

Coastside Democrats Candidate Survey

An email address is required to ensure integrity. Please note this form in its entirety will be posted for Public Review.

Email *

lizetcorteshmb@gmail.com

Thank you for your interest in applying for the endorsement of the Coastside Democrats. Please complete this submission by **Friday, September 4, 2026**. All Club members will vote on candidate endorsements.



Cabrillo Unified School District (CUSD) Governing Board Member

The role of the CUSD school board is to provide leadership and oversight of the district. The Board ensures that the district is responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of the community. The school district has approximately 2,600 students attending one of the district's seven schools.

CUSD holds district-based elections for its five Board Members to staggered four-year terms. There are three districts that are up for election in 2026: Districts A (Daniels), C (Cortez), and E (Alexander).

1. Candidate Name *

Lizet Cortes-Ronquillo

2. As a Club under the California Democratic Party, we only endorse fellow Democrats. *
Please state how long you have been registered to vote as a Democrat:

- ☒ Always been a registered Democrat
- ☐ Have been a registered Democrat for the last ten years
- ☐ Have been a registered Democrat for the last five years
- ☐ Just registered as a Democrat this election cycle.

3. I certify the information provided on this application and in any subsequent interview or written submission is true and correct. *

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

Statement Questionnaire

4. Why are you running for this office? *

I am running for re-election because we have laid an important foundation for improving student outcomes, supporting and retaining great teachers and staff, and stabilizing our district's healthy finances—but that progress is not guaranteed. It will take continued leadership, focus, and investment to build on what we have accomplished, particularly in the current political environment where so much of that progress remains tenuous.

As the immigrant daughter of farmworkers, a juvenile justice career professional, a mom of a CUSD student, and a graduate of CUSD myself, I bring a deeply personal connection to our schools and a professional commitment to ensuring that young people have the opportunity and support to thrive. I am also the only Latino ever elected to the CUSD Board, in a district where more than half of our students are Latino. I believe it is my duty to continue directly representing students who, in many ways, remind me of who I was when I attended these schools, while also representing and advocating for the full scope of students in our community today and for generations to come.

I am running to continue that direct representation and to keep the best interests of ALL our students, teachers and staff, and our broader community at the center of our district's decisions. Most importantly, I want to continue pushing on the issue I care about most: making sure ALL students—including, but not only, our English Learners—are achieving their academic and social-emotional goals and receiving the support they need to do so.

A healthy and happy district matters. Strong finances matter. Great teachers and staff matter. But they are means to a greater end: thriving students. That is the goal that drives me, and it is why I am asking for the opportunity to continue serving our community.

5. What will be your top priorities if elected? *

My top priorities are three things:

Continuing to improve student achievement and close the opportunity gap, particularly for students with language or learning differences. Every student deserves the opportunity to meet their academic and social-emotional goals, and we need to continue focusing our resources and attention on the students who need the most support.

Supporting and retaining great teachers and staff through targeted supports, professional development, and compensation that allows them to thrive. Our educators and staff are the foundation of student success, and retaining excellent people is one of the most important investments we can make in our schools.

Keeping the district financially healthy and disciplined so we can sustain the programs and supports students rely on. We have worked hard to stabilize our finances, and we need to protect that progress while making thoughtful, strategic investments in our students and employees.

These priorities are tightly interconnected. We cannot improve student outcomes without supporting the educators and staff who serve our students, and we cannot sustain those investments without a financially healthy and disciplined district. My goal is to continue balancing all three so that our district can remain strong while keeping student success at the center of every decision.

6. Please explain how your background and experience have prepared you for this office. *

I bring both lived and professional experience to this important leadership role in our community. As the daughter of farmworker immigrants, a native Spanish speaker, and a renter who has experienced the Coastside's affordability squeeze firsthand, I understand the pressures that many CUSD families—and our employees—face.

Professionally, I have spent nearly 20 years working in San Mateo County's juvenile justice system. That work has taught me the importance of accountability, supportive relationships, and meeting young people where they are so they can succeed. It has also given me a deep understanding of the systems and circumstances that can either create opportunity for young people or stand in their way.

I have also served eight years as a CUSD Trustee, including as Board President. That experience has given me a deep understanding of district governance, budgeting, and operations, including human resources, special education, transportation, facilities, and instruction. I understand both the big-picture policy decisions and the day-to-day realities of running a school district.

My path to the Board began as a parent and community advocate. Before I was elected to my first term, I served as President of the District English Learner Advisory Committee. That experience continues to shape my approach to leadership: listening to families, understanding the experiences of students and educators, and making sure the voices of our community are reflected in the decisions we make.

Together, my lived experience, professional career, and eight years of direct governance experience have prepared me to continue serving CUSD with both empathy and practical expertise.

7. What do you see as the major issues on the Coastside? *

Housing affordability tops the list. The high cost of living affects Coastside families directly, but it also has a significant impact on our schools. CUSD needs to be able to recruit and retain great teachers and staff, and it is increasingly difficult for employees to afford to live in the communities where they work.

Student achievement and opportunity gaps are another major ongoing issue. We need consistently high achievement across all student groups, including our large English Learner population, while ensuring that students with different learning needs receive the support they need to succeed. Closing opportunity gaps must remain a central focus for our schools and our broader community.

The Coastside's infrastructure and resilience challenges affect how people live, work, and learn here. Reliable and resilient internet, electricity, and transportation are essential, particularly for our schools and working families. At the same time, the increasing impacts of climate change—including wildfire, extreme weather, and other disruptions—require us to think seriously about long-term resilience and preparedness.

These issues are interconnected. Housing affordability affects who can live and work here; infrastructure and climate resilience affect whether families and schools can function reliably; and all of these factors ultimately influence our ability to give every CUSD student the opportunity to thrive.

8. Is there anything in your background which, if you receive the Club's endorsement, could cause embarrassment to the club? If so, please provide the details. *

No

9. Who is supporting your campaign at this stage (e.g., endorsements, donors), and are there any potential conflicts of interest we should know about? *

I have no conflicts of interest that would affect my service in this role.

At this stage, I am fortunate to have deep and broad support from leaders across education, local government, and the Coastside. This support includes elected officials, current and former school board members, education leaders, and community leaders, including:

- San Mateo County Supervisors Ray Mueller and Noelia Corzo
- San Mateo County Democratic Party
- San Mateo County Board of Education Members Susan Alvaro and Mike O'Neill
- San Mateo County Schools Superintendent-Elect Hector Camacho
- San Mateo County Poet Laureate, College of San Mateo instructor, and former East Palo Alto Mayor Antonio Lopez
- Cabrillo Unified School District Board Members Carmen Daniel and MaryBeth Alexander
- Former Cabrillo Unified School District Board Member Sophia Layne
- Retired Cabrillo Unified School District Associate Superintendent Elizabeth Schuck
- Pacifica School District Board Member Bridget Hardt
- Jefferson Union High School District Board Members Andy Lie and LaSaundra Gutter
- Former Redwood City School District Board Member Alisa MacAvoy
- S.E. Owens & Company President Stacy Owens
- Coastside Allies Founder and former Midcoast Community Council Member Kevin Sniecinski
- Foster City Council Member Phoebe Venkat-Singh

This list is representative, not exhaustive. I am grateful for the support of people who bring a wide range of experience in education, public service, and community leadership, both on the Coastside and throughout San Mateo County.

Specific Questions

10. For which district are you running? *

- ☐ District A
- ☒ District C
- ☐ District E

11. California schools face chronic, critical inequities and other challenges in funding. *

Describe this challenge for CUSD and how you would work to address it.

California's school funding system creates significant challenges for long-term planning. Although CUSD is community-funded and in a stronger position than many districts, our financial health is still affected by state policy, property-tax revenues, enrollment, employee costs, and local revenue sources.

I would approach this conservatively and transparently, with student outcomes at the center. That means maintaining healthy reserves, carefully evaluating new spending, and directing resources toward the greatest student needs—including closing achievement and opportunity gaps and supporting English Learners.

I would also support responsible local revenue opportunities, including a parcel tax when appropriate, but only with meaningful community engagement, clear priorities, and transparency about how funds will be used and measured.

Our recently negotiated three-year teacher contract also provides greater predictability for one of the district's largest expenses and strengthens our ability to plan responsibly.

Ultimately, the goal is not simply to find more money—it is to be excellent stewards of the resources we have, pursue sustainable revenue when supported by the community, and ensure every dollar advances student success and educational equity.

12. School boards must often make decisions incorporating input and perspectives from a wide variety of stakeholders. How do you plan to engage with groups who don't typically participate in education-related meetings, including non-English-speaking families? *

Removing barriers to student and family participation is a priority for me. We need to meet families where they are—literally and figuratively.

Every family comes to our schools with different circumstances, languages, experiences, and comfort levels with public institutions. A school board meeting is only one way to engage, and we should not assume that those who attend represent the full community.

As a Board member, I would intentionally seek out voices we might otherwise miss by being present in schools and creating opportunities for conversation at neighborhood and community events, family nights, and other places where families already gather. We also need to ensure language is never a barrier to meaningful participation.

I especially want to expand student voice. Students experience our schools every day and often see barriers and opportunities that adults may overlook. Their experiences should inform the decisions that affect them.

Meaningful engagement is more than providing an opportunity to speak—it is making the effort to listen. I want every family and student to feel that the school district belongs to them and that their voice matters.

13. What is your approach to school safety, including your views on topics like campus security, immigration enforcement on campus, and emergency preparedness? *

I view school safety as both a fundamental responsibility of the district and a shared community responsibility. Students cannot learn unless they feel safe, and families need confidence that our schools are prepared to protect their children.

Safety should never be a compliance checkbox. CUSD's emergency and school safety plans should be living documents—developed with appropriate experts, regularly practiced and evaluated, and updated as laws and best practices evolve. Staff also need clear training on mandated reporting, professional boundaries, and how to respond when concerns are raised. We must foster a culture where students and adults feel empowered to speak up and know that concerns will be taken seriously.

Our schools should also remain safe and welcoming for every child, regardless of immigration status. CUSD should follow its adopted policies and applicable law, ensure employees understand their responsibilities, and clearly communicate those protections and procedures to families.

Safety extends beyond emergency preparedness to the physical environment: secure doors and locks, safe facilities and accessibility, reliable fire and emergency systems, appropriate HVAC and ventilation, and safe traffic and drop-off procedures. These should remain central considerations when prioritizing capital investments.

My goal is a culture of preparedness rather than fear—where our policies are clear, our people are trained, our facilities are safe, our students are heard, and everyone understands that protecting children is our shared responsibility.

14. What do you see as the key opportunities for improvement in our local public schools? *

What do you believe is going well?

I see significant opportunities for improvement in CUSD, while also recognizing how much is going well. My approach would be to build on the district's strengths while being honest about where gaps remain.

A key priority is continuing to close achievement and opportunity gaps so every student has the support they need to succeed. I would also like every school to have access to a counselor. Students face increasingly complex academic, social, and emotional challenges, and trusted adults on campus are essential to supporting the whole student.

I also believe CUSD should continue exploring workforce housing. The Coastside is an extraordinary place to live and work, but housing costs can make it difficult for teachers and staff to live in the communities they serve. Creative, financially responsible solutions could help us attract and retain excellent educators.

There is also much to be proud of, including investments in research-based English Language Development, teacher professional learning, and partnerships with organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs of the Coastside, ALAS, PTOs, and booster organizations that expand enrichment and support for students and families. Our recently negotiated three-year teacher contract also provides greater stability for thoughtful long-term planning.

Overall, CUSD has a strong foundation and tremendous community support. My goal is to listen, address the gaps, and build on what is working so every student has the opportunity to thrive.

15. What is the plan for the school district property in El Granada? What do you think the district should do with it? *

CUSD owns a surplus property in El Granada in addition to the El Granada Elementary School site. The parcel was recently evaluated as a potential location for educator workforce housing, but it was determined not to be well suited for that purpose.

At this point, I believe the district should be thoughtful rather than rush into a decision about the property. Our immediate priority should be completing the reconstruction of El Granada Elementary School and then addressing the significant needs of aging buildings and facilities at Half Moon Bay High School.

Once those priorities are further along, I would support a transparent process to determine the best long-term use of the surplus parcel. That process should consider the district's educational needs, financial position, community priorities, and the potential for the property to generate long-term value for CUSD.

I would also want the community to have a meaningful opportunity to weigh in before any major decision is made. The fact that a particular use is not feasible today does not mean we should stop looking creatively at what the property could contribute to our students, staff, and community in the future.

16. As a school board member, do you think it is important to visit district schools on a regular basis? Please explain why or why not. *

Absolutely. Regularly visiting our schools is one of the most important ways a Board member stays connected to the people and communities they serve. I have had the pleasure of regularly visiting all seven CUSD schools and connecting with students, teachers and staff, families, and administrators.

Those visits have included everyday interactions as well as special events, from FFA activities and the Cunha pickleball court ribbon-cutting to English Learner Reclassification ceremonies, promotions, and graduations. But school visits are about much more than attending events. Being present on campus allows me to see firsthand how students are learning, listen to educators and staff, and understand what is working and where challenges remain.

I do not believe Board members should make decisions solely from the boardroom, a budget document, or a staff report. Those are important, but they are only part of the picture. Good governance requires combining that information with what we hear directly from the students, families, educators, and staff who experience our schools every day.

I intend to continue being present across the district—listening, learning, celebrating successes, and understanding where we can do better.

Submit When Finished

Click Back to return to a previous question. Click Submit when you are done.

Feel free to contact demclubcoastside@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Final results will be posted on <https://coastsidedems.org>

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms