

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. One of the few proven ways to increase student achievement is to lower class size. OUSD needs to make class size reduction a goal, a priority. Often the school board looks at class size in terms of the limits set by the state, which many classrooms across the district exceed anyway. Instead of saying we can only put 27 students in a class we could instead say we must create classes with less than 24 students. I want to be able to dedicate \$20m (2.5% of the budget) to class size reduction. We have the resources to achieve significant class size reduction. I want to reprioritize the budget by reducing the

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central administration and limiting the use of outside consultants. I will work to redirect our advocacy work in Sacramento to seek more funding, relief from our debt to the state and elimination of the state administrator, and a repeal of the charter law. Lastly I will work to create policies to increase enrollment. Hopefully these measures will help to create enough budget flexibility to fund class size reduction and many other need priorities like across the board raises and expanded curriculum and services.

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:

It is the responsibility of the board of education to make policy and then direct the superintendent to implement it. After the Board unanimously hired a Broad trained superintendent with little experience, who is “agnostic” on charter schools, they have allowed him to unilaterally dictate policy. He wrote a new strategic plan, has formed his own committees charged with creating policy, and has allowed charters even more access to our district. The School Board ceding their authority to the superintendent has not been good for our district. Transparency and oversight have been reduced. It has become more difficult for the community to actively engage with OUSD. If our democratically elected Board of Education does not represent the community’s vision for our education system then we are effectively disenfranchised.

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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. Converting more of our public schools to charters is not an option and it should not be allowed in any of OUSD's redesign or improvement processes. Some people have tried to push a narrative that says that our schools are failures and that charter schools are the only possible remedy. I do not believe this narrative. I will work to change the Quality School Development Policy. Currently the policy "allows" schools to be converted to a charter during the redesign process. This should be changed. Along with removing charters from the QSD process, I will work to end the charter compact (equity pledge) and to institute a much more restrictive interpretation of Prop 39. I will work to ensure that the district prioritizes our public schools. Oakland's plan for full service community schools was a good model but it was never fully implemented. Even without adopting a community school model we could take steps to move in that direction by reducing the counselor ratio, ensuring every school has a nurse and librarian, and encouraging our schools to provide more wraparound services and events like family reading nights, adult classes, Saturday school, etc. I will work to prevent charters from participating in our public school processes and I will work to move us to a district of full service community schools.

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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:

1. Reprioritize the budget/Equity in funding. We need to make sure that all of our schools are equitably resourced. Everyone should have access to quality, public, neighborhood schools.
2. Reduce class size. As I stated before, class size reduction is one of the few proven ways to improve outcomes.
3. Improve wraparound services and move to a model of full service community school.
4. End the privatization of public education in Oakland.

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 X

No

I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. I have long been an advocate of removing all police officers from our school sites. I do not believe that a school district should have its own police force. OUSD is currently under a voluntary resolution from the Office of Civil Rights due to the disproportionate rate of suspensions of African American males. Due to the effort to reduce suspensions and to eliminate willful defiance as a suspendable offense

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(which I support) suspensions are down across the board, but the disproportionality has remained constant. I do not believe that manhood classes run through the Office of African American Male Achievement has been the proper or effective way to satisfy the voluntary resolution or combat institutional racism.

Restorative justice has seen some success but we've had other programs like conflict managers and peacemakers working in Oakland for over 30 years. Every school should have some kind of restorative justice or conflict manager process to help students learn to manage and solve "problems" instead of escalating and exacerbating them. For a lot of reasons I prefer the conflict manager model.

The other part of the problem that we rarely look at is the number of students who are routinely sent to the office, given "in-house" suspensions, or forced to miss class time for minor offenses. Records are rarely kept on how much class time is missed due to punitive punishments.

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 X

NO

I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. In the Board of Education by-laws it delineates the different stakeholders that must be represented on committees. I will work to

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add the CAC to the list of stakeholders who must be included on all committees. I will also work to make sure that any committee or community engagement that is being formed will always have representation from the CAC. Lastly I will work to make sure that all of the named groups in the LCAP have an increased role in deciding how those targeted funds are used.

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 X

No

I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. I am strongly opposed to "common enrollment" and I will work to make sure that charters are not allowed into the public school enrollment process in Oakland. The enrollment process in Oakland is a mess. Many of the problems are due to the options process, which was enacted under the state administrator. One reform I will push for initially is to have one stop registration at the school sites or at least regional enrollment centers. Families should not have to take multiple trips across the city every year just to register their students.

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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. I am strongly opposed to the charter compact, equity pledge, or any policy that gives more of our public (school) resources to charters. I am philosophically opposed to the privatization and I will continue to diligently work to reverse the inroads charters and their backers have made in Oakland. I will work to end the equity pledge (which includes common enrollment), end the granting of long term leases to charters, re-interpret prop 39, and push to fight against the suit the California Charter School Association has brought against the district.

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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 X NO I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. It is nearly impossible to hold charter schools accountable. The charter schools office was created by the state administrator to facilitate the approval of charter schools in Oakland. One of the main reasons that Oakland has the highest rate of charter schools in California is because the charter schools office operates as if their only function is to help charter applications get approved. I don't believe that we should have a charter schools office. There are many changes that I would like to make. OUSD only charge charters a 1% oversight fee. I would raise it to 3%, the maximum allowable. The head of the charter schools office, Silke Bradford, previously worked for Green Dot

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Charters. I will work to staff the office with public school advocates who are directed to have a much more critical review of charter applications and renewals. There is a reason why the surrounding cities have far fewer charter schools than Oakland. Lastly, if we can't eliminate the charter schools office I will work to make sure that it operates like the rest of the district which means following School Board policy and not having a separate website.

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. I belong to Journey4Justice. I am Oakland's representative. I testified at the Department of Education in Washington D.C. with Journey4Justice in 2013 where I/we called for a moratorium on charter schools, co-locations, and school closures. Charter schools are not public schools. I will continue to work to bring about a moratorium on charter schools. I will also push to begin work on a process convert charter schools back into public schools to reincorporate them back into our school district.

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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.
- 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

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Quality Schools affiliates, charter school operators, or other organizations or individuals which have an agenda of charter proliferation?

YES X

NO I'm not sure

Please elaborate:

Yes. When I ran for school board in 2012 there was nearly \$200,000 spent against me. GO endorsed my opponent Rosie Torres and their PAC spent heavily for her. Her campaign also received money from corporate education reformers from as far away as ex-Mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg. Of the four people running for school board in district 5 I am the only one who has never received any money or endorsements from charter schools, their advocates, or their billionaire backers. I have never and will never accept money from advocates of charters and corporate education reform.