

ON THE ISSUES

On September 17, 2020, CNS held a Candidate's Forum for the SBUSD School Board. This was the first Candidate's Forum for SBUSD in the 2020 election cycle and the first-ever Zoom Candidate's Forum in the history of the Santa Barbara School District.

The incumbents were Wendy Sims-Moten, Jacqueline Reed, and Laura Capps. The challengers were Elrawd J. Maclearn, Monie DeWitt, Brian Campbell, and Virginia Alvarez. On November 8, 2020 Wendy Sims-Moten, Laura Capps, and Virginia Alvarez were elected.

CNS has traditionally hosted Candidate's Forums since our founding in 2000. We look forward to hosting a SBUSD Candidate's Forum in the 2022 election.

Incumbents:

WENDY SIMS MOTEN

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

Absolutely we should have neighborhood schools. I remember walking to school and how neat that was, to be able to chat and talk with my friends going to school and coming back. And just in terms of families out there meeting their children coming home from school. What a sight that is. It also reduces our carbon footprint. Less traffic, less busses, just much more clean air. Giving a time to decompress from the day. Absolutely I believe in making sure that we have, and want to work to make sure that we have, neighborhood schools.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

Certainly. I am open to all opportunities to make schools more accessible and available to our students and our families, with regards to that. But it's important to make sure we are looking at all the data.

What is the fiscal viability? Where are we now with regards to the schools? What more do we need in making sure we serve the most at need, and how are we able to do that? It all has to be in balance. I will look at this as something down the road that we have to consider and look at. If we're looking long term, certainly let's look at opportunities and make sure that we have schools that are more accessible to our students, and look at the data and what is the financial viability on that.

JACQUELINE REID

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

Neighborhood schools are the backbone and heart of our community. I was lucky enough to be able to walk to school. But my son wasn't. We didn't have enough money to afford a home near schools, so we didn't have that advantage. I think every student should have that advantage and that opportunity.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

When you say consider? I say yes. We can think strategically. We don't have to think right in this moment. Once we get past this pandemic, there are opportunities that we will have, to really make more changes. We have the opportunities to do to that, we have the wherewithal, and we have the community to support us with that.

LAURA CAPPS

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

Absolutely. I love the fact that I get to walk to school with my son the same path that I did as a child. Walking to school. All the benefits are there. The fitness benefit, the mental health benefit, the community cohesiveness. If you look at Franklin, and how well they're doing as a school, most of those kids at Franklin walk to school.

It's a huge priority. I love that this organization stands for that.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

This idea of potentially moving the district office and consolidating and this group putting it forward, I welcome that kind of exploration. I will do the due diligence. And say to you, as I have met with you, I will be a partner in trying to explore.

Challengers:

BRIAN CAMPBELL

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

Yes. I believe that every elementary school child should be able to walk to school. But it's not possible at this time because of where people live and locations of our schools. I walk my children to school every single day, rain or shine. It's a great bonding time with my kids, it brings a sense of community as we all enter into the school gates together, it's a great chance for exercise. It's great for the environment, for global warming. More and more people should be walking to school. Schools should be within the community, so kids can be in and around our homes, because that's what school is about. It's an extension of the home.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

Budget is obviously a very important thing.

The district just bought the Armory. The district has spent 10s of millions on the Armory and 10s of millions on the SBHS Stadium. Meanwhile we have existing schools with peeling paint, termites, jagged fences, schools that can't be locked down, that don't have fencing, a lot of other issues. But we just dropped 16 million dollars on some structures that are not going to safety or education.

What is the Armory going to be used for? That's in an ideal location for a downtown school. And the building's already there.

MONIE DEWITT

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

Yes, I'm in favor of that. I think it's a great idea. My boys were both able to walk to their school. I for one can say that it builds a sense of community. We also added that we wanted parents to put in a certain amount of hours as well, and that way you get to know each other. I'm all in favor for it. I also think it's great for the environment. We should make it a goal.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

I do like the idea. I think the City itself is trying to encourage more downtown housing. I think that location would be excellent for it. And we already know that we have so many layers of administration up in the County building? So it might make a lot of sense to merge them. And free up that building for elementary. I do think it builds community. And we all know how successful Franklin School is around community. Those teachers even have their own children there. I think it would help make everybody feel included and like they belong.

ELRAWD JOHN MCLEARN

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

Yes. I definitely think that families, parents and their children, should walk to school. That's the whole basis of my platform, parental engagement.

Of course, people these days, they might ride, bike or drive, but the nearness, and the proximity of the school to a family's home is pivotal in a child's education, and that is what's critical.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

I believe for starters, I'd like to start off with this. That there are too many administrative staff. I believe that we could reapply those funds to further the education of the students. Thirty years ago we didn't have such the monolith of administrative staff that we have now, and we actually had better scores, and better success.

Yes, I would agree with the question that we could definitely move the administrative offices to somewhere smaller, some other location.

And going back to the first question, hey, schools need to be close to the family. And if we can have another elementary school location, or another junior high, or whatever we feel, depending on student population ratios, that we need, then by all means, let's have another school.

Currently we have 25-30 students per teacher in these classrooms. If we could reduce the size of those classrooms, we could have better education and better construction.

So yes, I would say we do need to have more schools.

And we have the Armory, that we just bought as well. That could be used as an elementary school.

VIRGINIA ALVAREZ

Do you believe that every elementary student should be able to walk to school? Why or why not?

You brought up some good memories. I used to walk to McKinley School, many years ago. And I was actually in the last class when it closed. I remember that. I do agree with the concept about having students walk to school. I think it would be a wonderful idea because of many of the items that have already been mentioned. My analytical mind went further than that, and I started thinking about the fiscal impact, etc. But the concept, that is a good concept, I do agree with that.

Would you consider relocating administrative offices and maintenance and operations currently at 720 SB Street to another location in order to create a downtown neighborhood school at 720 SB Street?

Of course, the key word is consider, right? Consider. So I'm always open to consider different points of view. The consideration for me would include a complete fiscal analysis. Trends show that enrollment is declining. So I would like to consider this type of data in my analysis of whether to open another school. Opening a school downtown, does that mean we will be closing another school somewhere else?