

Why You Should Care about Voting this November

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This summer at Carnivale, I and a few civil rights veterans stood on the sidewalk encouraging passing revelers to fill out voter registration forms. After a full day, we could only count around 60 completed forms. The vast majority of those who declined our offer to register did so with a shrug of the shoulders or shake of the head. Some even responded with, "Hell No!" Very few said they were already registered. The most recent Public Policy Institute of California poll indicates that only 1 in 3 adults will vote in the California election this November. The majority of these voters will be older, white and affluent. There are many different reasons for this, not the least of which is that neither major party represents the economic interests of the less affluent, young people of color; the media increasingly fails to inform; governments lie; and the public education system fails to develop citizenship skills in its citizens.

Nevertheless, this November is one of the most important elections for school board candidates in a long time because the board that is elected this Fall will choose the next superintendent of SF Schools. In theory and according to law, the school board is supposed to set school policy. But in practice, it is the superintendent that holds the reins. Once the superintendent is chosen, he or she is able to set the agenda in defiance of school board resolutions. There are several reasons for this. One is that school board members do not have their own staff while the superintendent has the entire bureaucracy at his or her command. Secondly, unless they are supported by a partner, are independently wealthy or retired, school board commissioners can only work part time at the job (they are only paid \$500 a month). Thirdly, most of the candidates for superintendent attend programs run by corporate foundations like the Broad Foundation—they are taught how to eliminate community participation in developing school policy. This situation has allowed the last two SF superintendents to run the district by and for the corporate community.

One example that reveals just how undue corporate influence is over the superintendent is the different relationships that the Business Advisory Committee (BAC), the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), the teachers union (UESF) and the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) had with Arlene Ackerman over the last five years of her tenure. The 13 or so BAC members met behind closed doors with Ackerman once a month. The other groups had to sign up to speak at school board meetings and wait their turn to speak, and then only briefly.

I am not pointing this out to argue that the corporate community shouldn't have access to the superintendent's decision-making process. What I am trying to point out is how they monopolize that access, making the rest of the community's input, through their school board representatives, moot. And this is also part of a larger argument: if the community can elect at least 2 candidates this November whose priority is to reseat the diversity of community voices at the decision-making table, then it is likely that the next superintendent will be one that supports open, transparent, democratic decision-making. If not, the corporate agenda will prevail. For this reason, I will be voting for Kim-Shree Maufas and Jane Kim. My third vote will go to either Mauricio Vela, Kim Knox, or James Calloway. Please take the time to inform yourself. Candidate information can be accessed at:

http://www.sfusualsuspects.com/upcoming_elections.shtml