

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: VanCedric Williams

What district seat are you running for: OUSD, District 3.

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

I'm running for Oakland Unified School District, District 3 because I believe in public education and I feel that OUSD can do better with educating our Tk-12 students. At every grade level, OUSD can do better. Public education is the cornerstone of our Democracy and for far too long, we have failed our most vulnerable students. Many students are devalued, overlooked, and pushed out.

I will seek to dismantle and replace the institutional and systemic structures that have produced such poor and uneven results for all kids, particularly the Black children in Oakland. I want a system to work in favor of the students and their best interests. Every student should have the highest quality education possible. I will advocate for a new set of progressive policies, practices, expectations, and perspectives that create a new picture of how young men and boys are perceived and treated, in other words – a new normal.

I want to address these challenges by reestablishing trust, building and strengthening the parent voice and community relationships, develop transparent practices and hold the district accountable and put in processes that reduce and eliminate mismanagement of resources and to be intentional with using a racial equity lens to make decisions. My vision is to empower the community stakeholders to be a part of the shared decision-making process to have voice their Democracy public community institution.

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

Age: 51. I'm a Liberal Arts-History Major. I have a Real Estate License and a Teaching Credential. I'm a Teacher and Union Treasurer. I live in the Lake Merritt neighborhood.

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

Edgewood High in West Covina and Mt. San Antonio in Walnut, California. I've also attended San Diego State and San Francisco State.

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

I'm qualified in two ways. As a 20-year teacher, I've dedicated my career to teaching students in the most underserved communities, and through that experience, I have learned and comprehended the blueprint for a school site's budgets. I believe my intricate knowledge of school operations from various funding sources and how it affects everything from student outcomes, to school staffing, programming, facilities management, curriculum development, parent and community engagement, as well as hiring/layoffs, and everything in between. I have been in the middle of these discussions throughout all my years in education. In addition, I was elected as the Treasurer for the Teacher's union. In that position, I have managed accounts payable and receivable for a six-million-dollar budget. I have the experience and knowledge through participating at the bargaining table vs the school district. I have regularly engaged the district on statewide, special ed, general ed, ballot measure funding and special stipend funding. I have experience in reading and deconstructing school site budgets and school district's budget. I understand the district budget and its direct impacts on schools.

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

My Campaign Website: VanCedric Williams (<http://www.vancedricwilliams.com/> and on Facebook VanCedric Williams for OUSD (<https://www.facebook.com/VanCedric-Williams-for-Oakland-Unified-School-Board-2020-District-3-104548544684406/>)

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

During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Safe working conditions including lower class sizes, PPE, cleaning, testing, and other key health & safety protocols. Equitable access to online learning and closing the digital divide for our most vulnerable students and their families. Federal money to support the reopening, crisis learning and social distancing in the future.

Wrap around services that support our students, families and communities and families, with critical social needs such as affordable housing, food, and a job.

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 promptly provide accurate transparent budgets. I'd call for an immediate and full audit for OUSD from an independent accounting firm. Rather than prioritizing administrators, consultants, and contracted workers, the OUSD School Board members must instruct the District to adequately fund our schools and serve our students. They must protect and invest in all the unionized workers that make our schools clean, safe, and welcoming. They must fix the historical inequalities caused by Prop 13 by partnering with the city and county to make sure all children are served, regardless of their zip code.

8. 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 the decision by the board. OUSD is one of the few school districts in California that has its own school police force and allocates millions of dollars annually to police. What type of message are we sending to our students when schools are closing because of fiscal mismanagement? The presence of police in schools exacerbates the criminalization of Black and Brown youth. Instead, those funds should be directed towards anti-racists training for staff, de-escalation techniques for campus security, engaging grassroots and afterschool community organizations to support with school sites, develop restorative justice policies and practices that develop relationships between students and staff, mental health services for students, and wellness checks to cover basic Maslow hierarchy of needs.

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?

I would challenge the district to work with educators and classified staff to develop robust social, emotional, and mental health supports for students who are struggling through the pandemic. Identify and support the district to streamlined platforms that are easy for families while maintaining flexible and diverse learning tools. In addition, the district must implement accommodations for students who are supported by Special Education programs, including greater access to manipulatives and learning tools at home. Also, strengthen parent engagement, including training on various online platforms/apps prior to and during the school year. Support teacher-driven professional development that includes input from our various classified workers who often know children well, which focuses on digital strategies and emotional resiliency. Improved services for English Language Learners, including more robust translation services and technology. This has to be consistent, yet with flexible teaching schedules to accommodate parents and students who are essential workers. No reopening until the scientific data supports it

along with assurance from OUSD's essential workers who know what school facilities are actually like.

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 District does not have too many school sites and it should not close any. From the District own Snapshot, in 2014-2015 the District had 86 public and 32 charters with a budget of \$607million. In 2019-2020, the OUSD has 83 public and 33 charters with a budget of \$787 million. The district problem is a budget mismanagement problem and not a student enrollment problem. Mergers and school closures are not necessary. Good schools attract parents and enrollment therefore OUSD needs to invest in neighborhood schools turning them into community schools to support the surrounding communities.

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

OUSD must redirect funds to invest in community schools. School board members must fund and develop true, community schools in every neighborhood that have small class sizes and wrap-around services to compete with the charter schools. OUSD must address the historical inequities that have impacted our most underserved students, including our Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, and English-language learners. This work should be done through a racial justice lens by partnering with community organizations, parents of color, and the most impacted students.

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 support the idea of a moratorium on all charters schools. The original public-school concept of charters has been turned into privatizing and profiteering business, more than twenty years later. OUSD now has a two-tier education system. Charters must be locally and publicly controlled using California Assembly Bills 1505 and 1507. Charters drain resources and destabilize OUSD schools, which affect our students and shut out inclusive community services. OUSD is losing classroom space and cutting vital student programs such as arts, music, science parent centers that contribute to a rich vibrant school and neighborhood communities.

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

The district has to make it a well-known priority to recruit, develop, hire, and support teachers. Building a partnership across all credentialing programs is the first step. The strength of the credentialing program will prepare new teachers for the challenging job. Adding to the district's recruitment strategies to include attending more HBCU and Colleges with specific Latin-Heritage designation job fairs. New teachers need targeted support in the first three years of their teaching careers. They should have an OUSD-OEA trained to teach coach/mentor to provide that additional support, answer questions, and model good teaching practices. Then, for example, OUSD could follow up with monthly mixers sessions hosted at sites with the new teacher support groups. Also, OUSD can invest in the Para to Teacher pathways program. There are amazing paraeducators that are doing fabulous work for 10 and 20 years and we need open opportunity for them to grow our own talent within OUSD. Lastly, if OUSD is serious then we must bring teacher pay in line with the cost of living in the Bay Area. Quality teachers need a quality salary to produce quality results.

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

It is a matter of priorities for OUSD. School integration hasn't been one of them. The theory of action is not present in OUSD in regard to integration. Integration by public school closure or charter merger hurts the most vulnerable communities and keeps them isolated from the diversity of ideas, relationships, and social communities. OUSD must abandon past practices of redlining our schools and use progressive practices strengthening and developing more integrated schools. All OUSD schools should be integrated with quality and comparable investment of resources and programs, but OUSD has to make it a priority to be intentional to lift up schools that may need more resources rather than close them.

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

OUSD needs to center sustainable community schools as the hub of the community. By doing so, they will raise the quality of schools, enrollment, attendance, and graduation rates. As hubs of the community, these schools will provide wrap-around services such as health care, mental

health, transitional housing, after school support, job training, food distribution, and as well as social and emotional support services year-around.

It is essential that OUSD develop community partnerships to serve, support, strengthen, and transform student outcomes. In addition, OUSD needs to lift up a culturally relevant curriculum that is affirmative and inclusive of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) heritage and history. The needs of the community can be aligned with the needs of our stakeholders.

Collective and shared decisions to include arts programs, ethnic studies across all grade levels, planning, programming and always keeping the student at the center of those decisions.