

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:

I find that teacher retention is one of the biggest issues in OUSD that I believe we must address for our students to thrive. The poverty levels in Oakland schools are as high as 90% in some schools and on average over 65% in many schools thus teachers who have long term experience are key to academic and emotional success of students, and the need to put as much money closes to students will ensure successful graduation rates. Less on top level management is key, and the reduction of outside consultants is also critical.

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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 Board does make the policy to guide the work of the Supt. Not the other way around, and requires that the Board be clear on that role, when it is not, then the actuality is that the reverse can be in place, which makes it harder for all students to be included in policy as each district in OUSD may differ as to whom the students are. The lack of policy to meet all students needs results when new Supt. Come in with an agenda to “make their mark” as has often been the OUSD experience and lack of long term paths has done a disservice to teachers who must constantly change directions, or shift gears because of a new direction the district is going, whereas steady leadership could lead to steady actual growth in reality not just hype about growth.

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?

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YES ☒ NO ☐ I'm not sure ☐

Please elaborate:

Yes I would like the Board to make a policy that addresses the report by staffing the required amount of people to do adequate and true oversight, versus rubber stamping the charter applications and then forgetting the schools for five years until they show up to renew again. That is tantamount to no oversight at all and we cannot allow our students to not be served by special interest charter schools, but should return to the true intent of incubator schools for the purpose of offering the district new insights.

- 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 looping which allows teachers the ability to stay multiple with a student and get to know the nuance of needs they have, so for students of color from low income families, the teacher can recognize factors disrupting learning, like hunger, homelessness or lots of shifting of housing, lack of parental supervision such as unaccompanied minors which we see a constant stream of growth the past two years, lack of access to health care and eye exams. Teachers are also aware as they become trusted by students who live a life of fear or stress, that there may be a job to help support the family thus some students may need extra time to complete homework or leeway for time to get extra help after school or before. Aside from looping, I would require that teachers have contact with parents on a regular basis as well, in that they can assure them how to be supportive teachers at home by giving tips and tools to engage kids, as they can be an equal partner in the education of young people, yet often parents do not feel safe being at school nor do they feel needed or wanted in the environment that is stoic, but I have seen highly engage parents at

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some schools and the outcomes are higher academically such as UPA and Edna Brewer which both have high rates of low income students of color.

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 I was a key advocate with CBO's working on this issues such as Black Organizing Project, to ensure that decisions made by the Supt. about budget priorities did not just include saying we would increase our RJ programs mixed in with other priorities, but ensuring that slightly over \$2 million was actually earmarked for increased staff as that was the actual need to get enough employees at the high school and middle school levels. It has been leading to improved culture shifts at schools as there are now at least half time FTE if not one FTE at these schools.

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

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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:

I do believe we need a process that is fair and transparent around the changes that have been made to modify the para professionals and reduce the assistance to teachers in the classrooms. I am concerned about the law being followed as well and there is no reason to ignore it or assume that "inclusion" is a panacea. Where it can work to do inclusion that would allow students of SPED to thrive, it should be explored such as Edna Brewer where teachers work collaboratively over the three years the students are enrolled and therefore, we can simulate having teams of supportive experienced teachers that can assist each other. Sadly the district has such high turn over that this is an exception at Brewer and not the rule. But we can surely strive to do more of this and not just at middle schools. Of course, having more extensive parent voice is key if we can truly serve a population with a wide variance of needs, but some that are in need of advocacy as well.

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.

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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:

I do not believe Common Enrollment serves a purpose in Oakland.

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:

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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:

This is absolutely overdue and must be done as soon as possible with insight potentially from other districts that have experienced the same problem, such as LA that has seen the boom of charters only to now discover that there is much misleading data and deception played on parents that look a lot like Oaklands.

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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:

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

Please elaborate:

In 2012 I was introduced to the GO org by former director Gallo and as a first time candidate pursued every endorsement possible. I did receive the money and endorsement offered by GO along with many others that were pro labor such as SEIU, Alameda Labor Council, and other progressives like John George, NWPC, Stonewall, etc. However, over time as both a candidate then elected, I was afforded actually seeing the inside of charter schools having never been a charter parent. And what I saw were huge disparities in schools with private money like Oakland Military Institute where I entered a middle school science class and students had lab coats, live gas for experiments and showers in case of chemicals spills, meanwhile it was the third week of school and my own child had no text book in her science class at an alleged great middle school in OUSD, Montera. This angered me as a mom that OMI would be able to afford such luxuries but our own public school kids went without. At that point, seeing for myself what was really happening was not acceptable, and further when OSA came up for renewal and the data showed so few Latino and Black students as they were weeded out by a rigorous audition that only affluent students

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could excel in, I was once again reminded that there are two systems of education and I could not look the other way and pretend it wasn't happening. So no I will not take money from corporations who do not know our kids, nor are they serving them well, in OSA most kids come from Orinda, Lafayette, Walnut Creek, or San Ramon so that is not equitable use of Oakland education money.