



## Empower Oakland 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

*Empower Oakland is a movement fueled by Oakland residents who recognize that “business as usual politics” will only further perpetuate Oakland’s downward spiral. We believe in empowering Oaklanders to amplify their collective voices for greater political impact and influence.*

*All submissions will be unedited for spelling, grammar, and format and published on [empoweroakland.com](http://empoweroakland.com) to educate Oakland voters. Empower Oakland will also use candidate submissions to help inform their Candidate Endorsement process. Candidates may be asked to interview in-person with the Empower Oakland Endorsement Committee. Final endorsement decisions will be made by early September.*

*Please email the completed questionnaire as a .doc or .pdf document to [info@empoweroakland.com](mailto:info@empoweroakland.com). Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.*

**Candidate Name:** Rachel Latta  
**Email:** [Rachel@RachelforOakland.com](mailto:Rachel@RachelforOakland.com)  
**Phone Number:** 206-351-2237  
**Office & District Sought:** Oakland Unified School District Board, District 1  
**Campaign Website:** <https://www.rachelforoakland.com/>  
**Social Media Handles**

- Twitter:
- Facebook: @RachelforOaklandSchools
- Instagram: @RachelforOaklandSchools
- LinkedIn:
- TikTok:

**Expected total Fundraising Amount: \$45,000**

**Funds Raised To Date: \$20,000**

### General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

Born and raised in the Bay Area and a resident of District 1 for the last 11 years, I’ve devoted my life to helping others, especially those furthest from opportunity. A big part of providing opportunity to all is to create equitable, quality public schools in Oakland. I’m proud that I grew up the child of an immigrant family, raised in a union household. When not working as a nurse midwife or keeping up with my three incredible children, I’m an enthusiastic parent volunteer and advocate who believes public schools serving all children well are not just places where children learn, but also community centers that strengthen and revitalize neighborhoods. My advocacy within OUSD began as soon as



my daughter was applying for kindergarten, and I attended a meeting hosted by OUSD regarding internal segregation by race and class within Oakland Tech. Although my daughter was only 4 years old and not yet in school, I joined a parent group called "Equity Allies for OUSD" which was committed to working to address systemic inequities in our schools and how individuals can help create change. I have worked to increase school funding especially to the schools with the greatest need, and on the OUSD Superintendent's Equitable Enrollment committee.

2. What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?
  - a. Challenges: housing unaffordability, income inequality
  - b. Bright spots: Diverse, engaged community; increased investments from the state in funding public education
3. Why are you running for office and why are you uniquely qualified to fulfill the office you are running for at this time?

I am running for the Oakland School Board to bring the voice of Oakland parents and caregivers to the board. As a parent of three children, two attending Oakland Unified School District ("OUSD") schools and a third still in daycare, bringing out the best in Oakland public schools is my personal passion. I have worked for years as a parent organizer and champion of Oakland's public schools to make the district more equitable and sustainable, while celebrating successes small and big along the way. My experience as a parent and organizer in diverse school communities as well as working in coalition and partnership with school communities, advocacy organizations and OUSD leadership make me the perfect choice for the District 1 School Board Director in 2024.

4. Prior to running for office, how were you involved in local government, school board, and/or your community? What were your biggest accomplishments?
  - a. I have never held elected office, but have volunteered in my children's schools and participated in school parent organizations
  - b. I am on the Leadership Team of Equity Allies which has raised nearly a million dollars for schools in Oakland with greatest need but without the resources to raise those dollars in their own communities
  - c. I was a school liaison for the "Schools and Communities First" campaign to reform Prop 13 and bring more resources to our schools and communities
  - d. I was a member of the Superintendent's Equitable Enrollment Committee looking for solutions to improve our enrollment systems and make our district more equitable

## Oakland School Board

5. What are the highest priority challenges facing Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)?



- a. Ensuring equity and academic excellence across the district
  - b. Need for equitable and responsible budgeting
  - c. Recruiting and retaining teachers and staff to create a strong district and stable schools
  - d. Lack of authentic community engagement in decision making
6. What is your vision for OUSD in 10 years? What specific and measurable steps will you take to advance toward realizing that vision in the next 4 years?
- a. In ten years, our schools are less segregated, more equitable and our district is more oriented around student success
  - b. Some of the steps I will take include:
    - i. Pushing our state to increase K-12 funding commensurate with our place as the 6th largest economy in the world (but ranking 36th in US state education funding) which includes Prop 13 reform.
    - ii. Address the way that our enrollment system reinforces historic segregation.
    - iii. OUSD is a community school district, but often the community is left out of important decisions in a top heavy district. I will work to make sure that OUSD decisions are more transparent and vetted by the public, with ample time before important decisions for the community to review and propose improvements to plans.
7. OUSD student enrollment has declined over the last five years. This is not just an Oakland trend but a trend across the Bay Area region. How do you plan to address **declining student enrollment**?

OUSD needs to attract and retain students - this is how we make the district sustainable. I will promote increased enrollment in an equitable way while making the structural changes needed to help our schools grow and thrive. I also will continue and expand the work I have done as a parent organizer to promote our excellent programs and resources, which many families are unaware of and have improved students achievement and experience. I will also hold charter schools accountable for serving all students well, including disabled students, foster youth, unhoused students and English learners and where needed will work to bring students and educators into OUSD in the least disruptive and most supportive way possible.

8. Please share your perspective on the **quantity of public schools in Oakland**. Should the district consolidate schools or maintain the current number that exists today?

Oakland does have more schools than other districts, but our efforts to close OUSD schools in the past have harmed primarily Black communities, fueled gentrification and



the unaffordability of our city and have failed to solve our budget challenges. OUSD must look at this differently as it moves forward with any plans to consolidate schools.

9. What are the sources of the **low literacy and math scores** of OUSD students? How can the district meaningfully improve them? What will you specifically do to see that change during your 4 years on the board?

There are many issues that have prevented our students from reaching their full academic potential. First, literacy and math scores do not always completely reflect what our students know. There are some barriers with computer testing for many populations, including our newcomer students and younger students. As a district, we have invested a lot of resources into early literacy programs, including SIPPS (small group instruction and phonics). We have seen some success with this model, but we need to continue to provide robust training and continuing education for all staff, including our tutors and paraeducators, who play an essential role. We also need to ensure those positions do not go unfilled, which continues to be a barrier. Teachers, particularly new teachers, need support and paid time to internalize multiple curriculums and systems, particularly in elementary school, in order to anticipate where students may struggle, and provide support.

A lack of funding, inequitable distribution of funding, and lower teacher retention rates, combined with the impacts of gentrification and the pandemic on housing and food insecurity have also played roles, which is why we need to fully embrace the community school model. There is still work to be done in that regard. I will work to increase educator/staff participation in decision making and ensure that every classroom has a qualified teacher and adequate support.

10. How will you ensure the **equitable education of all students** across the district and that prepares every student for college and/or career success?

In addition to the above comment regarding equitable distribution of resources generally, I will focus on the continued growth of our Measure N/H programs and oversight and work with students, families and staff to determine how we can redefine high school to meet greater needs for flexible learning conditions post pandemic, including hybrid learning, paid internships and apprenticeships and expanding opportunities at all of our high schools.

11. What role should charter schools play in Oakland's education landscape? What do you feel OUSD should do differently as it relates to its **oversight and policy-making for charter schools** in the district? What should it keep doing? What measurable steps will you take as a board member as it relates to OUSD charter schools?



Charter schools can play an important role in Oakland's education landscape, and it is important that Board members and the district as a whole respect families who choose charter schools. But for too long Oakland opened charter schools as a school improvement strategy without acknowledging the profound impact that unchecked growth had on public schools. With new accountability measures statewide, OUSD must focus on ensuring that charter schools are serving all students (including students with significant disabilities, English learners, newcomers, foster youth and unhoused students) and that their special status as charter schools results in greater innovation and outcomes and not just acting as an alternative to neighborhood schools which must then function with fewer resources. OUSD should use its oversight function to provide greater transparency into charter operations and outcomes, and create policy that makes the failure to serve all students consequential. I look forward to working with charter schools that are committed to these goals, and will exercise the OUSD oversight function with fidelity. I also commit to remaining in dialogue with charter school families and partners as any changes are implemented.

12. The district has been plagued by financial problems for years. What do you think should be done to **fiscally put the district on the right track**?

I think OUSD has come a long way in addressing some of the structural issues with our budgeting and oversight in the last few years. This follows a distressing lack of oversight by the board over top-heavy spending and inequitable and wasteful expenditures of bond funds in the years after OUSD came out of state receivership. I will support the continued restructuring of central services and a review of top heavy compensation. We must examine every initiative, contract and purchase to ensure it is the best use of limited funding to maximize student success. We must make our budgeting process completely transparent and integrate the work of the PSAC and other oversight committees earlier.

13. **Teachers and staff** are the heart of a thriving school district. What specific measures will you take as a school board member to make OUSD the district of choice for teachers, staff, and other employees?

Teachers and all staff who work directly with our students should be well-paid and feel supported by the district to bring stability to the classroom and ensure a more enriching education for students. I will engage in ongoing, open dialogue with all union partners to ensure that we build trust and communication before bargaining to make negotiations successful. Employee retention is key to student success, which means strong union contracts are good policy.



We also need to ensure that our onboarding policies are efficient and clearly communicated so that we do not lose potential employees who choose another job while waiting to complete onboarding.

Finally, working conditions play a major part in teachers and staff feeling able to complete their work. I have committed to school communities that I will be readily available to address building and grounds issues such as bathroom cleanliness/functionality, facility upkeep and pest conditions.