

10/13 SUHSD School Board Candidate Forum Hosted by M-A PTA

Participants:

Area C Candidates

[Shamar Edwards](#)

[Rich Ginn](#)

[Georgia Jack](#)

Area E Candidates

[Shawneece Stevenson](#)

[Meeting Recording](#); Access Passcode: vjwhF97?

We were not able to accommodate all questions during the candidate forum, so we asked the candidates to provide written responses to the outstanding questions. Here are the responses we received.

1. *I would like to hear the candidates comment on how they plan to work with/manage the superintendent using examples of their experiences in management/strategic roles on the past.*

Shamar Edwards

As a school principal, I interact with my superintendent regularly, both informally and formally. Communication is key. I would want to engage the superintendent on a weekly basis to stay apprised of the inner workings. I also want to support the superintendent, especially since this person will be new, in establishing strong relationships with all stakeholders. As a Board member, I would request data on the implementation of district goals. I would want a “weekly” which is a report generated by the superintendent to get updates from district departments and Cabinet members. I would also participate on sub-committees to interact with members in the larger school community to establish relationships, listen to the needs and provide that feedback to the superintendent and my fellow trustees.

Rich Ginn

Having served 8 years as a school board trustee, I have worked as part of a governance team that included 5 trustees and 1 superintendent. The board should have goals and those goals should be mirrored in goals for the superintendent. The annual superintendent evaluation should be centered around progress toward the board goals and the superintendent goals. This is the formal aspect. Informally, trustees speak with the superintendent regularly and should keep the goals in mind and review progress toward the goals throughout the year.

Georgia Jack

The whole board is responsible for hiring and evaluating the superintendent. The current board, in collaboration with both prior superintendents, developed a common set of goals and a strategic plan both of which are available on the district website, under the “About Us” section. The board’s job is to monitor the implementation of these guiding documents and hold the superintendent accountable to achieving the goals.

As a board member, I have been working in partnership with my colleagues to monitor the district’s efforts to implement these directives. In March, prior to the shutdown, we were starting to see our efforts move forward, and even in the current times, we are working hard to keep implementation moving forward.

2. *It's great when the school administrators/teachers and parents/students agree on issues and directions, but when about when they don't. How would each of you balance perspectives and represent the students/parents/community in that kind of situation?*

Shamar Edwards

Usually when varying viewpoints arise, there is merit to them all and it takes a savvy leader to hear and make meaning of multiple viewpoints. What is key is having a process where stakeholders are welcome to share their perspectives and problem solve together. There are times when the final decision may not be accepted by all, but the Board and district should have practices where voices are heard. In crisis, multiple meetings addressing the issue and communicating the progress that is being made is equally important. I also advocate for design thinking as a process to problem solve. Bringing in the end user is critical to generating possible solutions. I also believe in proactive communication and transparency with the public. For issues coming down the pike, there should be enough proactive communication occurring so when the final decision is made, it doesn’t feel like it came out of the blue. Communication must also be shared in a variety of ways both traditional and unconventional including: utilizing parent outreach coordinators to share information and solicit input, posting timely communication on the website, automated phone service, district and site newsletters, surveys, comment boxes, open forums, and focus groups.

Rich Ginn

The goal of a school district is to provide education to the children in the community. When there are conflicts of interest, I reflect on the board goals and seek to vote or act in whatever way I believe is best for the students. “What’s best for kids?”

Georgia Jack

We experienced this scenario this spring when we were confronting the stay-in place orders due to COVID-19. I always take the position of the California School Boards Association that a board member's role is to represent the interests of students. As a parent, my job is to advocate for my child, but as a board member, my job is to understand the needs of every student in our district and make the sometimes difficult decisions that ensure the best outcomes for them. This is true even when the choice we make may be the least-worst choice, and we then have to work diligently to move back to a place that allows for more palatable options.

- 3. The board is responsible for the vision of the district. Recently, there was a vote of no confidence against the superintendent. In the letter from administrators, they said the superintendent lacked vision. How does the board work to ensure the district vision?*

Shamar Edwards

Visions should stem from our values and our purpose to educate students. To create a vision that is future focus, examining areas of need and opportunity is key. I also believe visions should be generated in a collective manner. The Board could authorize a process to have district, site administrators, teachers, staff and students articulate what is most important to them. This information could then be shared with parents and community members to contribute to as well. Thereafter, the Board could review and generate a final version reflecting the values, desires of the communities they serve. After the vision has been set, the superintendent has a clear purpose and mission to carry out and the Board ensures that there is support and incremental progress to the stated goals.

Rich Ginn

All board members should be visible in the community. This is harder during Covid, but still, board members should talk with a broad group of parents, students, and anybody interested in strong schools. Then, the board members must communicate with each other about what they are hearing. Additionally, the board should make extra efforts to hear from groups that may not be represented in the outreach of the individual board members. With broad and continual outreach, the board should be in a good position to set preliminary goals which should then be reviewed with the community and formally adopted after any adjustment the board feels is needed based on the community feedback.

Georgia Jack

Vision is established by the governance team, through an ongoing consensus

based process. The governance team includes the superintendent and board together, the district cabinet, which includes principals, and, most central to implementation, teachers and staff.

The board continuously monitors the effectiveness of the vision and its implementation and provides direction to the superintendent for adjustment as needed.

4. *I have a recent M-A graduate. She has some great teachers, many good teachers, and a handful of very low-quality teachers. What, as a board member, would you do to ensure there is a high quality teacher in every classroom?*

Shamar Edwards

As a Board member, we need to ensure that there is quality professional development that is required and relevant. We need a quality evaluation process that supports teachers and helps teachers dial into the cycle of continuous improvement. When a teacher consistently does not meet expectations, ensuring the site administrators have tools and strategies to mitigate the issues, with support from Human Resources.

Rich Ginn

- A) Ensure the district has strong hiring practices
- B) Ensure that the district administrators conduct a formal review process of each probationary teacher during their first 18 months in the district to make the best decisions about tenure – the board should get a written report from each administrator recommending any probationary employee for tenure – the report should include a resume
- C) Ongoing, consistent professional development for all district employees
- D) Maintain a culture of learning among all district employees

Georgia Jack

We provide a robust professional development program for our educators, along with a two-year early career support program. We provide teacher-mentors to teachers, and we perform instructional rounds to give a “fly on the wall” view for our educators to see a master teacher in action. As board members we entrust the evaluation and professional development needs of faculty to our site leaders and district staff, who are the experts to determine teacher quality and placement.

5. *I am a relatively new parent in this district. My perception is that we are in relative crisis right now. When the COVID crisis hit, the Board and Superintendent made decisions in short order that many parents, students AND*

teachers opposed— including the move to only pass/fail, limiting instruction and instructional standards radically, etc. Teachers and administrators gave a vote of no-confidence and the superintendent left/was forced out. Right now we have major choices in front of us— in terms of whether the District will be able to move back to in-person instruction at all this year, can the panelists speak more explicitly about how they plan to provide leadership during this crisis year and in this crisis moment?

Shamar Edwards

Leading is a challenge and it only intensifies in a crisis. As a Board member, I want to ensure that parent communication is a top priority for the new superintendent. Parents need information from the district office and their school sites respectfully. When in a crisis, there needs to be transparency and accountability for decision-making. Laying out the Why, the What, the How, and the Timeline helps empower stakeholders and alleviate the anxiety that comes with the unknown.

Rich Ginn

The role of the board is to direct the administration to develop plans that adhere to the health and safety requirements that will be in place when the county gets to a covid tier that will allow for students back on campus. Most often, the board governs by asking questions or giving direction.

The direction is to have a working plan.

The questions I would ask include:

- Who is on the committee working to develop the re-opening plan?
- If the committee is large, who is on the sub-committee producing alternatives for the larger group to consider?
- How often is the committee meeting?
- When is the next committee meeting scheduled?
- What is the timeline for the committee to bring a proposal to the board?

Georgia Jack

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, the board supported recommendations from our front-line educators and site leaders, which included pass/no pass grading and instructional changes. I also participated in the taskforce convened by the district to develop plans to offer flexibility at schools from full distance learning to full in person learning, based on health conditions and allowable operations as determined by the state and the county.

Our board continues to actively work with our interim superintendent on planning, and we are opening up learning hubs as of October 19 at our sites. We have opened up outdoor fields, courts, and tracks to allow for sports. Parents received a communication on these developments last week , and will continue to receive updates from the schools and the district.

I am continuing to check in with teachers, students and parents to hear what's working and what would be helpful to change or new ideas to bring forward. As a board member, I continue to participate in updates provided by the San Mateo County School Board Association and the County Office of Education, as well as listening to colleagues in other districts. I am also keeping abreast of developments in education across the state, with the intent to advocate for any adjustments that are needed.