

**Redistricting Commission
Applicant Profile**

Applicant #	11260057780
First Name	Benjie
Last Name	Achtenberg
District	District 6
Time living in District	Less than a year
Time living in Oakland	10 to 20 years
Education	Master's degree
Income	\$125,000 - \$250,000
Voting history	2018 & 2016 elections
Gender	Male
Race/Ethncity	White / Caucasian
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Supplemental Questionnaire

Your response to each of the mandatory following questions is limited to no more than 500 words. Please type in the space provided for each question.

*1. Why do you wish to serve on the Commission and why do you think the work of the Commission is important?

I want to serve on the Commission because as an Oakland resident with a family and a young child attending Oakland schools, I believe it is critical to have diverse, varied and informed perspectives represented on the Commission. I am excited to have the opportunity to bring my perspective as a former local teacher, current parent and long time resident to the work of redistricting our city. This work is essential in creating thoughtful and meaningful representative borders for both School Board and City Council. Oakland's demographics have changed a lot in the past 10 years and our new districts' borders should accurately reflect and respect the long time and new neighborhood communities that exist right now. Our city's districts should be drawn as accurately as possible when representing all of us, so that our varied communities' interests are represented as authentically and meaningfully as possible.

*2. Explain what it means to be impartial and describe your ability to exercise impartiality.

Being impartial means being fair and just while also not taking sides in a given situation. I have a strong ability to be impartial and exercise impartiality. As a former public school teacher I often had to be impartial when supporting students in solving conflicts. I was expected to and always did my best to listen to both sides of a conflict, and provide space for both sides to be heard, so that, ideally, the students could, with my support work towards a resolution, without me just telling them what to do. As an educator I believe it is our duty to be facilitators and supporters of students' learning in all settings. Knowing full well that all students enter classrooms with their own funds of knowledge and personal experiences that inform their opinions, allowed me to address most issues that came up through an unbiased lens. There were times that I personally disagreed with a student's perspective, however, it was not my place to tell them I disagreed or to prove them wrong. Rather, my charge, and what I always strived to do was to challenge all students respectfully to defend their ideas with evidence and encourage everyone (myself included) to listen to opposing opinions with respect. By bringing an impartial and as unbiased as possible perspective into the classroom each day, I was able to earn the trust and respect of my students and families, which ultimately led to positive outcomes for most students.

*3. The Commissioners will need to work collaboratively in redrawing district boundaries. Provide an example from when you had to set aside your own self-interest to achieve a common goal.

Due to the world-wide pandemic, the non-profit I work for has had to shift from providing physical summer programming for hundreds of Oakland students to a virtual, distance learning model. This process has been challenging for many reasons, but one reason in particular is that everyone has had to shift their lives from working at an office and out in the community to staying at home. Finding the balance of taking care of myself and my family while also focusing on supporting the huge shift in how my organization serves local communities has been challenging. Though I wanted to just settle into the new normal of being at home with my family and not really thinking about my job, I've had to put it all in perspective. Yes, this is challenging for my family, but I've realized how much more challenging this shift has been for many of the students and families my organization serves. My family is lucky because my partner and I still have our jobs and can work from home, while many of the families I work with are not as lucky. I have had to set aside and compartmentalize my family's stressors and challenges and really focus on supporting my organization's shift to creating a virtual distance learning model for the hundreds of kids we serve. Though I know and believe nothing can replace in-person, live teaching and community building, I know it is in the best interest of kids everywhere, especially those coming from low-income households here in Oakland to have some kind of distance learning and community building, albeit virtual, for this summer. Knowing that we are all in this together and that we will only all get through this if we work together as a community and as a city, has allowed me to focus on just that, the bigger goals for our city and all the kids my organization works with every summer.

*4. All Commissioners must demonstrate an understanding of and appreciation for Oakland's diversity. Describe your knowledge of and appreciation for Oakland's people and places, and how this will enhance your work as a commissioner.

I was an Oakland Public School teacher for 10 years and currently work for a local non-profit that serves young people from all across the city through no-cost summer programming. I have worked with students and families from West Oakland to Soverante Park, from the Hills to the Flatlands and basically every neighborhood in between. I have come to appreciate the immense diversity that our city has with respect to, well, everything. From the amazing restaurants all over the city, to the cultural celebrations throughout the year, to the multitude of languages we hear walking around Lake Merritt, our city is an amazing tapestry of people representing the world. Working in Oakland Public Schools has given me an opportunity to not just meet folks different from me, but to really learn from them too. I have come to appreciate the differences in how families communicate and interact with schools. Supporting my students and families in navigating the school system and accessing our city's resources has been both eye-opening and rewarding. Through my current work I get to travel to community centers and schools all over the city including district, charter, parochial and independent schools. I get to listen to the concerns of families from all over the city and learn about the hopes for their children when it comes to growing up in Oakland. Bringing my experiences with people from all over Oakland, cultural competence and informed perspective about the residents of our city to the Commission will make my ability to serve on the commission stronger and more valued.

*5. Provide an example from when you faced a complex question or situation. What problem solving skills did you use to solve it?

**Response required*

In my current job, I support the line staff at various summer programs across the city. In doing this work I am essentially overseeing the management of teams of 25-30 people in their work with Oakland youth. Last summer I faced a situation where two adult staff members were in conflict about how to address some inappropriate student behavior in the classroom. Both staff members felt that their approach to address this student behavior was the correct way to do so, while at the same time they both felt it was appropriate to call out the other staff member in their "incorrect way" of handling the situation in front of their students. I happened to be on their campus that day, heard about it and knew that I needed to address the issue immediately. I pulled both staff members aside after class to have 1:1 check-ins with them. Though I agreed with one of the staff members' approaches to addressing the student misbehavior, I knew it was my job to help them solve this conflict as colleagues on equal footing and not place blame. I listened to both staff members recount what happened, paraphrased what I heard back to them, to validate their feelings and to make sure I understood their perspectives. After listening to and understanding what both of them wanted and needed to resolve the situation, the three of us got together, to make sure they could listen to and hear each other in an authentic and safe way. They eventually did and were able to come to terms with their different approaches to student misbehavior. The hardest yet most rewarding part of this experience was addressing their class and making it clear that disagreements are ok, but that how we deal with them and listen/ not listen to each other can lead to further conflict. My ability to actively listen, see multiple perspectives and help all parties involved see and believe in the ultimate goal is (supporting students to make better choices in class) what allowed us to solve the problem and move forward.

*6. Describe any professional, social, political, volunteer, community activities, and/or causes in which you have been involved or that you have financially supported. If you do not have any activities to report, type N/A in the space provided.

Within the last five years I have not made any financial contributions to local candidates nor did I participate in local political causes in significant ways. I have marched for, picketed with and supported the Oakland Teachers strike in 2019 as well as Bread For Ed, the ad hoc organization that facilitated getting food donations to community centers and picket lines to feed students who were out of school and teachers/ staff on the picket lines.

Additional Information (Optional)

If there is any additional information that was not asked in the Supplemental Questionnaire that you believe would help the Screening Panel in making their nominations, you may enter that information here. Your response here is optional.

*I understand that if selected as a Commissioner, I shall be ineligible, for a period of 10 years beginning from the date of appointment, to hold elective public office for the City of Oakland. Additionally, I shall be ineligible, for a period of four years beginning from the date of appointment, to hold appointive public office for the City of Oakland or Oakland Unified School Board, to serve as paid staff for or as a paid consultant to Oakland City Council, or any member of the City Council or Oakland School Board, to receive a non-competitively bid contract with the City of Oakland, or to register as a lobbyist. This four-year ban on having a paid consultancy or entering noncompetitively bid contracts applies to myself individually and all entities for which I am a controlling person. Please enter your initials below to confirm your understanding of these statements.

Initials:	BA
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*I affirm, by entering my name in the space provided, that the statements contained in this application are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Name:	Benjie Achtenberg
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