

Parents United for Public Schools

2016 Candidate Questionnaire

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Parents United for Public Schools has created the following questionnaire to help parents, students and other community members understand how candidates for the OUSD Board of Education intend to represent our public school communities, if elected. Completed questionnaires will be published on our [website](#) and made publicly available in other ways as a resource for our communities.

Survey Questions:

1. **CLASS SIZE MATTERS:** Class sizes throughout OUSD are, overall, too large. [Research](#) shows that teachers and students need small class sizes to increase both teacher retention and student achievement. Instead of budgeting to decrease class sizes, OUSD throws hundreds of thousands of dollars to no-bid contracts, creates new six-figure central office positions, and gives raises to top administrators. As a school board member, will you prioritize spending less on upper-level administration salaries and outside consultants, and instead push that money to school sites to support interventions that directly benefit students, including reducing class sizes?

Yes x

No

I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. I've been a classroom teacher for many years, and YES – class size matters! It's doesn't take a lot of esoteric research to demonstrate this; ask any teacher or student – it matters, a lot. I am not only disappointed but offended by the priorities of the current Superintendent (supported by the majority of the current Board of Education). The classroom is where the rubber meets the asphalt; every service that is not directly in support of the classroom should be reevaluated. The only legitimate balance to class size is teacher salary.

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2. RELATIVE ROLES OF SCHOOL BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT:

It is the responsibility of the Board of Education to [make policy](#) and the Superintendent to implement that policy. What is your understanding of the role of the Board of Education and its relationship to the OUSD Superintendent, and how can this relationship be a barrier to, or catalyst for, improved educational outcomes for Oakland students?

Please explain:

The primary role of the BOE is to make broad policy decisions; however, they have two other very important jobs and that is to hire and fire the Superintendent. A dangerous and pernicious position that some school districts find themselves is a dynamic where large, and very sophisticated, political action committees are packing school boards by making large campaign contributions with promises of reelection, or political advancement, if the PAC is allowed to select and control the Superintendent. If elected, I will work to expose and eliminate this dynamics from OUSD. Additionally, I will direct the current Superintendent (or the new Superintendent) to make the classroom his/her priority.

3. **INVEST IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:** Over the last fifteen years, the OUSD Board of Education has attempted to address issues of school quality by drastically increasing the number of privately-operated charter schools, which now account for 27% of schools in Oakland.

However, the Alameda County grand jury recently [found](#) that Oakland's charter schools are *not* outperforming their public school counterparts, as promised. Charter schools aren't improving school quality in Oakland (or other cities), but research demonstrates that [community schools](#) are. Will you work and vote to shift OUSD's school improvement strategy from further charter proliferation to a true community schools model?

YES x

NO

I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. The original concept of charter schools was to be a few that would serve as incubators of creativity and innovation, not as an alternative to

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traditional district schools. Disingenuous conservative groups, nationally and locally, are using this as an opportunity to privatize education.

The local Grand Jury exposed the inadequacies of Oakland's charter schools. The ACLU and NAACP have nationally drawn attention to the discriminatory practices of charter schools. Please look at the rubberstamp voting record relative to Oakland Charter Schools of the District Three incumbent and then look at her primary campaign contributor.

- 4. IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:** Identify two or three specific changes that you would advocate for to improve outcomes for students, particularly students of color and those from low-income families.

Please explain:

I am a big proponent of nutrition education. One in three children, and nearly half of African-American and Latino children, are predicted to develop diabetes in their lifetime. I live a few blocks from West Lake Middle School and it saddens me to see our children, many of them already obese, consuming large sugary drinks and eating potato chips and candy while walking to school in the morning. I support the Oakland sugar tax initiative and Michelle Obama's "letsmove.org".

Additionally, and I know this may sound a little obtuse, but I'm interested in returning to a somewhat old-fashioned concept of "teaching the whole child." Standardized testing has become very important to everything from teacher, principal, superintendent, and school evaluations to real estate prices. California's adoption of Common Core appears to have escalated this importance. Academic achievement is important, but a child's social and emotional development is also important. Schools are not factories and teachers are not technicians. I see our schools as an extension of the community it serves and our teachers as extensions to every student's family.

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5. END THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE: The [school-to-prison pipeline](#) is real. We need to keep our students in their classrooms by investing in community schools, increasing school site counselors, strengthening culturally-relevant community partnerships, and increasing teacher supports. We need to remove police from our public school campuses, and institutionalize restorative justice practices at every school site. Will you commit to providing restorative justice counselors at every school and working toward a decreased police presence on our campuses?

Yes ☒ **No** ☐ **I'm not sure** ☐

Please elaborate:

Yes. And I'm not confident I could articulate it any better than the above. When children grow accustomed to negative interactions with police on school campuses, they expect similar interactions outside of school.

I've worked on a team implementing restorative justice in a school district; not only does it work, but it teaches a culture of respect and consideration.

6. AUTHENTICALLY ENGAGE WITH AND SUPPORT SPECIAL EDUCATION FAMILIES: Over the past few months of the school year, the District has begun a process to completely overhaul the Special Education ("SPED") department, which has resulted in students being moved to new schools without notice and programs being consolidated or removed without discussion. It has also led to [Special Ed parents to say OUSD is breaking federal law](#). This process has felt neither fair, clear, nor inclusive to the people who know best what the Special Education program's needs are: SPED families and staff. Will you work to ensure that special education families, teachers and other staff are included in SPED planning going

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forward, and specifically integrate the Community Advisory Committee for SPED into the budgeting and programmatic decision making of the district?

YES x **NO** **I'm not sure**

Please elaborate:

Yes. I am appalled at OUSD's dismantling of current SPED programs, particularly when there appears to be no concise, cohesive, or communicated plan in place. I've worked with approximately eleven superintendents during my career in education. I can generally divide them into two categories. The first category visits the schools, meets with the parents, listens to his/ her principals and teachers and develops solutions to issues/ problems that are unique to each school community. The other category reads the journals, goes to the conferences, and sells the BOE on broad-based, cookie cutter solutions to problems that may not even exist. I see our current superintendent as the latter of these groups and what has happened to SPED in our schools as an example. In recent months, I've attended several District SPED meetings and several Parents of SPED meetings. I was genuinely moved by the testimonials from so many parents. It will be a priority of mine to have an open communication with the Community Advisory Committee for SPED.

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7. ENROLLMENT REFORM, BUT NOT COMMON ENROLLMENT:

OUSD's current enrollment process is complicated, inaccessible, and lacks transparency and fairness for many Oakland families. The system needs meaningful change to make it simpler, more equitable and more accessible so that all parents have the ability to make sound choices for their children.

However, under the auspices of creating an enrollment system that justly serves all OUSD families, the District is proposing to add charter schools to our public enrollment system in a process called "Common Enrollment." OUSD claims it needs common enrollment to "level the playing field" but [experts](#) agree that common enrollment results in GREATER inequity as the equity gap widens in cities that have adopted common enrollment. Further, in cities like [Newark](#), New Jersey, common enrollment has resulted in mass confusion, public school closures, teacher layoffs and student displacement. As a school board member, will you support enrollment reform without including charter schools in the district enrollment process?

Yes ☒ No ☐ I'm not sure ☐

Please elaborate:

Yes. Common Enrollment is an example of what I've mentioned above - bringing outside solutions to our uniquely Oakland challenges. When I first started my campaign, I read over the District's proposal for Common Enrollment; ostensibly it appeared to be a plan to "level the playing field;" however, parents "on the street" and various parent organizations have educated me to its true colors. The more I learn about it, the more I'm outraged by the disingenuous nature of the program. If the Superintendent, GO, and several BOE directors want to privatize education in Oakland then they should be honest about their objectives; their insidious and devious methods are unforgivable.

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8. CHARTER ACCOUNTABILITY, NOT A CHARTER COMPACT: OUSD is proposing to reward charter schools with greater access to students, facilities and funding through a vehicle originally called the “[District-Charter Compact](#)” but which has recently been rebranded as an “Equity Pledge” to make it sound more palatable and distance it from the Gates Compact that inspired it. Like common enrollment, the Charter Compact is being drafted in closed meetings with hand-picked OUSD personnel and charter school leaders and advocates. There are no OUSD teachers or parents meaningfully included in the process, and it is clear from the information that we do have that the Compact will not result in greater equity for students, but WILL ensure that charter schools have greater access to funding, to facilities and to students without greater accountability. Charter schools, by law, cannot be forced to participate, and the district will have no authority to hold them accountable if they fail to comply. As a school board member, will you oppose any “Equity Pledge” that hasn’t genuinely come from the community needs or demands and which gives away public school resources to charter schools without the necessary accountability measures?

Yes ☒ **No** ☐ **I’m not sure** ☐

Please elaborate:

Yes. Like Common Enrollment, I was originally misled by the “Equity Pledge.” Even then, I questioned the feasibility of its nonbinding nature for charters. Again, I am appalled at its disingenuous nature. Existing charter schools need transparency and accountability. I am suspicious that what was recently revealed in the Livermore District to be just the tip of the iceberg. The positive side to the Equity Pledge and Common Enrollment is they were not quite devious enough to accomplish their goals. They exemplify the desperate nature of GO, the Superintendent, and several BOE members. I’m confident that in this election, the Oakland voters will see through the color election mailers, billboards, and phone calls and vote against the privatization candidates.

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9. HOLD CHARTER SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE: The Alameda County grand jury recently [found](#) that even though charter schools have been sold to our communities as a fix for underperforming public schools, 62%, or 23 of the city's charter schools, scored below state test averages in math, and 65%, 24 schools, scored below state test averages in English. While tests, obviously, do not provide a full picture of quality, it is clear that Oakland charters are not keeping the promise they have made to our communities.

Further, the grand jury found that, even in the face of struggling schools, the District has not prioritized charter accountability; the OUSD Office of Charter Schools is understaffed and underfunded. In fact, the state provides a formula for District staffing levels that would require 13 full time employees for a District the size of Oakland's, yet current staffing was only recently raised from five to six people. This is particularly troubling given the recent [ACLU report](#) which found that 12 of 37 charter schools in Oakland are advertising illegal and unconstitutional exclusionary practices on their websites which could and should have been discovered by our Office of Charter Schools.

As a member of the Board of Education, will you commit to fully-funding and staffing the charter school office with independent staff who do not have ties to the charter industry, and who have the training and experience to truly hold OUSD-authorized charter schools accountable?

YES ☒ **NO** ☐ **I'm not sure** ☐

Please elaborate:

Yes. The understaffing of the OUSD Office of Charter Schools is another example of the devious nature of "those in charge" to accommodate the proliferation of charter schools in Oakland. Again (and I'm attempting to remain positive), all this is coming out in time for the Oakland voter to be informed come November 8th.

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10. MORATORIUM ON NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS: The national [NAACP](#), [The Movement for Black Lives](#) and [Journey4Justice](#) have all called for a national moratorium on charter schools, citing increased segregation in schools, disproportionate and differential use of punitive, exclusionary disciplinary practices and a 2014 NAACP Resolution finding that school privatization is a threat to public education. In addition, the Alameda Grand Jury [report](#) found that OUSD has “no plan in place” to manage the “proliferation of charter schools.” As a member of the School Board, will you support a moratorium on new charter schools in California?

YES x **NO** I’m not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. My hope and plan for the first meeting of the new school board is a call for a moratorium on new charter schools with a yes vote from Shanthi Gonzales, Rosie Torres, Chris Jackson, and Benjamin Lang.

11. REFUSE TO ACCEPT MONEY FROM CHARTER INTERESTS: In recent years, Oakland has seen an unprecedented influx of spending in school board races from charter school lobbyists and organizations which have supported the proliferation of charter schools in our district, to the detriment of our public schools.

Specifically:

- In 2012 and 2014, Great Oakland Public Schools (GO) – through their PAC, “Families and Educators for Public Education” – [raised](#) hundreds of thousands of dollars, mostly from private multi-millionaires – to elect the majority of our existing school board members, who have then supported policies that have weakened our public schools through the expansion of privately-managed charter schools in Oakland.
- In 2012, the Director of GO said it would do “[whatever it takes](#)” to get school board members elected, stating they control a \$600 million budget.
- In 2012, GO’s PAC received [\\$50,000](#) from the California Charter School Association (CCSA), the lobbying arm of California’s charter school industry.

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- CCSA recently [sued](#) OUSD demanding, among other things, that Oakland close existing public schools to make room for more charter schools.
- Another major donor to GO's PAC in 2012 was Gary Rogers, of the Rogers Family Foundation, which states as a major goal "...[expanding and growing](#) ... charter schools...."
- Other historic [funders](#) of GO include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Walton Family Foundation (the WalMart family) and the New Schools Venture Fund, which provides venture capital start-up money for charter schools.

Will you commit to refuse campaign contributions from GO Advocates, Families & Educators for Public Education PAC, the California Charter School Association, Parent Teacher Alliance, EdVoice, Oakland Families for Quality Schools affiliates, charter school operators, or other organizations or individuals which have an agenda of charter proliferation?

YES ☒ **NO** ☐ **I'm not sure** ☐

Please elaborate:

Yes. I am not accepting contributions from anyone or any group. Obviously, from the content in this questionnaire, your group understands the District Three incumbent's relationship to the above organizations. GO will make an expensive, devious, and desperate attempt to reelect her. I am dependent on parent organizations, such as OUSD Parents United, and my ability to knock on every District Three voter's door to win this election.