

Santa Monica Democratic Club

2024 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. Only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration. 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.

Please send the completed questionnaire to smdemocrats@gmail.com by 11:59pm on May 18, 2024. Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis for the weekend of May 25/26 as the questionnaires are returned.

None of these questions shall be construed as litmus tests. There are no questions that must be answered a certain way to be considered for our endorsement.

General Information

Candidate Name: Jennifer Smith

Email Address: jgks@verizon.net

Candidate's Current Occupation:

Candidate's Employer: SMMUSD

Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate):

1. What qualifications do you bring to this office? *I have been involved in Santa Monica Schools for over 15 years as Roosevelt, Lincoln and SMMPTA Council President. I co-chaired the SMS Bond campaign and the GS/GSH campaign (education side). I have now served for 3 ½ years on the Board. I have two children, a senior at Samohi, and a child in college who have both gone to SMMUSD schools from preschool to high school.*
2. Why are you running? *I have a passion for public education, and specifically our SMM Schools*
3. What are the top issues of your campaign? How do you plan to address those issues once elected? *Budget, engagement, DEI, mental health, unification, reclassification. As a board, where I think there is a very good working relationship along with our superintendent and educational partners we need to engage in thoughtful conversations to be able to continue the critical work that I think we've started to address in these issues - Capstone, academies, project based learning, culturally responsive teaching, community outreach are all essential pieces of progress and achievement and reaching all kids.*
4. Please list all of your individual and/or organizational endorsements. *Maria Leon Vasquez, Jon Keen, Anastasia Foster, Dr. Margaret Quinones-Perez*
5. How long have you lived in Santa Monica or Malibu? Where else have you lived? *I moved to SM in 1996, with an 18 month move to Tempe, AZ and back to SM in 1999.*
6. Will you pledge to serve on the School Board for your entire four year term? *Yes*

Campaign Finance

1. How much money have you raised for your campaign to date? *\$0*
2. How much do you intend to raise by Election Day 2024? *I am hoping to raise about \$30,000.*
3. Candidates for local office often choose not to take campaign contributions from particular types of organizations or industries. Are there any such sources from which

you would decline donations? If so, which? I have only accepted money from individuals and organizations that align with my goals. I'm sure there are many that do not. I will address them as the arise.

Party / Activism

1. How long have you been a registered Democrat? 37 years. Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State? No. If so, which party and why?
2. What is your experience with political activism? Have you ever volunteered or worked for a political campaign other than your own, and if so, in what capacity were you involved? I co-chaired the SMS Bond Campaign and the GS/GSH Campaign (education) and I worked on the Y/YY campaign and the Measure A parcel tax campaign.
3. Which political candidates have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible, especially where you endorsed during a contested primary.
4. 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.
5. Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization. Samohi PTA, SMRR, Stonewall DC, National Women's Political Caucus. CEPS. I was the PTA president at Roosevelt Elementary School, Lincoln Middle School and the SMM Council of PTA's. I am the co-chair of Grad Nite
6. Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found below. List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree.

<https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FinalPlatform2024.pdf> yes.

SMMUSD

1. What are your top priorities for SMMUSD which you plan to address in this four year term? Creating a budget that aligns with our educational goals and a reserve policy that is practical and sustainable while making sure we are supporting the needs of our staff. Moving forward with our educational paths of Diversity, Equity and inclusion while addressing, belonging, curiosity and empowerment. Engagement of our students in the curriculum and resources for mental health and well-being. Improving on our reclassification efforts and special education services.
2. What have been the strengths (and/or weaknesses) of Superintendent Shelton during his tenure thus far? Dr. Shelton has deeply connected with all staff in the district. His goals and expectations are clear and organized. His willingness to adjust as he goes shows his flexibility and awareness of progress or lack of progress. His weakness lies in the inherent situation as a first-time superintendent, learning as you're leading can be difficult.
3. 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? Our status as Basic Aid makes me acutely aware of the risks that inherently come with that funding, the fluctuations that can occur and the need for stability to provide a quality education shows the need for more measured fiscal responsibility in the district and future planning. Without COLA increases from the state, I think about long term stability with the ability to support and retain staff. Funding priorities should be directly linked to student need, and I hope with thoughtful planning and support from our educational partners, we can create systems that create the long term plan the district needs.
4. Do you support the petition to transition the SMMUSD Board into districted elections, or do you believe the Board should continue in its current form of seven at-large seats? I am not in favor of districting for our school district. It is likely to dilute voting power for

protected classes of peoples and limits constituents' access to a broad group of people making decisions.

5. Deficit-based framing like “achievement gap” can increase challenges students from marginalized backgrounds face in academic environments. More widely, deficit framing can influence how broader communities see foundational complexities of education inequity. As an SMMUSD leader, how are you effectively shaping policy that helps students thrive and promotes healthy public debate? *The board has been reviewing, evaluating and updating policies that are barriers to students' achievement. Discipline and health policies have recently come to the board for change. Outside of policy, I think using practices that encourage mastery, and meeting each child where they are and meeting their needs while emphasizing engagement and having high expectations, we can create a culture and environment that puts students on a path of success. Focusing on success and reframing challenges and language are key eliminating the stigma of “achievement gap”.*
6. 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? *I believe the early childhood department has done an excellent job of rolling out a thoughtful plan for TK and providing a 3-year-old preschool program that has a fee schedule based on need. There are many challenges to early childhood education that we are looking for solutions for but will take time to build programs and supports from a wider lens than our district to make that happen. Having a pipeline of credentialed staff to maintain high quality is key. Continued advocacy for state support for early childhood is essential for it not to be marginalized.*
7. What is your assessment of the status of Malibu unification, and what is remaining to be done to ensure financial equity for Santa Monica and Malibu students? *We are sharing the financial agreement the unification sub-committee has worked tirelessly on with the public. Addressing any concerns and adopting language that gives us the flexibility to address unexpected future circumstances ensures each district will be whole.*

Student Concerns

1. What is your idea of the perfect learning environment? *Besides meeting the basic needs of safety and comfort, I think it is important to have spaces that engage all types of learners, so they are inspired by, motivated for and respectful of the process of learning. I think that means kids need space to engage, flexibility to not feel stagnant and materials to aid them in their work. A space where they can feel ownership of their education and respected by the people who are helping them achieve.*
2. How is SMMUSD concretely supporting the mental health needs of culturally diverse learners? *SMMUSD has a mosaic of mental health services using various state, county, city and nonprofit resources to put a robust program to reach as many kids as possible. With Margaret's place and community schools' programs at the high school and our district mental health coordinator there is great support for students. Widening our use of Restorative Justice practices and continuing our expanding social justice standards and Kotsen practices is reaching students, staff and community to attend to the needs of our very diverse community. Dispelling stereotypes and stigmas is also a goal for all to access mental health services needed.*
3. How do you feel about campus surveillance? *I do not believe in student surveillance. There are cameras at campuses on the perimeter.*
4. What is your position on gun safety at school? What steps can the School Board take to prevent violent shootings? *Creating a safe environment is the highest priority. Building a caring environment, using our anti bullying programs and providing expanded mental health services to address students' needs and actively lobby for better gun control law at the state and federal level.*
5. Do you support SMPD officers in the schools? *I do not.*

6. How will you support our students to be critical thinkers, leaders, and activists, starting in elementary school? Would you support student activism such as the student walkouts in support of gun control, racial justice, climate strike, foreign divestment, etc.? How can these ideals be incorporated into the curriculum? **More student interest and project-based learning are ways to engage students and create the spark and the drive for critical thinkers. Our district is providing robust professional development to assist teachers and staff to effectively engage students in this way. Allowing more opportunities with student led clubs is one way to support students in their interests wherever they may lie. I do support activism, and having the ability to show what they care about. I think showing students pathways to change is important for them to be the change makers of the future. I believe these ideas are imbedded somewhat in the curriculum, especially in the social justice standards being incorporated.**
7. How are the effects of learning loss from home instruction during the COVID pandemic still being felt by students, and in what ways are the district responding? **We know we are still recovering academically from the pandemic. Understanding the cumulative effects are important. Using our cycle of inquiry and honing our abilities to identify where the needs lie allows our staff to adjust to situations as they are seen and using the resources on hand to address them. In school, after school and summer school programs are being used to address these needs all year long.**

Social Justice

1. What can SMMUSD do to better implement social justice instruction and otherwise address equity issues? **We are expanding our opportunities for students to access ACES course in high school. All schools having access to a broad range of resources that reflect all facets of our society in the curriculum is ongoing. Continuing to train and use restorative justice practices to create better community and engage kids in communicating in productive ways around race and social justice issues.**
2. How are you using your position on the School Board to assist systematically disadvantaged groups of residents of Santa Monica? **By removing barriers to opportunities and access to education through change in policies and by showing up and listening to members of our school community and understanding the concerns and needs of all groups and all students.**
3. In light of anti-DEI practices across the nation, how is SMMUSD encouraging opportunity based on place and promoting more equitable approaches to public education? **I think we are creating a culture where DEI is at the top of mind for all policy and programs as we move forward and reviewing and changing policies that create barriers for any student. Providing opportunities like school wide SATs – practices such as AP Classed for all students, eliminating bias in class selection are some ways I've seen this progress.**

Ballot Measures

Do you support the Justice For Renters Act? **Yes**

Do you support the repeal of Article 34? **Yes**

Do you support the initiative to require new local taxes to pass by a two-thirds vote? **No**

Do you support the potential measure to amend Prop 47? **No**

Do you support the proposed amendments to Measure GS to exempt multifamily housing? **No**

Additional Questions

1. What role do you believe the Santa Monica Democratic Club should have in our City? **I think it should be and is the voice of Democratic Party. To advance the ideas and advocate for policies that uphold those ideals.**

2. 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?

I believe showing up and being accessible are two of the key elements of our community being seen and heard, If you want to go far – go together – I want us to be able to give the very best education and opportunities to our students, so let's go together.

3. What is the most important topic that was left off of this questionnaire? Environmental justice and sustainability.