

## Parents United for Public Schools

# 2016 Candidate Questionnaire

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.

### RESPONSE FROM JODY LONDON, CANDIDATE FOR SCHOOL BOARD, OAKLAND DISTRICT 1

#### 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

☐ No

☐ I'm not sure

**Please elaborate:**

During my tenure on the School Board, and with the arrival of Superintendent Wilson, Oakland Unified has continued to make more funds available to school sites. This year, an additional \$24 million is going to school sites, and \$2 million has been cut from the Central Office. In my first term, we adopted site based budget policies that direct more funds to school sites and presaged the adoption at the State level of the Local Control Funding Formula. The Local Control Funding

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Formula requires districts to reduce class sizes in early grades. Oakland Unified made this move right away, ahead of the schedule dictated by the State.

When I joined the School Board in 2009, at the tail of six years of State receivership, the finances were worse than they had been when the District had accepted the State loan in 2003. I was part of the team that made hard decisions to close the \$40 million structural deficit, begin to fix outdated and inadequate financial and human resource systems, and complete years of audits. I'm pleased to tell you that Oakland Unified recently completed all outstanding audits, and negotiated down millions of dollars in penalties. We also regained our credit rating at a high rating level. This allowed Oakland Unified to sell bonds over the summer at lower interest rates. All of this means more money we can spend on school improvements, which benefit employees.

**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:

I believe the role of the School Board is to set policy, and delegate to the Superintendent the day-to-day implementation and operation of the District. I am always available to learn about concerns. I then work with the Superintendent to ensure that he understands any concerns and is addressing them.

**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

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school improvement strategy from further charter proliferation to a true community schools model?

**YES**

**NO**

**I'm not sure**

**Please elaborate:**

I was a member of the School Board that in 2011 adopted the full service community school district model, and since then have worked to support, sustain, and build out community schools across the City.

I have been outspoken in my opinion that we have too many schools in Oakland. Starting in 2013, I began voting "no" on applications for new charter schools, even though under State law a school board is required to approve a new charter school if it provides a "sound educational program." I have been focused on reducing demand for charter schools by improving District schools, supporting them in school-based redesign work.

My two children have attended neighborhood schools operated by the District since kindergarten, and are now both at Oakland Technical High School. My opponent cannot say the same; it is my understanding that his school-age child attends a charter school.

We must find a way for charter schools and district schools to co-exist. Charter schools are not going away, as is evidenced by what is happening beyond Oakland. Charter schools, in my opinion, have a lot of flexibility in terms of how they operate, who they hire, and many other factors. In exchange for that flexibility, I believe charter schools should offer innovation, as was the original intent of charter law. District schools have the benefit of a large system that can provide central services, access to facilities, and other economies of scope and scale, and of course quality education. I am interested in identifying how we can level this playing field.

**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:**

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In a city as diverse as Oakland, there will always be many different student groups that require attention. There is not a one-size-fits-all strategy.

Our District, during my time on the School Board, has taken bold steps to interrupt the pattern by which students from certain backgrounds are not well-served by the education system. This includes changing our policy on suspensions so that students spend more time in the classroom, and using restorative justice across the district. There is always room for us to improve on these programs, and every year they get better.

Oakland's African American Male Achievement initiative is making a big difference for African American boys, and is being expanded to serve African American girls and other historically underserved student populations. I support these programs because they can be successfully replicated across the District, and reach individual students. It is challenging when solving systemic problems to remember that we must reach individual students in order to be successful.

The English Language Learner roadmap is important and I am pleased that we are implementing it. We must be mindful that English Language Learners are not always the same as our newcomer students, who require additional and different supports, particularly social emotional and legal.

Our special needs program needs a new approach. I am cautiously optimistic that shifting the leadership of programs for students with special needs under the Chief Academic Officer will introduce some rigor and standardization. I have made difficult decisions in recent years to change job classifications in the special needs program in order to have instructors and aides with more training for our students, and to create more clearly articulated career paths for our staff.

I believe we also need to be mindful of our gifted and talented students. In my experience as a parent in the District, these programs are not well defined or articulated in the elementary years.

Recognizing this, I believe we need classrooms that engage students early. We also need to educate parents about the value of education and regular attendance from an early age. Additionally, I support Oakland Unified's work to develop and implement an equity policy. I also believe that our ethnic studies policy, which the Board approved last year, will help make school more relevant for students.

I would like to find ways to continue to recognize and challenge all our students. I'm hopeful that the buildout of the career pathways funded by Measure N will

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give us a strong foundation for greater personalization and opportunities for all students.

**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:**

Our District, during my time on the School Board, has taken bold steps to interrupt the pattern by which students from certain backgrounds are not well-served by the education system. This includes changing our policy on suspensions so that students spend more time in the classroom, and using restorative justice across the district. There is always room for us to improve on these programs, and every year they get better.

Ideally we would have a world where police are not needed. The reality in our City is that schools across the City, in every neighborhood, are put on lockdown because of activity in the surrounding neighborhood. Sadly, even in the relatively "safe" neighborhood around Oakland Tech, it seems every year students are robbed at gunpoint when they are leaving school. Our school police, all 12 members of the force, are important to maintaining a safe environment at our schools and in the surrounding neighborhoods. The Oakland School Police are trained in alternative methods of policing and not using force. It is worth noting that there are some in our community who would like to see more police on our campuses.

Additionally, prior to my election to the Board, the District eliminated the police force and was required to reinstate it after the union sued.

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### 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**

**NO**

**I’m not sure**

**Please elaborate:**

Yes, I will work to ensure there is better and more complete engagement with special education families going forward on budgets and programs.

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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:**

The District has been proceeding with modifications to its own enrollment process since earlier this calendar year. That work will proceed, and is part of the Superintendent's work plan for the current fiscal year, which work plan is developed in collaboration with and approved by the School Board. Additionally, the Superintendent's work plan includes continued work on an Equity Pledge, one component of which is enrollment.

The question of whether charter schools join in a citywide enrollment process is not determined. At this time, it's not clear that all charter schools are interested in participating. My focus is on improving the District enrollment process.



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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:**

I am interested in the Equity Pledge, and am following the work in that area. Until I see the agreements that are reached, I cannot provide my endorsement. I also believe there is room in the process for more involvement from parents and community members. This is a sensitive endeavor, subject to political scrutiny. All the participants in the work should welcome involvement from other voices.



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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:**

As indicated above, I believe the role of the School Board is to set policy, and delegate to the Superintendent the day-to-day implementation and operation of the District. Hiring staff is the Superintendent's responsibility. If I observe a staff member not fulfilling his or her responsibilities, I can raise those concerns with the Superintendent, which I do when necessary.

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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

☐ NO I'm not sure

**Please elaborate:**

When I was a candidate for School Board in 2008, I supported a moratorium on new charter schools. As indicated above, starting in 2013, I began voting “no” on applications for new charter schools, even though under State law a school board is required to approve a new charter school if it provides a “sound educational program.” I continue to believe that there should be a limit to the percentage of students in charter schools in any single 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,

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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:**

I have been endorsed by GO Advocates, after responding to their questions about charter schools as I have responded here. My campaign continues to rely on donations from individuals, at last count well over 100.

I turned down the opportunity to participate in the California Charter School Association endorsement process. None of the other groups listed have approached me about an endorsement.