

**SCUSD School Board Candidates Forum**  
**Tuesday, October 23, 2018**  
**Candidate Responses**

**Note:** *On Tuesday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Sacramento ACT hosted a Candidates Forum for the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) School Board. All 7 candidates running in Areas 1, 2, and 6 were invited and attended the event. The questions below were drafted by ACT leaders and shared with the candidates the day before and all candidates answered these questions at the forum in addition to other questions presented by community members at the event. After the forum, all the candidates were sent an email inviting them to submit their responses in writing so that we may share them with other community members that couldn't be there. The two candidates in Area 1: Anna Molander and Lisa Murawski as well as Area 2 candidate Cecile Nunley sent their responses. The remaining candidates either didn't respond or chose not to send written responses. Sacramento ACT is a non-partisan organization and we do not endorse or oppose candidates.*

**AREA 1 CANDIDATE: Anna Molander**  
**Campaign website: <https://anna4sackids.com/>**

**1. Why are you running for School Board, and what do you bring to the table for our community?**

*Answer:*

*As the youngest of 9 children, we often didn't have enough but my mother always said "When there's a will, there's a way!" That's how all 9 children put ourselves through college and graduate schools. Over the last more than a decade, I've served on the boards of arts groups, youth athletics, a vocational trade school, and on the City's Planning Commission. I've also served in numerous capacities as a volunteer in our School District - from school site level to leading District-wide committees. And as a lawyer, I have spent nearly twenty years asking hard questions. When I see a problem, I look for the people who can fix it. Because together we can do better. In tough times, it's easy to lose hope but we can't do that for our children. No matter how tough things got when I was a child, my mother never lost her hope and optimism. I'm running because I want to solve our budget problems - for the long term - without losing the hope and optimism of a successful school district.*

**2. According to the NAACP's "Capitol of Suspensions" report, in 2016-2017, black males were suspended 1,859 times, specifically affecting 887 individual students. That means that 21% of the 4,286 black male students in SCUSD were suspended in that year alone. This suspension rate exceeded that of LA Unified, despite the fact that they have 7 times the number of black male students. Out of those suspended, 45% were suspended more than once. **What changes do you think our district needs to make to address this critical issue of inequity?****

*Answer:*

*This report comes as no surprise to anyone who has been involved in the District during the last decade. We need to work with our community partners to implement a plan that reverses the policy of suspensions for willful defiance but that won't be enough. We also need to build in the services and supports at each school site so that children who need an adult's attention, get the right attention, so that the child can continue to learn. And the classroom teachers need specialists trained in trauma-informed interventions to work with children in their time of need. What's more, when we do this right, we will end up savings from the increased ADA, reduced need for remedial education, and increased graduation rates.*

3. Budgets are moral documents, and should reflect the real priorities of the community. We are currently in a budget situation that affects many stakeholders and requires painful choices, and you will face more if you serve as a Board member next term. The community needs to understand how you will lead regarding our needs and priorities. **If you were on the Board today, what would be your approach to finding student-centered, sustainable solutions?**

*Answer:*

*Not too long ago, my rabbi told our congregation that when we look into our checkbooks, that's where we show our true priorities. Right now, our budget isn't focused on children as priorities. What we all know to be sound educational needs, our District has failed to provide. It continues to cycle through boom and bust - even in these great economic times - without ever re-setting our priorities. We need to fix the budget but we also need to seek out community input on what our budget should value. Right now, our budget committee consists of three board members, none of whom are education experts or financing experts. Instead, let's rethink our approach so that we get the best and brightest in Sacramento to help us reconfigure our budget so that every decision has children at its center.*

4. Having a safe, supportive school climate that addresses the needs of the whole student, including trauma, mental health, and family instability, is essential to improving outcomes for all students. **If you were faced with a budget vote that allocated funds between 1) School Resource Officers, 2) student support services (meaning counselors & social workers), and 3) parent & family engagement, how would you prioritize them?**

*Answer:*

*I would first prioritize (2) student support services, then (3) parent and family engagement, and, in distant third, (1), school resource officers (in their current form). Without a doubt, providing children with high quality counselors, social workers, nurses, college and career counselors, and other support services will yield results immediately and for decades to come. Every time we intervene and do it well, that child comes away with life skills, confidence, and the ability to learn; these are at the core of what we should value in our schools. Likewise, parent and family engagement is money well-spent. Providing families with the right mix of information and support will extend the classroom into the home and ensure families feel welcomed and engaged with and on their school sites. In a distant last*

*spot is the school resource officer, in its current form. The biggest complaint when it comes to safety is student bullying and RSOs aren't trained to address those issues - they are the province of student support services. It makes far more financial sense to me to prioritize those services and supports that have the most positive impact - both short and long term - student support services and parent and family engagement.*

**AREA 1 CANDIDATE: Lisa Murawski**

**Campaign website: <https://www.lisaforschoolboard.com/>**

### **1. Why are you running for School Board, and what do you bring to the table for our community?**

*Answer:*

***Student-Centered Values.*** *I'm running because I care deeply about the success of our kids and I believe we have a moral obligation to put our students first when we make decisions and to proactively address the conditions that promote poor and inequitable outcomes. Not only because I'm a mom with two sons in our city schools, but because all of our kids deserve to thrive.*

***Professional Experience.*** *I'm also running because I have a great deal of professional experience to contribute. I've spent over a decade in the state capitol advising top policymakers on programs and cost-effectiveness, negotiating with interest groups to forge solutions to complex issues, and in conducting fiscal and budget oversight and analysis that is sorely needed on our board, especially in this time of budget crisis.*

***Independence.*** *This is critically important. I also bring an objective, independent mindset and I can work well with all stakeholders to do what's best for our kids, without necessarily aligning myself with any single organization's priorities.*

*The implementation of new, more flexible state funding has allowed our school district and community to define our own priorities. This is a tremendous opportunity, and but with this flexibility there is an even greater need for local leadership that is driven by student success and not politics. I hadn't even planned to run for office until my community reached out to me because I'd bring a great deal to the table, and folks who know me know have no personal or political agenda other than doing what's right for our kids while upholding my deeply held values. My support comes largely from community members, not from interest groups.*

*I have seen the corrosive influence of political pressure on decision-makers and I know I can serve with integrity and faith to the community. I'm excited, if I get elected, to get to work on behalf of our kids.*

2. According to the NAACP's "Capitol of Suspensions" report, in 2016-2017, black males were suspended 1,859 times, specifically affecting 887 individual students. That means that 21% of the 4,286 black male students in SCUSD were suspended in that year alone. This suspension rate exceeded that of LA Unified, despite the fact that they have 7 times the number of black male students. Out of those suspended, 45% were suspended more than once. **What changes do you think our district needs to make to address this critical issue of inequity?**

*Answer:*

*Research shows adverse impacts of suspensions and expulsions:*

- *Students are **more likely to ultimately drop out of high school***
- *Students are much **more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system***
- *Students who are excluded from classes **lose instructional time**, which results in a **loss of funding to the school***
- *A student's suspension or expulsion can have **harmful effects on the family**, including **loss of wages** or employment for the parent, particularly for single parents.*
- *Students who are suspended or expelled are subject to the **risk of further behavioral problems from lack of supervision.***

*It is a tragedy that our district is known as the Capital of Suspensions and we need to tackle this head-on because it's immoral and it's exacerbating poor outcomes.*

***Restorative practices** have been shown in other schools to bring down high suspension rates. For example, implementing "**peer courts**" and other student-centered solutions helps foster authentically positive school climates. It isn't just about "getting the number of suspensions down" but what we are doing to address the needs of students and the root of why they are acting out. It's about really promoting a shared understanding of how behavior affects the community and improving the ability to self-regulate.*

*At the board level, we can **ban suspensions for willful defiance**, which is a catch-all category, and set the expectation that alternative disciplinary practices should be used when behavior is not serious enough to be grounds for removal from school.*

*Professional development and training in how to counteract **implicit bias** is also important. Many leading agencies and companies are conducting such training in order to promote equity in the workplace and foster better workplace climate.*

*I would look to ensure these cutting-edge practices are implemented and sufficient training and support services are available to ensure successful implementation.*

3. Budgets are moral documents, and should reflect the real priorities of the community. We are currently in a budget situation that affects many stakeholders and requires painful choices, and you will face more if you serve as a Board member next term. The

community needs to understand how you will lead regarding our needs and priorities. **If you were on the Board today, what would be your approach to finding student-centered, sustainable solutions?**

*Answer:*

*Budgets are statements of values. My values are student-centered, and I think our budget should be student-centered while also maintaining responsible stewardship of funds.*

*Over the medium to long term, this includes moving some student programs from the “nice-to-have” column to the “must-have” column and building the budget around those. These could include programs like summer learning, arts, athletics, after-school programs, and other approaches that promote academic achievement and engagement, and equitable access to opportunities. Stewardship is living within our means and not deficit spending or creating liabilities for future generations, as prior generations have created liabilities for us.*

*Over the short term, we have a budget problem. I want to address these systemic fiscal issues and keep these cuts away from our students to the greatest extent possible. I don't think students should pay the price for adults' failure to adequately plan.*

*We should of course look at efficiencies and cutting waste and making sure our central staff is operating efficiently and effectively and eliminate positions that do not add value. We should also recognize we are not going to solve a large ongoing budget problem simply through cuts to administration or minor trimming around the edges. We need to be clear-eyed about two things.*

*The first is **where and how big our ongoing cost growth and liabilities are.** Our increased pension obligations, special ed costs, and health care costs are significant areas of growth. Some of these we can't change, but we must look at where we have flexibility to lower the district's cost overall structure where we can in these areas on an ongoing basis. For instance, we are an outlier among districts in our liability for health benefits, which results in high costs that grow rapidly and unpredictably. If we don't find a way to limit the district's liability for these costs, they eat a larger and larger portion of the budget every year, leaving less available for other needed investments in our schools and students.*

*The second thing we have to be clear-eyed and honest about is what choices are on the table, and what they mean. It's easy to throw out things that sound good, but we need clarity and good faith and agreement on facts. We do ourselves and our community a disservice when we oversimplify complex issues and I will always push all parties for **clear and honest accounting about what exactly are the investments, cuts, or cost savings we're pursuing and how they will affect our students,** because that should be the basis for our decisions.*

4. Having a safe, supportive school climate that addresses the needs of the whole student, including trauma, mental health, and family instability, is essential to improving outcomes for all students. **If you were faced with a budget vote that allocated funds**

**between 1) School Resource Officers, 2) student support services (meaning counselors & social workers), and 3) parent & family engagement, how would you prioritize them?**

*Answer:*

*Community and family engagement go hand in hand with student support services - I would prioritize student support services and parent/family engagement over increasing school resource officers.*

*It's not a zero-sum game. We have a lot of work to meet the mental health care needs of our students. I think we can do a much better job of drawing down state, federal, and possibly private insurance funds for behavioral health services for our students. Our students should all have insurance cards and that means they are entitled to behavioral health care. So I think we need some creative solutions as to how to improve access to behavioral health services in our schools where and when our kids need it to ensure they are well-served by systems that are ostensibly set up to serve them.*

*We all know, and the research is clear on, how parent and family engagement helps school climate, and involving parents, particularly in the higher grades where engagement really falls off, can be beneficial. I think having more resources at school sites to engage parents could be valuable here.*

*School resource officers: I am not an expert on their use; they may have some value in certain circumstances. But I would want to weigh the potential benefits carefully against the cost of having sworn officers versus investing in other ways to improve school climate. I don't think we can police our way to a positive school climate. Instead, practices like restorative justice that engage students in problem-solving with problem behaviors will help foster authentically positive school climates.*

*To the extent our community wants or needs armed police in our schools, we need to ensure there are very clear guidelines that differentiate routine school discipline issues from issues that are appropriately handled by law enforcement.*

**AREA 2 CANDIDATE: Cecile Nunley**  
**Campaign website: <http://cecilenunley.com/index.html>**

**1. Why are you running for School Board, and what do you bring to the table for our community?**

*Answer:*

*I am running because SCUSD needs to do better. My platform contains the same three issues from the beginning of my campaign.*

- 1. Fiscal responsibility. **The budget has been rejected by the County Office of Education twice. It is obvious that we need better fiscal oversight. Once the county rejects the budget a fiscal advisor is appointed over the district not someone the***

*district hires. That is important for several reasons. It signals the beginning of the district losing local control and also is an indicator that the district does not have the capacity to manage itself.*

- 2. Transparency. As I have attended many of the board meetings the past year many of the important decisions have been made when the public was handed the supporting documents for the decision just before the board voted. One of these was for the approval of the agreement with SCTA. Another instance had a contract that was approved by the board that was poorly written the district pays out \$5.2 million dollars and received nothing for the money and now has to sue to attempt to get its money back. This is disgraceful.*
- 3. African American male suspension rates. Sacramento City Unified School District has the worst rate in the county and also the state when it comes to exclusionary discipline practices. In particular this rate is alarming when you consider that the rate is 10 times the normal for those students that are in grades Kindergarten to third grade. These are students that are so young they are not even in double digits yet but are being excluded from the classroom and excluded from a quality education.*

2. According to the NAACP's "Capitol of Suspensions" report, in 2016-2017, black males were suspended 1,859 times, specifically affecting 887 individual students. That means that 21% of the 4,286 black male students in SCUSD were suspended in that year alone. This suspension rate exceeded that of LA Unified, despite the fact that they have 7 times the number of black male students. Out of those suspended, 45% were suspended more than once. **What changes do you think our district needs to make to address this critical issue of inequity?**

*Answer:*

*As I mentioned during the forum I had recently re-read the report and another factor that was alarming was that SCUSD suspended all students at a rate of over 5% when other district suspended in the 3% range. This to me is a clear indication that we need to change the culture of how we view disciplinary practices. The best way to change this culture is to start with the board. One of the recommendations in the report was to have the board agenda have the data for the AA male suspension rates as a standing item. I have lobbied for this since the report was announced. Second is to have appropriate training on cultural sensitivity and implicit bias for all staff from the board to all management, certificated staff and classified staff including custodians, secretaries and food service staff. Only when everyone is on the same page can change really occur.*

3. Budgets are moral documents, and should reflect the real priorities of the community. We are currently in a budget situation that affects many stakeholders and requires painful choices, and you will face more if you serve as a Board member next term. The community needs to understand how you will lead regarding our needs and priorities. **If you were on the Board today, what would be your approach to finding student-centered, sustainable solutions?**

*Answer:*

***The only way to make sound decisions is to use evidence based or data driven information. Boards and entities in general need to have good information presented to them and also have good information available when requested. Sound, logical actions can then be made based on this information. Too many times decision makers are presented with partial information and do not understand the full implications of a decision. Other times decisions are made using intuitive approaches that are not based on fact. We need to be clear how we are basing our decisions on true facts not what feels right in the moment.***

4. Having a safe, supportive school climate that addresses the needs of the whole student, including trauma, mental health, and family instability, is essential to improving outcomes for all students. **If you were faced with a budget vote that allocated funds between 1) School Resource Officers, 2) student support services (meaning counselors & social workers), and 3) parent & family engagement, how would you prioritize them?**

*Answer:*

***The first priority of course is to our students they are the reason that the district exists. Given the needs of our students my first priority would be to student support services. This is especially true for our students who are in crisis. The second priority would be to parent and family engagement as many research studies show that parent engagement is necessary for student success. Last would be School Resource Officers. I have a personal concern that SRO's do not provide the appropriate support and do not make our schools more safe. I also have a concern that SRO's may actually have an impact in a negative way on the school to prison pipeline. The ACLU has reports and studies that have been undertaken that show this has been the case. I think a reevaluation of the SRO's in our district would be a valuable task to help our community.***