



## 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.*

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**Candidate Name:** Patrice Berry

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**Phone Number:** 510-384-2414

**Office & District Sought:** Oakland Unified School Board, District 5

**Campaign Website:** [www.patrice4oaklandschools.com](http://www.patrice4oaklandschools.com)

**Social Media Handles**

- Twitter:
- Facebook:
- Instagram: [patrice4oakland](https://www.instagram.com/patrice4oakland)
- LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/patriceberry](https://www.linkedin.com/in/patriceberry)
- TikTok:

**Expected total Fundraising Amount:** ~\$75k

**Funds Raised To Date:** ~\$15k

### General Questions

**1. What is your background/experience in Oakland?**

Since 2013, I have been deeply rooted in Oakland, working in the community through various roles. In addition to serving on the board of Oakland-based non-profit, Hack the Hood since 2021, I also served in Oakland’s Mayor’s Office from 2018 - 2022. I now serve Oakland as a state anti-poverty policy advocate.

As an advisor to former Mayor Libby Schaaf and a member of the Education Team, I am most proud of the following contributions to Oakland:

- When students did not attend school in solidarity with teachers during a teacher’s strike in 2019, I asked former Assemblymember Rob Bonta to author a bill that would allow schools and districts to secure an extension to the Cal Grant’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and CA



Dream Act (CADAA) deadlines during moments of crises. The bill ([AB 1774](#), Bonta) was signed into law by the Governor in October 2019, in time to help address the impact of student displacement at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

- I partnered with other colleagues (most notably, Matthew Hulse) to design what is now known as the [Northern California College Promise Coalition \(NCCPC\)](#), for which I was a founding steering committee member and organized its inaugural convening. NCCPC now serves 300k college students across the state.
- To help schools (including teachers, counselors, mentors, and other stakeholders) navigate students and families through the process of planning and preparing for college, in 2019, I also developed a brief [college access guide](#) that is distributed to all high school students, grades 9 - 12.
- Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, I recruited senior leaders from OUSD, Oakland Promise, Oakland Chamber of Commerce, Alameda County, CSU East Bay, Peralta Community College District, Urban Strategies Council, and other institutions to come together and develop a shared vision for postsecondary success and outcomes in Oakland. By 2022, that initiative became the [Oakland Postsecondary Education and Workforce Collaborative](#). In 2022, I brought in over \$500k in multi-year funding to seed the continuation of this partnership beyond Mayor Schaaf's term. Members continue to work together to make it hard for Oakland graduates to thrive in education and work beyond high school.
- I founded AssistHub, a platform that helps individuals and families discover and apply for financial resources like CalFresh, CalKIDS, CalEITC, and other public benefits to which they are entitled. Although this initiative serves Californians in all 58 counties, the organization is based in Oakland and prioritized serving Oakland residents at its inception.

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

Among the biggest challenges facing Oakland today (including affordable housing, homelessness, public safety, and workforce development), I would name public safety and affordable housing as being two of the severest challenges, particularly because they are also significant drivers of other challenges Oakland is encountering today. Public safety affects school enrollment, mental health and overall well-being, business development and revenue, among several other critical variables that correlate with building high-quality education for students and families.

Despite these challenges, there are several bright spots in Oakland. OUSD is emerging from fiscal crisis and should soon be out of financial receivership; Black students in Oakland have one of the fastest growing rates of college enrollment; Rise East—a 10-year investment in the well-being of black students and families in East Oakland—has raised nearly 100% of the \$50m endowment it needs to fulfill its mission; Oakland secured \$15M to expand access to high-speed Internet throughout the city (particularly in disinvested areas); and a new Police Chief was hired, filling an incredible leadership gap; and a new affordable housing complex was recently founded (an initiative led by Elaine Brown, formerly with the Black Panther Party).



**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 believe every child deserves the opportunity to experience the power of learning and education. I went to public schools until I went on to college over 20 years ago; we are still battling against the same education injustice I was fighting against when I was a child. I know that we can do better - especially in Oakland, with its rich history of resilience and resistance.

I grew up in a segregated town where it was quite normal for me to witness me and other Black and Latino students shuffled into less-resourced classes together. My mother, who did not graduate from college until she was 52 years old, wanted more for me and my siblings and she was always fighting for us and other kids at our schools. At home, our doors were always open to our community, even if we were struggling ourselves. I learned from watching my parents advocate for us and others that individual successes did not amount to justice and that it was important to build a system that would serve all of us. I've been fighting for equity in education for as long as I can remember.

I've had the privilege of building a career as an educator and policy advocate: I've taught, developed academic and leadership programs, founded and led a non-profit organization, and catalyzed statewide policy reform. I am running for school board as a part of my path building a future where all our students and teachers feel valued in our schools, where students learn to read and do math early, and where all our students move on to jobs, college, or other postsecondary programs and thrive.

To get there, we'll need a financially stable school district with a vision for sustainability—one that prioritizes generating a steady stream of revenue and maximizing federal and state resources. We should leverage our fiscal health to ensure that we can make invest in student and teacher well-being, updating our facilities, and other priorities that create the conditions necessary for high-quality education and learning in our schools.

I've been serving students since 2003 when I developed my very first curriculum for aspiring first-generation college students. Since then, I've helped hundreds of students attain their college and career dreams, partnered with parents/caregivers and teachers to design programs that have led to dramatic improvements in English and Math test scores, and raised millions of dollars to support anti-poverty and economic mobility programs.

I believe my experiences as a former teacher and college counselor, chief executive and policy advocate, as well as my experience as a parent of two children, make me uniquely qualified to serve on Oakland's school board.

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

Although my response to prompt #1 addresses some of my experience in local government, school board and my community, the following experiences have also led to some of my biggest accomplishments:



- As the director and college advisor of a student success center in Philadelphia (which I helped design), I taught college and career readiness coursework, mentored college students, and founded a non-selective, social entrepreneurship and leadership development program called Leaders of Change, which served over 500 students annually and tripled in scale by year 3. Leaders of Change graduates participated in internships and went on college or trade school at rates much higher than their peers.
- As the Site Director of College Track East Palo Alto, I built a diverse team of 20 staff who centered trauma-informed care and innovation that led to significant gains in high school GPA, English and Math scores, and an increase in the college acceptance rate from 86% to 100% and an increase in college enrollment, which jumped from 77% to 93% during my tenure.
- In addition to my service with Hack the Hood, over the last decade, I've also served on two other boards: Mount Tamalpais College (formerly Prison University Project), and Moneythink.
- My work has also been recognized by the following fellowships, with whom I've also had the opportunity to further develop my leadership: Camelback Ventures, Fast Forward, Roddenberry, Solis Policy Institute, and Emerge CA.

## Oakland School Board

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

OUSD faces several high-priority challenges, including the following:

- Fiscal challenges continue to threaten the health of OUSD (a budget deficit is expected by 2027)
- Literacy and math scores are far below standards, and performance is particularly low among Black and Latino youths
- We must find ways to protect programs that directly impact students in the midst of continued financial hardship, including special education programs and ELL programs, and ensure that the programs we do have adequately service students

### 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?

Vision:

In 10 years, I envision OUSD as a fiscally stable district with a clear vision for education in Oakland, including a vision for the role charter schools will play in fulfilling our mission. Corresponding with our mission and vision, we are following a roadmap that guides decision-making. The district will have strong leadership, including a stable board, an effective superintendent, and a strong advisory group comprised of community advocates.

In 10 years, OUSD will also have demonstrated growth in key areas such as literacy, math, and postsecondary outcomes, especially among students living with disabilities, Black and Latino youth, Newcomer students, and students from families with low incomes.



Additionally, by 2035, OUSD will be working in deeper partnership with Alameda County, Peralta Community College District, and other higher education institutions, and trade organizations to provide our students and families with even more programs, services, and education opportunities.

To accomplish this, over the next four years, I will advocate for the following:

- First 6 months
  - Landscape studies to better understand what programs and services are offered at each school, which students are being served by each program, how well each program is performing (or how effective each service is) at addressing gaps in ELL, special education, literacy, and math, and to identify opportunities for improvement and promising solutions.
  - A formal community of practice between all schools and an advisory group for each priority or challenge
- First 12 months
  - Partnerships with the city (i.e., mayor's office, city council, workforce development, parks and recreation, boards and commissions) that integrate OUSD priorities into city-wide vision and scope of work
  - A policy agenda that includes statewide advocacy to ensure that we're also using our collective power to dismantle institutional barriers at the state level that keep Oakland from thriving

**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?**

In addition to addressing some of the above recommendations related to building the financial health of OUSD, I also propose at least the following actions to address the steady decline in student enrollment:

- Assess the impact of declining school enrollment (i.e., fiscal, climate, safety) for use in future decision-making
- Partner with other Bay Area cities to pool resources and conduct focus groups or listening sessions to better understand the major considerations families grapple with when navigating enrollment decisions
- Investing in a rigorously-prepared, marketing and outreach campaign to promote schools, unique programs, and evidence of success

**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?**

In 2012, I worked alongside other teachers in Philadelphia to organize students in a fight against the closure of our school. Over several years, we worked together to build a special community school and experienced significant improvements in student culture and climate, student attendance, academic performance and postsecondary outcomes, attracting local and national attention. The announcement of our school's closure brought significant grief. Although Oakland's fiscal outlook may require difficult decisions, decisions like



closures, merger or consolidations should be treated with the utmost carefulness and our decision-making processes should honor of the people who work so hard every day to create high-quality learning experiences in our schools—including teachers and staff, parents and caregivers, and our students. These stakeholders (and all stakeholders) should be engaged early and often, and leading whenever possible.

Although OUSD probably has more schools than it can currently afford, I would caution against making plans to consolidate schools before making time for due diligence and authentic community engagement. For instance, before making any decisions about school consolidation, here are a few important considerations or steps:

- It is crucial to recalibrate or establish a new vision for OUSD. This involves imagining the school district we want 20 years from now, and determining what we need to accomplish that vision.
- I would also review the budget to identify non-essential costs that can be reduced or cut without directly affecting learning.
- I would also partner with colleagues to assess the opportunity costs associated with different scenarios we'd like to consider. For instance, without a strong, deliberate vision for small schools in Oakland (and our approach to education more broadly), it is likely that keeping very small schools open means other needs may go unmet or underserved—like, for instance, meeting the increasing demand for TK and bringing more special education services to OUSD and delivering them in house (instead through contracting).

Ultimately, only through an inclusive process and after a thorough analysis could we consider whether consolidation is necessary.

**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?**

Here are a few pieces of feedback that I've gathered from teachers and board members.

From board members:

- There is an opportunity (and need) to expand the science of reading and other leading evidence-based practices in schools. For instance, one approach that research showed changed results for schools deemed "low performing" was to give the school resources to implement evidence-based reading instruction practices. Everyone had to go through some training, and then the school had to create a plan to implement changes.
- There is not yet a coherent vision and standards across all schools

From teachers

- Lack of additional support in classrooms to address individualized and differentiated instruction needed, as well as the socio-emotional needs of students in the classroom
- Special education services are inconsistent across the district





To address some of these concerns, I will advocate for cultivating OUSD's network of care and investing in community-school programs and schools so that we can better address basic needs, ACEs, and other environmental challenges, and student can direct their attention to thriving in school.

**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?**

A few critical actions seem particularly important in ensuring the equitable education of all students.

- Increase transparency about the opportunities available at each school campus and the current cost per pupil
- Assess the true needs of each school campus

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?

**I would defer to the charter renewal guidelines** (both local and state around fiscal management, equity standards, performance, etc) and, in so doing, if we identify opportunities for growth in the existing criteria, I would love to prioritize amending our processes to reflect our shared values and vision for charter schools in the District.

Beyond that, I think it is also important for us to

- **Align our board on a vision** for education and within that, the vision we see charter schools playing in fulfilling that vision
- **Establish a framework** upon that vision that guides accountability and decision-making (including decisions related to charter school renewals)
- **Cultivate a stronger relationship between schools** so that promising practices, successes, and challenges can be exchanged
- **Developing a policy agenda** that allows the District to address significant challenges at the systems-level if/when necessary

Charter schools should play a role in improving the overall climate and performance of OUSD by offering families more unique or targeted learning environments, tangible improvements in education, and a steady cadence of new lessons and insights from their innovations for the benefit of the broader district. OUSD should continue its current oversight practices but with a stronger focus on ensuring that charter schools, like all our schools, deliver on their promise to deliver high-quality learning experiences to all our students, equitably.

As a board member, I will work to establish formal collaborations between all our schools—regardless of the type—that focus on shared learning and mutual accountability, and I will catalyze the movement toward a unified vision for learning at OUSD and the role charter schools will play in achieving that vision.



**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?**

Although I caution against making any specific recommendations before speaking directly to the finance department, budget chair, and others deeply familiar with and responsible for the budget, I am happy to share how I think about managing budgets, which I've done for over a decade, including in the poverty abolition work I do at End Poverty in California.

I think about budgets in a few ways:

1. Budgets reflect what we value, even in a state of crisis.
2. Although I believe that the notion of scarcity is, in many ways, a limitation of imagination, until there are significant structural changes, OUSD has limited resources and therefore, we cannot implement all desired learning experiences at the scale we'd like with the financial resources we have today. Building a financial future for Oakland will require some scaffolding.
3. In the inevitable conversations we'll have about what we may have to remove from (or adjust within) the budget, we should also discuss revenue. Together, this allows us to acknowledge challenging circumstances while maintaining our vision. Ideas for revenue include: leasing vacant property for use in the development of workforce and/or affordable housing or for use in providing other services like adult or continuing education; and identifying additional sources of federal and state funding (like state budget allocated to violence prevention, mental health, after school programming).
4. Budget decisions should be driven by a vision of our District and its financial future. One of the first things I learned when I was training to be a teacher was how to plan backward. We have to start with the end in mind, which is very different from emergency response. I've learned that it is possible to manage a crisis and remain anchored in a long-term vision. Related, a critical part of my approach will also be to remember that our mandate is to protect and care for the education of our students.

**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?

To make OUSD the district of choice for teachers and staff, I will prioritize the following actions:

- Convene regularly with teachers, staff, and other employees to cultivate a direct line of communication, and ensure that they have the resources and other support they need to succeed
- Partner with the Mayor's Office, the City of Oakland, Alameda County, community-based organizations, and others to do our part in transforming Oakland into a place that is affordable, safe, and accessible for all.