



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 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. Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.

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Office & District Sought: Oakland Unified School Board, District 3

Campaign Website: vancedricwilliams.com

Social Media Handles

- Facebook: [vancedricforousd](#)
- Instagram: [vancedricforousd](#)
- LinkedIn:

Expected total Fundraising Amount:

Funds Raised To Date:

General Questions

1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?

As a 24-year teacher and the incumbent District 3 Director of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), I've lived in West Oakland for 17 years. During this time, I've learned and deeply respect the community's rich history, cultural spaces, and the legacy of Black excellence in business, art, music, and political activism. I've understood the importance of acknowledging our ancestors and the generations of Black (s)heroes and siblings, standing up for human rights and dignity for all at all costs. They are the ones who shaped not only the West Oakland community but all Black communities in the struggle against oppression. I am committed to speaking truth and power to racial, social, economic, gender, climate, and community justice, and I hope to inspire and empower others to do the same.

2. What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?



One challenge is for Oakland Unified students to access a well-rounded education. The future of Oakland depends on our students having a high-quality, well-rounded education that will prepare them to compete successfully on a global stage and engage as citizens. Our district must ensure that all students have access to rigorous coursework and the support they need to be successful. Rethinking the high school experience for students will give them a global view of the education they deserved.

Bright spots include Youth Vote, which aims to empower young people and ensure their voices are heard in educational decisions.

Another bright spot is the Rise East collaborative. Oakland community organizations are leading the way to revitalizing our communities in the East with multilayer services that provide a safe space for skill development, adult education training, community investment, and mentoring opportunities for our youth. Community partnerships, such as the Roots Center at Parker Elementary, are paying good dividends to the community.

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 committed to seeking re-election as the incumbent for District 3. I aim to ensure that all children can access well-resourced classrooms with dedicated educators. District 3 schools have successfully shared community resources, and I am devoted to advocating for the fair distribution of OUSD resources to District 3 schools, including McClymonds long awaited renovation. Every student deserves a safe, just, vibrant, and equitable school that fosters a community-minded generation of scholars, organizers, and activists who can reimagine our systems and institutions to work for the working class families.

I take pride in our progress in transforming our schools from a traditional top-down model to a shared governance model of community schools. This model ensures that all stakeholders, including students, families, community members, educators, and school administrators, have an equal voice in determining the best ways to serve our students and advocating for equitable distribution of OUSD resources to District 3 schools, including McClymonds High. EVERY student deserves a safe, just, vibrant, equitable school, cultivating a community-minded generation of scholars to reimagine our systems and institutions for freedom instead of oppression (Paulo Freire).

4. Prior to running for office, how were you involved in local government, school board, and/or your community? What were your biggest accomplishments?

Before running for office, I taught students history and assigned project-based lessons to encourage them to become youth leaders in their communities. For example, students took a trip to elementary schools to mentor elementary students and be big siblings to our youth. They would reflect on the experience and use it as a positive experience. They would read, teach writing, and talk with elementary students. It was a compelling lesson.



Also, we would go to the senior center, read to our elders, and talk to them about their life experiences. Our students would record the oral stories, research their history, create history presentations, poems, artwork, dance pieces, and video collages, and present them to the seniors and their classmates. In addition, as part of their community service and service leadership, my students would fundraise to buy grocery items to make bag lunches with sandwiches, cookies, and fruit and give them away to those most in need in their community. I am so proud of these young folks who want to identify a challenge and propose solutions to keep their community vibrant and strong.

Lastly, I was fortunate to work on and win multiple school board candidate campaigns and understand board policy's impact on the school district.

Oakland School Board

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

Expanding targeted supports, with a strong emphasis on school safety and a deep commitment to equity and justice, we will continue to implement the George Floyd Resolution. Our goal is to reverse the challenges of unhoused and chronically absent students, develop literacy and reading programs for all students, and support our Arabic and Muslim students and families. We are fully dedicated to implementing ethnic studies, expanding Career and Technical Ed pathways, and updating and expanding the climate sustainability policy to the district's facilities master plan. Our long-term policy includes supporting the construction of workforce, affordable, and youth transitional housing on district vacant lands, and increasing salaries and health benefits for our lowest paid and classified workers.

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?

I see a community school district that is responsive, innovative, and refining our teaching methods. It values students, respects employees, and is focused on student outcomes. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that all young people have equal access to a high-quality, world-class education with high-quality teaching and learning.

Our schools still operate on the factory model designed a century ago to run like a standardized assembly line, even though we know children learn differently. Effective academic outcomes are driven and enhanced by relationships that allow educators to know children well. However, it's essential to evolve in the next ten years so our public schools teach skills that match the job market and are culturally and linguistically responsive.

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?



Declining student enrollment is something to keep our eye on, but the City of Oakland is building 30,000 rental units over the next several years. Therefore, we are best positioned to capture future students, starting with TK. OUSD's declining enrollment is connected to charter expansion. OUSD lost 15,000 students to charter schools, which forced OUSD to implement school closures that have harmed marginalized Black communities. Even though declining enrollment is a regular district talking point, enrollment has stabilized for OUSD. However, I expect the board of directors and the superintendent to work together to seek a demographic family study and review the programmatic offerings and impact of charter enrollment on OUSD with school closures on the horizon. In the near term, I want to see our district focus on addressing chronic absenteeism, increasing the unhoused student population, and strengthening our engagement with our families.

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?

The quantity of public schools in Oakland is a much-debated matter. There's a segment of the community that believes in small schools. Educational research supports small schools, and others think school reductions in marginalized communities are the key to balancing the budget. The CA Attorney warned OUSD to change the school consolidation policy, or they would sue the district. We have evidence that a majority of school closures have severely impacted Black communities. The trauma and anxiety our Sped students and other students experience, learning loss, mental health issues, educational inequity, and school consolidations show marginal savings in reducing the district's budget and cost.

For example, OUSD has closed at least 16 public schools in the past few years, and the budget has had no significant financial impact. School closures have affected West Oakland, most of all communities. (Cole, Marcus Foster Elementary and Middle, Hoover Middle, Lowell Middle, and Lafayette). In 2020, OUSD attempted to close Prescott, West Oakland Middle, and Westlake, but the community pushed back to save their neighborhood schools. Closures hurt working families or are away from their community to seek stability elsewhere. Also, many families can't afford the additional costs of their neighborhood school closing. They shouldn't worry about transportation or daycare costs and their child's safety uncertainty in leaving their community. We can't keep balancing the budget on the backs of the Black community.

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?

The causes can vary from poverty, learning disabilities, family constraints, previous negative experiences, socio economic issues, disruption in early childhood learning, over-diagnosis for SPED, inexperienced teachers, high turnover and low pay for educators, and resource and staffed schools, over-reliance on the latest vendors programs and consultants to solve the matter. The district and the board must commit to working-class families and prioritize low literacy and math scores. Simply chasing the latest educational software program is not the answer. I will continue to urge the board President and Superintendent to prioritize this matter in their work plans.



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?

It's our collective responsibility to ensure all young people have equitable access to a world-class education. We must prioritize innovation, creativity, high-quality teaching and learning. Many of our schools still operate like a standardized assembly line with break bells every 50 minutes, even though we know today's children learn differently.

Equitable education is under attack with the underfunding of our public school system. We talk more about closing schools in an inequitable way than funding them. In preparing our students to become the next generation of workers in a global job market, we must challenge OUSD to focus on practical and equitable resource allocation, which enhances and enriches relationships that allow educators to know the whole child design a personal lesson to be innovative and culturally and linguistically responsive. I will continue to advocate for inclusive curriculum, equitable resource allocation, target supports and services, and keep families engaged.

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?

All children in Oakland should have equal access to all public education opportunities, including charter schools. Charters should be subject to the same transparency and accountability standards as public schools. Even though taxpayers fund charter schools, some don't hold themselves accountable to the standards other public schools are held to. Some don't share financial records, hold open meetings, or adopt conflict-of-interest policies. Charter board members are typically appointed, not elected, leaving a board more accountable to those in charge than those it serves.

OUSD oversight and policymaking for charters should follow AB 1505 and 1507. At the same time, some charters are under-enrolled and on the brink of closing; they would be better served if they rejoined OUSD.

Establishing a meaningful charter school cap would allow Oakland school districts to control the educational opportunities and support within their communities to meet the needs of their students best. Neighborhood public school students are bearing the cost of the unchecked facilities expansion of privately managed charter schools, and authorizers must be able to consider the financial impact that charter schools will have on students already enrolled in Oakland public district schools.

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?



The district has made several tough decisions to put itself fiscally on the right track and pay off that \$100 million loan within the next two years. We have taken a proactive approach to budget-driven decisions, prioritizing the district's strategic work plan, which focuses on staffing and student achievement rather than limited resources.

The CBO's communication strategy is clear and concise. Through multiple meetings, the CBO has created opportunities to critically re-examine spending patterns while reminding the Board to align budget decisions with our long-term goals. Kudos to the board budget committee, which has developed and implemented a strategic budget planning that prepares the district to exit financial oversight with a viable and sustainable plan as required by Alameda County. Lastly, there is more transparency now than ever, and we have the best Chief Business Officer in the Bay Area, Lisa Grant Dawson. Consistency is essential, and we will move toward collaboration and cooperative spirit exit oversight.

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?

I agree that our teachers are the heart of our thriving District, and I appreciate their endorsement of my re-election campaign. Our classified employees are the District's backbone and need a living wage. More importantly, I want to highlight the fantastic work of all our labor partners in OUSD. Engaged and happy employees play a crucial role in building a positive brand. OUSD labor relationships must be authentic, consistent, and genuine, and more employees will share positive work experiences, making OUSD a magnet for top talent.