
ALBANY BOARD OF EDUCATION Questionnaire

**GREEN PARTY OF ALAMEDA COUNTY
2018 ENDORSEMENT DECISION**

Please email your responses to GPAC-VoterGuide@yahoogroups.com. In the subject line, please include "Albany Board of Education".

We prefer that you convert your answered questionnaire into a .pdf document, so we can post it directly to our website. Or simply include your responses in the body of an email, and we will do the conversion.

If it is not possible for you to email, please snailmail your responses so we receive them by 8/23, to:

Albany Board of Education Questionnaire
c/o Green Party of Alameda County,
2022A Blake Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

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Current occupation: Environmental scientist, self-employed

1. Please briefly summarize your background, qualifications, and reasons for wanting to serve on the Albany Unified School District Board of Education.

I support public education. It is foundational for democracy, enables children and teens to grow, develop, and become creative and productive citizens, lifts people out of poverty, and offers a path toward income security for all. I care deeply about Albany's schools, where I have volunteered in many roles for over 20 years. It hasn't mattered to me whether my children were currently enrolled or not. When my children were attending Albany schools, I chaired or co-chaired three PTAs and one school site council, devoted time to community fundraising, and served on advisory committees. When devastating budget cuts occurred in the early 2000s, I ran for the Board of Education. Between 2004 and 2008, I served as Board president and vice-president for two years each. I worked to build consensus and restore the educational program. I contributed to the renovation of our high school football/soccer/baseball field (Cougar Field) and spearheaded the bond campaign and design process for construction of the new Albany Pool. This new pool has served both the schools and the community at large, is energy efficient, and operates without subsidies from the school budget. After leaving the Board at the end of 2008, I

served on the Albany Unified School District (AUSD) Strategic Plan Committee, the Albany Pool Sustainability Committee, and the City of Albany Sustainability Committee.

I am an environmental scientist and I have attempted to connect my professional experience to the needs of our schools. In 2012, engineering reports identified two of the Albany schools as seismically deficient. Some of the proposed rebuilding plans that were circulating then were unimpressive – they would have provided less space for libraries and multipurpose rooms than presently exists in those two schools and they gave minimal attention to green building design principles. So, after a six-year hiatus, I rejoined the Board in 2014 to ensure that new AUSD buildings would be sustainable, well-designed, and long-lasting. During the past four years, I have focused much of my effort on supporting a local bond measure to fund new school construction and developing plans for new buildings that will be great spaces for teaching and learning. I facilitated the creation of a volunteer Sustainability and Integrated Design Committee composed of residents with engineering and architectural expertise, encouraged the involvement of this committee in the design process, and supported the committee's recommendation to adopt the guidelines of the Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS). All our new buildings will be CHPS verified and zero net energy (ZNE) or zero net energy ready (ZNER) (if we can afford all the solar panels). Two of the buildings are now under construction and we have secured Proposition 39 funding for solar panels on the first one.

I completed the California School Board Association's Masters in Governance program in 2015 and 2016.

Albany schools, like most California school districts, face a looming budget shortfall. The state's decision to require increasing pension plan contributions – which is necessary to fully fund the teachers' (STRS) and public employees' (PERS) plans and meet our obligations to staff – has created the crisis. Local districts' contributions are increasing from 8.5% of payroll earlier in this decade to 19% (STRS) and over 20% (PERS) by 2020-21, and the state has provided no revenues for this purpose. The money has to come from somewhere, and this new obligation means redirecting our existing resources. For Albany, the new pension costs are over \$3 million, about 8% of our \$46 million annual budget. Balancing the budget will be difficult. About 90% of our costs are personnel, so there are few options – either the average cost per staff position decreases or we learn to operate with fewer positions. I've been through two rounds of budget cuts before – in the early 2000s and again during the Great Recession. I know that balancing the budget will require working with the community and staff to spread out our expenditure reductions as equitably as possible and to continue to serve students as well as we can. We've managed to keep up with the rising costs so far by reducing ongoing annual administrative and operating costs by \$400,000 but we cannot fund the full \$3 million shortfall with administrative cost reductions alone – our entire administrative budget, including principals, assistant principals, and site directors, is only \$3.4 million.

In March of 2017, I was stunned – as was most of Albany – to learn that racist and misogynistic photos and comments had been posted by some students to a private Instagram account – which like most forms of social media became public even though it had been set up as private. I fully supported the school and District actions described here. Throughout the spring of 2017, counseling services were offered to all affected students and they were encouraged to use those

services. Both the superintendent and the acting principal met with families. In accordance with state law, the Board served as a neutral party that reviewed staff decisions on discipline and either upheld or reversed those decisions. As a Board, we have an obligation to observe confidentiality for minors, to provide due process, to be fair and impartial when disciplinary actions are brought to the Board for resolution, and to act according to the California Education Code and Board policies that establish that suspensions and expulsions are the disciplinary options of last resort. The Alameda County Board of Education upheld our decision in one expulsion case. There is still hurt and anger in the community to be addressed and we have been hampered in doing that by a series of lawsuits that were filed against the District in response to staff actions to discipline students who had access to the Instagram account. Some lawsuits are still active and as a Board member I have not been able to comment on the cases. To prevent future occurrences, we now have a new administrative team at Albany High School and the Board has worked with this team to develop a new culture around student behavior (replacing the old discipline grid with a behavior matrix that emphasizes positive behavior and restorative justice). We have funded professional development in culturally responsive teaching, recognizing and countering implicit bias, teaching tolerance, and other topics. The Board has received recommendations from a community advisory committee and directed staff to evaluate current Board policies and student support services in view of the recommendations.

2. What ideas do you have for addressing overcrowding in Albany schools? How can we protect class size reduction for all levels? What are your views on inter-district transfers and what priority do you feel should be given to children of teachers and other district employees who live outside of Albany?

We are building new schools to alleviate overcrowding. When the current Albany Middle School Annex and Albany High School Addition are completed in summer 2019, we will use them temporarily to house students from Ocean View Elementary for two years while construction takes place there. After that, all three of those schools can expand into their new spaces. AUSD will have the capacity to proceed with construction at Marin Elementary and then to handle increasing enrollment in future years. Both new elementary schools will have full-size classrooms – Ocean View and Marin currently have classrooms that are about 750 square feet compared with current design requirements of 960 square feet.

Albany currently has lower class sizes than most school districts. Grades K – 3 have been operating with 20 – 24 students, grades 4 and 5 with 24 – 28, and grades 6 – 12 with fewer than 30 on average. Our funding crisis will have the greatest impact beginning in 2020-21. We either need to renew one of our parcel taxes at a higher rate in 2020 or obtain more funding from the state. The Alameda County Office of Education is requiring AUSD to adopt a plan by December 2018 for reducing expenditures, effective July 2019. I would like to see community discussion to consider the relative merits of smaller classes, elective periods at middle school and high school, and student support services such as counselors, intervention specialists, and others. Spreading our budget cuts across all program areas would help minimize the impacts on any part of the program. If we can delay implementing some of these cuts until we can obtain more funding, the impact will be reduced.

I was a Board member in 2006-07 when we adopted the current policy on inter-district transfers, which I continue to support. The policy allows staff to accept inter-district transfer students at grade levels where there is space available. State law requires us to accept transfer applications either first-come-first-served or by a random drawing. We can establish priority groups, and I continue to support reserving first priority for children of staff members. This is a benefit that we can offer to help attract and retain educators. Our second priority is for children of City of Albany employees, which helps the City in the same way. Third priority is to keep siblings together, fourth is for children of Albany business owners and operators (who often wish to be close to their children's schools), and fifth is for everyone else equally.

3. How can the district best serve the needs of our diverse range of students, some of whom are ready for AP or honors classes, some of whom are not college bound, and some of whom have disabilities or other difficulties that can make learning a challenge?

We serve our students best when all students become career and college ready, not career or college ready. Career skills help students succeed in college. Students who are not ready to attend college after graduating from high school might decide to attend college later, a choice that will be open to them if high school has prepared them for college. AP and honors classes should be open to those who are willing to challenge themselves if they have completed prerequisites – more students can succeed in challenging classes if schools provide extra resources, such as homework support for AP classes. Students with special needs can succeed with accommodations. Intervention programs, starting as young as possible, effectively address special needs and can keep students from falling behind. Providing support is key in all these cases and most school districts are having difficulty finding the funds to provide adequate pupil support services.

4. How should the district balance the need to attract and retain high quality teachers by offering competitive salary, security and health benefits with the need for enhanced programming for students?

AUSD continues to provide full health care coverage, which I support locally and for all Americans. We approved a \$15/hour minimum salary effective July 1, 2018, two years ahead of state requirements. Only three entry-level classified job categories had been paid at less than this rate but raising the floor benefits everyone. I support efforts to focus our limited resources on entry-level positions. With the impending budget shortfall, we need to remember that across-the-board salary increases that are much larger than cost-of-living adjustments will reduce educational services to students.

5. What is your vision for Albany's 21st-century schools and how would you as a Board of Education member assist the transition of AUSD towards a 21st-century model?

Our first task has been to provide the physical space suited for 21st-century learning. Our new buildings will be energy efficient, will feature natural lighting and ventilation, and will feature spaces that are good for teaching and learning. All four of the new school buildings will have flexible learning spaces. The Albany High School Addition will include a maker space with associated computer lab. In contrast to the traditional classroom, with its roots in industrial

organization, flexible learning spaces provide opportunities for group projects, collaborative learning, and self-paced activities. We have been encouraging professional development in innovative teaching approaches. Our teachers have embraced the California Standards (Common Core) concept of teachers who facilitate active learning by students, rather than the older “sage-on-the-stage” model. We supported this transition by funding a teacher on special assignment at each school to help teachers implement the new approach. Unfortunately, our budget shortfall limits our ability to continue this funding beyond the 2018-19 school year.

6. Three-part question on alternative instructional approaches:

a. What alternative instructional programs do you support (e.g., "blended" curriculums, flexible and open learning environments, technology-based learning, and project-based learning)? What is your understanding of these instructional methods?

I am happy to encourage all these innovative approaches to education and we have been working to provide the physical spaces to facilitate new ways of teaching. Blended learning provides both a student-teacher relationship and expanded opportunities through use of online materials, which is promising because an inspiring teacher is almost always the single most important key to educational success. I have supported and will continue to support projects that actively engage students in an extended investigation of challenging questions. A key part of the middle-school experience is the 8th-grade I-Search project, a one-semester investigation of a topic of a student's choice. Last year's projects are listed at

https://ams.ausdk12.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=92918&type=d&pREC_ID=1411884.

At Albany High School, the EDSET (Environmental Design, Society, English, and Technology) program offers a two-year integrated learning experience featuring internships and an independent project, which I supported in its creation over ten years ago. I have also supported the Venture program for business and design studies, which spans two years and features internships (this program is changing, however). A related topic is mastery-based grading, in which students work to master subject material and then move to the next topic when they have. Many students thrive with this approach.

b. Are there other changes in the current schedule, such as a later start time, for which you would advocate, and, if so, what is your reasoning for supporting these changes?

I support a later start time at Albany High School if staff can develop a schedule that meets full instructional minutes. Studies show that high school students need more sleep and learn better when they start school later in the day.

c. Are you familiar with the Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>) and what is your view regarding the role of this type of resource in Albany?

Salman Khan was one of the most inspiring speakers at the Annual Education Conference two years ago. I researched Khan Academy after hearing him. Parent can use the resources provided by Khan Academy to complement the classroom experience. I also support staff utilization of independent study and online curricula. Albany High School provides credit recovery through Brigham Young University's online high-school diploma program.

7. Who has endorsed you or is supporting your candidacy?

* For identification purposes only

Paul Black, AUSD Board of Education President*

Jacob Clark, AUSD Board of Education*

Ross Stapleton-Gray, AUSD Board of Education Vice President*

Kim Trutane, AUSD Board of Education*

Pete Maass, Albany City Council*

Peggy McQuaid, Albany City Council, Mayor*

Nick Pilch, Albany City Council*

Sheryl Black, City of Albany Arts Committee*

Preston Jordan, City of Albany Charter Review Committee*

Jim Lindsay, City of Albany Charter Review Committee*

Tom Cooper, City of Albany Sustainability Committee*

Max Wei, City of Albany Sustainability Committee*

Patricia Low, past member AUSD Board of Education*

Ron Rosenbaum, past member AUSD Board of Education*

Allan Maris, past member AUSD Board of Education*

David Glasser, past member AUSD Board of Education*

David Farrell, past member AUSD Board of Education*

Marsha Skinner, past member AUSD Board of Education*

David Arkin, Teresa Barnett, Sandra Bender, Susan Burr and Michael Hartman, Helene and Gary Class, Ellen Hershey, Loretta Kane, Sara Marcellino and Doug Johnson, Sue Mellers and Mark Meldgin, Bob Menzimer, Merry Selk, Amy and David Tick, Ellen Toomey

8. The following are the 10 Key Values of the Green Party (more details available at <http://www.cagreens.org/platform/10k.shtml>). In view of these values, why do you feel your candidacy merits Green Party endorsement?

Green Party 10 Key Values:

- 1) Ecological wisdom
- 2) Social Justice
- 3) Non violence
- 4) Grassroots democracy
- 5) Decentralization
- 6) Community based economics
- 7) Feminism
- 8) Respect for diversity
- 9) Personal and global responsibility
- 10) Sustainability

The Green Party endorsed me in both my previous campaigns (2004 and 2014). I hope that I have lived up to those endorsements.

My personal values align with the 10 Key Values of the Green Value. I believe in the separation of church and state, so my answer to this question is solely intended to convey a sense of my core values and their expression, not to mix secular and non-secular arenas of life. Apart from supporting public education, I practice my values through activist Quaker organizations. At present, my largest commitment of volunteer time outside public education is to the Quaker Institute for the Future (QIF) (quakerinstitute.org), for which I serve on the Board and as treasurer. QIF's focus is to facilitate research and public discourse on ecological integrity and environmental/economic justice. QIF publishes books (available as free downloadable PDFs or in print) and organizes research seminars. I am a co-editor or co-author of three of our last five Focus Books: "Energy Choices: Opportunities to Make Wise Decisions for a Sustainable Future," "Toward a Right Relationship with Finance: Debt, Interest, Growth, and Security," and "A Quaker Approach to Research: Collaborative Practice and Communal Discernment."

Here is the QIF vision statement, which I helped craft and to which I subscribe:

QUAKER INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE: Research & Discernment on Economics, Ecology & Public Policy for the Common Good - Vision

QIF envisions a global future in which humanity is in right relationship with the commonwealth of life.

The mission of QIF is to advance a global future of inclusion, social and economic justice, and ecological well being through participatory research and discernment.

QIF adds a Quaker voice to public discourse. It calls on Quaker experience and approaches that contribute to the advance of governance for the common good, and the promotion of values necessary for social and ecological well-being. Underpinned by coherent and systemic analysis that supports strategic intervention and social action, QIF shares its work in various forms, including books, pamphlets, reports, newsletters, website, conferences, workshops and seminars.

Our concern is global – as well as local.

We see **inclusion** as people having secure and equitable access to the decision-making processes that affect their lives and the common good of their environments.

We see **social and economic justice** as people having secure and equitable access to the means of life, and to the opportunity for making a contribution to their communities.

We see **ecological well-being** as the resilience of a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship and the continuous renewal of the whole commonwealth of life.

We see **participatory research and discernment** as essential for creating the social and ecological wisdom that advances the common good.

Focus of Our Concern

- Moving from economic policies and practices that undermine Earth's capacity to support life to an ecologically based economy that works for the security, vitality, and resilience of human communities, and for the well-being of the entire commonwealth of life.
- Bringing the governance of the common good into the regulation of technologies, and holding ourselves responsible for the future well-being of humanity and the Earth.
- Reducing structural violence arising from economic privilege, social exclusion, environmental degradation, and militarism through the expansion of equitable sharing, inclusion, justice, and ecosystem restoration.
- Reversing the growing segregation of people into enclaves of privilege and deprivation through public policies and public trust institutions that facilitate equity of access to the means of life.
- Engaging the complexity of global interdependence and its demands on governance systems, institutional accountability, and citizens' responsibilities.
- Moving from societal norms of aggressive individualism, winner-take-all competition, and economic aggrandizement to the practices of cooperation, collaboration, common wealth sharing, and an economy keyed to strengthening the common good.

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire!

Sincerely,

Greg Jan
Green Party of Alameda County