

Green Party Questionnaire for Alameda County BOARD OF EDUCATION

Name: Amber Childress

Website: amberchildress.com

Line of work: Small Business Owner / Marketing Consultant

1) Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of County School Board.

- Raised in the Bay Area
- Former Oakland USD Student and A Better Chance Scholar
- Parent, my child has attended school in both cities within my district. Active parent volunteer both in and outside of the classroom.
- Appointed Member of the Measure G Parcel Tax Oversight Committee
- Emerge Program Member
- Board of Directors, East Bay Women's Network
- Former Chair of Studio WFO (Wardrobe for Opportunity)
- Small Business Owner / Marketing Consultant
- Long term volunteer and mentor with Girls Inc. of Alameda County
- Advisory Board Member for OWH Studios (programs focused on at risk youth providing life skills and on the job training)
- Linked Learning, Host for Oakland USD Student Intern
- Oakland Promise Volunteer

Awards:

Powerful Women of the Bay, Innovator Award 2016

Nominated: Oakland Youth Friendly Business

2) A. Why are you running?

I am running for the Alameda County Board of Education because our students cannot afford for community leaders and advocates to sit idly by. I am running because our most at risk students need a nurturing and strong voice to speak on their behalf. All of our students deserve to have access to quality education. I share the same objective as the Board of Education "providing the leadership necessary to meet the multicultural educational needs of a diverse student population and to increase student success". My work around supporting quality education began when I was a student at Cox Elementary in Oakland. It has not stopped since then. Often times I have found myself working with schools and education based nonprofits, disappointed by the limited resources and support available to service our students. I have felt the painful frustration of being on the other end of poor decision making. My experiences as a parent, a committed volunteer, a small business owner, an Emerge program member and as a member of the Measure G Oversight Committee have prepared me to step-up to serve on the Alameda County Board of

Education as a collaborative, accessible and genuine Trustee. I would be honored to gain the support of the Green Party of Alameda County.

B. What do you believe are the main priorities for the County School Board?

- Advocate for the students in our Court and Community Schools
- Ensure fiscal health of the County Office of Education
- Provide responsible charter oversight
- Advocate on behalf of Alameda County's school districts and all 225,000 students.

C. If you are an incumbent, how would you assess your job performance? Please cite specific accomplishments and setbacks. [[If you are not the incumbent: How would you assess the current incumbent's job performance? Please cite specific strengths and/or weaknesses.]]

I am not the incumbent. I believe the current incumbent has a clear passion for some of the neediest students in Alameda County and I have an immense respect for the passion that he brings to his role as the incumbent.

However, the incumbent has failed to connect with the community he represents, especially in West Oakland and Alameda. He has never been elected by the voters. He was appointed in 2009 by a split vote of the Alameda County Board of Education and in 2012 his race did not appear on the ballot due to the lack of a challenger. As a result, he has never been forced to engage with the community through the electoral process and has not been held to account for his time on the County Board of Education.

The incumbent is divisive. This is not a time when we need more division in politics and especially not in education. When the incumbent interviewed for his appointment to the Board in 2009, he claimed he would work collaboratively with the districts. He has not delivered on that promise.

3) Concretely and specifically, how will you make yourself available to those who elect you? That is, how can we participate in holding you accountable if you are elected?

As a marketing consulting, I will utilize social media and email newsletters to keep my constituents informed. It is extremely important that elected officials make themselves accessible to those that they serve. I am committed to standing by that. It is important to me to engage with the community. I will engage with my district when important decisions need to be made. Their input is key if the Board is to be successful.

4) How familiar are you with the School Board's responsibilities under the Local Control Funding Formula? What efforts would you make to hold district's accountable for demonstrating that they have conducted an adequate process for getting public input into their Local Control Accountability Plan? How will you ensure that the LCAP aligns with the state priority areas and expressed community needs?

LCFF has been a huge boost to ensuring local decision makers are able to direct the resources available to them toward the priorities they and their community have identified and toward the students who need additional resources the most. This has been a positive shift away from the old categorical program funding system toward a more needs based funding system driven by local decision makers.

Community engagement and public input is the glue of the LCAP process and also a cornerstone of my campaign. There are two important factors in ensuring public input and holding districts accountable for it:

1. My relationships with the community that I represent. It's important to make sure that community voices are represented when important decisions are being made. I will help bridge the gap between the community and the board to improve access to quality education. My experiences as a global alliances manager and a small business owner have taught me how to communicate effectively with communities around the world.
2. Keeping a firm finger on the pulse of the district's efforts to authentically engage the community and gather and respond to their input. The Education Trust-West, the California School Boards Association, Public Advocates and our own County Office of Education have all provided valuable tools and checklists to help the stakeholders understand all that a district should do to authentically gather input.

This includes making sure the following questions are answered and supports are provided (provided by The Education Trust-West): Is a parent advisory committee reviewing a draft of the LCAP and providing written comments? Is the superintendent answering in writing? Does the parent advisory committee include parents or guardians of students receiving free and reduced lunch, English language learners, and/or foster students? If the district's student population is at least 15% English learner, is a district English learner parent advisory committee reviewing a draft of the LCAP and providing written comments? Is the superintendent answering in writing? Did the district consult with the following stakeholders in developing the LCAP: parents, students, teachers, principals, administrators, other school personnel, local bargaining units? Did the district share the LCAP with, and request input from, school site-level advisory groups, such as school site councils, ELACs, pupil advisory groups, etc.? If 15% or more of the students enrolled at any district schools speak a primary language other than English, were notices, reports, statements, and records related to LCFF / LCAP that were sent home to those students translated to the primary language? Did the district provide notice to the public of the opportunity to submit written comments on the actions and expenditures included in the LCAP? Did the school board hold a public hearing to solicit feedback and comments from members of the public? Did the school board provide 72 hours notice for this meeting? Did the notice include the location of the LCAP for public inspection? Did the district adopt the LCAP at a public meeting that took place subsequent to the public hearing? Was the LCAP adopted at the same meeting during which the district approved the budget? Did the district post the school board-approved LCAP on its website? Did the district make efforts to meaningfully engage stakeholders? Did the district begin communicating with the public regarding LCFF and LCAP early in the school year? Did the district offer informational meetings to introduce the new funding formula? Were multiple stakeholders invited to these public meetings? Who were they? Were these meetings well-advertised? How was the public informed? Did the district publicly share a timeline for the LCAP process? Did the district provide the public with timely and relevant information on LCFF / LCAP on its website? Did the district provide enough relevant

information, such as data on student academic performance and budget projections for the next year, to help stakeholders prioritize their input? Did the district survey or interview stakeholders to gather relevant and meaningful input for the LCAP? Did the district hold community forums to gather input for the LCAP, and did it make every effort to let the community know about these meetings? Did the district explain how it planned to incorporate community input into the LCAP? Was the district transparent about how it chose members for advisory committees? Does the make-up of the advisory committees reflect the district's parent population? Are the advisory committees comprised primarily of parents? Did the district arrange for members of advisory committees to be trained on their role? Did the district engage and involve foster youth stakeholders, such as: county child welfare agencies, county office of education foster youth services programs, court-appointed special advocates, foster youth, foster parents, and education rights holders?

As you can see, there are a lot of questions to be answered in ensuring genuine, valuable public input, so utilizing resources such as Education Trust-West, CSBA and other advocacy groups is important so that a Board member doesn't feel that he/she needs to reinvent the wheel when it comes to fully understanding high quality LCAP implementation.

The next six months are a very important time in the next phase of the LCFF / LCAP era. With the State Board of Education deciding on an Evaluation Rubric for school districts. Again, the California Department of Education, the County Offices of Education and numerous advocacy organizations have all provided valuable templates and tools to ensure the LCAP aligns with the eight state Priority Areas (Basic Services, Common Core State Standards, Parental Involvement, Pupil Achievement, Pupil Engagement, School Climate, Course Access, Pupil Outcomes) and expressed community needs. It would be up to me and my fellow Board members across the county to utilize the resources available to us, to show up at the various community input meetings, to diligently review the LCAP and to communicate with the appropriate staff and stakeholders to provide input and guidance so that the LCAP appropriately reflects the metrics the state has set forth and the priorities of the community.

5) How will you deal with violations of the law over which the School Board has direct control? Specifically, Education Code section 41372 requires that when a district fails to meet its obligation to spend at least 55% of expenditures on current classroom expenses, the deficiency needs to be set aside and paid to teachers and instructional assistants the following year. The Superintendent's office has either waived the provision or, when she has refused to waive it, has not mandated the funds be used in the proscribed manner the following year. Would you enforce this provision?

I appreciate the context provided for this question, because it points to an underlying issue I have noticed in my review of County Board of Education meetings over the past few years. I have noticed that there seems to be a muddying of the waters of what is in the County Board's purview and what is in the County Superintendent's purview. Unfortunately, I don't blame any person for this, but I blame the convoluted ambiguity and complexity of California Education Code. Though ambiguous and complex in many areas, in my review of California Education Code 41372 (text below), it actually seems clear that this is an area of district oversight that is solely within the County Superintendent's purview. Thus, it would not be in my legal authority to formally enforce this provision and I don't want to make a campaign promise that I can't enforce

However, I would absolutely have conversations with the Superintendent to discuss what is best for the students and parents whom the Superintendent and I jointly represent and I would work to support the enforcement of the provision and keeping communication lines open to help ensure it doesn't happen again.

California Education Code 41372 (b) excerpt:

If the county superintendent of schools having jurisdiction over the district determines, on the basis of an audit conducted pursuant to Section 41020, that a school district has not expended the applicable percentage of current expense of education for the payment of salaries of classroom teachers during the preceding fiscal year, the county superintendent of schools shall, in apportionments made to the school district from the State School Fund after April 15 of the current fiscal year, designate an amount of this apportionment or apportionments equal to the apparent deficiency in district expenditures. Any amount designated by the county superintendent of schools shall be deposited in the county treasury to the credit of the school district, but shall be unavailable for expenditure by the district pending the determination to be made by the county superintendent of schools on any application for exemption which may be submitted to the county superintendent of schools. If it appears to the governing board of a school district that the application of the preceding paragraphs of this section during a fiscal year results in serious hardship to the district, or in the payment of salaries of classroom teachers in excess of the salaries of classroom teachers paid by other districts of comparable type and functioning under comparable conditions, the board may apply to the county superintendent of schools in writing not later than September 15th of the succeeding fiscal year for exemption from the requirements of the preceding paragraphs of this section for the fiscal year on account of which the application is made. Upon receipt of this application, the county superintendent of schools shall grant the district exemption for any amount that is less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000). If the amount is one thousand dollars (\$1,000) or greater, the county superintendent of schools may grant an exemption from the requirements for the fiscal year on account of which the application is made. If the exemption is granted by the county superintendent of schools, the designated moneys shall be immediately available for expenditure by the school district governing board. If no application for exemption is made or exemption is denied, the county superintendent of schools shall order the designated amount or amount not exempted to be added to the amounts to be expended for salaries of classroom teachers during the next fiscal year.

The county superintendent of schools shall enforce the requirements prescribed by this section, and may adopt necessary rules and regulations to that end.

6) A. Alameda County has had several "fiscally challenged" districts over the past few years, with Oakland perhaps being the most notorious. Are there systemic reasons why this is so, and how can the County School Board address these if they do, in fact, exist?

B. What role can the County School Board play in addressing this issue?

A. The most pronounced problems with school districts in Alameda County, that could be called "systemic," are related to the high cost of living and high employee turnover. Though they affect each school district and the county office of education differently, these are two primary reasons our schools have struggled. Recognizing that the talent pool in the Bay Area is dominated by Silicon Valley and San Francisco, the school districts have difficulty recruiting and retaining employees with the cost of housing and the long commutes from less expensive communities.

B. Education Code 1240(b) states that the County Superintendent shall “maintain responsibility for the fiscal oversight of each school district in his or her county pursuant to the authority granted by this code.” In a collaborative model of governance, the County Board of Education and County Superintendent should be working together to support each other’s unique and separate legal responsibilities. Students’ interests are best served when the County Board of Education supports the County Superintendent in her oversight role by paying close attention to what is happening in local school districts. Specifically, trustees of the County Board of Education should be reading agendas and minutes of the school districts within their districts to get a sense of potential issues that could negatively affect a school district’s finances and student achievement. Trustees are uniquely positioned to establish relationships with local school officials, parent groups, and community leaders that would give them insights into the decisions that school districts are making. When a Trustee receives information or senses that a school district is making decisions that threaten its finances or educational programs, the trustee has an obligation to inform the County Superintendent of his or her concern.

7) The School Board and the Superintendent provide fiscal oversight for Alameda County's school districts, including Oakland Unified School District. The Oakland Education Association previously said that "Oakland Unified has gotten over 20% in COLA since 2002, yet District employees have received less than 1%!" Please explain how your fiscal oversight will be used to benefit the students and employees of OUSD.

I believe in our teachers. I believe in the hard working employees who ensure our students have safe, clean buildings in which to attend school, healthy meals to eat, supportive guidance throughout their day and a variety of other roles staff are called upon to do to ensure our children’s safety and success. As a leader for education, I will be a staunch advocate for employees of Oakland USD and Alameda USD. This will mean fighting to bring more resources to our school districts from the state and federal level so that district leadership is not forced to choose between paying employees the wages they deserve and ensuring all of the other district operations and initiatives are maintained to a high degree of quality. I will develop close relationships with my counterparts on the district school boards in order to advocate for our district employees and to collaboratively advocate with state and federal legislators for the resources our students, teachers, and district staff deserve.

8) A previous County Superintendent's message on the ACOE website stated that "it is true that we lack the funding needed to do the job right." What proposals do you have for increasing funding to our schools? Please include proposals that can be implemented at the County level and also proposals for which you advocate when contacting State-level officials.

In January 2016, the California School Boards Association (CSBA) released a comprehensive report titled, “California’s Challenge: Adequately Funding Education in the 21st Century.” This report outlines the numerous options for which we all must advocate. I mention this report, because my advocacy efforts alone will not be sufficient. I must, we must align our efforts with organizations and advocates who are already doing the vital work. While CSBA represents all of California’s school boards, it will be vital for me to be active to ensure representation of Alameda County’s students and families - a group that can often be left out of conversations in Sacramento.

At the local level, there are two options available to support school funding: parcel taxes and bond measures. An interesting highlight within the CSBA report, is that the Bay Area passes more parcel taxes, has the most number of districts in the state who have passed parcel taxes to supplement education financing. That means Bay Area residents are righteously choosing to carry a heavier burden than residents across the state to elevate funding levels of their schools. But we can't rely on parcel taxes, because they are inequitably distributed and simply just aren't enough.

We must **reform Prop 13** at the state level. I will have a loud voice and active hands to **close the commercial property tax loophole** that will bring in an estimated \$9 billion in proper tax revenue.

We must also **extend Prop 30**. I will work closely with the California Teachers Association and other groups who are leading the fight to ensure education funding doesn't drop off a cliff once Prop 30 expires.

Finally, I will fight for a number of bond measures that will be on the ballot and will work closely with local and state legislators to place and support responsible, targeted bonds on future ballots. This year, Alameda County and the City of Oakland are both placing important housing and infrastructure bonds on the ballot that can **support affordable teacher housing**. I will fight to ensure our teachers can live in the communities where they teach and where they are most needed!

9) What is your position on charter schools? Will you support charter school applications turned down by local school districts?

I believe in access to quality education for all students regardless of what neighborhood they happen to live in. There are some district schools that have been failing students since I was in Oakland USD schools in the 80's and 90's. Parents should have the right to choose a school outside of their neighborhood if that neighborhood school does not meet the needs of their child. My child has attended both public and charter schools. There are good and bad district and charter schools, the ones that are failing our students need to be held accountable. I am grateful that I had the option to choose.

Given the way our state laws are written for charter schools, the county board of education and the local school districts seem to have little choice. Charter schools that are denied by both the county board and local districts can go appeal at the state level. If that happens, local control of that charter can be lost, should their application be approved. With that said, I will review all information thoroughly before making decisions on charter school applications.

10) A. What is the role of the County School Board in appeals from parents and students from the local districts?

It is the role of the County Board of Education to ensure due process and consistent, fair treatment of students and families. The Board must follow specific procedures and timelines as

specified in Education Code and Board policies and conduct objective hearings to obtain the facts and make the best decision for the involved parties.

B. Transfers, expulsions, other decisions of the local boards are sometimes overruled at the County level. What is the criteria for overruling a local decision?

In expulsion appeals, the Board must consider:

- Whether the school district board acted without or in excess of its jurisdiction.
- Whether the district conducted a fair hearing.
- Whether there was a prejudicial abuse of discretion by the district.
- Whether relevant and material evidence could not have been produced or was improperly excluded by the district.

Upon hearing such considerations, the Board can then affirm or reverse the district's decision or remand the matter back to the district in specific instances.

In interdistrict transfer appeals, a transfer permit may be initially denied, revoked, or rescinded by a district for the following reasons:

- False or misleading information was provided.
- Student is excessively tardy or absent from school, or student is brought to school excessively early or left excessively late.
- Student fails to uphold appropriate behavior standards.
- Student fails to make appropriate academic efforts.

If the student appeals the district's decision, the County Board may grant or deny a student's appeal based on the merits of the reasons listed above.

11) A. How much money do you currently have for this race?

I have raised close to \$5000 after 2 weeks of fundraising.

B. How much money do you plan to raise

I plan to raise at minimum 15k

C. Where will the money come from?

My personal network, endorsements and fundraiser events.

D. Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

I would refuse contributions from any sources with a known history of acting in a way that is in conflict with my values.

12) What endorsements have you received thus far?

As of March 25, 2016, I have the following endorsements.

Shelia Jordan, Alameda County Board of Education, Emeritus
Jumoke Hinton Hodge, Oakland USD School Board Director

More to come!

13) What is your political party affiliation and how committed are you to that affiliation?

I am a Democrat. I believe in a government that is for the people. I believe in a fair tax system. I believe in family. I believe that we are responsible for one another.

Thank you!

Amber Childress
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