

Tracy Hollander-
Candidate for Berkeley School Board Director

Question #1

The key to raising the achievement of our English learner students is going to be smart investment in teacher training. We need to be sure that our hard-working teachers are given the tools they need to succeed. There are several well-researched programs that have been successful in other districts and are known to be part of the solution to closing our achievement gap. These programs or teaching methods are Cultural competency, which already exists to a small degree in BUSD, Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and culturally relevant and engaging curriculum.

The goal of these programs is that students will feel supported and validated in their language and culture and that they will successfully learn academic English. By definition “cultural competency” refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. This training enables teachers to engage more effectively with students and their families. These programs are not only successful with native Spanish speaking students but students across the board. Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching programs acknowledge a student's home language while teaching them how to “code switch”. This is the ability to know when to use academic English, for example on standardized tests or in a job interview. Sometimes the conversational English spoken by students on the playground masks the need for further

instruction of academic English. We need to be continually measuring student achievement through informal classroom assessments to be sure that we are giving proper support when needed so students do not fall behind.

As a board member I would want to look at opportunities to implement some of these programs. These programs not only help raise the achievement of our English learner population, but they boost achievement and student engagement across the board.

Question #2

My experiences working with English Learner populations is from my time in East Harlem, NY as a preschool teacher, my time as a student teacher in San Francisco where I was placed in a Kindergarten where out of 31 students (this was before class size-reduction) 8 different languages were represented and my experience at Rosa Parks Elementary working with groups of English Language Learners on a weekly basis.

I have a foundation of knowledge and understanding of how children learn, and how to teach so children learn. This will be knowledge I will use when determining how to move forward with educational policies, especially the approval of policies to teach or English language learner population.

Question #3

We need to have well researched processes and strategies put in place. We have many successful programs in the nation to refer to, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. These strategies should include plans for:

- 1) Community/family outreach and engagement
- 2) Student engagement/best practices
- 3) Professional development opportunities for teachers and staff
- 4) Implementation of a fair policy for student placement

Starting a new school is a great opportunity to build from the ground up together with the school community. We know that “buy in” from all stakeholders is essential to the effectiveness of any program.

Ideally everyone on staff from the teachers, the school secretary, the custodians and all of the administrators will be bilingual. This helps to support the learning of the language, the culture and helps support a school climate of accessibility for students and their families.

A team needs to be assembled to develop a school site plan. There should be several classroom teachers on this team in order to keep actual implementation real. There should also be administrators on the team at least as consultants who have direct experience with running a Spanish immersion school.