

Hello TUSD Governing Board Candidates!

As some of you well know there was a time when Tucson newspapers were much bigger and focused more than they do now on local, school board candidates. There also was a time when there would be three or four forums for school board candidates during an election season.

We at CARE do not expect to see that in this election. We feel incredibly lucky to have met with each of you for an extended time, and to get an idea of your various positions. Now we would like to bring your positions to the general voting public. We hope you will answer the following questions--considerably shorter than our initial interview with each of you-- and allow us to post your answers on our website and Facebook page. We ask that you answer in up to 150 words per question--shorter is better!

We would also like to hold a Zoom forum sometime around when ballots drop, as people this year may well be returning mail-in ballots quickly upon receipt. For that forum, we are considering doing a lightning round of questions that each of you would like to ask the other candidates as our final round of questions. If that is something you would like to participate in, please send us a question you would like to see asked at that time (that will not be published on our website, etc.)

We hope you will see this as an opportunity to get the word out about your various positions to the voting community. We will do everything we can to send out your responses to media outlets, and hope that you will do everything you can as well to share the information. We are a diverse group unified by our commitment to TUSD and the value of a qualified governing board.

We ask that all answers be returned to us by September 13th.

Name: **Cristina Mennella**

Link to Website: **Cristina4TUSD.com**

Endorsements:

I'm working on a few this week. However, I am a licensed healthcare provider with the AZ Department of Health Services as a speech-language pathologist with 17 years of professional experience. I'm also ASHA Certified by the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association.

Contact info if a voter has additional questions:

My TUSD phone contact is (520) 749-4391; email is: cristina4tUSD@gmail.com; mail address is: Healthy Communications; 8987 East Tanque Verde #309-172; Tucson, AZ 85749-9610

1. A. Evaluate the progress TUSD has made and areas where it is still falling short in achieving benchmarks assigned by the Court toward achieving unitary status. Be specific. **TUSD has made significant progress on the unitary status plan and was awarded "partial unitary status" in 2018, which will lead to closure of the case.**

B. Has the district earned that right to be free of the burden of needing court approval for major initiatives?

Due to the fact that we've had state and nation wide shortages of teachers and principals in public education, as well as oversized classrooms and caseloads over the last several decades, consideration should be given in regard to how broken public education is in this desegregation case. The ultimate cost of this lawsuit has hindered the district's ability to successfully exist. Because of the huge attorney fees and expenses, TUSD has become inequitable for students no matter their color, beliefs, or disabilities. I'm paying over \$238.88 annually in property taxes and even though my daughter is attending an "A" rated high school, her safety is compromised when fights break out in the hallways and when behaviors in classrooms hinder learning for all students. The failing schools should not displace students attending the "A" rated schools when property taxes are at play.

2. A. Have you heard stories of problems with the HR department? Would you support the idea of an audit? Yes I've heard many negative stories about the HR department. I would support the idea of an HR audit.

B. Would you be willing to sponsor a proposal for an HR audit?
Yes I would be willing to sponsor a proposal for an HR audit.

3. A. Do you believe the district needs to reform the way principals and other administrators are selected and/or evaluated?

D/t shortages and nationwide turnover rates in principals and administrators, I don't believe the problem lies in the selection process. I believe more focus should be on retaining these key players for our district's success. In addition, maintaining accountability and incentivizing better pay based on performance evaluations are important factors too.

B. If so, how? What performance factors should carry the most weight?

With performance factors in place, the ones that are most critical include the following: 1) Consideration of working conditions and teacher shortages; 2) Competitive compensation and financial obligations, such as student loans need to be assessed and evaluated; 3) High Stakes Accountability systems and evaluation systems need to be in place; 4) Consideration of lack of decision making authority and how it affects performance and 5) Consideration of inadequate access to professional development learning opportunities and as it relates to performance outcomes (e.g., drop out rates...).

4. Evaluate the actions of the current Governing Board. What action or actions were their greatest achievements in the last four years? What actions do you wish they had taken but did not take?

Actions that were taken: 1) Policies addressing the practice of blacklisting are now underway; 2) 20 year extension of UA's lease to operate Camp Cooper was established when the last extension was only 5 years. I myself attended Camp Cooper while at Wrightstown elementary in the 70s; 3) Recruitment of an internal auditor, with increased compensation; 4) Replaced unpopular traditional health insurance by a self insurance plan in 2011.

Actions I wish were taken: improving enrollment and standing up to the community when evidence for approving the family curriculum was not sufficient. I was initially for the family life curriculum based on the fact that I advocate for LGBTQIA as a healthcare provider; however, if we expect general ed teachers to teach such specialized topics such as gender identity then we have lawsuits and biased dooming by teachers waiting to happen. These topics require specialized healthcare providers to provide unbiased instruction.

5. What does TUSD need to do to stop the loss of enrollment?

In the last decade I watched my students with special needs leave public education and enroll in public charter schools because special education services were either not available or adequate. In addition, many of my students were bullied but administrators didn't do enough for students and families. To stop the loss of enrollment, TUSD needs to implement my goals:

Cristina Mennella 4 TUSD

LEARNING FIRST:

*Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs)

identify, assess and provide interventions for BEHAVIORS in the classroom/homes so that ALL students can learn.

TEACH TOLERANCE FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS:

SLPs teach perspective taking to bullies and those who are bullied.

SCHOOL SAFETY

SUICIDE PREVENTION

STOP VAPING & ADDICTIONS

EXPAND EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

STOP SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

RETAIN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM PROFESSIONALS, TEACHERS, & SUBSTITUTES

COMPETITIVE SALARIES FOR TEACHERS

READING AT GRADE LEVEL

SPEND HARD EARNED TAXPAYER DOLLARS IN THE CLASSROOMS

All of these improvements will result in higher enrollment numbers.

6. What does TUSD need to do to help retain teachers and staff?

TEACHERS - need competitive wages, raises, benefit packages and classroom size needs to be reduced. Regardless of COVID status, classroom "sizes" must be reduced to manageable numbers. Job sharing is an attractive alternative for teachers looking for part time positions.

STAFF - need competitive wages, raises, benefit packages and manageable hours. Part time work and job sharing is always an attractive alternative for parents who want to work flexible hours.

SPECIALIZED PROFESSIONALS (i.e., Mental health providers, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists etc.) - the district MUST reduce caseload sizes to manageable numbers. The American Speech & Hearing Association recommends 50;

however, speech-language pathologists and speech-language pathology assistants typically have over 100 students on a caseload, which is why they leave our profession in droves. Salaries can be adequate but it's not enough to retain these specialists. 100+:1 ratio is insanity and it's a lose/lose for student/specialist.

7. What do you know about issues facing subs? Do you think full-time subs should be treated more equitably (i.e. access to benefits, compensation, etc.) relative to other full-time TUSD employees?

D/t COVID and (additional) shortage of teachers, our subs need to be the priority! Regardless of COVID, subs need to be prioritized in such a large district with the teacher shortages we've had for decades. I want more equitably and I want them to have offers of attractive benefits/compensation. Subs recently lost pay when the district admitted to not executing timely contract terms with ESI.

On a personal note, at the beginning of the school year, my daughter was displaced from 4 of her classes as a freshman at an "A" rated TUSD high school. The principal couldn't hire full time teachers and ended up only hiring one full time sub for the rest of the year. We need subs like we need regular teachers! Teachers will be more likely to stay if they have happy subs to relieve them as needed. Many go on to become teachers.

8. What does accountability in TUSD look like to you?

All stakeholders need to be heard with their contributions for solutions considered and on the table before decisions are voted on. Accountability needs to happen at all levels and checks need to be in place so that complaints can be thoroughly investigated by a non biased, non partisan task force. Manipulators, bullies, and bias should never be tolerated or there won't be justice for any stakeholder.