

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: Sheila Pope-Lawrence, parent, educator, democrat

What district seat are you running for: OUSD School Board Director District 5

1. Why are you running for Oakland Unified School District's board of education?
I am running to deliver bold, progressive and proactive leadership to OUSD. Our school board should reflect the values and priorities of the community it serves. My lens differs from the other candidates in that I am a parent, I am currently working in schools to address the challenges that our families are facing, and I have a proven record of collaborative leadership that has led to sound solutions.
2. Please list your age, education, any professional licenses or other relevant credentials, your current occupation, and your neighborhood of residence.
I am 54 years old. I have a BA in Spanish and Psychology, MS in School Counseling, MA in Educational Leadership. I also hold a current Single Subject teaching credential, an Administrative credential, and Pupil Personnel Services credential issued by California Department of Education. I am working as a middle school counselor and I live in the Lower Laurel neighborhood (below MacArthur, between Fruitvale and Coolidge) in District 5.
3. What schools did you attend? What schools do your kids attend?
I attended public schools k-12 in southern California. I attended Holy Names, St. Mary's and University of LaVerne for college and graduate school. My son and daughter attended Patten Academy of Christian Education K-12 and are both currently away at college

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

As an educator of 29 years, I've worked at all levels as a bilingual-teacher, school counselor, and administrator. I have served on several advisory committees and was a legislative representative for CASCWA. I lowered suspension and expulsion rates by training principals and teachers to de-escalate and prevent student behavioral problems. I increased student attendance which led to increased instructional time and higher school revenue. I created policies that encouraged dialog and positive relationships between school-staff and families which led to increased student engagement. I introduced social and emotional wellbeing programs in schools which improved student achievement. I was honored by my peers and the California Department of Education for my leadership abilities which has prepared me well to drive systematic changes to OUSD that will increase equity and improve all public schools.

Where can voters get more information about your campaign? Visit my website at:
popelawrence.com

What do you think are the biggest issues facing Oakland schools and students right now? Accessing their education post COVID 19 is the top issue students and schools are facing. From digital and technical challenges to gaps in their learning, OUSD has put a plan together, now it's a matter of implementation. Next, maintaining a sustainable budget, and retaining high quality employees would be next on my list of priorities. I will propose to solve the budget problem by requiring the Board set goals that are measurable and that will hold district leadership accountable. Too many students are being promoted socially and lack basic skill development as a result. Research and common sense has proven that our students need to be exposed to ethnic studies and career development starting in elementary school to engage them. This can only be done by committed caring adults who will stay in the district and I would support policy that would encourage retention. I am also concerned about the privatization of the public education system. I will vote to keep public schools from closing, and I support limiting the expansion of charter schools.

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?

OUSD is one of Oakland's largest property owners with an abundance of unused and underutilized administrative builds in prime real estate locations. These properties are expensive to maintain and use resources that should be used to improve schools and for more student services. I support leasing and selling the abundance of unused OUSD administrative properties as a solution to help put our district on the right track.

I support limiting the expansion of charter schools that drain resources away from public schools. A study from a political scientist at the University of Oregon stated that charter schools reduce OUSD's budget by 57 million dollars in an academic year; funds that could have been used to reduce class size and expand services for students.

We can improve the financial health of our school system with better oversight and transparency of OUSD to ensure resources are used wisely. We can increase enrollment in OUSD schools by improving the quality of education and by ensuring school sites are safe, clean and welcoming environments. Working toward these four objectives will improve the fiscal health of OUSD and will improve public education.

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

I support eliminating police officers patrolling our school sites - the idea that we need to choose between social justice or school safety is a false premise. I support school security, better de-escalation training for school staff, and supportive services that have proven effective at making schools safer environments.

As an administrator I have increased safety at school sites and lowered suspension rates by creating training programs for principals and counselors to de-escalate and prevent student behavioral problems. I support expanding evidence based safety programs that include Restorative/Transformative Justice by investing in counselors and training programs for school-staff.

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?
Under the circumstances, with such a vast number of needs to address, I think that the district has done a good job of keeping communication open and responding to teachers and families during COVID 19. The district should continue to follow the guidelines of the state and county health officials using caution in trying to reopen schools. Safety has to be our #1 priority.

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?

Yes, it does have too many sites currently but this can change if the quality of our schools improve.

How would you address under-enrollment across the district?

As mentioned above we can increase enrollment in OUSD schools by improving the quality of education and by ensuring school sites are safe, clean and welcoming environments. This an attainable solution that will require improving the fiscal solvency of OUSD and better management and oversight of district resources. I also support limiting the expansion of charter schools that decrease enrollment of students in Public Schools, hurting our district's enrollment. As a school district we need to better market ourselves to students and families. Many schools in OUSD, including ones in district 5, have improved over the years. It's our job to inform the community about these meaningful improvements to increase enrollment. The Los Angeles School District has been able to increase enrollment through strategic outreach and marketing to students and families - this is an effort that should be emulated here in Oakland. Implementing these three policy points will allow our School District to increase enrollment.

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?

Charter schools have impacted traditional public schools in many negative ways since their inception. I don't agree with them being able to use public dollars and

not held accountable to provide services for all students. If elected I will vote to stop the permanent closure of public schools, support a moratorium on charter schools, and create budget solutions that increase resources for traditional public schools.

How can the district attract and retain quality teachers?

The district has done an exceptional job of developing a brand and marketing tools that attract quality educators to the district. The way to retain them is to do the following:

- *Increase salaries- Consider rolling the health benefits into the salary schedule like surrounding districts have.*
- *Improve the OUSD HR onboarding process. It is too cumbersome and complicated to navigate compared to other districts.*
- *Change the contract commitment- Require that after 1 year satisfactory probation remaining contracts are for 3-5 years*
- *Promote from within- All interested teachers, including Ameri Corp volunteers,, classified staff, community members working and committed to schools should be given first priority for promotion as positions open,*

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

I don't think implementing policy will create more integrated schools. That has been tried and has failed in several districts all over the nation over the years. Some things need to happen organically. Only families who want to be in environments that reflect the diversity of Oakland should attend our schools. Our rich blend of cultures and perspectives is why I've remained and raised my family here for 25 years. I strongly believe that once the word gets out that the safety and quality of education has improved in OUSD, families that have left the district will return.

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

An assessment would need to be done district wide in order to determine what schools need to become quality community schools. The community school initiative was a national initiative originally that was being funded by the federal

government, and rightly so. That funding went away and districts were expected to continue the concept using community resources instead of federal. When implemented with fidelity, it proved to be a very impactful approach to ensuring access to education.