



Oakland Unified School District Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire, Policies and Issues

Section 1: For each of the following statements, please rank your level of agreement on the following scale:

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

At the conclusion of this section, you will have a total of 250 words to expand upon any of your responses. This exercise will help our network better understand your positions on a wide range of issues.

Statement	Level of Agreement (Rank from 1-4)
Quality Public Schools	
I support the #SchoolAfterCOVID Family Demands . Family voices, especially those historically marginalized, should be centered and part of the decision-making process as they have become experts on what it takes to get distance learning right and they have the most at stake. We must follow their lead.	3
District and charter schools can both be part of a successful community of schools in Oakland , but there needs to be equity between systems and fairness in how we hold schools accountable to serving students. The Board of Education has responsibility for the success of all students attending Oakland public schools.	2
I support a system for evaluating the quality of our public schools, both district and charter, that is primarily based on their results for students based on qualitative and quantitative measures such as the School Performance Analysis (SPA) , and the School Quality Review Rubric .	3
Research shows that four key resources have a dramatic impact on student achievement (grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement in what they're learning, and teachers	2

who hold high expectations). As a board member, it would be my primary focus to expand access to these four resources to students who have been historically denied access.	
I support the articulated vision of our current superintendent, Kyla Johnson-Tramell.	3
Statement	Level of Agreement (Rank from 1-4)
Financial Sustainability	
I commit to governing and voting in accordance with nationally established best financial practices, including those in the Smarter School Spending Framework put forward by the Government Finance Officers Association, and adopted in Board Resolution 18-0127 .	4
I would give more funding to support students most likely to have suffered significant learning loss due to COVID school closures, in excess of Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) supplemental and concentration grants.	4
District leadership should be held accountable for presenting their budget in a clear, student-centered way at public board meetings that allows parents, community members, and board members alike to understand and engage. As a board member I will demand this level of transparency from district staff and use GO's Sunshine budget Presentation Rubric . You can find a sample rating here .	4
To increase state education funding, I support Proposition 15 on the November 2020 ballot, also known as Schools and Communities First, and believe that Proposition 13 should be modified to tax commercial and industrial property owners at their properties' current market rates.	4

Section 1 Response (OPTIONAL): In 250 words or fewer (in total, not 250 per statement), expand on any of your responses to the statements above. You might use this section to add nuance to one of your positions or to provide additional context on your opinions. You may address as many statements from the above section as you would like, so long as your response falls within the 250-word limit.

1. I support the #SchoolAfterCovid recommendations to strengthen distance learning, but not the messages from GO that families need to be involved in negotiations between OUSD and OEA. That was not a question on the survey. Many organizations in Oakland claim to represent families, but in fact the Board is elected by the voters so they are the only ones who truly represent them. It's a symptom of our malaise that the board, who after all will approve any MOU, is not seen as representing families in this process.
2. A "Community of Schools" can only be real if charter organizations commit to abide by the decisions of the Board. The district cannot be fully responsible for charter schools because they are independent and privately run. Recently, when the district has tried to exert responsibility, charters have appealed to the county or state.
3. Public schools do so much to overcome gulfs of opportunity and resources - we should not "punish" schools for serving low-income students because they score poorly on tests. The school dashboard ratings must be seen in the context of structural racism, economic deprivation, and a system of school choice that concentrates students with very high need at some schools.
4. I reject the frame that lack of high standards or poor teaching is the root cause of the opportunity gap. When the coronavirus crisis hit, it dramatized just how wide the gaps are between poor and affluent students. Our educators work hard to bridge those gaps. I support better integration of our schools, and incentivizing teachers with more experience to stay at flatlands schools rather than going to the hills.

I have much more to say on all of these topics, but I am already over the 250-word limit.

Section 2: Please answer each of the following questions in 250 words or fewer.

Quality of Public Schools

Review the [#SchoolAfterCOVID findings](#) about family and student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and extended school closures. As a board member overseeing the district's recovery, what would your top 2-3 priorities in this area be?

1. To learn, students need to engage with ideas and content in live interactions with others. During the pandemic, we need to improve distance learning: for some students it didn't work well last spring, and others not at all. But it will be the one constant as we go through waves of partial and full closure, as infections continue. Online learning is less efficient than in-person learning, but for now we are relying on it. This means:
 - every student needs a chromebook and wifi - using the Oakland Undivided fund and additional donations
 - daily synchronous instruction in each subject, whether virtual or in-person
 - lots of study groups and pair work, using family or community volunteers, or non-profit partners paid with coronavirus relief funds
 - prioritizing students who can't do distance learning (due to special needs, homelessness, newcomer status, etc.) for in-person instruction
 - social-emotional learning and support, including 'check-ins' on campus as possible so students feel connected to their school community
2. As the virus subsides, implement 'acceleration' supports in math and ELA to catch students up who fell behind. This approach has succeeded at community colleges: giving students extra tutoring support, so they advance at a steady pace, is better than slowing students down by remediating or making them repeat classes. No student should be left behind because of the pandemic.
3. Use the pandemic as a 'teachable moment': support development of curriculum for students to examine the science, sociology and politics of this era.

Review the [vision and goals](#) the district is currently using to determine the future of Oakland public schools in order to increase quality and be fiscally solvent. To what extent do you support this criteria? What would you change and/or prioritize?

Students can only succeed if their schools have the resources to be successful. School communities need to come together to decide how best to use the resources they have. The problem with the Blueprint process is that decisions were top-down, and school communities did not believe in, nor experience, the supposed benefit of resources being freed up by school closures or mergers.

We need a clear and transparent accounting of the five school mergers or closures so far: how many students left the district? What was the impact on their learning? What was the impact on teacher retention? Were resources freed up and if so, how much did that benefit the merged schools? What were the savings in central services?

Teachers and school site staff are perceptive and analytical, so their rejection of this process was very telling to me. Until there is more trust and buy-in from them that the Blueprint process will truly free up resources to help school sites, it will continue to create conflict and contribute to a negative cycle of lowering enrollment in the district.

There also must be a plan to increase enrollment in OUSD, through marketing, strengthening feeder patterns in the transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high, and disrupting patterns that concentrate highest-need students at certain schools.

By increasing enrollment, and bringing families back to the district who had opted for charter or out-of-district schools, we can create a virtuous circle for school quality and sustainability in Oakland.

Financial Sustainability

In your view, what are the most significant drivers of OUSD's current financial crisis? As a board member, what would you do to mitigate these issues? (250-word limit)

A student's education shouldn't depend on where they live. Yet California drastically underfunds education, 41st out of 50 states. If Schools and Communities First passes, it will help tremendously, but this wealthy nation-state can do better. I will not just review the budget, but also advocate strongly in Sacramento for more funding.

Our community also deserves good financial management and transparency. OUSD has struggled with both, though it has improved greatly under Supt. Johnson-Tramell after the disastrous practices of

Antwan Wilson. Hopefully the new CBO, Ms. Grant-Dawson, and COO, Mr. Thomas, will support this trend.

But the bad habits do persist. Contracts come to the board after work has already started. The district contracts out for work that could be done internally, by developing expertise in-house. No-bid contracts are granted at too high a price. There are repeated negative audit findings for issues that better systems would resolve.

Accountability needs to start at the top with clear goals and expectations for the superintendent, and consequences if those are not met. Again, practices have improved dramatically under Supt. Johnson-Tramell, and they must improve further.

In addition, I will promote greater budget transparency, including better data and visualizations to answer the community's questions. How much does the district spend on contracts and consultants and why? Why does OUSD spend so much on management?

Many brilliant volunteers in our community would gladly organize and present financial information to the public, if they had full access to it.

What in your experience and background prepares you for overseeing the OUSD budget of over \$500M per year? What steps are you willing to take, if elected, to build your own capacity (and the Board's collective capacity) to provide good stewardship and oversight for OUSD's budget? (250-word limit)

This is an awesome responsibility and one of the main jobs of a school board member. The creation of the Board Finance Committee was a good step taken by the current Board and it should continue. Given the number of new board members, we will need to create a plan for training all new directors on budget issues in general and the issues in Oakland in particular.

I have been engaged in these issues as a parent activist for the past decade and have attended innumerable meetings and pored over the documents at length. I have a Masters degree in Applied Mathematics, have taught math and worked extensively with data in my current job, so I love numbers, analyzing them and creating visualizations to better understand them, and sharing my understanding with others.

But, I know I have a lot to learn. I am prepared to devote myself full-time to working as a school board member for the first two years of my term, having built up savings in my current job. I will take advantage of training available to Board members to develop expertise in school budgets, and rely on

experts who I trust, such as Angelica Jongco from Public Advocates and former OUSD board president David Kakishiba, to deepen my knowledge.

I will also share what I learn with parents, teachers and staff at school sites, and volunteer members of our citizen commissions, to get their feedback and learn more about what questions I should be asking.

We know that millions in cuts need to be made in the coming school years to prevent OUSD from being taken over by the state of California. What criteria will you use to determine whether staff is recommending the right cuts, and how do you see the difference between the responsibility of district staff and the Board of Education? (250-word limit)

We need to protect school site positions when possible. Those are the caring adults that students depend on, while central office positions exist to support schools. OUSD should adopt the same zero-based budget approach for central office departments that is used for school sites. That means building up each central department budget based on what is required to support schools, rather than keeping funding levels from year to year. Too often, a central program previously funded by philanthropy is preserved even when the source of funding has dried up.

However, I also question the assumptions made in this question. We live in one of the wealthiest regions in the richest country in the world, and we should demand full funding for education. Our students should not be punished because the state has not adequately funded its pensions, nor because they don't live in wealthy suburbs that can afford to subsidize what the state provides..

So in fact, we don't know for sure that millions must be cut, but sadly it is a possibility. You can count on me to advocate for more funding, but if we do not succeed, then we do need to make cuts to avoid further control by the county or state.

In making any cuts, the board and district should use an equity framework, since schools in the hills can fundraise to ameliorate cuts, while schools in the flatlands with concentrations of need have no way to make up for lost resources.

Leadership and Candidacy

What are 1-2 barriers for positive impact of the current board and how would you plan to address those as a board member? (150-word limit)

- 1.** A school board member should represent their district's school communities. However, some of the current board were elected thanks to vast expenditures by billionaire donors. This leads to a lack of trust from the community and suspicion that they are not accountable to the voters. I am addressing this by forming relationships with and listening to families, teachers and staff at school sites across my district, and refusing support from wealthy outside interests.
- 2.** The school board's biggest responsibility is to supervise the superintendent. We must not shy away from giving clear direction and holding her (or him) accountable, up to and including reducing her salary or replacing her. There have been multiple instances since 2012 where the board has deferred to a superintendent out of fear of micro-managing or losing him or her. That means the superintendent is managing the board rather than the other way around.

As a school board member, how do you plan to engage your community and rebuild trust, especially when making high-stake decisions? (250-word limit)

There is so much trust and feeling of common purpose at many of our school sites, yet at the district level the acrimony and suspicion have gotten out of hand, especially at board meetings.

I have already been meeting with families, teachers and school staff at all the schools in North Oakland. When the coronavirus crisis hit, I organized Zoom calls every two weeks for two months so that we could share information and resources across North Oakland, and people participated from almost every public school community in District 1.

As a board member, I would continue to organize regular meetings to communicate about major decisions confronting the board, and also to create a space for community-building across different schools.

I also want to work with families and staff of color to facilitate more opportunities for their voices to be heard. When I worked on the Manzanita campus, there was always strong voice and participation from African-American and Latina/o families and staff. But at many of the schools in District 1, due to gentrification and structural racism those voices have been marginalized in decision-making, even though many families and school employees of color are very involved in supporting students at those schools.

I will also maintain a website with information about ongoing issues, and an email newsletter to keep people up-to-date on upcoming decisions. And I will continue to be available to meet one-on-one with concerned citizens during 'office hours'.

What have you done to lay a foundation for a successful candidacy? Speak specifically to fundraising, campaign staff, field preparation, campaign infrastructure, and key endorsements. (150-word limit, do not count key endorsements against your word limit)

The most important thing I have done is to form relationships with parents, teachers and school staff from all the public schools in North Oakland. I have organized a team of volunteers and raised funds from over 250 individual donors totaling over \$34,000 so far. I have contracted with a campaign consultant and am printing up flyers to distribute by hand to voters across District 1. Of course we will not knock on doors during the pandemic, but will call or text them afterwards to follow up. I have a volunteer coordinator, voter lists, and am planning to distribute flyers and make phone calls and texts starting next weekend.

My key endorsements so far are:

Parents from public schools across District 1

SEIU Local 1021

Northern California Carpenters Regional Council

Alameda County Superintendent of Schools L. Karen Monroe

Alameda County Board of Education Trustee Joaquin Rivera

Oakland School Board Director Aimee Eng

Oakland School Board Director Rosie Torres

Oakland School Board Director Shanthi Gonzales

Alameda County Superintendent of Schools Emerita Sheila Jordan

Former Oakland City Councilmember Jane Brunner

OUSD College & Career Readiness Commission Chairperson David Kakishiba

What will your ballot designation be, and why? (50-word limit)

As a new candidate, I am still learning about the requirements for ballot designations. I will discuss this with the City Clerk's office and make sure I follow the rules.