

Olaina Anderson, Candidate for School Board Member
Los Alamitos Unified School District

First Name and Last Name

Olaina Anderson

Are you an incumbent? If so, how many terms have you served?

No

Have you run for School Board Office before? What is your involvement with the School District (past or present?)

This is my first time running for office. I will be the only candidate with a child currently enrolled in our district, my daughter is in third grade. Since she started kindergarten, I have volunteered in her classroom, the art lab, the computer lab, and library. I also volunteer with the PTA and Project Seek (Parent Foundation for fundraising), helping with PEACE Week, Come Walk in My Shoes, Red Ribbon Week, the Carnival, and various other events and fundraisers.

Do you have a campaign website? Share the link.

Yes. Olaina4SchoolBoard.com

In life, who do you look up to? Why? Whose example would you like to follow and why?

I look up to my parents. They are Indian immigrants who moved to Canada as 20-something newlyweds in 1968 with nothing. They set right to work to build their Western life. My mom was a nurse, my dad an interior architect. In the mid-70s my brother and I were born and we moved to California as a family in 1980. I went to three schools in first grade: Toronto, then Arcadia, CA, and finally Huntington Beach where my parents settled and still live in my childhood home. Because of them, I got to attend great California public schools from first grade through college and my teaching credential. If it weren't for their perseverance in following the American dream, I wouldn't be here. They taught me to work hard.

What would be your top 3 priorities; What do you hope to achieve if elected?

1. Transparency
2. Access to resources for all students
3. Support for teachers

What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about? why?

I am passionate about public education, safety, and mental healthcare. These three areas of public policy are intertwined, and with the proper and adequate resources and attention, they work in together to create a healthy and productive community. I believe that all people are entitled to a good education and that an investment in public schools is the best choice for the community. Not only do the students benefit from learning, the community benefits by developing good citizens who are productive members of society. My teaching career began the year after Columbine. As a high school teacher, I always had a lesson plan and an escape plan. After 26 children and educators were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School, I became involved in gun violence prevention. As a teacher and a parent, I understand that school safety is not just a matter of high fences and strong locks, it's a matter of giving people the tools they need for conflict resolution and social-emotional awareness beginning at a young age—kindergarten at least. If we can help people become self-aware and also give educators class sizes small enough to really interact with the individual students and be able to spot a possible need for mental health attention, and then also be able to provide mental health services, we will create a safer environment in schools and beyond.

What characteristics or principles are most important for an elected official?

What do you believe are the core responsibilities for someone elected to this office?

An elected official must be honest, trustworthy, caring, fair-minded, empathetic, and compassionate. They need to know right from wrong, be able to work with others, listen with an open mind, and make decisions based on facts.

The School Board is responsible for hiring the Superintendent, approving curriculum, books, teacher development, supplemental programs, district policies, and the budget and spending for everything the

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district does including building maintenance and development. We need School Board Members who actively listen to the teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the district. They must respect teachers' professional expertise and academic integrity and include teachers in their decision-making process. They must be transparent so that the parents, students, and teachers can participate in and understand the Board's decisions about how to spend taxpayer money. They must provide equal access to resources for all students, and create opportunities to develop critical thinkers with skills to pursue a wide-range of opportunities after high school ranging in scope from trades to higher education.

What legacy would you like to leave?

My husband had a heart attack in September, and it has forced me to pause and remember what really matters in life. I want to be remembered as a loving and compassionate person. Of course family comes first, but I hope that people remember me as someone who worked with compassion and love to improve my community and society. Since childhood I have looked for ways to make the world a better place and then actively tried to do something about it, whether as a volunteer or as a professional—as a teacher. If you're asking about a legacy as a School Board Member, my goal is to make sure the Board makes all its decisions with the best interest of all students at heart. The culture of any organization is set by its leadership. A school district is more than test scores and trophies. A school district is a culture, and the culture of Los Alamitos USD could use some work. As a parent of a third grade child in our district, I intend to do everything I can in my next ten years as a Los Al parent to shape to the culture of Los Alamitos USD to be one of inclusion and acceptance, where every kid feels safe. All kids. Every ability. Every race. Every orientation. Every nationality. Every gender. Every human being. It's up to the leaders to set the tone. I am ready to lead as your School Board Member.

What was your very first job and how long did you have it?

My first job was at McDonald's Restaurant for the summer.

If you could be any fictional character, who would you want to be?

Anne of Green Gables—a kindred spirit.

What is your favorite holiday? Why?

My favorite holiday is Veterans Day. My husband is a United States Marine. He enlisted in the Marine Corps straight out of high school (LB Poly '92) and lost half of his left foot in a boat propeller during a training accident, so he is a disabled veteran. I like Veterans Day because it gives everyone a chance to pause and remember those who have fought for our country and those who are still fighting. I think it's important to remember what we are celebrating or observing when we have three-day weekends, and too often people just enjoy an extra day off. Most Veterans I have met are very humble, and my husband is no exception, so I am proud and grateful that we have a day to be very intentional in honoring veterans service and sacrifice.

What is your favorite book? Why?

I was a literature major and an English and journalism teacher. I am staring at walls lined with books and sincerely cannot choose just one favorite. My daughter is currently reading the Little House on the Prairie series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. They were some of my favorites when I was her age, so at the moment they're my favorite again because I always LOVE reading with her and am enjoying reliving the excitement of experiencing Laura's life through my eight-year-old daughter's eyes.

What is your favorite thing in your home? Why?

The people and our dog. Everything else is static and replaceable. My husband, daughter, dog, and I—and whoever is visiting—have so much still to do, so many memories to make, so many adventures to have, and people to meet. I cannot imagine living without them. My husband had a heart attack 3 weeks ago, a stark reminder that “living” is all that matters.

Were you ever (or still are) involved in sports or Arts?

As a kid I did ballet and played the clarinet from fifth grade through freshman year in college (including the marching band and chamber orchestra). My dad is a painter and sculptor, so we grew up surrounded

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by art and with lots of encouragement and opportunity to create our own work. As an adult I have taken photography and painting classes.

What is something that has been a struggle in your life?

My family moved to California in 1980. I was in first grade. I went to three schools in two countries that year—in Toronto from September to December, in Arcadia, CA, where we lived with my aunt for a few months, and finally in Huntington Beach where my parents still live in my childhood home. I was already a painfully shy little girl, and moving to a new country and different schools was really hard for me. My parents are from India, and we were one of the only Indian families in my neighborhood. It was a struggle to feel like I belonged, partly because we didn't exactly blend in easily, which is what I wanted to do as a shy child in the '80s. Fortunately, my public school teachers were able to pull me in (literally—I was the kid crying outside the classroom door the first week of school (at all 3 schools!)) and draw my personality out, so I eventually made friends and found my safe place in my new environment. I'm still shy by nature, but as an adult I know that reaching out to connect with someone is worth the work I have to do to build up the courage just to say hello.

What is the primary job of a school board member in your view?

The primary job of a School Board Member is to listen to the community and understand and represent their needs when making decisions for the school district. The School Board is responsible for hiring the Superintendent, approving curriculum, books, teacher development, supplemental programs, district policies, and the budget and spending for everything the district does including building maintenance and development. We need School Board Members who actively listen to the teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the district. They must respect teachers' professional expertise and academic integrity and include teachers in their decision-making process. They must be transparent so that the parents, students, and teachers can participate in and understand the Board's decisions about how to spend taxpayer money. They must provide equal access to resources for all students, and create opportunities to develop critical thinkers with skills to pursue a wide-range of opportunities after high school ranging in scope from trades to higher education.

How would you support the diverse needs of your district's students, faculty, staff, and community?

The School Board can only support the diverse needs of students, faculty, staff, and community if they listen to them with open hearts and minds. As a School Board member I will be accessible and transparent. I plan to make meaningful visits to the campuses; rather than just peeking into classrooms without a word or making appearances at big events, I want to visit with teachers at lunchtime in the teachers lounge (or whenever and wherever works for them) and spend time hearing their stories and needs, and working with them to develop plans and solutions to meet their needs. I plan to include teachers in the decision making process because they are the experts in their field and with will be most directly affected by Board actions, along with their students.

In light of the circumstances of NFL players not standing for the national Anthem to protest certain perceived racial injustices, how would you react to a student Athlete protesting at a school athletic event in the same manner?

As a high school journalism teacher, I spent years studying, teaching, protecting, and guiding students and administrators alike in exercising their First Amendment right to freedom of expression responsibly and respectfully.

The only legal reaction to a student athlete protesting at a school athletic event by kneeling for the national anthem or performing any other act of peaceful political expression is to protect that student's right to free speech and allow the protest without punishment. This is settled case law. In *V.A. v San Pasqual Valley Unified School District (2018)*, a high school senior football player who had knelt during the anthem at two different football games sued the district after they sent out a letter requiring students and coaches to stand, remove hats/helmets, and remain standing during the national anthem. They also said "kneeling, sitting, or similar forms of political protest are not permitted during athletic events at any home or away games," and that violators may be removed from the team.

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That recent court decision to allow peaceful protest stands on the 50-year-old US Supreme Court precedent that protects students' First Amendment Rights in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969). In *Tinker*, the Supreme Court ruled that schools must allow students to wear black arm bands to protest the Vietnam War. The result of *Tinker* is that public school officials cannot censor student speech unless the speech will substantially disrupt regular school activities.

How do you expect your staff to address any bullying issue in the classroom or campus, if at all?

Bullying should not be tolerated. If there is a bullying incident, I expect the staff to address it immediately and reasonably with appropriate consequences. There should be clear communication between the bully, the victim, and the bystanders to create a teachable moment so that all involved understand what was wrong with the behavior, learn healthier ways of interacting, and repair their relationships so that they can coexist in the school respectfully. Ideally, we can create a school climate that reduces the incidents of bullying. The School Board has the ability to approve curriculum and services that address this issue.

How will you do to build a better relationship with parents in the district? What plans do you have to be inclusive of parental involvement?

I will be the only School Board Member who is currently a district parent, so I have a clear and realistic understanding of how parents feel about their relationship with the district from my own experience and from what I hear on campus every day.

Parents are happy with a lot of our school district's qualities, but we know that this district is not perfect. Parents are frustrated with the current top-down management style of the district. They do not feel like they have access to Board Members or the opportunity to weigh in on important decisions. Currently, Board Meetings are held at 6:30, unless they decide to have a workshop, which always starts at 4:30 and is an opportunity for community input and discussion about topics that may be voted on in the 6:30 meeting. Most parents work at 4:30. The district needs to more publicly advertise the time and agenda of these meetings, and should hold workshops at a time that teachers, parents, and community members can actually attend. Just as I plan to meet with teachers at their sites at times convenient for them, I plan to meet with parents and students at their sites, as well. Realistically, given today's fast-paced world, a more accessible online presence will also improve the district-parent relationship and can increase parent involvement.

Do you believe it is important to intentionally recruit with the aim of diversifying the district's faculty, staff, and administration? if so, what would be your policy to achieve this?

I just came from a meeting with the Superintendent, Principal, and parents at McGaugh Elementary School where we discussed ways to improve the culture of our school and school district and how we can help people of all backgrounds feel welcome and included. Several parents suggested having a staff that is more representative of the population. We have to do a better job with recruitment for all positions from the Superintendent down. It will take more than a policy to create diversity in the district's faculty, staff, and administration. It would take a School Board that values diversity and is willing to cast a wide net when it comes to hiring and seriously consider broadening the perspective of our School District.

The School Board hires the Superintendent (currently Sherry Kropp), who hires the rest of the leadership team at the District level including the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services (currently Ondrea Reed) and others. Together they hire the site principals, who along with the District leadership team hire the teachers and staff. When our current Superintendent retires in the next few years, the Board will be tasked with hiring the next leader of Los Alamitos Unified School District. That will be the moment we choose the person who will set the tone for our district--with the values, priorities, and experience they bring to the position.

The citizens (not just parents, but every single voter) of Surfside, Seal Beach, and Los Alamitos cities hire the School Board, who have 4-year terms without term limits. The only way the community can truly influence the hiring of the Superintendent (and all other Board decisions and policies) is by hiring School Board Members who value diversity and inclusion, and whose vision extends beyond maintaining the status quo. The current Board's most senior Member was hired in 2000, the most junior in 2010. The two members running for reelection have been in place for 12 and 8 years each. It's time for new leaders—

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am a leader who was a teacher and has a child enrolled in the district. That's the perspective we need on the School Board.

What issues get in the way of quality education? how would you address these obstacles?

The most significant factor that affects the quality of education is large class sizes. Our district touts a student to teacher ratio of 24:1 in grades TK-3, and 32:1 in grades 4-12. In reality, those numbers are an average and a goal. In fact, there are some classes with up to 40 students enrolled. At the high school level, multiply that by 5 classes for one teacher—200 students. For middle school multiply by 6.

Financially, it is not realistic to lower class sizes across the board. If we want to give students the individual attention they need to be able to succeed academically and expect teachers to recognize that a student is troubled, or hungry, or struggling we could consider adding teachers' aides to classrooms.

Teachers need to be able to engage with individual students, and when a 55-minute high school class is all they get to reach 32-40 students that's 1.71-1.37 minutes per student. During that time, we expect teachers to recognize and address students' academic, social, and mental health needs. If the student to teacher ratio were 24:1 throughout the district, that would still only amount to 2.29 minutes per student.

My daughter was lucky enough to be in the Community of Learners class last year—a blended class of typical and mainstreamed students with special needs. The class was slightly larger than average, but had 2 teachers and 1 aide at all times. The student to teacher ratio made it possible for the students to have individualized spelling tests, academic and social assistance for all students as needed, an extra set of hands to handle some of the simpler grading or preparation of materials for lessons the teachers planned. It also gave students one more adult in their lives whom they could trust and who believed in them. Even if teachers shared an aide or we hired one part time aide per class, it would make a difference in every student's quality of education.

Teachers expect to and do work far beyond the hours of 8 a.m. to 2:20 p.m. As a high school Honors English teacher I always worked on lesson planning and grading for at least 3 to 4 hours after the bell rang. If I assigned an essay or major research paper, I worked 80-hour weeks to grade all 200 and get them back to the students as quickly as possible so that their memory of the work was fresh enough that we could use those assignments to learn from them and apply more finely tuned writing skills to the next assignment. One classroom aide would not substantially affect a teacher's workload outside school hours, but it could make all the difference in the life of students just by giving them one more adult to trust and who believes in them in their lives.

What constitutes good teaching? How will you measure this? How will you support advanced teaching approaches?

Good teachers inspire and motivate their students. They "meet students where they are" and help them progress to higher levels of academic understanding and success. Good teaching cannot be fairly measured by choosing one number as the measure of success on standardized testing, because the only thing standard is the test—not the students. It doesn't take into account whether a student has a background with books in the home and parents home to read to them every night, it doesn't take into account whether they come from a home where English is the primary language, it doesn't take into account whether their parents hold advanced degrees or didn't finish high school, it doesn't take into account whether a student comes to school hungry every day because they are impoverished—and there are families living below the poverty line, who are homeless, or facing food scarcity in our schools.

That said, we live in a world where numbers are the easiest way to measure the success of masses of people. So rather than expecting every class to reach the same number as the ultimate measure of success, wouldn't it make sense to measure success based on improvement? For instance, on a scale of 1 to 100, rather than making it the goal of every student to reach 95 by a certain date, make the goal of every student to improve from their baseline 10% (just keeping the numbers simple for this example). In kindergarten, some students come to school without knowing their letters, and some students come to

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school already reading multisyllabic words and independently reading books. The distance each child must travel to reach 95 varies per individual. We have to meet them where they are. We can't expect a child who starts at 10 to reach 95 at the same time as a child who starts at 90. The child who starts at 90 shouldn't be labeled above average and have nothing to challenge them while they wait for everyone else to catch up.

Fortunately, teachers know this and education has evolved from having a one-size-fits-all language arts textbook to using individualized texts at varied reading levels (A-Z), so that every student is engaged in learning and success is measured in progress for each individual. That means every student's goal isn't to get to level L, it's to move toward level L for some students and to move beyond level L for others. No one is set up to fail, and no one is bored while trapped at level L with nowhere to go because they've already reached the finish line.

Why does this matter if teachers are already meeting students where they are and progressing from there? Because student success is still measured by whether they're at level L, and teacher success is still measured by whether the whole class reaches level L according to a standardized test. At all levels—site, district, state, country—a school is labeled a success or failure based on level L. Knowing this, administrators pressure teachers to teach to the test rather than teach to the student's rate of progression.

It's a broken system at the federal and state levels.

But in our district and at individual sites, we can choose to evaluate teachers based on students' individual progress. We can reject the idea of measuring merit by standardized test scores. Good teaching can be measured by observations of teachers working with students on a regular basis. I would support advanced methods of teaching by giving teachers in-service time to work with education experts. Currently, we have Teachers on Special Assignment who do this work. But no one checks in with them to see if the program is working and worth the investment. As a School Board Member, I will ask for reports from the teachers who implement the programs and use that feedback to make fiscally wise decisions about which programs to pursue and which are not worth the time and money. I will be the only Board Member with a child enrolled in the district, so I will see the effects of the programs firsthand. As a former teacher, I will bring an educator's perspective to the Board, which is vital to making student-focused decisions.

What type of skills should students be learning for success in the 21st Century?

Students should be learning critical thinking skills, writing skills, public speaking skills, computer literacy, conflict resolution and social-emotional awareness. Those skills are necessary in all fields and subject areas.

How might you improve the value of a high school diploma? what should the diploma reflect?

A high school diploma should reflect proficiency in subject areas and critical thinking skills, writing skills, public speaking skills, computer literacy, conflict resolution and social-emotional awareness.

In what areas would you like to expand curriculum? what sort of additional *technical training, apprenticeships* and *innovative programming* would you advance if given the opportunity?

Our current "Career Pathways Cords" include Arts & Communication, Consumer & Human Services, Health Sciences, and Science & Technology. I would add a pathway for trades like Auto Mechanic, Construction, Electrician, Plumber, and Fashion & Beauty. These courses give all students an opportunity to explore various fields during high school (when education is free). High school is the only time when kids can have the opportunity to try something new without the concern of committing financially to a particular school or program. Students taking these courses may discover a passion they want to turn into a career, or they may discover a skill they'd like to pursue as a hobby. Courses in these topics could be taught by experts in their fields if the district creates partnerships with local businesses and apprenticeship programs so that high school students can have a similar opportunity to taking an

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Advanced Placement class to get college credit, by beginning to learn a trade and get credit toward mastery of that trade.

A business class could be offered so that students who want to follow any of the Career Pathway Cords could also learn some of the skills necessary for people who want to be self-employed or small business owners. Entrepreneurial students could graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge to pursue a college degree or to learn a trade—and after getting that education and becoming experts in their field, they could both become successful business owners.

What role do you imagine technology playing in and outside the classroom in the future?

The role of technology in our lives grows stronger and more prevalent every day. We have to remember that as humans we have the responsibility to choose how to use technology and to what end. We also need to remember not to rely so heavily on technology that we lose human interaction. As educators, we must prepare students for the future by giving them access to current technology (ie. they use tablets and computers and ever updating and evolving new programs and equipment to do their work, whether it be math and science or language arts). We also use technology—like smartboards, online connections with parents and students, projectors, etc.—in presenting information. Again, though, we need to teach students to be responsible citizens of the world who use technology appropriately and also have the critical thinking skills, writing skills, public speaking skills, computer literacy, conflict resolution and social-emotional awareness necessary to work with people while using technological innovations.

What principles drive your policies for safety in schools? What will you implement in our schools for our kids and staff to be safer?

As the parent of a third grade student, I will be the only School Board Member who has a child currently enrolled in the district. I was an English teacher at Newport Harbor and Torrey Pines High Schools. I began teaching the year of Columbine. As a teacher, I always had a lesson plan and an escape plan. School safety is of utmost concern to me. A school is more than test scores and trophies. It's a culture. As with any organization, the leaders set the tone. The School Board is responsible for creating a safe culture in our school district. The Board needs to do more to make every student, teacher, and administrator feel safe.

We must take physical measures to ensure the safety of our campuses. I have participated in countless lockdown drills as a teacher and a parent. Our children regularly practice how not to die at school. The current security measures are a start. We need video surveillance installed at all campuses. We need a policy to include parental notification and instructions when we have emergency drills at school. Parents need to know and practice the evacuation protocol and pickup location and identification requirements in an emergency.

Locking students in and intruders out of campuses is not enough to create a safe school. Most mass school shootings happen in demographics like ours. Additionally, students commit suicide in middle and high school. It's happened here. There should be educational programs to teach gun violence prevention to the community and families. Most importantly, kids should feel physically and emotionally safe. All kids. Every race. Every gender. Every nationality. Every orientation. Every ability. We need policies that educate students and teachers in creating a culture of acceptance and inclusion. We have to start at the kindergarten level with intentional districtwide programs to teach conflict resolution and social-emotional awareness. Making that a priority will help our students stay engaged with the school and life. It will help us prevent the scenario where a student was bullied and felt so disenfranchised that they turn to violence as a solution to end their pain.

How will you support the mental health needs of students/faculty/staff?

Mental health needs must be given the same attention we give to the physical and intellectual needs of students, faculty, and staff. As with the student to teacher ratio, mental health services availability comes down to a matter of numbers, dollars, and priorities. I've said all along that a school district is more than test scores and trophies, it's a culture. The School Board and administrators set the tone and the priorities.

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Mental health needs of students need to be approached on a variety of levels. In K-12 there needs to be age appropriate curriculum in social and emotional awareness, conflict resolution, and consent. The subjects should be addressed with a districtwide curriculum and ongoing teacher training so that all students and teachers learn the language and behavior necessary to create a school culture that values the well-being and inclusion of every student.

Mental health is directly tied to school safety. Spending money on physical measures like fences and cameras that may prevent a dangerous intruder from entering our campuses, is not sufficient to keep our students, faculty, and staff safe. Therefore, mental health should be prioritized when budgeting to include grade-level curriculum, and enough counselors and school psychologists on each site to meet the counselor to student ratio recommended by the California Department of Education at all grade levels.