santa Monica?**

I would use my position on the school board to advocate for policies and programs that support BIPOC and other vulnerable students in our community.

**How do you plan to (in the moment) counteract any and all observed possible acts of microaggressions towards Women, African Americans, Hispanics, LGBTQ and others of marginalized communities from your fellow Board Members or members of the public? What is your experience in dealing with these situations?** “There is a widely shared perception that underperformance, particularly among SED and English Learners, is due to their families not valuing education or being unable to support their learning.” (Noguera Report, 22) This is a common microaggression that I have seen used to blame parents and students and it is a major obstacle at times. I will try and do my best to speak up when I hear microaggressions spoken by colleagues or members of the community.

## **Ballot Measures**

**Do you support California Proposition 1? Yes!**

**Do you support the citizens initiative ballot measure which would tax real estate transactions over \$8M and provide revenue for affordable housing, rent subsidy, and SMMUSD? Why/why not?** Yes, I support the people's initiative. We must do everything we can to provide affordable housing for our families. Access to affordable, safe, and stable housing improves child outcomes. This measure also provides additional funds for our school district.

**Do you support the competing council-approved ballot measure which would**

**tax real estate transactions over \$8M and provide revenue into the general fund? Why/why not?** No, I don't support it.

**Do you support the rent control ballot measure which would permanently lower the rent control General Adjustment cap from 6% down to 3%?** Yes

**Do you support the SMC bond measure?** Yes

**Do you support the 1% transient occupancy tax ballot measure?** Yes

**Do you support the cannabis business tax ballot measure?** Yes

## **Additional Questions**

**What role do you believe the Santa Monica Democratic Club should have in our City?** The club should be the voice of progressive democratic values in Santa Monica. We need to continue to support progressive candidates, propositions, and legislation.

**If elected, how would you attempt to interact with the Santa Monica Democratic Club and other political organizations to ensure community buy-in on new proposals?** Since joining SMDC, I've been an active member. I have enjoyed participating in the many activities the different committees plan, and always look forward to attending our general monthly meetings and DEI meetings. Whenever possible I will work with the SMDC to support progressive proposals.