

# 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: Jorge C. Lerma

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?

The time has come to affirmatively confront OUSD for its failure to provide an equitable and meaningful education program for a majority of Black and Latinx students in OUSD. I am fully committed to end the century old apartheid and unequal educational system that decimates students of color and depresses education quality in Oakland. Oakland's school system needs an update. We need to get rid of the tired standardized testing and replace it with student-centered assessment. Students do not see themselves reflected in the teachers - we need to change this by hiring more Black and Latinx teachers. There is so much work that needs to be done to better serve our students and I am ready to get that work done.

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

I am 70 years old and currently serve as the President of the Educational Coalition for Hispanics in Oakland (ECHO) where I primarily partner with the OUSD equity office to produce Latino student honor roll recipients. I live in the Fruitvale District, where my family moved to when I was young. I possess dual teaching credentials, one for elementary schools and the other for high school. I earned a master's degree in Science and have an Administrative credential that allows me to supervise and direct educational programs at all levels of the educational establishment, from Kindergarten to 12th grade.

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

I started my educational experience at Lafayette School in West Oakland, which I attended from K to 5th grade. When the family moved to the Fruitvale District, I attended Fruitvale School, Bret Harte Middle School and Oakland High School. My son and daughter attended Centro Infantil CDE, Franklin Elementary, Claremont Middle School and Oakland Tech High School.

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

I am a lifelong educator and teacher who has dedicated my life to fighting for educational justice and equity for children of color, an experience that allows me to challenge the inequities and accelerate the equity movement in OUSD. I have lived and understand the disparities and marginalization experienced by a majority of Black and Latinx students.

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

[www.jorgeforoakland.com](http://www.jorgeforoakland.com)

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

The biggest issue is the fact that being an entity that has fiduciary responsibilities, the failure to maintain the budget is a threat to the livelihood of the whole organization, including the students. OUSD has failed to comply with the demands and 20 criteria imposed by FCMAT. By ignoring these criteria, the district continues to fall behind and, therefore, our students' education continues to be in jeopardy. Additionally, the school board has failed to be present and give direction.

The second issue of importance is standardized testing and over-reliance on these results. This process deprives students of their identity and unfairly labels them as struggling compared to other students from varying socio-economic groups. Instead of continuing with this archaic system, we need to implement student-centered assessment so they we can precisely diagnose the cause for learning difficulties.

A third issue is the failure of the Human Resource department to improve or close the gross disparity in hiring of Black and Latinx teachers and administrators in OUSD. All minority groups should be at parity, yet Latinx students who make up the largest percentage of the student body have the lowest percentage of teachers per ratio of any group. I consider this unacceptable.

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?

OUSD must replace its antiquated and obsolete budget and accounting department. A new system of financial management and strategic oversight must urgently be implemented. The school board must provide dedicated and constant oversight over the financial resources of the district and work hand in hand with the Superintendent to ensure long term financial stability and accountability.

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

The safety and wellness of the school will only be accomplished with a multi-prong approach. This includes diversity of people and culturally appropriate means. Aside from internal district resources, the community must be included representing every racial and ethnic group through community-based organizations. This is a topic that no longer can be left to the principal alone.

A culturally and multilingual approach will assure that the program and its practices are inclusive and accessible to everybody involved.

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 not reopen until a cure or vaccine is available. While I acknowledge small children may have a higher level of resistance, that is not enough. Schools are a small town, a village of diverse cultures, languages and ethnicities that are all susceptible to COVID-19. It would be criminal negligence to open schools just to satisfy personal and political agendas. I do believe more has to be done to improve the quality and content of digital learning. It has to be more interactive and robust, to avoid the "talking head" lecture only approach that is so common. The district must pair up with the City of Oakland to provide hot spots and easy access nodes to students and families. Instruction must be multilingual and available on a 24 hour basis, even if it's pre-programmed, or provided by digital tag teams of instructors and teachers.

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?

I demand to have a demographic, and educational environmental investigation. Real Estate alone is not the reason to close a school or keep it open. These decisions must be based on local needs and conditions. Most schools have innovative and progressive teachers and administrators. The "failure of school" syndrome is based firmly on poor school programs and curriculum, misaligned policies and centralized bureaucratic decision making that doesn't allow local community control and decision making.

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

I would openly invite all students who have left district schools for charter schools to return to district programs with guarantees of improved instruction, student-centered, full spectrum instruction and assessment. Every school site should have early childhood education programs and preschool programs based on developmentally appropriate practices. Oakland is filled with wonderful, curious and anxious students of all ages, ready to learn, that just need to be enticed to return to an improved, higher quality, and fun school environment. In addition, I would convert schools into learning malls and service centers that offer adult education, career and job recruitment and parenting classes for families to prepare them to help their children and students in the neighborhood.

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?

Charter schools should have no role in OUSD. They are independent and self-governing. They are a private enterprise that uses public money to carry out their own programs, often not providing any significant advantage or lifting educational achievement. OUSD has lost more than \$55M due to the presence of charter schools in Oakland. Many of them are reluctant to

enter into collective bargaining agreements with their teachers and school personnel. Many of them don't take students who have social, emotional needs, speak a language other than English or have Special needs. I do support the call for a charter school moratorium. I believe all schools that operate in conjunction with OUSD must have the same administrative accountability and same regulations.

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

OUSD must immediately become a credential-offering institution. The state credentialing system does not produce enough teachers of color, varying ethnicities or representative of students in Oakland. Students want to see themselves reflected in their teachers and teachers need to be supported by their community. If we can create a type "teacher farm team" locally and generate real community engagement, teachers will feel the support they need in order to stay in OUSD schools.

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

Oakland schools are diverse and integrated, they just aren't equitable. All schools must have affinity groups that represent the diverse cultures, languages and ethnic groups in the school, that then send people to an all school multicultural parent council. Schools must do more to have an integrated workforce. When you have mostly white teachers and white principals there may be a lack of credible participation or representation of the true experiences and desires of the diverse communities within the school.

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

The key element in creating true community schools is having true participation and ongoing outreach to diverse communities in each school. In the past certain, usually self-appointed, parents, teachers or administrators will step up and become the alleged community spokesperson. While it may have started with the best of intentions, there needs to be an empowerment movement that brings all parents and families together supported with resources, people and community liaisons that work with, and facilitate parent and family meetings. Parents must be surveyed and focus groups must be done at each grade level to ensure that all voices have a champion within the movement.