

# **Parents United for Public Schools**

## **2016 Candidate Questionnaire**

### **Kharyshi Wiginton**

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**

Please elaborate:

**Classrooms, especially at the comprehensive high schools, are filled with students that have multiple, contrasting issues. These range in issues such as complex trauma, students who read far below basic, and students who have identified and unidentified learning disabilities. Creating smaller class sizes will allow teachers the opportunity to provide more personalized learning and create better, more effective academic interventions. It will allow for an environment that focuses more on learning and**

# **Parents United for Public Schools**

relationship building and less on classroom management. Additionally, The East Coast-based Grassroots Education Movement (GEM) lays out ten REAL reforms that can transform public education. The two that have the most immediate impact on student achievement are teacher training and small class size. This is a common sense strategy that should be implemented as immediately.

## **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 aforementioned relationship is how the process should work. When the Board of Ed is working in tandem with the constituents who elected them and who are directly impacted by the policies created, it is the duty of the Superintendent to carry that work forward. Right now, lack of leadership, vision, and collaborative practice inverts that relationship. The elected board has become policy creators under the direction of the Superintendent. This is a barrier when the Board is not working with community for improved education outcomes. This leaves students and families feeling marginalized and alienated and does not work for anyone.

**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.

## **Parents United for Public Schools**

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**

**Please elaborate:**

**I currently work at McClymonds High School, the only comprehensive high school in District 3. It is also a full service community school. Our school hosts Children's Hospital's Chappell Hayes clinic, a strong COST ( Coordination of Services Team) with several clinicians, social workers, and drug and alcohol counselors, and a dynamic parent program which includes advocacy, skill building, and work done across the pipeline, a solid afterschool program, gender specific programming both during and after school, and a SPAAT (a program that provides academic support to our athletes). We have all of these services, as well as other things that I didn't list. A true community school model will see the student as an entire being and work to develop her/him holistically as opposed to just focusing on academic achievement. This includes providing programs and supports for the family as well. I have many critiques of Charter schools, in particular OUSD'S relationship to charters. However, I believe that the biggest threat to thriving community schools is open enrollment. As long as places like West Oakland have more than 60% of its students choosing schools outside of their community, feeder schools will be weak, and we will never truly have thriving community schools.**

# **Parents United for Public Schools**

**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 would advocate for smaller classroom sizes and more teacher supports.
- I would advocate for universal prek.
- I would advocate for policies that interrupt the school to prison pipeline and the effects of gentrification / displacement on students, families, and teachers.
- Adult education
- Critical pedagogical curriculum

**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**

**Please elaborate:**

**In addition to what you have outlined, I will work to remove police from all schools, as well as pushing to increase the finances and resources in the SSO ( School Security Officers) program. SSO's are the face of the school (often the first adult that a student encounters when she/he steps on campus) and are our first line of**

## **Parents United for Public Schools**

defense. They also tend to have better relationships with the students and have information about students based on behaviors and murmurings in the halls. I would work to increase their skill sets and knowledge of restorative justice so that schools are accurately utilizing their presence on campus. I also want to differentiate between OPD and SSO's. At McClymonds, our School Security Officers are family. They know all the students and their families. We all rely on them for various education and safety related issues. They are the fabric of our community and are valued for the services they provide.

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

**YES**

**Please elaborate:**

OUSD continues to mess up family/community engagement. The only way that a department such as Special Education can thrive is if families are at the table working in partnership with the district to develop solutions and procedures. I am anti-exclusion. I am an active and founding member of Black Lives Matter, Bay Area and we exist to uplift the voices of those in the margins. This is happening writ large in our education system. As your school

# **Parents United for Public Schools**

**board representative, this would never happen on my watch.  
Stakeholders will have a permanent seat at the table.**

## **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**

**Please elaborate:**

**I agree with enrollment reform, but I don't agree with common enrollment. Additionally, I would move to push away from open enrollment so that energies and resources are going to support strong community schools that are populated by students in the schools area. You can't have community schools while simultaneously with common enrollment. The two are mutually exclusive.**

## **Parents United for Public Schools**

### **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**

**Please elaborate:**

**I will not support any policy that isn't connected to strong, adequate family/community engagement. I would also support a moratorium on charter schools while the Board gets solid on this issue and creates policies that are anti-racist and equitable. The term *Community Needs* is key in the aforementioned paragraph. I will be a vessel for the families in District 3 because this seat is not about a board member or a superintendent, but for every student that goes through OUSD. I will also disallow individuals from using euphemisms to describe what we clearly understand to be detrimental policies and practices for our students.**



## **Parents United for Public Schools**

**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**

**Please elaborate:**

**I believe that there are many problems with public education in the United States. It is a racist and oppressive system that shows up differently at different times, but in general continues to churn out the same results generation after generation. I support real education reform for both public and charter schools, but feel the privatization of public space and resources must end immediately.**



## **Parents United for Public Schools**

**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**

**Please elaborate:**

**I will support a moratorium on new charters, yet I understand and appreciate the style of Roses in Concrete in East Oakland. Above all, I want students to learn to be able to how to recognize and shed the fetters of oppressive education that doesn't nurture, affirm, and uplift who they are and will ultimately be.**

**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.

## Parents United for Public Schools

- 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.
- 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**

**Please elaborate:**

**I am completely anti GO Public Schools. I have watched them move around our campus and in our community, and I don’t trust them one bit. I have consciously elected not to pursue any type of support from their agency or constituents. This simply means that I will truly need the assistance of engaged organizations and individuals to beat the big money that charter organizations are putting into independent expenditures for field work. If community doesn’t want big money in politics, we have to put show with work on grassroots campaigns.**