



ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2022

Maria Salamanca

**Running for
Orange County School Board
District 2**

Candidate Information

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1. What motivated you to run for this position?

I credit my success to the OCPS teachers and leaders that went the extra mile to support a first generation Latina. It was my second grade teacher that believed in me enough to transition out of ESL classes, my 4th grade teacher that advocated for me to be tested for gifted classes, and my AP teacher who recruited me to debate where I was exposed to higher education. To pay it forward, I want to be a voice for today's students so they can reach their fullest potential.

Believing wholeheartedly in OCPS's talented teachers and administrators, I know that OCPS can lead the nation in innovative approaches to student success.

I am running for school board because our students deserve leaders who listen, lead with integrity, and propose innovative solutions in difficult times. It is no secret school boards across the country have become the target of political attacks and I know I can cut through the noise to provide effective representation of our students, parents, teachers, and community members. I hope to create a new level of collaboration within the OCPS D2 community, one that recognizes that the success of our students means the success of all stakeholders in our district.

2. What does being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community mean to you?

Being a first-generation, queer, Latina, I know the benefits of engaging multiple perspectives. In a county as varied as ours, diversity is truly our greatest strength. My background and lived experiences will allow me to empathize with our most vulnerable students and provide innovative solutions to the modern problems our students are facing.

3. Please summarize your history of community involvement. This may include city boards, civic associations, non-profits, etc.

*please ask about this in an interview

4. **Please summarize any work you have performed in the past five years to further LGBTQ+ rights. This may include paid positions, volunteer work, and donations.**

I have volunteered my time to support LGBTQ-led events in Florida and California. I have also donated money to causes that support LGBTQ youth and adults. *please ask about this in an interview

Questions

5. **The rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation barreling down from Tallahassee has caused a sharp increase in discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Orange County. How would you go about reducing discrimination in your district or local community? How would you measure your progress?**

Orange County families need elected leaders who will stand unapologetically with LGBTQ families. As a proud Orlandoan, I know the effect that an inclusive and welcoming community can have on people struggling to make ends meet. As a majority-Hispanic district, it will take someone who has been there to understand the needs of the community. We should take a look at including LGBTQ history in our curriculum. We have to provide safe spaces during school hours for LGBTQ students to feel community. We need to review whether SROs need to play such a direct role in student discipline. By nurturing an inclusive environment, we will beat back discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ community.

6. **Elected officials and office staff are still woefully under-educated on the transgender community. This means that the services their offices provide are often ignorant of the needs of the transgender community. What actions would you take to ensure that the services your office will provide will be educated on and cognizant of the needs of the transgender community?**

It is our job as the Orange County School Board to provide safe spaces for our transgender students. This means creating new protections in school board policy to effectively shield our students from culture-war attacks by our state legislature. I want to ensure our LGBTQ families know the school system they send their kids to everyday will protect them. It is important to communicate school standards with parents in a clear manner, to share resources aimed at uplifting LGBTQ youth, and to find opportunities to celebrate the diversity in our schools in an inclusive way.

- 7. The Florida Republican Party is leading the country in stripping away LGBTQ+ rights, starting with our children. Students are having their lives and livelihoods placed at risk by laws such as the Transgender Sports Ban, the so-called Parental Bill of Rights, and now Don't Say Gay. These shamelessly discriminatory bills are forcing LGBTQ+ families to reconsider their future in Florida. What would you tell the parents of LGBTQ+ children in your district who feel they need to leave Florida in order to protect their children?**

First, I want to acknowledge these culture war attacks are unprecedented. Combined with higher cost of living and lower quality of life, I do not blame ANYONE who feels they have to leave Florida in order to look out for their family. That being said, I want to emphasize to Orange County families that the Orange County School Board will always be responsive to the needs of our parents and students and will NOT partake in fearmongering tactics weaponized against our most marginalized families. I share your fears and I will continue fighting for LGBTQ youth because we all deserve to live our best lives.

- 8. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered attempting suicide and 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ attempt it. How would you lead on this issue and work to decrease these statistics over the course of your term in office?**

It is important to let our at-risk youth know they are not alone. We, as a county, need to provide safe spaces for our LGBTQ youth and bolster our counseling programs to effectively serve the entire student body. Students need guidance and mentorship from school administrators. There needs to be a campaign to reinstate Florida in the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey to collect data on students at risk of suicide. In the meantime, our school board needs to fill in the gaps and release an information campaign aimed at discrediting policies that do nothing to keep our students safer (hate bills).

- 9. The same survey by The Trevor Project found that nearly all transgender and non-binary students have had to worry about their access to gender-affirming healthcare, bathrooms, and sports teams being taken away from them. How would you work to take this fear off their shoulders so that they can go back to just being kids?**

I would simply not allow transgender students to be discriminated against because of their gender identity. Teachers know best how to care for their students and I have the utmost faith in our staff that our transgender students will be uplifted instead of denigrated. This will be emphasized from a top-down approach with widely-shared messaging that would inform best practices for creating a safe space for transgender youth.

- 10. Far-right groups are pushing to ban books on any topic they find disagreeable, such as books on Black history and experiences, immigration, the LGBTQ+ community, climate change, etc. Do you support these book bans? If not, what is your plan to counter them and ensure students have access to a full array of age-appropriate knowledge and experiences?**

NO. We need to let our students read! As a hungry young academic, I leaned into books as a means of SURVIVAL. My books got me through hard times and I immediately learned I had a love for economics, history, and politics. It is through my learning journey that I became aware of the social inequities in our democracy and joined the counter movement. Plans to ban books are fascist, plain and simple. These fascist demagogues want to erase certain populations from the history books because it benefits their ultimate mission, white supremacy. We need to safeguard our knowledge as an ever-evolving society and fight this book banning movement by being ever-vigilant of phony public records requests and ensuring our librarians are in charge of choosing our kids' reading selections, not Governor Desantis.

- 11. During a town hall in your district, a constituent describes being gay or transgender as a "lifestyle choice." What is incorrect about their description? How would you constructively respond in this situation?**

Being transgender, bisexual, lesbian, or gay is not a lifestyle choice because we did not choose our sexual/gender orientation. We discovered it. I would share my own experience and the experiences of my loved ones to urge the constituent to reconsider the way he/she/they characterizes LGBTQ motivations.

- 12. During a board meeting, the board chair purposely refers to a transgender woman as "he" and "him" as the woman attempts to give her public comment. The woman corrects the board chair each time, insisting that her pronouns are "she" and "her." The board chair continues to misgender the woman until she eventually leaves the chamber in tears. How would you respond in this situation?**

I would stand firmly against the board chair's behavior by claiming time to speak about the matter on the record. It is important for all our Orange County families to know exclusive and selfish leadership is not the norm. I would explain how dead naming someone is deeply offensive and distasteful. It is the ultimate disrespect to someone brave enough to share their lived experience with you. It is important to act in the moment because violence against transgender people cannot be tolerated in a place of governance.

13. A parent approaches you at an event, insisting that her son's teachers have "groomed" him into liking boys. Her son is at her side when she says this. How do respond to the parent's statement such that the young boy leaves feeling better about himself?

"I don't think you can speak for your son's experience if you still hold hateful misconceptions about LGBTQ people. I knew I liked girls at a young age and I became a successful entrepreneur and students rights advocate running to represent Orange County School Board District 2. B)"

14. Orange County continues to embrace urban sprawl, despite a plethora of data that links urban sprawl to severe strains on our housing, employment, healthcare, and public transit systems (to name a few). What are your thoughts on Orange County's growth? What could Orange County in terms of development that would better serve the communities in your district?

Though I will be slightly out of my policy jurisdiction as a school board member, it is clear Orange County needs to prioritize smart growth near urban centers, jobs, and more transportation routes. Attempts by developers to build across the rural service line endangers our sustainability as a region by threatening quality of life, water quality, and our environment. Orange County needs to contract developers who want to provide affordable housing to the most vulnerable among us. There were more than 5,000 homeless students in 2021. This is unacceptable and only an increase in housing supply will help solve this problem in the long run.

15. Do you support the idea of constructing more multi-family homes in neighborhoods traditionally zoned for single-family homes? What impact would this have on your district?

Yes. We need to build the missing middle housing so families of all types can afford to live and work in our community. This would have an extremely positive impact on my majority-Hispanic district and would help families spend less on rent and more on their children.

16. Homeowner Associations often prevent homeowners from transitioning their lawns away from non-functional grasses such as turf and towards sustainable options such as native Florida plants and edible landscapes. HOAs insist that moving away from the traditional pristine green lawn would lower housing prices. What is your opinion on this issue?

I do not feel qualified on this specific issue but I am of the opinion that public policy with no particular aim stops us from evolving into a better functioning society.