

- 1. Why are you considering running for the school board? What background, experience and qualifications do you bring to the role? Do you have the time commitment for the job?** I am running for the school board to help improve the safety, excellence and accountability of the schools in our district. I have three girls who all started as Kindergarteners at Madroña Elementary. They are now at Redwood Middle School and Thousand Oaks High School. My perspective as a father has helped shaped my views about the great things in the district as well as some of the things that I would like to see improved. I have a science and computer background that I will use to help make decisions based on published data, as well as examples from other school systems, to help guide us through our current economic crisis. I am running as someone who will think logically through our problems and promote consensus and consistency in the district. I have also served as President of a small condominium association in Santa Monica. My wife, Carmen, works full-time, which allows me to work very flexible part-time hours at UCLA and take care of our children. I emailed all the board members to ask the time commitment and received replies from 3 members. Based on their responses I will have enough time to devote to this job. My wife, my girls and my mom are supporting my time commitment to the board. We see it as an important way to give back to the community.
- 2. What do you envision as the responsibility of a school board member? Do you believe that training is important to be successful in the job? Why?** I found a good reference from the Oakdale K-12 district that I believe sums up many of the responsibilities of a board member. It reads “Beyond the establishment of school district policies, the Board is responsible for adoption of the annual budget and approval of all expenditures; employment of personnel; approval of curriculum, textbooks and courses of study; and decision making relative to the purchase, planning and construction of all school district property”, <http://www.oakdale.k12.ca.us/school-board/board-responsibilities.htm>. I believe the responsibility of the school board is to guide the district towards excellence and ensure that students have a safe and effective environment in which to learn. I look at the board as an entity to set the path for the future, based on views of the students, parents, teachers, staff, and administration. It is also the board’s duty to hold these groups accountable. And the purpose of elections is to hold the school board accountable. Ongoing training is always important in any job. I hope to learn and grow if elected.

3. **What do you think are your special strengths that you would bring to the school board?** One of my strengths is that I will not be afraid to put our student's interests first. I will think in long-term perspectives and not compromise for a short-term fix. I have an extensive background in education as a researcher at UCLA and I have a considerable amount of computer programming experience. I will use my experience to update our views on these areas and hopefully push us towards using the web more to disseminate and collect data. I am a person who is direct and honest when presenting my views, but I also understand the importance of getting groups to "buy in" to goals. Without support from all sides we will end up stagnated, but with thoughtful dialogue we can overcome our current problems and become an even better school district.
4. **How do you feel about employee unions and employee bargaining rights? Do you support collective bargaining?** Employee unions and collective bargaining are essential for the protection of both teachers and their students. Teachers need to have a strong voice in the policy making process. They are in the trenches and have first-hand experience that no one else can possibly have. They bring a unique perspective that cannot be ignored. We are not in the best financial nor educational position at this point in time. It is going to require creative solutions to lead us out of this situation. The teachers unions are positioned to help figure out what is best for our students. As partners we can find win/win solutions. Almost all the teachers that I have encountered through my experiences at our district are motivated to do an outstanding job. We need to give incentives to excellent teachers as well as all employees associated with our district who show a passion for what they are doing and ignite a passion to our students. It is only when someone uses a union to try and protect themselves from being held accountable or flexible in their duties that I find unacceptable. Regretfully, a few bad teachers, staff, administrators or board members can have a widespread negative affect and they need to be dealt with appropriately and swiftly. I don't think the teacher's union wants anything but the best for our children and we can and will work together to achieve a higher standard of excellence.
5. **What do you believe to be the most pressing problems facing this district? What is your plan to address these problems?** The most pressing problem facing the district is the elementary school closures. If elected, I will vote to reverse that decision. I believe the decision to close schools was guided by a poor understanding of the overall economics of the situation. Some have argued that school closures will lead to enormous savings, but this is not true if you

consider the loss of students, the cost of maintaining the properties, the lowered property values on homes proximal to schools being closed and the loss of community support. The district gets paid \$5,700 per student per year (Ventura County Star, "Officials say school closures can save millions. But as students leave so does funding. Is it worth it?" March 16, 2008 by Cheri Carlson and Marjorie Hernandez). For every 175 students that leave to go outside the district we lose \$1,000,000 dollars of funding. There is not much literature out on how closing schools will save money, but there are quite a few articles promoting small schools as financially sustainable, not to mention many other educational advantages (Dollars & Sense, The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools and Dollars & Sense II, Lessons from Good, Cost-Effective Small Schools at <http://www.dollarsandsense.org>). As I said earlier, if elected, I will vote to reverse the decision that was made to close these schools.

We face a formidable challenge when it comes to the finances of the school system. Our children are suffering for it. We have ignored infrastructure. Schools are crowded. We can't afford fast internet at the schools, during the most important computer era ever. We failed to make developers pay their fair share for our schools. Failing to adjust to the ups and downs of school population in a coherent way has negatively impacted almost all schools. In addition, these overcrowded and underfunded schools have cost our students in terms of the quality of their education, and certainly does not help the reputation of our district. Some bad decisions have been made at the national, state and local levels and we are left holding the bag. Can we keep these schools open? Can we rebuild the infrastructure needed to bring us into the 21st century? If elected, I will vote to make this happen, but it will not be easy with our current financial situation. There is very little money to do the things we need to do. Therefore, I will make it part of my job to be a fundraiser for our district. I feel the board should be responsible to help raise money from the main businesses in our community. We both need each other and by working together we can both become better. If our path is clear and strategically sound, I believe the people and the businesses in our district will support our schools. You cannot continue to be one of the worst states in school funding for so long and expect things to be okay. The teachers and staff are not paid a salary that is aligned with the high cost of living in this area. Having a good school district benefits everyone. We may have to face some unpopular decisions to keep the schools open and to change our path, but I believe it is the right thing to do.

Another pressing problem is that we have failed to improve our lowest scoring elementary schools. I think we should judge our district not on how well our best schools are doing, but on how well our worst schools are doing. These

lower scoring schools typically face different challenges from other schools in our district. From language barriers to socioeconomic barriers these schools need some fresh ideas and support from all of us to help bring them up to a more competitive level. I believe that if there are any schools in the district where you would not want to send your own children, then we, as a board are not doing our job.

6. **Much has been said about the importance of making decisions at the school site which include input from both parents and teachers. Do you support more site-based decision making rather than central office controlled decisions? If so, what will you do to make this a reality?** If site-based decision making is better for the students then I am all for it. However, we do need to maintain some consistency throughout the district. Site-based decision making is great as long as the decisions support the long-term goals of the district. I believe that site-based decision making requires a commitment to deliver on promises, but the sites are more informed on the differences that their schools face. Students need excellent teachers who motivate them. Teachers need administrative help to accomplish their goals and the board needs to set the direction of the district. I believe the parents and the students will support the district and its schools if they believe in the overall plan and they can actually see the results of this plan. Let's put more information out on the web for the parents and students. Let's collect more information from all groups to help find solutions to our current problems and then let's get the board together to make some tough decisions to get this district to be the best in the state of California.

7. **What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Conejo schools?** The strengths of the Conejo schools are easy to pinpoint. We have a committed group of parents and very bright students. We have teachers who want the best for the students and administrators and other staff who want it all to run efficiently and effectively. We live in a very safe and affluent area, which gives us a great head start for becoming the best district. However, there are obstacles to overcome. There are some students, teachers, parents, administrators, staff members who do not strive for excellence. We need funding for many important projects including, as I said earlier, basic infrastructure. The students need to be given the tools and motivation they need to succeed.

8. **What messages can we expect you to be giving to the school board, to the newspapers and community between now and election time?** Safety, Excellence and Accountability. We are going to make a positive impact on this

district starting today and thinking for the future. Let's bring the board together to work through our tough decisions and let's work towards the goal to become the best district in California. I'm going to be a person who will listen to what interested parties say and form a consistent message to represent their interests. It's easy to complain or point the finger at what the problems are. I would love to see interested parties pose solutions with their problems. If the district won the lottery this job would be easy. But we are in the real world, where our state's governor is proposing to take away funding while his own staff is recommending that the state dramatically increase funding. Therefore, creating the best district in California is not going to be easy. But we are a great community, full of people who want the very best for their children and our schools. If we come together and work hard we can give each child the opportunity to fulfill their dreams.

9. **What is your position on charters, vouchers, and privatization of public education?** Regretfully, charters, vouchers and privatization have come about because many parents felt that this was their only solution out of a bad situation. When the district and schools are not held accountable, when students drop out, when students don't live up to their full potential, when we quickly patch a budget shortfall with dubious savings by closing schools, then you have an increase in talk about charters vouchers and privatization. If the school district does its job, then this talk will cease. I hope to reverse the decision to close our schools and open up a new dialogue with the many frustrated parents who have no real desire to start a charter school, but who are doing so simply because they feel that the district has turned its back on them and their children. I believe that charters will only compromise public schools in the long run, but I understand that frustrated parents will do what they think they have to do to educate their children in the short run. Unfortunately, vouchers and privatization of public schools is just a short-term solution to a long-term problem of accountability that many parents find not only in the school system, but other aspects of government-run organizations. These "solutions" will continue to be part of the educational landscape until our schools start performing to a level that the American people want.
10. **What will you do, as a board member, to encourage the district administration to provide the support and materials for teachers to successfully meet requirements for state standards based evaluations and the needs of the students?** State standards are a critical measure of how our district is stacking up against other districts here in California and across the United States. But these constant tests are putting an onerous strain on the

ability of our teachers to actually do real teaching. I don't have a good understanding of how to help the teachers in this area, but I'm sure the teachers do. If elected, I hope we can work together to find ways to make it easier on the teachers to meet these requirements while at the same time finding ways to get more information out to parents. State standards are important, but these are not where we should be setting our goals. We need to shoot higher. This is why, if elected, I will vote to stop using Everyday Math as our core curriculum. I realize that many students struggle to keep up with mathematics; however, we need a very rigorous and state-approved curriculum to take our students into the 21st century. There are many aspects of Everyday Math that I like, but not as a core curriculum. I would like to see our math department heads get together and figure out what is the best state-approved book to use and then if they want to supplement with Everyday Math, then fine. As a nation we are outsourcing our industries and therefore will need to become much better at using our brains to compete internationally. I would also like to see more information published on the web about state standards for homework. As a parent, I see some homework with no obvious goal of meeting state-based standards. Succeeding in core curriculum is not a high enough goal. As someone who played sports in high school, was in the student government, made some artwork that my parents pretended to like, I would like to think there is room for art, music, sports, life skills, vocational skills and many other subjects that are equally if not more important to you. Funding for these extra activities is going to be a challenge when we don't seem to have enough funds to even teach the basics or keep our schools open. But our community is passionate about their children and their children's opportunities to excel and I believe we can find solutions to improve our core curriculum and keep and expand many of these important subjects.