

## **Berkeley Schools are at a Crossroads** **by Priscilla Myrick**

### **Candidate for Berkeley School Board Director**

*Berkeley schools are at a crossroads. BUSD has made strides in improving achievement at our elementary schools, but too many Berkeley middle school students arrive at high school two or more grade levels behind. They are unprepared for a rigorous high school curriculum.*

A recent report entitled “Diploma to Nowhere” sponsored by Strong American Schools ([www.Edin08.com](http://www.Edin08.com)) reported that a third of today’s college students have to enroll in remedial classes because they are not adequately prepared by their high school education to successfully complete college level work. More than 60 percent of freshmen admitted to the California State University schools need remediation in English, math or both. Today only 52% of Berkeley High School students are proficient in English language arts as measured by California state standards. This is a decline from 58% proficient in 2002. Even greater declines in proficiency have occurred in math and science. As a school district, our goal must be for all students to graduate from high school proficient or above in both English and math, ready to meet the challenges of post-secondary education and careers. There is no silver bullet to improving student achievement. However, Berkeley can do a better job of educating students and managing resources; I can help make it happen.

I am the only candidate for Berkeley School Board Director that brings extensive experience as a chief financial officer in the Bay Area bioscience industry and CPA, as well as volunteer experience in the classroom, in school and non-profit governance, and in district oversight. This skill set will bring a fresh perspective and real oversight to the Berkeley School Board.

### **Improved budgeting, planning, fiscal transparency and oversight**

As a chief financial officer, I balanced budgets under conditions of economic uncertainty. As an auditor, I worked on the audit of federal block grants to the City of Boston. My work has taught me in a visceral way that using money wisely and developing efficient systems allows more resources to be targeted to school district priorities. Even though the current state budget crisis has been temporarily resolved, the BUSD budget, like all school districts in California, will continue to be squeezed.

I will insist on fiscal oversight of Berkeley taxpayers’ bond money and better facilities planning, including the addition of needed classrooms at the high school level. My older child started Berkeley High in 2000 shortly after the B Building burned to the ground—a loss of 17 classrooms and additional office and administrative spaces. When the \$116 million BUSD school construction bond Measure AA was passed in November 2000, voters were promised that the lost classrooms would be replaced. Eight years later Berkeley High is still missing those much-needed classrooms, and the bond monies have

been spent. No audit of Measure AA has ever been performed. As School Board Director, I will push for systems to ensure fiscal transparency and accountability in the oversight of taxpayer money.

### **Sustained, thoughtful attention to raising student achievement**

I will refocus the District on retaining qualified teachers and improving instruction and curriculum, keys to improving student achievement. I will fight for more instructional resources to be allocated to programs that have demonstrated results in improving student achievement in English, math, and science in K to 12 classrooms.

For the past eight years as founding member and volunteer for WriterCoach Connection, I have worked with Berkeley secondary students on improving their writing skills. Excellent work is going on in the classroom, but many successful ideas are not shared or sustained. Coordination and articulation of curriculum between school sites, grade levels, and between the regular school year and summer school, should be institutionalized. Struggling students should be matched with timely and effective interventions starting in kindergarten. The achievement gap must be addressed from pre-school through high school graduation. All students must become proficient or above in literacy and math skills in order to successfully participate in the global economy.

An inherent part of this work will include reaching out to other California school districts, educational foundations and organizations so we can all learn which programs help our students and which ones waste our dollars. We can't be afraid to evaluate programs that perhaps promised much hope and were eagerly embraced by many, if the long-term results do not show anticipated improvements in student achievement.

As a school district we need to critically assess our programs on an ongoing basis. For example, the idea of restructuring or redesigning comprehensive high schools into smaller schools had the support of the Gates Foundation, which funded the small school reform initiative at Berkeley High. However, an independent evaluation of the Gates Foundation's High School Grants Initiative ([www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)) concluded that hoped-for gains in student achievement did not materialize. Program decisions should be based on analysis of data, not anecdotal evidence.

### **Demonstrated experience and commitment**

My years in the classroom, my experience with school governance, and my professional experience in finance will provide additional strength to the BUSD board and needed oversight to the District. I am a 24-year resident of Berkeley and the parent of two Berkeley High graduates. I have a BA from UC Berkeley in Religious Studies and an MBA from Columbia University. I have been involved in BUSD as a member of the Berkeley High School Governance Council and the Citizens' Budget Oversight Committee. I was a founding board member of Community Alliance for Learning, sponsor of the WriterCoach Connection program. As a board leader for Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, I became familiar with issues of equity and

homelessness in Alameda County and the effect on families and education. Let's make sure that school resources deliver the greatest educational benefit for all our students. They deserve it.

I have been endorsed by school board members, Berkeley City Councilmembers, social service and education leaders, and many community members concerned about education and the Berkeley public schools.

**Vote for Priscilla Myrick for Berkeley School Board Director on November 4<sup>th</sup>!**