

Oakland Unified School District director candidate questionnaire *Thank you for taking the time to complete The Oaklandside's 2020 election questionnaire. Please briefly answer each question using no more than 300 words. Please be as specific as possible when discussing policy ideas or positions you've taken, or would take, on different issues.*

Name: Cherisse
Gash

What district seat are you running for: Oakland School Board Director District 3
2020

1. Why are you running for Oakland Unified School District's board of education?

As a native of Oakland's District 3, I have been both a student and a parent in OUSD. My mother taught in Bay Area public schools for three decades. I have watched as students of color, like me and my son, are being increasingly marginalized by a District that has prioritized privatization over high-quality, accessible, equitable public education for all. I'm running to advocate for all students, parents, and teachers in the District.

2. Please list your age, education, any professional licenses or other relevant credentials, your current occupation, and your neighborhood of residence.

I'm 43 years young. Holistic health educator/ advocate and Health home care. Parent. The neighborhood of Glen Echo Creek (off Broadway)

3. What schools did you attend? What schools do your kids attend?

I attended MLK Jr. Elementary School, Kaiser Elementary School and Claremont Middle School. My son also attended Kaiser Elementary School, Claremont Middle

School, Oakland Tech High School and Met West High School. My son just graduated from Met West High School class of 2020. My son has been an active participant in the African American Male Achievement Program, KingMakers of Oakland and The Hidden Genius Project over the last many years. I have been a volunteer parent and advocate for these programs.

4. What qualifies you to run for the school board?

I'm a third generation Oaklander, descendant of teachers; alumnus and proud mother of a

recent OUSD grad. I have more than a dozen years of experience collaborating with

community organizations like the African American male achievement program, Oakland

Not For Sale, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Restore Oakland, and many more.

Through hundreds of meetings, rallies, and events, and bearing witness to the legacy of my

family's decades of involvement in public education, I have acquired unique and pragmatic

insight into what OUSD needs to change in order to offer high-quality, accessible, equitable

education for all.

5. Where can voters get more information about your campaign?

www.cherissegash.com

6. What do you think are the biggest issues facing Oakland schools and students

right

now

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OUSD has suffered under widespread fiscal mismanagement, led by a Board and leadership

that has catered to corporate privatizers seeking to profit off the education system, and not

to our students' or teachers' needs. School Board members have proclaimed a budget

deficit year after year when millions have been squandered on empty property leases,

ineffective quid-pro-quo deals, and exorbitant contractors. Under the current system,

businesses are prospering off of taxpayers' money, while we are compromising our

children's academics, success, and safety. Furthermore, the history of on-site school

policing has intimidated and demoralized students of color, preventing them from

achieving their full potential. I'm committed to eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline to

support, not suppress, the students' educational needs.

7. The district has been plagued by financial problems for years. What do you think

should be done to put the district on the right track?

Rather than continuously closing schools and replacing them with unaccountable charter schools, thus draining the district of funds that come with public school

enrollment, we need to: 1) maintain our public schools, properly resource and market them, to bring enrollment and thus taxpayer funds back into the District; 2) work with supportive state legislators to have the State of California pay Oakland back for years of unnecessary expenditures while we have been under state control; 3) severely cut bloated District administrative salaries, exorbitant contractors, property leases and quid-pro-quo deals that have been the result of unethical insider deals by Board and administrative staff.

8. Earlier this year, the school board voted to eliminate the district's police department. How should the district ensure safety on school campuses?

We keep children safe by ensuring that they and their families and communities have the financial, social, and emotional resources they need to thrive. This means investing in restorative justice programming and hiring nurses, psychologists, counselors, and other specialists, trained in racial bias and harassment, who are invested in the success and overall well-being of students. It means creating a cohesive support network for students' physical, mental, and emotional needs. It also means reforming the hiring and training of all educational and administrative staff to create a cohesive network that specifically supports the populace of our district. The recovery and rebuilding process will be multifaceted and incredibly challenging in this new normal, yet we will persevere.

9. How would you improve the district's COVID-19 response and distance learning curriculum? How should the district decide when to re-open for in-person learning?

The District should be assessing each family's needs and working to meet them - including technology, childcare/parental guidance, and even food and survival. Parents should be given much more guidance support for remote learning. The District needs to use a science-based approach for deciding when to re-open for in-person learning, that includes testing, contact tracing, and other safety protocols. The District should be working closely with the teachers union and public health professionals to put measures in place to support a safe return to school at the appropriate time. The District should

definitely not be closing schools permanently at the same moment in which public health experts nationwide are calling for greater space for social distancing. Whenever we do return for in-person learning, we will need all the space we have for public education.

10. Does the district have too many school sites for the number of students it serves,

and should it close some campuses? Or, should the district maintain all of its current school campuses and prevent closures and mergers?

Free, accessible, high quality public education is the last remaining bastion of a truly free democracy. Oakland's schools have and still can provide that free, accessible, high quality education, particularly if they are well-resourced and allowed to maintain small and reasonable school sites with librarians, nurses, and other resources. Closures and mergers have never saved the District funds - on the contrary, closures and mergers have cost the district millions in lost enrollment. Every school closure has been replaced with a charter school, revealing the fact that the true agenda behind school closures is not saving funds or an overabundance of schools, but rather a desire to privatize our district and dismantle the teachers' union. These closures and mergers wreak trauma on our students and have been concentrated in Black and brown communities, once again creating a more unequal system. Particularly at a time when public health experts are calling for more space for social distancing and proclaiming the greatest severity of the pandemic in Black and brown communities, we must stop all permanent school closures and mergers.

11. How would you address under-enrollment across the district?

As mentioned above, rather than continuously closing schools and replacing them with unaccountable charter schools, thus draining the district of funds that come with public school enrollment, we need to maintain our public schools, properly resource and market them, to bring enrollment and thus taxpayer funds back into the District. Each school closure dramatically reduces enrollment in the District - parents leave for private schools and charter schools. If we invest in high-quality public education, we can dramatically increase enrollment. This can be clearly seen in districts where high-quality public schools experience much higher enrollment rates.

12. What role should charter schools play in Oakland's education landscape? Do you

support or oppose the idea of a moratorium on new charter schools?

I am committed to placing a moratorium on charter schools that are non-union, unlicensed, wealth biased. Privatized charter schools often neglect those unhoused, at-risk and with special needs. If we don't invest in the public school system, one incorporating all of Oakland's youth including the marginalized, our district will be bankrupt in 3 years.

13. How can the district attract and retain quality teachers?

The District needs to provide teachers with reasonable pay and benefits to live in an increasingly high-cost region, and it must provide new and incoming teachers with greater security. Many teachers are turned off from working in Oakland because of the low pay, minimal security for new hires, and under resourced public schools. Teachers need to be paid well and provided with the security and resources they need to thrive and allow our students to thrive as well.

14. What policies, if any, should OUSD implement to create more integrated schools?

First and foremost, stopping public school closures and mergers, and preventing the growth of privatized charters that are allowed to 'skim' and choose particular students, must be our highest priority to ensure greater integration. As mentioned above, free, high-quality, accessible public education is the last bastion of our democracy - the place in which people of all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds meet as equals and have an opportunity to learn together and learn from one another. That is the true promise of a great public education system, and one that a public school Board should be upholding, not diminishing.

15. What needs should Oakland schools fulfill to become quality community schools?

To have quality community schools, Oakland needs to invest in free, accessible, high quality

public education rather than closing schools and replacing them with privatized charters.

Concentration and investment in our students is invaluable. The current system is failing

Oakland's children and outside billionaires are profiting from it. Well-educated students

from diverse backgrounds become leaders, mentors, and voters. We need more people who

care about the present and future of Oakland. My focus is on our teachers, students, and the

future of our community. I have refused all corporate donations and my dedication to the

needs of students cannot be bought. We need leaders on the Oakland School Board who

will push for investment in our students' and communities' holistic needs - that is how our

schools can become quality community schools.