

# 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: Mark Hurty

What district seat are you running for: District 3

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

I am passionate about service to the community and the need for children in Oakland to have a high quality education. I believe I have the experience to serve on the board and make this a reality.

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

I am 62 years old. I have a BA from Western Illinois university. I attended the MFA program at American Conservatory Theatre, and I have a certificate in Education Finance from Georgetown University. I currently work as a senior product manager at EducationSuperHighway where my current responsibilities are leading the engineering team that is developing tools for school districts to bridge the digital divide.

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

I attended Joaquin Miller, Montera, and Graduated from Skyline High in 1975. I met my wife when we worked as aides in a literacy support program at Thornhill Elementary shortly after graduation. Our two sons attended Joaquin Miller elementary before we moved out of Oakland in the 1990s. I returned to Oakland in 2010 as a Teach For America corps member (special education teacher) at Edna Brewer Middle School.

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

My experience as a teacher and as a manager in the education non-profit sector has given me insight into the challenges that school districts face. In preparation for this run, I enrolled in the Education Finance certification program at Georgetown. I have served on boards of other

smaller organizations so I am familiar with board governance, and I have a passion for service to the community.

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

<https://markforoakland.com>

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

There are three:

- 1) Only 1 in three students in Oakland read at grade level. This is having an impact across the board on all other measures of academic achievement. Addressing this issue so that all students read at grade level by third grade will change the trajectory of students in Oakland.
- 2) The digital divide was a problem for students in many parts of Oakland well before it became a highly visible problem with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. And the solution to this problem is more than just giving students a device and access to the internet. We need comprehensive professional development for teachers to help them teach at a distance. We need curriculum to help students learn to use the tools and technology at all grade levels. And we need support for parents and families who are being taxed by the dual challenge of supporting their children at home while also needing to earn a living. (FYI - groups like The Oakland Reach are developing strategies that address all these issues and can serve as a model for best practices across the city.)
- 3) Financial struggles and budget opacity. The history of the district's handling of its finances is dark. See the answer to question 7.

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 has had a problem with finances for decades. Both the annual audit reports and the Alameda County Grand Jury report articulate in detail the problems that the district has had with accounting and budgeting. While it is popular to point to insufficient funding as a root cause, the reality is that OUSD is receiving resources similar to or greater than neighboring districts. Of course I believe that we must continue to grow our statewide spending on education -- investing in our children should be a top priority in the state and the city, but clearly OUSD has not managed its resources as effectively as it could. The political will to make the difficult decisions to consolidate schools and prioritize spending to achieve better student achievement has plagued the board even as they have created policies that propose exactly those changes. As a board member I will advocate for the implementation of the Administration's Blueprint for Quality Schools that was the response to Board Policy 6006. In addition I will push for policies that call for modernization of OUSD's accounting platform, and I will advocate for budgeting practices that are student centered, community driven, and transparent. If we hope to free the district from

FCMAT oversight, it is critical that the district build a sufficient contingency fund that protects against future emergencies and challenges.

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 importance of the site security staff -- adults who work on campus and build lasting relationships with students -- is critical to school safety. As a board member I will support the strengthening of site security staffing. In addition, I will support the expansion of restorative justice programs, and training site security personnel in this effective tool. I will support policies that re-direct the budget for the police department to the expansion and enrichment of our site security staff.

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 COVID pandemic didn't create the digital divide, but it certainly exposed the significant chasm that stands between students and learning. In addition to the obvious need for devices and connectivity, the district needs to provide professional development for teachers so that they have the capacity to operate in a distance learning environment. In addition, the district must provide a curriculum that helps students and their parents use the home learning platform. I believe that opening facilities for in-person learning should be phased according to the best practices around health and safety. I also believe that the return to school sites should be available first for students with significant needs. Special education students, newcomers, and language learners are most likely to benefit from in person learning and we should prioritize that population first. The second tier of students returning to in-person learning should be those who don't have the level of support at home that is necessary for distance learning. In many cases this will be dominated by our youngest students and those who don't have an adult in the household who can help facilitate learning at home.

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?

The number of campuses we support is preventing us from delivering the kind of high quality education that the children of Oakland deserve. And the gaps created at school sites that are under-populated are especially damaging to the black and brown students who have traditionally disenfranchised by an inequitable distribution of district resources. One of the most damaging aspects of under-enrolled schools is that there is reduced opportunity for staff collaboration and skill sharing/development that is necessary for upgrading the educational experience for students. In addition, fixed cost for facilities and mid-level administration reduces the resources that can be deployed in direct support of student-centered needs. Consolidating schools can also serve a goal of better integrated schools. I believe that the will to make a

positive impact on students through the consolidation of school sites is critical to the district's mission of providing a high quality education for all students.

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

I would work to match the number of schools to the number of students we serve. I would also focus on making sure that there is an effective public school in every neighborhood. And I would work to make sure that the charter schools in Oakland are doing their part to serve all students in the city, including students with disabilities, newcomers, and other students who have been traditionally disenfranchised in the city. When charter schools fail to live up to this obligation and commitment, we should review their charter and consider whether a renewal is appropriate.

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 believe that charter schools in Oakland offer some families a choice that they wouldn't otherwise have to place their children in a school that they feel offers a high quality education. Depriving families of that choice is depriving them of their power to hold the district accountable to delivering on its mission. The power to leave is the ultimate power, and typically that power has only been available to people with privilege. Charter schools in Oakland help to address this imbalance of power. That said, given new state laws and tools available to school boards, I would support a higher degree of oversight of charter schools by the district, and I would consider seriously any new charter application and expect a very high level of commitment to the district's needs before voting to support a new charter school.

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

Better salaries, of course. Our teachers are earning less than teachers in neighboring districts, and in many cases it's difficult for our teachers to live in Oakland on the salaries the district pays. In addition, our teachers need high quality, meaningful professional development that gives them the opportunity to excel as teachers and have the kind of impact that draws many to the profession. And of course investing in the resources that help to create a culture of safety and learning on campus is critical to creating an environment where teachers are eager to engage and remain for their career.

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

The consolidation of Kaiser and Sankofa was both an effort to create equity and to increase integration. Unfortunately there were parents who did not see the benefits of this consolidation and rose up to confront the board and the district. That the district could have done a better job of communicating these goals in advance of the action taken. I believe that the Blueprint process could help to create opportunities for better integration in Oakland, and I support that initiative.

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

It is important to see our schools as a hub of community life in the neighborhoods they serve. For many families, the shortcomings of an OUSD education has been generational disenfranchisement. Parents and grandparents of Oakland students who struggle with literacy are themselves former OUSD students who never learned to read and write at grade level. Our adult education program has been starved of resources, but it could be revitalized to provide adult learning on the same campuses where our children attend school. Parent learning centers and community health programs would help to bring a community together at a school site and help those sites become the vital community centered schools that are crucial to delivering a high quality education.