

I have not formally endorsed anyone. However, I am a supporter of Bernie Sanders and will now be supporting the Biden/Harris ticket. State wide and locally, I am in support of Omar Torres (SJ Evergreen Community College TA #7) , Jake Tonkel (City of San Jose Dist, Council Member, # 6), Ash Kalra (27th assembly member), Kalen Gallagher (Campbell Union High School District, Governing Board, Trustee Area 5) , Brenda Pinal Zendejas (Alum Rock Union SD), Maimona Afzal Berta (Franklin-McKinley SD), Jesus Omar Salazar (Luther Burbank SD), Ketzal Gomez (Board of Education, TA#4)

b. Are you endorsing anyone else in your own race?

No, I have not endorsed anyone else in my own race. I am in the process of meeting with TA #1 candidates.

c. Who has endorsed you?

East Side Union High School District Trustee Lorena Chavez

Campbell Union High School District Trustee Kalen Gallagher

Santa Clara County Board of Education Member Peter Ortiz

District 5 Community Outreach Director, Former Franklin-McKinley School District Trustee Omar Torres

d. Whose endorsements are you seeking or expect to receive?

Other endorsements I am seeking are from:

**Councilmember Magdalena Carrasco
Councilmember Sergio Jimenez
BAYMEC
Silicon Valley Stonewall Democrats
Silicon Valley Asian Pacific American Democratic Club
DAWN
Oak Grove Educators Association
Santa Clara Democratic Party
South Bay Labor Council**

2. **Campaign Funding** —How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions

for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any). How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any).

I plan to raise around \$10,000. I am relying on individual supporters to support my campaign who range from former and current colleagues, fellow educational and social justice advocates, friends, and community members from the Oak Grove community. I currently have \$490 from donors. I am hoping to not have to rely on my own personal funds, but as of now I have purchased my candidate statement using personal funds.

Office-Specific Questions:

1. **Motivation**—Why did you choose to run for the School Board?

I am choosing to run for Oak Grove School board because I am committed to supporting our students from the beginning of their education to their graduation day at East Side Union High School District (ESUHSD). I currently work at ESUHSD as a special education teacher and a student advisor. I continue to see the inequities that persist for our students and I want to address them from the beginning of their education.

I am also running for Oak Grove School Board because I believe our students deserve a progressive leader that represents the community. Many of the issues I faced as a queer first-gen Latina like unstable housing and adverse childhood experiences continue to exist for our students.

I believe in community, restorative justice, anti-racist teaching, diversifying our community and mental and physical health services for all students regardless of identity or status or language. I have the classroom and policy experience and I want to bring progressive change to Oak Grove.

2. **Program and Priorities**—Elected office provides the opportunity to proactively lead by placing new ideas on the agenda for consideration and development. What are some specific ideas you intend to pursue if elected? What do you believe are the main priorities for the School Board?

The program and priorities I have for my potential term are grounded on the following values: safety, racial justice, equity and diversity, transparency, and compassion and community.

I plan to hire diverse staff. It has come to my attention that Oak Grove has been discriminatory towards hiring trans candidates. It will be my priority to promote hiring a diverse staff that includes trans individuals. Our students deserve to have adults and

leaders on their campus that represents the diversity of identities and backgrounds. Therefore, I will make sure that our hiring policy is equitable, just, and truly seeking of diversity.

I also aim to tackle our high suspension rates and chronic absenteeism. Our students are struggling to connect with their schools and we continue to see the disproportionate rates of graduation and discipline. I want to be a part of ending the school to prison pipeline. From the beginning of students' elementary education, I want to tackle how we address behavior and meet our students with mental health supports, restorative justice, social emotional learning and mindfulness.

Lastly, with Covid-19, wild fires, and the demanding task of educating youth, I want to support both classified and certificated staff. I want to make sure that professional development is meaningful, that we are engaging in constructive conversation, and really honing in and supporting them to deliver quality and anti-racist teaching.

- 3. Qualifications**—Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for the office of School Board. If you are an incumbent, what issues can you point to in your time as an incumbent that have had a positive impact? As an incumbent what can you tell us about your service on the school board, and share with us the decisions you have made in this capacity that you believe made a difference in the functioning of the school district?

I was raised in Miami, Florida, where my mother, who is from Honduras, struggled to find quality public schools that my younger sister and I were zoned for. From a young age, I was actively involved in community service including activities such as providing assistance to community members with disabilities and interviewing historic communities in our neighborhood. I feel lucky that I was able to attend University of Pennsylvania on a full need-based scholarship where I continued to explore my passion for understanding behavior, mental health, child development, and the science of learning by pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Neuroscience. I also acquired minors in Psychology and Italian Cultural Studies, in addition to being active in child development research in the areas of scientific learning, play, and learning disabilities.

My experience as a First-Gen Latina at Penn was a pivotal experience. The education disparities between my public educational experience prior to Penn compared to others, including that of the West Philadelphia community, were concerning. After graduating from Penn, I knew I wanted to serve in the classroom to reach students of all backgrounds and work with colleagues to create equitable opportunities that every child deserves. I applied to Teach for America to be able to relocate to a state that offered me LGBTQ protection and had a diverse student population. I fell in love with San Jose and received my teaching credential and Master's in Special Education during my time here since 2015, in addition to fully participating as a community member through leadership development, advocacy, and service. My master's thesis was focused on advancing self-advocacy skills for diverse learners, which largely reflected on Paulo Freire's work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed".

I was a founding sponsor of a “Bring Change 2 Mind” chapter at IHS focusing on the mental health and wellbeing of our students, along with our IHS school social worker. I also have participated on my school’s and district’s teams for social emotional learning, mindfulness, MTSS/PBIS, school site council and was a special education department chair. During my new role as student advisor, I developed an attendance mentorship program that focuses on goals, social emotional skills, and self-advocacy. Outside of school, I have sought fellowships with First5 working with Margot Grant Gould, Policy Director for First 5 California, on policy briefs on adverse childhood experiences, housing, and childcare costs. I also worked for Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy Education, investigating how to best reach teachers with cutting edge research. I also am an alum of New Leaders Council and the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley’s Latino Board Academy. Lastly, I am a tutor with College Track and participate as a giving member to the Latino Community Foundation.

- 4. School Climate, Engagement—**What is your understanding of the kinds of changes that most schools are making to improve school climate and school discipline policies? What are your views on school suspensions? What are your views on restorative practices and restorative justice in schools? What are your suggestions to support students who are chronically absent, students who have dropped out or left school or are on the verge of leaving or dropping out?

As a student advisor at Independence High, I work on the safety and discipline team. Part of this is reaching out to our chronically absent students and supporting our students that are making unsafe or unhealthy decisions.

This experience has led me to continue to want to ground myself in mindfulness facilitation, restorative justice, and anti-racist behavioral interventions. As of now, our students are facing punitive reactions due to their language and their need to socially-emotionally communicate. I want to reach our students where they are with tools, however, the practices we have right now are outdated and dismissive.

To address chronically absent students, I created a mentorship program where students learned self-advocacy skills, social-emotional skills, and bonded with a staff member and 4 other group members. Almost all of our 25 participating students improved in attendance. When a student is chronically absent, many of the students just don’t connect to their school and need to feel their value and that they matter. I also am really interested in exploring public transportation options for our students. I know many of our students struggle with attendance when the weather is poor or because they have to walk so far from their homes to school.

- 5. Inclusion—**What are your views are special education? What changes, if any, need to be implemented? Should special education students be included in general education classes? Why or why not?

I am a credentialed special education teacher; therefore, this topic is close to my heart. I absolutely believe that special education students should be included in general education classes, especially in electives that can promote social emotional learning or other skills

outside of what we view as traditional academic topics. Inclusivity is pivotal for all learners to grow in social-emotional skills and learn from one another.

That being said I don't think that just because a class is labeled "general education" it means that it is the best instruction or the "better" instruction. Often times, there are students who fall through the gaps in general education classes that aren't labeled as a special education student, but still need assistance. Therefore, I think we all benefit as learners with a variety of modes of instruction and tools to connect with the material.

Therefore, I think to encourage more inclusivity, general education teachers and programs that educate general education teachers should provide more support in understanding and serving diverse learners. There can sometimes be a divide of "our students" vs "general education students". I'd like to promote inclusivity by giving the tools and educating all staff members on ways to reach all learners. I truly believe that all learners, in and out of general education classes, will benefit from this.

6. **Charter Schools**—What are your views on charter schools and charter school expansion? What is your understanding of the controversies surrounding the privatization of public education? Would you support measures that would strengthen transparency and oversight of charter schools?

My understanding of the controversies is that charter schools can impact public school funding by affecting the declining enrollment in our district schools. There is also controversy of when charter schools claim certain students to receive funding, but then those students later enroll in district schools. Another issue that we face is space. At Independence High School, we share the campus with three other charter schools, and truthfully speaking, that puts a strain on our safety team in terms of keeping the campus safe and closed and on athletic teams that have to share the space with charter schools.

I absolutely would support measures that would strengthen transparency and oversight of charter schools. I welcome alternative schools and many of my students excel in district provided alternative education like Silicon Valley Center for Technical Education. I just want to secure funding for public schools and to ensure that we are making them of quality before dividing funding that doesn't benefit all of our students.

7. **Testing and Teacher Evaluations**—What should our policy be around Student Testing and Teacher Evaluation? Do you see alternatives to the use of mandated standardized tests in meeting local, state and national education goals? How much are we teaching to the test now, and what should we be doing differently if you feel it should be different?

I strongly am against teacher pay being dependent on student testing and teaching to the test. The joy and effects of teaching and learning can diminish when we are teaching to the test, and there are too many factors to account for with standardized testing to make teacher pay dependent on the testing scores. Standardized tests also have been shown to be biased against students that speak a different language or are of a different races or ethnicity. I

believe like understanding any sort of progress on a goal, a one-time data point can be a hasty conclusion and we should rather look at portfolio assessments or a multitude of assessments throughout their educational career that measure different skills in a variety of ways, including their success after high school. Our students, much like adults in different careers, show understanding of material and skills differently, we should allow for choice to communicate understanding of material.

8. **Common Core**—What are your views on the use of the proposed Common Core curriculum?

What I like about the Common Core curriculum is that many of the skills are cross-curricular and transferrable to future careers that our students might have and real-life situations. The focus on critical thinking skills is also fundamental for understanding a variety of material and subjects. Common Core also meant that we were shifting towards more project based learning and collaborative experiences. However, the Common Core still falls short in details of how to translate the standards to real life lesson plans and how to support students with varying abilities. I believe that there are certain skills that teachers need to pre-teach before going into a full Common Core plan, and if there isn't support on how to scaffold these lessons, many of these lessons can fall short because the students are lacking certain foundational skills. Overall, the transition to Common Core was a sharp transition and more scaffolding for teachers.

9. **Budgetary Priorities**—Imagine in the year after your election to the school board, due to a shortfall your annual budget is reduced by 10%. Where would you make cuts? What would you try to shield from cuts?

I would shield the jobs of staff and teachers from the budget cuts. The budgetary priorities of the district are the jobs of the staff members and safety. Especially during the times of Covid-19, I want to ensure that those that are on-site have the protective equipment that is needed in order to remain safe from exposure or transmittance of Covid-19. I would make cuts from outside agencies or consultants that we might be able to do in-house. There are often initiatives that rely on outside agencies when we have leaders within the district that are ready and willing to step up and lead initiatives. I would try to make these cuts so that our employees are shielded from the cuts.

10. **Governance**—What concerns, if any, do you have relative to the current School Board? What policy changes would you make? What solutions would you propose to address and prevent conflicts of interest and misuse of public funds such as those recently exposed in the Alum Rock School district?

I believe that we should be transparent with the budget that we propose, including constantly reviewing our budget and aligning our budget to what the community and district goals are. I see my role as making sure that all board members embrace the value of transparency and that we all act diligently and honestly with our positions. The concerns that I have relative to the current School Board is that we are facing decreasing revenues and that there have been concerns of transparency. I will push our policy so that we are regularly holding budget meetings and meetings to understand the needs of the community.

11. **Accountability**—Concretely and specifically, how will you make yourself accountable to the voters who elect you? How can the voters participate in holding you accountable if you are elected?

I aim to be present and accessible by email, phone, and by formal and informal regular meetings. I hope to be a consistent community member and to be able to meet many of my community members through events, school visits, and other ways in which they wish for a board member to be involved. There are many meetings that take place within our schools to keep our community informed. I hope to be a part of that dialogue if my community members are open to that and to organize my own chats to connect with my neighbors and hear their concerns and goals for the district.

12. **Anything Else?** — Is there anything else you would like to share?

Being elected to this office would mean I'm the first Latina to serve on the Oak Grove School Board. Our district is diverse and I would love to represent the community and represent the values my community and I stand for.

Positions on Issues

Please answer YES or NO for each statement.

Do you support a living wage? **YES** **NO**

Do you support participatory budgeting (citizen involvement in school board budgeting)?
YES **NO**

Do you support free public education from pre-school through graduate studies?
YES **NO**

Would you support allowing undocumented immigrants to vote in school board elections?
YES **NO**

Do you support the right of transgendered individuals to use the restroom of their choice?
YES **NO**

Do you support the use of city funds to develop worker-owned co-operatives?

YES NO

Do you support a policy to place school board funds in a Public Bank?

YES NO

Do you support single-payer healthcare?

YES NO