

QUESTIONNAIRE

GREEN PARTY OF ALAMEDA COUNTY 2014 ENDORSEMENT DECISION

Please email your responses to: GPAC-VoterGuide@yahoogroups.com.
In the subject line, please include "Oakland School Board D6"

If it is not possible for you to email, please mail your responses to:
Oakland School Board D6
c/o Green Party of Alameda County ,
2022A Blake Street * Berkeley, CA 94704

Please respond by Saturday, August 23, 2014

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1. Motivation -- Why did you choose to run for School Board?

My father was an organizer for the United Farm Workers. Because of his influence, I was raised to think about the world in terms of the arbitrariness by which people can be subjected to exploitation – by employers, relationship partners, government officials – and the tools we can use to reduce vulnerability.

After the UFW, he went on to become a public interest attorney, helping workers with wage claims, and seniors and others get benefits they were eligible for. I started organizing in high school, working against Proposition 187, which would have prevented undocumented children from attending public schools. I worked on a living wage campaign and the No on 209 campaign and when I finished college, I went on to organize homecare workers, who are not protected by federal labor laws. They have no overtime or minimum wage protections. Today, I serve on the board of La Raza

Centro Legal and the Library Advisory Commission, facilitating services that help some of our most vulnerable people.

I am running for school board because **education is the best tool we have to reduce vulnerability**. About a month ago, I met a parent on Bancroft. She is an American citizen, but has worked cleaning homes for her whole career, because she cannot read. She could have a union job cleaning hotel rooms, and have benefits and better wages, but because she is illiterate, she can't fill out job applications. She is also a domestic violence survivor; it has been hard for her to leave her relationship because her work is so precarious.

Her desperation crystallized for me what this is all about. What I want for every Oaklander is for them to have choices and the ability to leave an exploitative relationship or job. It is what we all want for ourselves – safety, prosperity and opportunity.

We live in the wealthiest corner of the entire planet, and I know that we can do better to provide education that guarantees that people will have choices and agency in their lives.

2. Program and Priorities -- Elected office provides the opportunity to proactively lead by placing new ideas on the agenda for consideration and development. What are some specific ideas you intend to pursue if elected? What do you believe are the main priorities for the School Board?

Public education is under attack in Oakland, and this race is an opportunity for those who believe in public education to stand up. I don't believe that closing public schools and replacing them with charter schools is the best way to address Oakland's need for stronger education. **I believe in investing in our schools.** If you look at Oakland's strongest public schools, they are unsurprisingly located in the wealthiest areas of Oakland. **The main difference between strong and weak schools is investment.**

My opponent is backed by an organization that believes that if there were no teacher unions, that would solve most of our problems. However, we need only look at some of Oakland's best public schools – Chabot, Thornhill, Montclair, Crocker Highlands - to know that great schools and teacher unions can coexist peacefully. A key x factor is resources.

Securing more resources is what we all need to work on together.

However, there ARE things we need to do differently. We need more instruction time and to retain experienced teachers in the flatlands schools, and I plan to work with teachers to help these things happen. The district lacks focus, and spends too much on central administration. We have to change that.

However, ***the only thing that has ever made change in the district is organized parents***. This is what I want to do, and I know that my background in organizing is going to be a key asset. Parents need to know their rights, to develop a shared vision for their children's schools, and to have someone build their capacity to push the district for change. We can mobilize organized parents to push for better schools and also to help secure more resources.

What you will see when I'm on the board is a focus on investing in schools rather than closing and conversion to charters, and organized parents holding the district accountable for improving their schools.

3. Qualifications -- Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of School Board member. If you are a current School Board member, what issues can you point to in your time as Board member that have had a positive impact? As a Board member what can you tell us about your service on the Board, and share with us the decisions you have made in this capacity that you believe made a difference in the functioning of the School Board?

My first work experience was community organizing on the No on Proposition 187 campaign. I was trained in grassroots organizing by

Californians for Justice, and I worked with them on numerous campaigns while in high school and college. After I graduated college, I went to work for SEIU UHW. I worked there off and on for almost seven years, between 2002 and 2009. In 2009, UHW was put into trusteeship and dozens of us lost of jobs, myself included.

I wanted to stay in the labor movement, but did not find a job that was a good fit, so I ended up at The San Francisco Foundation. I worked in Community Development grantmaking for a year, and have now been at the Women Donors Network for three years. We are a national network of progressive women donors.

My work is in development and programs. I research and identify prospective members, organize programs and opportunities to help prospective members learn about WDN, and cultivate deeper member engagement in WDN. I am also on the program team, and this year have been working on a series of programs on what it means to be a movement ally.

I am really proud of the work I have done on the Oakland Library Advisory Commission to build the capacity of the commissioners. I joined the commission because the library had just suffered massive cuts as a result of the budget crisis in Oakland. The libraries used to be open six days a week, 10 hours a day. Now they are open five days a week, only about five hours per day.

We recognized that we needed an organized force of library advocates in Oakland, with established relationships with city elected officials, and trained to be able to speak knowledgably about the library's budget and the importance of library services to Oaklanders, both to be able to mobilize to oppose any future cuts and to fight to get back our sixth day of service and service hours.

So we set out to build that kind of commission. We have turned the commission into a mobilized vehicle for strong advocacy for library services, and also created a commission that looks like Oakland, and the only commission in the city with a waiting list to join.

We recently won \$500,000 from the city in the midcycle budget to fill a looming shortfall in the 2015-2017 cycle, and are organizing to lead a ballot initiative in 2016 for additional revenue for the city's libraries.

I believe that all this experience is relevant to the School Board because I see a desperate need for organizing in the district. I have spoken to people in all parts of the education ecosystem in Oakland, and have heard repeatedly that the only thing that has ever created positive change in the district is organizing the parents. Organizing builds people's power to solve their own problems by creating a shared vision and building capacity to bring that vision to life.

I have also served Oakland through service on the Alameda County Human Relations Commission, the Friends of the Martin Luther King Jr Branch Library and through volunteering at Oakland Animal Services.

4. School Ratings and Evaluations -- How do you rate the Oakland schools? Name the success and shortcomings?

There is no way to answer this question, because every school is so different, and there are so many ways of evaluating schools. One of the major shortcomings of the district is the fact that educational opportunities are so maldistributed in Oakland. For example, the more successful high schools in Oakland (Oakland Tech and Skyline) have a lot more academies that offer students a more individualized experience and often provide more opportunities for out of class learning. Students attending these two high schools are also more likely to have the ability to meet the A – G requirements to attend college, access to extracurricular activities and the ability to earn college credit while in high school via AP classes.

Another major shortcoming in Oakland schools is the lack of focus. Rather than focusing on 18 things at once, we need to choose just two or three. I think those things should be better retaining and supporting teachers and investing in Oakland's priority schools to make them safe, nurturing schools that we can all be proud of.

Some things that are working well in the district are that there seems to be a sincere commitment to healthier food, and the new central kitchen will help kids learn about science through growing food and learning about agriculture. There are farmer's markets on many campuses, and the district is trying to use more local and organic foods.

I think the interest in finding alternatives to suspension and expulsion is mostly sincere, and that many of the social-emotional learning programs are great. The approaches seem pretty fractured, however. One question is what is being done to evaluate the effectiveness of the many programs, and scale up the more effective ones.

Also, while suspensions and expulsions are down for males of color, it is not clear whether the students in question are in class or just somewhere else in the school, perhaps still missing instruction time. We need more information about what schools are doing with these youth. Are they missing instruction time, even if they aren't being suspended or expelled?

5. Budget -- What changes to the OUSD budget would you suggest? (include changes to revenue).

Oakland Unified is the most top-heavy district in Alameda County, and we need to change that. Organizing parents is a big part of that; we have to create demand for change in how resources are used. Strong unions can also create pressure for a more fair allocation of the district's money.

In order to be a responsible School Board member, I would need to talk more with district officials before making specific recommendations. I can say that I know that we contract out for a lot of services that we already have people on staff to do, such as legal and financial services, and that needs to change. If the people we have on staff aren't the right people, then perhaps we should let them go and hire others. We also need to get a better handle on the district's finances. Because we can't get a clean audit, we pay more interest on our debts, losing millions a year that should be going into classrooms.

One of the district's major challenges is with teacher turnover. Oakland Unified teachers are the lowest paid in Alameda County, and this has to change, however we need to invest in teacher support and training as well as compensation. We also need to pay other district workers decently. Food service workers for the district earn only \$9/hour, and are the parents of many of the district's children. Paying district workers decent wages is a very important and obvious step we can take to improve the lives of Oakland children.

We need more revenues as well as to reallocate money within the district. I plan to work with other School Board members, Library Commissioners like myself and other people who care about public services for change to Prop 13. We need a split-roll that treats commercial property differently, which will help us get needed resources for public services, as well as oil severance taxes.

6. LCFF & LCAP -- How do you see the impact of the new Local Control Funding Formula and the role of staff and parents/community in LCAP?

The idea behind LCFF is great, to give parents and community members more say in the needs of their schools. Oakland schools vary greatly, however, in the level of parent involvement. I am concerned that schools with weaker School Site Councils, of which there are several in District 6, could pose a threat to the district's ability to receive all of the funds it is due. There is a strong need to organize parents in order to pressure the district for school improvement, but also for this reason: to ensure that Oakland gets all the resources it is due.

7. School Closures -- What is your position on the schools which have been closed over the past several years, and the eviction of the "People's School for Public Education" at Lakeview School? What is your position on future school closures?

What we need to do with struggling schools is to invest in them, not to close them. Closing schools is an admission of defeat, and children are never hopeless.

There is money available to keep schools open, but the district does not want to shift its priorities so that the needs of children come first. This is why we need organized parents; to force the district to focus on the needs of children rather than the district's desire to maintain the status quo.

8. Other OUSD Properties -- What are your views on the use of the District property at 1025 2nd Ave. and the future location of Dewey HS?

We always need to be careful about closing or relocating schools, because it is so disruptive to communities and families. I know there has been a lot of controversy about the way the RFP for this property was handled, with many people feeling there was not sufficient time or

consideration of community input and feedback. I agree that it felt very rushed and secretive. This is problematic because it is public land that is potentially being disposed of, and therefore the public needs to be included in the discussions.

I also know that affordable housing for teachers in Oakland is a real and growing concern, and that the district is looking for additional revenue streams. My expectation is that whatever happens, the public will be meaningfully included in the discussions about the future of that land and there will be minimal disruption for Dewey students.

Given that waterfront land is very valuable and (this parcel) publicly owned, it's important that the development benefit the Oakland community.

9. Truants and Drop-outs -- What do you suggest we do about the truants and those who have dropped out?

It is very unfortunate that the district has largely abandoned Adult Education, because Adult Ed was an important tool for people who left school, but later decided to go back and get a GED or improve their basic skills. District 6 has a lot of people reentering society after incarceration with poor basic skills, many of whom were drop-outs, and they need Adult schools. One of my goals on the board will be to bring back Adult Education. Educating adults also benefits Oakland's children.

The district also used to operate truancy centers. I believe these centers were win-win-win for both the city and the district. The students who were brought in were offered services to address the challenges that led to them being truant, the district received the state revenue for the children in the centers, and police officers had a place to take children that should be in school.

A coordinated policy around truancy is an opportunity for deeper investment and engagement with the city. Crime goes down when children are in school, and collaboration with the city around attendance was transformative for Logan High School in Union City. We need to get the city more invested in addressing truancy because it affects safety in the city. It is also an opportunity to address the need for services that families may have. For example, a child may be

experiencing bullying or other trauma at school. Truancy centers can help us figure out why children aren't attending school and get them services to help them get back on track.

10. Charter Schools -- What should Oakland's policy be around charter schools? What would you propose, if anything, in lieu of Charter schools? Do you distinguish between the different types? Would you support putting charter schools under the union contract?

I fully support the rights of all workers to organize into unions.

The tools that School Board members have to address charter schools are inadequate; school board members have almost no ability to do anything about charters (other than voting yes or no to approve or renew), because the laws regarding charter schools are made at the state level.

I believe in accountability for public funds, and there have been multiple instances of Oakland charter schools where public funds have been mismanaged. Accountability goes beyond funds, however, and is also relevant when it comes to accessibility to parents and other community members.

While there are both district and charter schools where parents are unhappy, district parents can easily contact and access the appropriate school board member. Charter school parents have no guarantees of any recourse for their grievances. If their children go to a school with a responsive and accountable board, they will be able to talk to someone. However, charter schools vary widely in terms of the accessibility of their board members, who are not publicly elected.

At least one Oakland charter school's board (Leadership) meets in San Francisco, and only two of the 38 Oakland charter schools list board member contact information on their websites – they aren't required to by law. The parent handbook of the Amethod charter chain says that "individual board member contact information is never available" to parents.

Charter schools are also much more likely to exclude Oakland's most vulnerable students, the 11% with special needs, the over 30% who are English language learners and children with behavioral issues. They

are not legally allowed to discriminate, but nearly all charters have far fewer of these students (relative to their district school counterparts) nevertheless. We need to examine these disparities and use them to determine which charters should be renewed.

My priority will always be investment in the publicly-controlled schools, because I believe that the tools for accountability are stronger, and that the likelihood is stronger that we will serve all of Oakland's children.

11. Testing and Teacher Evaluations -- What should our policy be around Student Testing and Teacher Evaluation? Do you see alternatives to the use of mandated standardized tests in meeting local, state and national education goals? How much are we teaching to the test now, and what should we be doing different if you feel it should be different?

There is only so much we can learn from testing students, about both teaching and learning. We need robust methods of evaluating both. What I think would be useful in assessing teachers would be more classroom observation. Feedback on teaching should be solicited from more than one source – from peer teachers, students, and parents, as well as administrators. Classroom observation should be done regularly, so that it's not a big scary annual thing, but a regular occurrence used mainly to improve practice.

In terms of evaluating student learning, we want to know more about schools than how well students can perform on tests. Do students feel safe and included in the school community? Is there churn among the teachers and other staff at the school? Are students attending school regularly? Are parents involved in the school? Do the kids have access to needed services, such as counseling, social work, nurses, etc? All of these things are relevant, and are more likely to impact the students in Oakland's flatland schools. I am not sure how to do it, but we have to consider these factors when we evaluate schools. Students attending flatland schools are often coming from less stable families, which affects them, and their scores on standardized tests.

Any parent has the right to opt out of testing that they object to.

12. Common Core -- What are your views on the use of the proposed Common Core curriculum?

The goal of bringing critical thinking back into schools is imperative. It is also important that teachers be given sufficient preparation and planning time, because the Common Core is a really dramatic shift in teaching. It is not ideal that the curriculum was planned without much teacher input, but I am hopeful that it will bring some of the creativity and autonomy back to teaching, and also help inspire lifelong curiosity and a love of learning.

13. Small Schools -- What do you think of the current Small Schools?

Many of the small schools continue to provide a good education to Oakland students, but much depends on the leadership of the school, and the ability of the Principal to align people with the vision for the school. The research demonstrates that small schools can be powerful tools, but the other things matter too – the school’s leadership, resources, services provided to students, etc.

I think we saw a great deal of success with small schools in Oakland, and we also know that there are challenges currently with having so many schools competing for enrollment. The way I think we should address this is to invest in and improve the schools so that parents elect to use the district schools rather than opting out, and bring Oakland students back into the district.

14. Central Resources -- How do you think the allocations of central resources should work and how should that relate to local school funding?

Budgeting should start with our priorities. I believe those priorities should be improving teacher retention and better supporting teachers, and investing in the district’s priority schools. Whatever the agreed-upon priorities are for the board, I will be looking hard at how the district’s resources are allocated (money and people and facilities) with respect to those priorities. If money is being spent centrally that isn’t closely related to the priorities, then it needs to be reallocated.

15. City/Government Relations -- How should the City of Oakland support the OUSD, and education in general?

The district should work closely with the city on policing, with a focus on improving attendance. This has been a huge success in Union City,

CA, and has been win-win, with schools receiving more resources for improved attendance and getting better student outcomes, while decreasing crime in the city.

This is definitely an area for improvement. The fate of Oakland's schools is intimately linked to the fate of the city - what happens in the schools affects the rest of the city, and what happens in Oakland also affects students. There are many ways the city could support schools better, but collaboration around attendance is a good place to start.

16. Police -- What is your position on Campus police? How would you create an environment where police are not needed?

OUSD spends \$6 – 7 million annually on its own police force, which is regarded by many observers as insufficiently trained. I'd like to see the district police more focused on attendance, and school security done by trained parent volunteers and/or unarmed civilians who are part of the school community. We want people who have been trained to work with children, and who have been trained in restorative justice practices to address the school to prison pipeline in Oakland schools.

17. Unions -- What do you think of the relationship between the OUSD and the unions? What would you propose it should be and how would you act on that?

The inequality that exists in the United States is also played out in the district, with many district workers grossly underpaid, and many executives earning hundreds of thousands of dollars. The district needs to treat workers with more fairness. This would go a long way in addressing labor relations, and would also improve education outcomes for kids. Workers who are being treated fairly deliver better services to families.

18. Adult Education -- What is your position on Adult Education?

Restoring adult education is going to be a priority for me.

19. Vocational Education -- What is your position Vocational Education?

The trades are a great option for many kids, and we need to provide vocational education so that more kids learn about this path. We also

need to provide better basic skills in math and science so that the trades are a feasible option for more kids, and to use opportunities like linked learning to help kids learn in class and out of class, and develop relationships that will help them when it comes time for them to start their careers.

The number of highly educated people working in coffee shops shows that college is not always a route to success. Every child is different, and so we have to provide options to help them all succeed.

20. 'Academics vs. Electives' -- What is the proper balance between academics and sports, arts and other electives? Do you support using organizations such as Play Works to provide sports, arts and other electives formally provided by staff before the series of cutbacks?

Each child is different, and what will engage them and foster their curiosity and make them want to come to school is different. That is the reason that we have to have a rich and diverse curriculum that offers kids multiple avenues to discover their interests and passions. Sometimes job quality is higher if providers are employed by the district, but not always. What is important is that the services keep students safe, engaged and build their confidence and skills.

21. The School Day -- What is your opinion on the length of the school day and the role of before school and after school programs?

We need to lengthen the school day, both to increase instructional time, and also to give teachers more time for preparation and collaboration, and we also need high quality programs that reinforce what kids learn during the school day. This is a priority, and it's one of the lessons that district schools can and should take from charter schools – additional instruction time matters. We need to work with teachers to identify the best way to do this.

22. Accountability -- How do you propose making yourself accountable and accessible to the citizens of Oakland?

I plan to hold regular office hours in a public place (probably a library), posted on my website, so that everyone knows where and when they can find me on a consistent basis. I plan to attend as many School Site

Council and PTA meetings as I can, so that parents and school employees know who I am, and that I want to hear from them.

I will respond to requests from community organizations and unions for information, for meetings, and for assistance, and make every effort to include them in the decision-making of the district. I will also regularly attend board and committee meetings.

23. Endorsements -- Who has endorsed you so far? Who do you expect to endorse you?

Already Endorsed:

Oakland Education Association
Operating Engineers Local 3
National Union of Healthcare Workers
Delaine Eastin, Former State Superintendent of Instruction
Dan Siegel, Former District 6 School Board Member

Expect to Endorse:

Alameda County Central Labor Council
Alameda County Democratic Central Committee
AFSCME Council District 57
SEIU Local 1021
Building Trades Council
Carpenters Local 713
Painters and Allied Trades District Council 16
Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Instruction
National Women's Political Caucus

And more!

24. Campaign Funding -- How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

I have about \$20k on hand, out of about \$38k raised. My goal is to raise \$60k. The money has come from friends and family, as well as

some of the members of the Women Donors Network, the organization I work for. They believe in electing more progressive women of color to office.

I expect the rest of my funding to come from supporters, friends, family, unions who have endorsed me, and house parties.

I would refuse to accept money from people who do not believe in public education, and see education as a potential profit center rather than a human right.

25. Anything Else? -- Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

I would be proud to have the endorsement of the Greens.