

January 26, 2026

Dear Members of the Oakland Unified School District Board,

We, the undersigned elementary school principals of Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), write to you in response to the one-page budget allocations recently shared with school leaders. We understand the magnitude of the district's financial challenges, including the projected deficit, and we have long anticipated that difficult decisions would be required. At the same time, the consistent message we have heard is that Oakland will continue to maintain high-quality schools.

We are writing because there appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding embedded in the current approach to school funding and the definition of high quality: the notion that the "bare minimum" required to operate a school is a teacher in each classroom, a principal, and an administrative assistant—and that anything beyond that is optional, extra, or "nice to have." As principals doing this work every day, we need to be very clear: this assumption is incorrect.

We did not become principals because of a passion for building management, lunch duty, or operational troubleshooting. We stepped into these roles because we believe deeply in the power of education—because leadership matters, because instructional improvement is intentional work, and because students thrive when adults are able to lead, plan, reflect, and respond thoughtfully to their needs.

High-quality schools do not happen by accident, and they do not happen through endurance alone.

Our charge as instructional leaders is to ensure that students feel seen, valued, and supported; that teachers are able to provide individualized attention; that learning gaps are identified early; and that the system responds effectively—especially for students who have historically been underserved. That work requires time, people, structures, and expertise. When those are labeled as "extras" and removed, schools do not simply become leaner—they become less functional.

Across Oakland schools, principals are working toward ambitious, necessary goals: early literacy outcomes that ensure students are reading on grade level by the end of second grade; meaningful growth for focal student populations, including African American students, English Learners, and students with disabilities; and reductions in chronic absenteeism through stronger belonging, safety, and family partnerships. These outcomes require evidence-based instructional practices, targeted interventions, progress

monitoring, collaboration between general education and special education staff, and strong systems for student support.

None of this happens without adequate planning time, professional learning, instructional support staff, updated materials and technology, and opportunities for educators to collaborate as professionals. Just as teachers cannot provide differentiated instruction without time to plan and analyze student work, principals cannot effectively lead schools and instruction without the essential staffing that are listed below. **Therefore, we are asking the Board to protect and fully fund the following essential roles and supports:**

- **Community School Manager (CSM) – 1.0 FTE:**  
Responsible for developing and sustaining partnerships with families, community organizations, and local resources. Ensures students and families receive coordinated, comprehensive support and anchors critical work related to attendance, school culture, and family engagement.
- **Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA) – 1.0 FTE + additional FTE allocations based on number of students and IEPs:**  
Provides instructional leadership, professional learning, and on-site coaching to teachers. TSAs are essential for implementing district priorities effectively and improving academic outcomes through consistent, job-embedded instructional support.
- **Attendance Specialist – 1.0 FTE:**  
Tracks, monitors, and supports improved student attendance, which is directly tied to academic success and district compliance. This role is essential for addressing chronic absenteeism proactively and accurately.
- **STIP Substitute – 1.0 FTE:**  
Ensures adequate classroom coverage for IEP meetings and other legally required obligations. Teachers are required by law to attend IEPs; without substitute coverage, schools are forced into noncompliance or instructional disruption.
- **Noon Supervisors – 0.5 FTE per 100 students:**  
Provide necessary supervision during lunch and recess to maintain student safety, reduce behavioral incidents, and prevent the loss of instructional time later in the day. Adequate supervision also relieves teachers from non-instructional duties.

When funding decisions strip away these supports, the impact is immediate and real. Principals are left managing impossible tradeoffs, teachers are asked to absorb more without the conditions needed to succeed, and students receive a diminished educational experience. **This is not about discomfort or resistance to change. It is about integrity. We know what it takes to do this work well, and we cannot pretend otherwise.**

We are committed to Oakland's students. We show up every day ready to lead, to problem-solve, and to shoulder responsibility. But we are not willing to quietly accept a system that repeatedly asks schools to “do more with less” while **redefining adequacy downward**. That approach erodes the dignity of our profession, undermines instructional leadership, and **unconscionably compromises the quality of education our students receive**.

We ask that you listen closely to principals and school leaders as experts in this work. Preserving high-quality schools requires more than meeting the bare minimum for operations—it requires investing in the people, structures, and conditions that make meaningful learning possible.

In community,

*Svaicha Chanduri*, Principal, Joaquin Miller Elementary School  
*Vanessa Flynn*, Principal, Sequoia Elementary School  
*Lusa Lai*, Principal, Franklin Elementary School  
*Matt Takimoto*, Principal, Glenview Elementary School  
*John Stangel*, Principal, Laurel Elementary School  
*Ronald Towns*, Principal, Allendale Elementary  
*Alex Brandenburg* Principal, Garfield Elementary  
*Cynthia Bagby*, Principal, Redwood Heights Elementary  
*D Pharr-Matthews*, Principal, Markham Elementary  
*Nekseem Ratchford* Assistant Principal, Lockwood Steam Academy  
*Cody Marshall*, Principal, Fruitvale Elementary  
*Jennifer Heeter*, Principal, Piedmont Avenue Elementary  
*Faris Jabbar*, Principal, La Escuelita Elementary  
*Annie Hatch*, Principal, Hillcrest K-8  
*Mukta Sambrani*, Principal, Lincoln Elementary  
*LaTasha Ellison*, Principal, Manzanita Community  
*Raquel Rodriguez Jones*, Principal, International Community School  
*Angela Webster*, Principal, Montclair Elementary  
*Caroline Guggino*, Principal at Chabot Elementary  
*Dewanna Slaughter*, Principal, Prescott Elementary School  
*Anie Akuma*, Principal, Korematsu Discovery Academy  
*LaShante Scott*, Principal, Thornhill Elementary School  
*Pris Castillo*, Principal, Emerson Elementary School  
*Justin Davis*, Principal, Esperanza Elementary School

*Dr. Charquita Arnold-Whitaker*, Principal, Sankofa United Elementary

*Lucy Lefkowitz*, Principal, Think College Now Elementary

*Peter Van Tassel*, Principal, Cleveland Elementary

*Julissa Lambert-Yank*, Principal, ACORN Woodland Elementary

*Lorilei Aguinaldo*, Principal, Greenleaf TK-8

*Roma Groves - Waters*, Principal, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary