

Mónica Ratliff Questionnaire- Imelda Padilla

1. There are many ways to make a difference in education. Why have you chosen to run for school board?

I have always cared and held a special place in my heart for the youth of this community. My passion to make a change in public education comes from my personal story and experience as an LAUSD graduate. As an LAUSD student I saw that only some of us got to attend the college we hoped to, while others that I grew up with fell through the cracks and into things like drugs, gangs/violence, and vandalism. I feel like I am very fortunate to have made it to college, and as such I feel a sense of responsibility to teach and inspire the youth of my community to do the same. It is our job to help clear the barriers that can prevent them from becoming successful, educated members of the community.

I am a proactive person who takes on issues, and I have made uplifting the youth of this community my top priority. Seven years ago, several teachers and I got together and created a youth leadership conference geared towards empowering and inspiring at-risk youth. The Adelante Hombre Latino youth conference was designed to help the youth who might not find inspiration, information, or motivation at home to think about a successful, productive future. My role in the implementation and continuance of this very special conference is to find the funds, food, and volunteers needed to make it happen. The summit hosts over 100 adult volunteers and 300 to 500 youth each year. It was the teachers and community leaders from this network who encouraged me to run. They want a candidate that comes from the community, and has a background in advocacy and policy.

2. What are three things that you would like to do immediately, if elected?

One: I would meet with you, Ms. Ratcliff, to discuss the work you have done in the district so far and to gather your recommendations on what needs immediate attention. Thereafter I would work with my staff to schedule a meeting with the principals of all my schools. I would like to find out which schools offer certain programs like music, art, sports; are interested in starting magnets; use the Small Learning Academies model; or need support to implement intervention and enrichment programs. I think it is essential to be familiar with every school in the district. I hope to do this in the first 6 months.

Two: I would also work with my team to do a thorough scan of the resources available at Beaudry. When a principal reaches out to me for assistance, I want to be able to tell them immediately how I will help.

Three: I am a big fan of community collaboration and would like to begin planning community event like a Literacy Fair, Parent

College Night, Magnet Application training, How to Read the Budget, and many more. My goal is to do 2-3 community based events per semester.

In short, I plan to hit the ground running. As the candidate who has a relationship with multiple leaders in the community, I know I can help coordinate our efforts so that youth, parents, and school personnel have as much access to resources as possible.

3. The monthly board book is frequently over 700 pages long. The closed session book, including dismissals, frequently runs another 500 pages plus. How do you plan to tackle the monthly board book and understand the issues presented?

As a community organizer I have become accustomed to reading over 150 pages a day as a way to stay well-versed and on top of the topics related to the policy campaigns I am working on. In addition to interacting with people on a

daily basis, I read a significant amount of literature then translate the information to the community members I am working with. This integration of reading, interpreting and speaking to community members helps me collect the data (their stories) that is needed to impact what gets discussed in the reporting documents. If I keep up this trend I should be able to read the 1,200 pages. In addition, I plan to make sure my staff is similarly well-prepared.

4. Each of you have received significant endorsements and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of support via independent expenditure campaigns. Supporters will expect access and the ability to share with you their perspective on policy, budget decisions, hiring decisions, etc..

a) Please describe how you plan to handle the pressure your supporters will exert on you to respect and put forth their perspective once you're in office?

My supporters know that I come from a place of coalition building and negotiations and that my priorities are the students, parents and community members of the North East San Fernando Valley. Therefore, my supporters will know that I am someone who looks at all perspectives before I make a decision.

b) Please describe a time in your life when substantial pressure was put on you to conform and how you dealt with that pressure?

During the planning meetings of Adelante Hombre, we would get requests to make changes each year. The most popular ones include moving the event to a college campus instead of having it at a high school, and that we needed to spend money on better marketing.

I believe these requests were not in the best interests of the young people, so I have declined them. Part of the original goal of Adelante Hombre was to get young men to travel within their regional area and see another part of their

community. Thus, I have stood my ground and maintained the original intent for the event. I'm proud to say my group of community members is in route to plan the 7th Annual Adelante Hombre on May 20th 2017 at Panorama High School.

In addition, I have not spent money on marketing because the original intent is not to enrich those who can make our flyer look nice, but instead to spend the funds that we raise to go back to students in the form of education supplies, and/or breakfast and lunch.

The bottom line is, if you don't lose sight of the big picture goals, it becomes much easier to determine which requests are consistent with those goals, and which are not.

~~5. Ms. Gopez, labor—UTLA and SEIU—have spent significant money and people power to ensure that you are not elected. Yet, the majority of UTLA and SEIU members have NOT been involved in preventing your election.~~

~~a) How will you deal with your feelings about labor, if elected?~~

~~b) Prior to running for school board, have you ever been in a situation in your life where someone or a group worked against you? Please describe the situation and how you handled it?~~

~~c) What assurance do workers have that you will not hold leaderships' decisions against the individual workers?~~

6. Ms. Padilla, some charter advocates have spent significant money and people power to ensure that you are not elected. Yet, the majority of charter school parents, teachers, and students have NOT been involved in preventing your election.

a) How will you deal with your feelings about the charter advocacy groups/leaders, if elected?

I have not allowed the work of the California Charter School Association to impact my

feelings about the individual charter leaders of my community. My respect and admiration for the parents and students of charter schools started as a young college graduate working as a youth program coordinator at Pacoima Beautiful. Since then, our relationships have flourished over the years as collaborative community partners.

For example, if you look at my campaign social media accounts you will notice that before and after CCSA attacked my volunteerism on the neighborhood council, it did not keep me from going to Vaughn Charter School for the Cesar Chavez conference, which is coordinated by education leaders from both school governance types. This is a perfect example of how educational community partnerships can provide essential learning opportunities for our students.

In addition, I have a very good relationship with Sylvia Fajardo of Pacoima Charter Elementary, Dr. Yvonne Chan and Mr. Stan Leandro of Vaughn, and Evelyn Licea of Valor Academy.

My connection to charter schools is local, and cannot be impacted by the behavior of an outside organization.

b) Prior to running for school board, have you ever been in a situation in your life where someone or a group worked against you? Please describe the situation and how you handled it?

This is the first time in my life that a group has worked against me. However, for the first 12 years of my life, bullies called me “crooked legs” which was a direct attack on my self-esteem. I dealt with it by reminding myself that they have another agenda and other issues. Ms. Ratliff, you personally have shown the ability to set aside campaign differences in order to do what is right for students, and that is the approach that I will take as well.

c) What assurance do charter parents, teachers, and students have that you will not hold leaderships’ decisions against them?

I have already given them assurance by attending forums hosted by their funders and by visiting the campuses when the parents invite me. And again, I feel like you have set a standard for dealing with this situation that I intend to emulate.

7. Please describe your position on charter proliferation and saturation and why that is your position?

I support choice. Parents should have choices on where to send their kids to school. However, the driving force must be what is in the best interest of the kids and their families. Our kids need quality, innovative schools, and our families need accountability. There are many charters that are precisely that, and I support those.

8. There are schools that have been failing for years – students leaving the school unprepared for the next step in their education.

A) What is your experience with such schools?

As the only candidate in this run-off who graduated from LAUSD, I am well aware of this issue.

When I was growing up, certain schools were known for their negative or positive reputations. I'm excited to see that as new teachers have arrived to those schools, they are bringing proactive change.

B) What should be done about such schools?

Those schools need to be thoroughly scanned to see where the weaknesses are. Schools do well when they have a combination of strong administration, good teachers, involved parents and a desire from the community to collaborate. We need to identify which of these elements is missing, and address it with either a change in staff, or with an influx of resources sent its way.

9. Employee wages and benefits make up the majority of the school district's budget. Enrollment is declining in some areas such that some schools are shrinking and becoming

difficult to maintain financially. What are your thoughts on these issues?

We need to address enrollment head on. Some of it is a natural decline in the number of school-aged children, but we are also losing kids because parents feel their schools are not providing a quality education and a safe environment. And, too often, kids feel like they are not excited to come to school. We need to make schools more appealing to parents and kids by providing a quality education and offering programs that make students feel their needs are being met.

10. Please describe in detail your experience with schools, classrooms, and children and youth?

Schools:

- Pacoima Beautiful, Youth Program
Coordinator - During my time at Pacoima

Beautiful as a youth program coordinator, I worked with Maclay Middle School, Arleta High School and San Fernando High School to run after-school environmental justice based clubs. Together we hosted Earth Day events, community clean-ups, tree maintenance events and other school-based activities to expose kids to the importance of recycling, re-using things, and reducing waste. In addition we did a lot of work on air pollution and water issues. During my tenure, I helped Pacoima Beautiful enter a partnership with Polytechnic High School, Cesar Chavez Learning Academies, Sylmar High School, and Vaughn School of International studies.

- Youth United Towards Environmental Protection- At Pacoima Beautiful, I ran this club. When I got there, we had an average of 10 to 15 youth attending mainly from Pacoima, but the number quickly increased to 25 to 30 a week, serving youth from all over the East Valley.

- Adelante Hombre, Founder and Lead Organizer- I have worked with many schools to help youth attend the leadership conference that I host with over 300-500 youth: Arleta High School, Polytechnic High School, Van Nuys High School, Monroe High School, East Valley High School, San Fernando High School, Sylmar High School, San Fernando Middle School, Cesar Chavez Learning Academies, and many others.
- Parent Centers- In all my community organizing I have worked with the parent's centers of many schools to reach the community.

Classrooms:

- Service Learning- Even after graduating from Polytechnic High School, I never stopped attending the campus because I have a strong relationship with my former teachers. These are teachers who are aware of where my career took me so they have

invited me every year to come speak to students on Service Learning opportunities. Poly emphasizes the well-rounded student concept as a way to be competitive in college applications.

- Holy Rosary Confirmation Teacher- I was a religious education teacher for three years at my local church to teach kids about their confirmation. These classes included a very diverse group of youth ages 15 to 17 from all over Los Angeles and I'm proud to say that I had the lowest rate of student drop-out in the entire religious school program because students liked my teaching methods.

Children/Youth:

- In addition to working as a youth program coordinator, and starting my own youth based leadership conference I have a love for speaking to youth at parks, libraries and other public places about their futures.
- For example, I have ridden my bike on some of the most dangerous streets of our

community to teach kids how to make sure they are not being profiled.

11. Please describe in detail your experience creating policy?

As a public administration graduate student, I follow policy developments at all levels of government. I am especially interested in local policy because I believe it has the greatest impact on the daily lives of my family, friends and neighbors. I am also particularly interested in policy relating to public funds; green-space and the environment, education, transportation and criminal justice policy.

I have had the privilege in three different capacities to play the role of bringing in the human-community based experience to three major policies.

For example, when I worked for Pacoima Beautiful, I helped make sure the Clean Up Green Up policy incorporated the stories of Pacoima/Sun Valley residents to address the

issues that were unique to their community. One example was the need to address granite shops whose dust contributed to air pollution. Because of residents' input on the issue, addressing it was incorporated into policy.

Similarly, when I worked on the Raise the Wage campaign, there was a lot of data and research that was impacting what would be on the actual-policy, but we also needed community members to provide input at public hearings at the Van Nuys City Hall and downtown City Hall. As a result, the campaign was able to pursue specific policy language that would be productive to both workers and employers alike. For instance, in the City of Los Angeles Raise the Wage ordinance, there is a provision that allows state-funded non-profits extra time to increase their minimum wages, because reimbursements from the state take a long time to come in, potentially creating financial problems.

12. Please describe in detail your experience dealing with angry, unsatisfied constituents or

stakeholders? If you have no such experience, please describe an experience dealing with a stranger or acquaintance who was angry with you.

It is my personality to try to fix things immediately when I get the impression that someone is upset with me.

Recently, a woman became upset with me for walking into the auditorium of a school where the Neighborhood Council is held because she was just about to give the “controversial-climatic part of her story” during public comment. She said that me entering distracted everyone from “hearing her out”. Rather than ignore her or fight with her, I offered reconciliation, and she ultimately felt comfortable getting back to her presentation.

13. What is your assessment of Superintendent King? What changes, if any, would you like to see her make?

Michelle King, as the superintendent of LAUSD represents growth for woman and minorities. Her path to success started as a student that culminated to her appointment as the Superintended. There are a lot of mirroring similarities she can share as a teacher and an instructional coach. That said, I applaud her successes in academic pedagogy and integration of a 25 year historical perspective, but there is much to accomplish. On the school board I will ask for continued strengthening of various academic programs. I will seek to support legislation that reorganizes a stronger approach to community schools. Above all, I will demand that our superintended make more of an effort to be a presence in our schools communities to obtain direct teacher, student and parent input.

I think her strategic plan in a good one, but I hope to work with her on the planning and implementation part.

14. What is your assessment of Local District Superintendent Ekchian? What changes, if any, would you like to see her make?

Superintended Ekchian in my eyes is in a very interesting position. I must admit that my interaction has been limited, but as a member of this community I am familiar with her positioning. Ekchian served as the lead HR representative on behalf of LAUSD having negotiated pay increases for certificated employees, this move continues to lift educators into the middle class. Her ability to decode high level policy issues through personal and budgetary experience speaks volumes. I am however still concerned. On the school board I will ask for more classroom experienced personal to lead academic instruction. I will demand that the local district take a more active role hosting administrative support groups under the local superintended leadership. I will ask Ms Ekchian to be more academically driven while focusing on teacher driven policies.

15. What is your assessment of Local District Superintendent DelCuetto? What changes, if any, would you like to see her make?

Ms DelCuento in my eyes is a leader of leaders. To be clear, I have not directly worked with her in the past, but look forward to her leadership. Her experience in negotiations with pilot schools and administrative tenure for pilot schools sets a standard of measure. Her knowledge of Valley schools is important and I will look to her historical perspective for support and guidance.

16. The District budget is over \$8 billion and over \$13 billion if you include facilities. Each of you will receive discretionary office budgets of several hundreds of thousands of dollars. Please describe any experience you have reading, examining and/or tracking large budgets?

As a student of California State University Northridge's Masters in Public Administration

program, I have training in how to read, examine, put together and track public budgets.

In addition, I followed the Cities of Los Angeles, Pasadena, and Long Beach's budget for two years when I was advocating that they invest in a Wage Claims Department during my time on the Raise the Wage campaign.

17. Have you ever watched a board meeting? Why or why not? If so, what were your observations about the board, Superintendent, staff, and/or the meeting?

I have watched board meetings many times. It makes me happy that the board allows a substantial amount of time for public comment and everyone is cordial and understanding when someone goes over their time allotment. Given that we are talking about children and families, we must make every effort to be accommodating.

18. A) If you are faced with a situation in which a child accuses an adult of an unacceptable

behavior and the only evidence is the word of the child, what do you do and why?

I would follow the legal protocol. The state of California has made it very clear that all school personnel are mandated child abuse reporters. If a child says that he or she has been a victim of a crime, school personnel must report it to a law enforcement agency. The law enforcement agencies will follow the due process of investigating the incident. They are responsible for gathering evidence to determine if the validity of the claim. As the receiver of this accusation, you should help the child feel safe and continue to listen and support until appropriate assistance arrives.

B) Does your answer change if there is some documentation that the employee has been counseled or disciplined for a similar accusation previously? If so, why?

Every accusation must be treated seriously and dealt with according to the protocol.

19. There are a few dismissals that come before the Board in which the teacher is simply a lousy teacher. They may have been a good teacher once but now they may be frequently absent, do not effectively address the standards, do not implement suggestions for improvement, and do not help their students succeed. Frequently, they and/or their advocate claims that they should be able to keep their job – especially if they are close to retirement. What is your position and why?

I would have to look at it from a case by case basis. Our obligation is to provide our children with a quality education. That takes precedence.

20. Is there anything that this questionnaire did not cover that you would like to include?

I want thank you for serving our community so well and for always being a supporter of my work to help our youth.