

Santa Monica Democratic Club

2026 College Board Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Dr. Luis Barrera Castañón

General Information

Candidate Name: Luis Barrera Castañón, Ed.D.

Email Address: LBC4SMC@gmail.com

Candidate's Current Occupation: Founder & CEO

Candidate's Employer: EmpathySystem.ai

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1. What qualifications do you bring to this office?

My lived experience, professional background, and direct governance experience are what I bring to the role of Trustee at Santa Monica College.

My family and I sought refuge in California after the Guatemalan civil war and the targeted disappearances of Indigenous people. I grew up unknowingly undocumented in Culver City and eventually came to Santa Monica College after a friend suggested that my plumbing career might benefit from additional certifications. I enrolled at SMC, did well in my assessments, and quickly realized that I had found much more than a place to take classes. I found community. I found confidence. I found my calling. In two and a half years, I went from being a timid undocumented student carrying shame about my status to serving as Student Body President. SMC changed my life.

After SMC, I transferred to UC Berkeley. That trajectory would not have been possible for me directly out of high school. SMC created the bridge that helped me see a different future for myself, and as a Cal graduate I built a network that supported my dreams, goals, and professional ambitions. Since then, I have spent nearly 20 years working at the intersection of economic development, workforce development, K-14 education, talent development, and adult learning. I have designed nonprofit workforce programs, educational pathways, and employer-connected talent pipelines. I have helped develop state administrative regulations, state laws, and local government policies focused on creating opportunity for people who have struggled with traditional education systems and need a pathway to self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

I also bring operational and fiscal experience. Throughout my career, I have managed millions of dollars in grants and revenues, with a focus on keeping organizations solvent, sustainable, and able to continue delivering services to the communities that need them most.

As a current Trustee at SMC, I have pushed our Board to think critically about the college's mission and future. The purpose of a two-year college is still rooted in the same core responsibilities it had in the 1930s: providing vocational training that meets the needs of local employers, creating a pathway to four-year universities, and offering lifelong learning opportunities to the local community. SMC has excelled in transfer, and that should remain a point of pride. But we must also strengthen our focus on

workforce development, dual enrollment, lifelong learning, and the changing needs of students and the regional economy.

The educational landscape and population trends are shifting. As stewards of this public institution, we have a responsibility to look beyond the current moment and ensure that many more generations can experience the life-changing power of Santa Monica College, just as I did.

2. Why are you running?

I am running because I made a promise to my younger self when I was Student Body President at Santa Monica College that I would do so. I became a student leader during a time when the state was facing significant budget challenges, and the SMC Board of Trustees had to make difficult decisions that affected faculty, staff, and students. As students, we often felt outside of that process. We wanted more transparency, more communication, and a clearer understanding of how decisions were being made. That experience stayed with me, and it shaped my belief that students, employees, and the community deserve a public institutional governance process that is open, accountable, and easier to understand.

I am also running as a higher education and workforce development professional who believes SMC must stay at the forefront of innovation and change. For many years, the college has been rightly proud of its transfer success. That must remain central to our mission. But transfer alone is not enough to meet the full needs of today's students, workers, employers, and community.

The world has changed. Degrees still matter, but applied skills, competencies, workforce readiness, and lifelong learning are now more important than ever. Students need multiple pathways to success, whether that means transferring to a four-year university, gaining industry-relevant skills, entering a new career, advancing in their current profession, or returning to college later in life.

I am running to help ensure SMC stays ahead of these changes, strengthens its financial future, and challenges itself to be not only a strong educational institution, but a leader in meeting the future needs of students and the community.

3. What are the top issues of your campaign, and how do they differ from other candidates in this race? How do you plan to address those issues once elected?

My top issues are fiscal accountability, alignment with the state funding formula, and student success. Fiscal accountability is essential to SMC's future. The college has faced serious financial challenges, and I believe past budget decisions created long-term obligations without a sustainable financial plan. I want SMC to have well-compensated faculty and staff because they are central to student success. But compensation, staffing, benefits, and long-term commitments must be aligned with actual revenues and long-term stability. We cannot continue using one-time funds to pay for recurring expenses.

As Trustee, I will continue pushing for stronger budget discipline, clearer long-term planning, and policies that prevent structural deficits in the future. Fiscal responsibility is what allows the college to protect programs, support employees, invest in innovation, and serve students for generations. Second, SMC must better align its institutional strategy with the state funding formula. The formula is built around transfer, workforce development, and high school dual enrollment. SMC excels at transfer, and that must continue. But we need stronger strategies for workforce development and dual enrollment so we can maximize state funding while better serving students, families, employers, and the regional economy.

Third, student success must remain the core mission. We need to be honest about which students are succeeding, which students are not, and where the college must intervene. That requires transparent, disaggregated data by race, income, first-generation status, age, program, and other equity indicators. If some students are not succeeding at the same rate as their peers, we have a responsibility to name that clearly and act.

What differentiates me is that I bring lived experience as an undocumented SMC student and student leader. I bring professional experience in workforce and economic development, operational experience managing grants and revenues, and direct experience serving on the Board. I am not approaching these issues only as concepts. I have worked on state legislation to advance educational pathways, expand workforce programs, formalize talent pipelines, and bring accountability, transparency and local control to educational systems.

To address these issues once elected, I will push for clear goals, regular public updates, an accountability dashboard, and more frequent Board study sessions on fiscal stability, student outcomes, workforce development, dual enrollment, artificial intelligence, enrollment trends, and the changing needs of our region. My goal is for the Board, administration, faculty, classified professionals, students, and community to work from shared facts, transparent data, and a clear long-term vision for the college.

4. Please list all endorsements received to date (individual and organizational).

- Dr. Sion Roy, Chair, Santa Monica College Board of Trustees
- Dr. Tom Peters, Vice Chair, Santa Monica College Board of Trustees
- Dr. Nancy Greenstein, Trustee, Santa Monica College Board of Trustees
- Rob Rader, Trustee, Santa Monica College Board of Trustees
- Anastasia Foster, Trustee, Santa Monica College Board of Trustees
- Dr. Susan Aminoff, former Santa Monica College Board Trustee
- Dr. Louise Jaffe, former Santa Monica College Board Trustee
- Caroline Torosis, Mayor, City of Santa Monica
- Kay Ambriz, Santa Monica Rent Control Board Member
- Dan Hall, Santa Monica City Councilmember
- Barry Snell, Santa Monica City Councilmember
- Ellis Raskin, Santa Monica City Councilmember
- Natalya Zernitskaya, Santa Monica City Councilmember

- Ted Winterer, former Mayor and former Santa Monica City Councilmember
- Mike Fong, California State Assemblymember, 49th Assembly District; Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee
- Mike Soloff, Santa Monica Resident
- Denny Zane, Santa Monica Resident
- Patricia Hoffman, Santa Monica Resident

5. How long have you lived in Santa Monica or Malibu? Where else have you lived?

I have lived in Santa Monica for four years. Moving here and building my family here was always a personal goal of mine, and when I reached that stage of my life, Santa Monica is where I chose to grow my family roots.

Prior to Santa Monica, I lived in Brentwood and Mid-City LA most of my life, except during my undergraduate years and when my family arrived in the United States.

6. Will you pledge to serve on the College Board for your entire four-year term?

My commitment is to serve the Santa Monica College community for the full four-year term. I believe the college needs steady, thoughtful leadership during an important period of financial recovery, enrollment change, workforce development, and institutional planning. I have no current plans to seek any other office; my priority is this role and the work ahead at SMC.

7. What is your history of watching, attending, or speaking at SMC Board meetings? (If incumbent, prior to your own service.)

Prior to joining the Board of Trustees, I made it a point to review Board meeting recordings from 2018 forward so I could better understand the major discussions, decisions, and context that shaped the college before my appointment. I wanted to enter the role with respect for the institution’s history and a clear understanding of the issues the Board had been navigating. Since joining the Board, I have worked to listen carefully, understand the nuances behind prior decisions, and contribute to the college’s future with that context in mind.

Any direct experience speaking to the Board before serving as a Trustee was primarily as a student leader when I served as SMC’s Student Body President.

Campaign Finance

1. How much money have you raised for your campaign to date?

I recently formed my campaign committee and submitted the necessary paperwork, so I have not begun fundraising yet. As of today, my campaign has not raised any funds.

2. How much do you intend to raise by Election Day 2026?

My goal is to raise 45K+ by Nov 26 election day. This will allow the campaign to communicate with voters, build visibility, support outreach, and run a disciplined operation.

3. Candidates for local office often choose not to take campaign contributions from particular types of organizations or industries who are out of step with their own values. Are there any such sources from which you would decline donations? If so, which?

I intend to run a campaign that is rooted in friends, family, community members, and people who believe in the future of Santa Monica College. I would decline contributions from sources that are not consistent with my values. I will not accept contributions that compromise, or appear to compromise, my ability to make independent decisions as a Trustee. I will evaluate contributions through that lens and remain committed to transparency, accountability, and compliance.

Party / Activism

1. How long have you been a registered Democrat? Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State? If so, which party and why?

I have been a registered Democrat since my first presidential vote for Barack Obama in 2008. Earlier in life, I was registered Republican largely because of my family's experience and the political environment I grew up in. My father received legal status through the Reagan amnesty program and as a small business owner he believed the Republican Party (at that time) reflected values that mattered to him and our family.

As I matured, I studied and was exposed to politics/government for myself. I gained more experience working in education, workforce development, public policy, and community systems; my values and political home became clear. Those values are why I became a Democrat and why I remain one today.

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?

My political activism has primarily been rooted in the political process through policy development, local Democratic engagement, volunteer campaign activity, and public advocacy.

Professionally, I have spent much of my career working with elected officials, community leaders, nonprofit organizations, employers, and public agencies to help craft legislation, administrative regulations, and local policies focused on education, workforce development, economic mobility, and opportunity for underserved communities.

After moving to Santa Monica, I made it a priority to become more active locally. I joined the Santa Monica Democratic Club and Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights. I later joined the Executive Board of the Santa Monica Democratic Club. During the 2024 campaign cycle, I volunteered in GOTV

efforts, including canvassing, phone banking, and speaking in support of candidates at public meetings.

3. Which political candidates and/or ballot measures have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible, especially where you endorsed during a contested primary.

In 2014, I worked with a coalition of allies in support of CA Prop 47. At the time, I worked at the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. I helped move the Chamber to take a “no position” on the measure. I supported Proposition 47 because I believed then, and now still, in reducing certain nonviolent, nonsexual, and nonserious offenses from felonies to misdemeanors in efforts to create more just pathways for people to rebuild their lives.

In 2024, I publicly supported and canvassed for Dan Hall, Ellis Raskin, Barry Snell, and Natalya Zernitskaya for Santa Monica City Council. I also supported and canvassed for Margaret Quiñonez-Perez, Rob Rader and Anastasia Foster for the Santa Monica College Board of Trustees.

In 2026, I supported Xavier Becerra’s primary campaign for Governor and Elmer Roldan for Los Angeles City Council District 9.

4. Have you ever signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office? If so, please list the name(s) of the officials and why you felt they should be recalled.

No, I have not signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office.

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

- House of Haven — Board Member; Past Chair and Vice Chair
- Raza Golf Foundation — Board Member
- Strive LA — Board Member
- Santa Monica College Young Alumni Council — Founding Member

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.

I have read and I agree with the CDP Platform.

SMC Governance & Finance

1. What are your top priorities for Santa Monica College over the next four years?

My top priorities over the next four years are fiscal stability, revenue growth, alignment with the state funding formula, and stronger transparency and accountability.

First, SMC must restore long-term fiscal stability. We need to ensure that the college no longer uses one-time funds to pay for recurring expenses. That principle should be reflected in Board policies and institutional practices moving forward. As Chair of the Board Policies Committee, I will work to align our policies and strengthen our practices around long-term financial responsibility.

Second, SMC must better align its institutional goals with the state funding formula. The formula is not perfect, but it is the system we have. We need to maximize our funding by strengthening all parts of the formula, including transfer, workforce development, and dual enrollment. SMC has a strong transfer legacy, but we need to be more intentional about workforce pathways and high school partnerships.

Third, we need new revenue strategies that are connected to the future of education and the needs of the region. One opportunity is targeted international student enrollment in programs that match global demand. For example, water security and sustainability are growing issues around the world. The City of Santa Monica has made important progress toward water independence and local water filtration systems, but that work is not meaningfully connected to SMC. That is a missed opportunity. SMC could build a stronger sustainability and water conservation pathway that attracts students, partners, and potential funding from regions where these skills are urgently needed.

Finally, I want to focus on data transparency and accountability. The public, students, faculty, classified professionals, and administrators should be able to clearly understand the college's finances, enrollment trends, student outcomes, bond investments, and progress toward institutional goals. Over the next four years, I want SMC to move toward a culture where decisions are guided by clear data, shared facts, and long-term responsibility.

2. How do you assess the College's current financial and enrollment outlook, and what steps would you take to ensure long-term stability?

SMC can create long-term stability, but we must be honest about where we are. The college is facing an \$8 million deficit even after taking austerity measures that resulted in stricter financial controls as well as laying off 45 long term members of our classified staff. While the college community has bravely taken the first necessary step in addressing the damage, more needs to be done.

Proposed steps:

- Grow our reserves.
- Stop using one-time money for recurring expenses.
- Align our institutional goals with the state funding formula.
- Create an accountability dashboard to track our progress
- Invest in revenue-generating strategies outside of the formula.

We need clear numbers, shared facts, and financial discipline.

3. How would you approach working with the College administration to effectively implement Board policies and ensure accountability?

My approach would be to work collaboratively with the current and incoming Superintendent/President, set clear expectations, and make sure we are measuring progress over time. The Board's role is to set vision, policy, and accountability. That is important because the Superintendent/President is the vehicle for how the Board works with administration and ensuring that Board policies are implemented across the college.

This year, SMC will hire a new Superintendent/President. That person will need to work closely with the board to create a strategic plan that reflects where the college is, our financial reality, our enrollment challenges, our student success goals, and the future of higher education. My approach would be to work collaboratively with the Superintendent/President, set clear expectations, and make sure we are measuring progress over time. Accountability cannot just be something we talk about internally. The campus community and the public should be able to see what goals we set, what progress we are making, and where we are falling short.

I also think our governance structures need to adjust. The current District Planning and Advisory Council (DPAC) should be looked at carefully so that good ideas and innovations can be widely shared and adopted by more stakeholders. The Superintendent/President should not be the only decision maker in that space. We need a process where administration, faculty, classified professionals, and students all feel part of the ideation and decision-making process.

That is how policies become real: clear direction from the Board, a strong working relationship with the Superintendent/President, transparent goals, and a governance process that allows the college community to help move the institution forward.

4. How do you assess Santa Monica College's current approach to transparency, public engagement, and community trust? What specific steps would you take to ensure accountability and meaningful public input in Board decision-making?

While the college has information available through different webpages that is not the same thing as true transparency. Right now, someone can go through agendas, minutes, budget documents, state laws, regulations, and other public documents and eventually piece together the whole picture. But that takes time, and it also takes a certain level of knowledge about how colleges and public institutions work. Most students, staff, faculty, and community members do not have the time to do that. So even though the information is technically available, it can still feel esoteric and hard to understand.

Transparency must be easier to digest. As a public institution that receives taxpayer support, SMC should be fully transparent about the decisions being made, whether those decisions are easy or difficult. That includes our finances, student outcomes, bond investments, enrollment trends, and future goals.

I think SMC has done well with public engagement and community trust when things are going well. But when it came to the financial condition of the college, I do not think most people knew how serious the situation had become until the consequences were already being felt. Celebrate America and the layoff of Emeritus College leadership are examples of decisions that had real community impact. Those moments showed that we need a better way to communicate the reality of the college before people are surprised by the consequences.

My approach to accountability is full disclosure, except for items that are legally required to stay private, such as personnel issues. Everything else should be easier for the public to access and understand. Our budget, benefits and salaries, bond expenditures, student outcomes, enrollment trends, and long-term plans should not be hard to find or hard to interpret.

One specific step I support is creating a public dashboard with the most important information about the college. Another is holding a State of the College once a year for the community. That would give students, staff, faculty, residents, and community members a clear understanding of where the college is, what decisions are being considered, and where public input is needed.

If we do not create shared facts, then everyone can tell their own version of what is happening. I think SMC needs to make the truth easier to see, easier to understand, and easier for the public to engage with.

5. Santa Monica College recently faced a significant budget shortfall that led the Board to approve layoffs, prompting substantial public debate over the College's financial management and long-term planning. What is your assessment of how the Board handled the situation? How would you balance fiscal responsibility, workforce impacts, educational quality, transparency, and long-term institutional stability when making difficult governance decisions?

Layoffs are serious, and they have real consequences for people, families, students, departments, and the culture of the college. I do not take that lightly.

At the same time, the financial reality of the college was apparent if you knew what to look for and where to find it. When personnel costs started to climb beyond 85% of the budget and later became 92% of the entire budget, that is a structural problem. It limits the college's ability to invest in students, programs, professional development, technology, and innovation.

The fact that we let our personnel costs reach 92% of our budget should have been a red flag to anyone who has owned a business, managed personnel costs or is familiar with budgeting for organizations. That is the reality that the Board faced, and although some on the Board pushed for the College to begin this process sooner, the Board decided to slow down the process. I think the situation could have been handled better and faster without having so much uncertainty take place at the college.

The Board made the right decision at the end of the day; however, this is only the first step. The college still faces a budget deficit, and once that deficit is taken care of the college will still be in deep financial austerity. The college's competitiveness is suffering because the college does not have money to support robust professional development. The staff and faculty that we need to be leaders and innovators in higher education cannot attend conferences and gatherings because the college does not have additional dollars to provide these opportunities to everyone. Addressing the structural deficit alone doesn't solve our long-term issues. This means that the new Board that joins the college must have the resolve to continue to make difficult decisions to get the college to not only financial stability but financial freedom.

For me, fiscal responsibility, workforce impacts, educational quality, transparency, and long-term stability all come down to vision and accountability. We must be honest about past decisions, honest about the current budget, and honest about what it will take to move forward.

The goal cannot just be to survive the deficit. The goal must be getting SMC to a place where we have the financial freedom to invest again. We must invest in our students, our faculty, our classified professionals, our programs, our innovation, and in our community. Only by being honest about our current state of affairs, the realities of our budgets and the long-term vision needed for us to reach stability will we be honest about where our college is and where it needs to go.

Students & Learning

1. What specific steps would you take to improve student outcomes at SMC, including transfer rates, completion, and workforce readiness? How should success be measured?

One of the first steps I would take is around transparency. Currently, we do not have a clear enough picture of how we are doing over time with student outcomes. We may receive updates once a year, but it is not always clear what changed, what interventions were made, or what we are doing next. This is one of the biggest challenges for the college. I think having more transparency around our goals, outcomes, completion rates and student success metrics over time would be a good start, so everyone in the campus community is aware of where we stand with our goals and how we might be able to create a path forward to address where our students are not meeting expectations.

Additionally, I would institute monthly study sessions in all facets of the education pipeline to make sure all staff, faculty, administration and students are aware of the future trends in education and what we can do as a college community to meet the moment that is in front of us. I believe in shared governance, I believe in the role of each union to exercise its power, and I believe that we should start from a common knowledge base to begin to come up with solutions as a college community.

2. How should SMC address student housing insecurity, and how should access to any new student housing be prioritized?

SMC already has a plan for student housing, and the voters approved bonds that prioritize the students most in need. That should remain the goal. I also think the college must be more creative

with its land and partnerships. With AB 648 now signed into law, SMC has more room to think about how its properties can support housing not only for students, but also potentially for workers and partners connected to the college. We should work closely with the City of Santa Monica and the County to understand the best use of our land and how it can meet real housing needs.

One of the biggest challenges we need to address is the fact that only 60% of our students come to campus. We have a need to get more students to our beautiful campus and having student housing will help us meet this goal. We have more than enough property to think more creatively about housing but at the heart of each of these decisions must be those that are in most need. That is not to say that our properties cannot also house those that can pay prevailing rents, because we must also provide a space where students from different economic backgrounds can cohabitate to learn and grow from each other. Our priority is those students and workers that simply cannot afford the rents in our city.

3. What role should Santa Monica College play in supporting student mental health and well-being?

Mental health and well-being are central to student success. Students cannot succeed academically if they are struggling with basic stability, wellness, or access to support. The college must support these needs, but it does not have to do them alone. There is an existing network of mental health providers in the region as well as within the city of Santa Monica. Nonprofit providers that have decades of exemplary work in this space. SMC can use its funds to leverage these organizations' network and create programming that can outlive state funding for mental health and wellness, which at times seems to be cyclical.

Additionally, as an educational institution, SMC has the opportunity to create a social work and psychology pathway that starts to train practitioners in this space. By doing so, we can become a teaching hub, in partnership with local universities, that can also provide these necessary services to our students at no cost. These are the innovative approaches we should be investing in to meet the real needs of our community.

4. How should Santa Monica College balance the use of digital learning tools and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, with concerns about academic integrity, student engagement, and educational quality? What guidelines or limitations, if any, should the College adopt?

Educational institutions are inherently testing grounds for new technologies. Instead of resisting these new methods, the college must work collaboratively with all stakeholders to understand the limitations and opportunities that exist for these technologies as learning and engagement tools.

Presently, it is difficult to generate universal guidelines for these new tools, particularly AI, because their uniqueness is inherent in their innovation. The goal should be responsible use, not blind adoption and not fear-based rejection. What we must do is create processes that engage our campus

community to come together at times when new technologies are developed and devise the guardrails or limitations for that technology.

Campus & Community

1. In light of increasing political tensions surrounding public education nationwide, how should SMC balance academic freedom, free expression, inclusive learning environments, institutional neutrality, and disruptive campus protests?

This is a tough question because it is difficult to control the consequences of these actions. As an institution, SMC must provide and protect academic freedom, free expression, and open discourse. I think SMC should create space for difficult conversations and make sure there are clear expectations for protest, speech, and conduct. When expression offends, the answer should not automatically be censorship. Often, the answer is more dialogue, more education, and a process where people can be heard but when conduct creates harm or threatens safety, the college has to act before harm occurs.

At the same time, the college has a responsibility to maintain an inclusive learning environment and keep people safe. Expression should not become harassment, intimidation, or disruption that prevents students from learning or employees from doing their work. Campus safety must take priority. Anything that puts students, staff and community at harm must be addressed before harm occurs.

As a practice and as an institution of higher education and learning, we must be ok with testing the boundaries of our comfort if by doing so we learn more about our limitations, prejudices or humanity.

2. How should the College adapt its programs to meet evolving workforce and economic needs?

SMC should be in regular conversation with local employers, labor, small businesses, public agencies, nonprofits, and regional economic leaders so we understand what skills are needed now and what needs are coming next. Through continued conversations we can understand how the college can meet the needs of these stakeholders.

We also need to use the labor market data that already exists. There is a myriad of labor market information portals for local, regional and statewide use that the college can use in order to help us understand job growth, wage trends, skills gaps, and emerging industries.

Additionally, the Los Angeles Regional Consortia provides a space where the local community college districts in the region can discuss and coordinate efforts to address workforce and economic development priorities. Based on all this data, the college, through its shared governance structures can devise a plan to meet the workforce and economic needs. The goal is to make sure SMC is responsive to where the economy is going while staying true to student success and lifelong learning.

3. Do you support the Club's resolution calling for a citywide ban of artificial turf on locally owned public land?

Yes, I support the club's resolution calling for a citywide ban of artificial turf on locally owned public land.

4. In what ways should SMC strengthen pathways between K-12 education, community college, and career opportunities?

We currently have strong relationships with Santa Monica High School through dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and workforce pathways. The challenge is that these partnerships require staff, coordination, and long-term planning. If we want dual enrollment and career pathways to grow, we need the capacity to support them well. Presently these staff members are funded by temporary funds. The college currently does not have any workforce development professionals funded by the general fund. This must change. It does not have to be 50%, but some percentage of our general fund must be spent on workforce programs like those connected to our local high school.

There are also regional boundaries that limit how SMC can engage with other local high schools because many are within the Los Angeles Community College District boundary. This creates a limitation that must be creatively navigated by our next Superintendent/President to look for opportunities where partnerships are possible.

On the career side, SMC is doing important work, but again the challenge is capacity and not having enough staff to create more of these opportunities. If we want stronger pathways, we must invest in the people and systems that make those pathways real and that investment must be connected to long-term funds and not temporary dollars, which is where all of our workforce programs currently live.

5. What role should Santa Monica College play in the broader Santa Monica community and regional economy?

SMC was founded to meet the needs of the local community and regional economy. Since the 1930s, SMC has been able to meet the local needs of the community by creating pathways to local 4-year colleges. Local Santa Monica youth and surrounding communities benefited from this approach, so much so that this practice was copied by the community college system.

But our focus on transfers has made the college less responsive to the needs of local Santa Monica residents; Santa Monica has changed and so has the economy. The average Santa Monican is 43 years old, with 74% having a bachelor's degree and 30% having advanced degrees. What this group needs now is upskilling, retraining, career transition support, and access to new skills in areas like AI, business, accounting, entrepreneurship, and technology. Others are worried about displacement or trying to figure out how their skills transfer into a new career. Too often, they must go to private online educational providers for that support. There is nowhere in Santa Monica where they can gain these skills. If we cannot do this at the local college level, then our college is really not meeting the needs of

our community. SMC should be the place where the local community can come for that kind of learning and upskilling.

We should continue to be a transfer leader, but we also need to be a stronger workforce, lifelong learning, and upskilling institution. If the local college cannot help people adapt to the future of work, then we are not fully meeting the needs of our community.

Ballot Measures

1. Do you support the California Billionaire Tax Act, which would impose a one-time emergency 5% tax on those worth more than \$1B? Why or why not?

Yes, I support it. I believe people who have benefited the most from our economy should contribute more to the public systems that make opportunity possible. I've heard from some billionaires that they want to contribute more but our tax system has been designed in ways that often favor extreme wealth. A one-time emergency tax on billionaires is a reasonable way to address the imbalance and invest in the public good.

2. Do you support the state ballot measure which would require voters to present government-issued identification when casting ballots? Why or why not?

No, I don't think we need government-issued IDs. We have not had voter fraud issues in the past. These are all scare tactics. Our system has worked. It's not broken.

3. Do you support the proposed state taxpayer initiative which would limit the ability of local governments to raise revenue through certain taxes and fees including real estate transfer taxes? Why or why not?

No, I don't support limiting local control. Every community is different, and some communities need flexibility in enacting local policies. We cannot take a universal guideline to all communities, at least not for this type of practice. Local control needs to remain.

4. Do you support the proposed ballot measure which would set aside 25% of the airport land for 3000 units of affordable housing, in addition to the remainder which would become a Great Park? Why or why not?

No, I believe the voters have spoken, and the majority of people want a park on the airport land. I think we should respect that decision.

What I would be interested in pursuing is changes in local zoning to the surrounding areas. We have a business park, the local college, and the land the city owns that are all adjacent to that park. We need to really think about developing that area and making that all affordable deed-restricted housing. We also need to give options to property owners to tap into subsidies for further development, if they are using it for affordable housing.

5. Based on results from the first few years of implementation, do you believe that 2022's Measure GS should be amended? If so, how and why?

During my work at the state level, one specific kernel of information that I picked up is that it takes 5 years to really see a policy take effect. There are so many bureaucratic paths that must be resolved for policy to truly become practice, especially good practice. So, I think we need to give it time before making any changes. As long as there is no corruption or outright obstruction, then let us trust the process and our content experts to figure out the vision of the original measure.

Additional Questions

1. 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?

My goal is to stay active, accessible, and in communication with the Santa Monica Democratic Club and other political organizations.

Community buy-in cannot happen after decisions are already made. Trustees need to share what the college is facing, explain the data behind major decisions, and listen early enough for community input to matter.

The role of Trustee takes a lot of time, especially during moments like contract negotiations, fiscal instability, and major college decisions. But that is exactly why communication matters. Community organizations should not have to guess what is happening at SMC or only hear from Trustees when there is a controversy.

If elected, I will stay connected through meetings, events, direct conversations, and regular communication when major issues are coming before the Board. My goal is to maintain a real relationship where community members understand what is happening at SMC and have a chance to weigh in.

2. What is the most important topic that was left off of this questionnaire?

In terms of questions that were left off, AI is not only an academic issue but it's also an issue of displacement. AI machines are already becoming a reality in other parts of the workforce. I, and many in the AI-first world, foresee a reality where machines are doing work that humans currently occupy. Specifically, AI machines for repetitive work, such as janitorial and regular maintenance, as well as administrative roles, is a reality. My question would be: "What steps should the college take to limit the displacement of jobs for the most vulnerable staff at the college?" And my answer would be that we need to take a proactive role to ensure that when these changes occur that our staff have a path to other careers in our college and in our system.

3. Please describe whether and how you used generative AI tools in preparing your responses. If elected, how would you use these tools in governance, if at all?

I answered the entire questionnaire on my own and then used AI to help review grammar and clarity. If elected, I would use AI the same way I believe public institutions should use it: as a tool, not as a replacement for human judgment, public accountability, or community input.

I would support thoughtful guidelines for AI use at SMC that protect privacy, academic integrity, transparency, and public trust while still allowing the college to responsibly use tools that can improve access to information and decision-making. But these guidelines must be a result of true shared governance with all campus stakeholders.