

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 *

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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 *

Mary Beth Alexander

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? *

A decade ago, I spent some time volunteering in my daughter's classroom at Hatch Elementary School. One day, I noticed all the kids were working away - except for one. He was struggling and couldn't figure out how to do the assignment. I tried to help him, but he spoke only Spanish, and I spoke only English.

After some trial and error, we figured out how to communicate with my phone. But it was rudimentary, and we kept laughing when we figured out our miscommunications. This was a Spanish Immersion classroom, so a teacher was there who could speak his language. But she was busy with other students and work. He needed so much support, and there wasn't enough time to give him the help he needed.

I still think about him and wonder how he is doing.

I worry that he is struggling.

This is how my interest in public education started. I believe public education is the backbone of our society, raising up the next generation. As I became more involved, I could see where students were getting left behind, and it was heartbreaking. Every student deserves a chance to be the best version of themselves, and that might take more time and energy for some students. This is what led me to run for the school board eight years ago.

During my two terms, there has been positive progress. We have expanded early childhood education, implemented research-backed curricula, stabilized fiscally, expanded environmental literacy and green initiatives, and focused on college and career readiness. We are also working to put better supports in place to help those students who are falling through the cracks.

Being a good Board member requires strong analytical skills, compassion, resilience, and perseverance in the face of challenges such as public health pandemics and chronic underfunding. It is sometimes difficult to decide where to prioritize spending, and we need a strong Board that can work in partnership with our Superintendent to make the hard choices, always keeping in mind that decisions must be made in the students' best interests.

As a data-driven biologist by training, a mom of two CUSD graduates, a 30-year Coastside resident, and a two-term board member, I have the training and experience to get the job done. We have an experienced Superintendent on board who can make impactful change where needed. I want to work alongside him, my Board colleagues, our teachers/staff, and our community to make a difference for our students and our community.

I would also like to continue my work at the County and State levels as a San Mateo County School Board Representative and a state Delegate for the California School Board Association to support the systemic changes we need at the County and State levels to better support our students and communities.

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

If elected, my top priorities will be as follows:

Improve Academic Outcomes for All Students

- This includes English Learners, low-income students, LGBTQ+, and students with special educational needs
- Provide them with the targeted supports they need to thrive, such as reading and math specialists and counselors
- Provide professional development training to teachers to increase effectiveness and implement new curriculum to the highest standards
- Expand CTE, Concurrent and Dual Enrollment for secondary students
- Extend UC/CSU standards to a broad array of classes

Attract and Retain Great Staff

- Attractive Salary and Benefits
- Excellent HR department
- Employee training and development
- Staff support infrastructure
- Modern facilities
- Strong technology foundation
- Workforce Housing

Use Bond Money Judiciously to Make a Generational Update to Schools

- College and Career Readiness, CTE Building
- Expedite the work as costs continue to increase
- Run multiple projects in parallel to increase cost savings-both time and staffing

Fiscal Health

- Continue to find cost savings (e.g., reduce reliance on consultants)
- Spend within our means
- Keep a typical reserve in case of unexpected reduced cash inflows or increased cash outlays
- Run efficiently and then add in targeted student and staff supports where needed

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

I love people. I love hearing from them and talking with them. I want to help children. I want to make a difference in the world, and I am driven to do so. I'm not afraid to be opinionated and express it. I can change my mind when I have new facts. I meet community members where they are - not just at Board meetings or onsite at our schools and events, important and insightful as these are.

People are comfortable and happy to talk about education at community events, such as the 555 Kelly fundraiser, a food bank, or the Coastside News happy hour I recently attended. Our community, our parents, and our staff want to know what is happening in our schools, how they can help, and offer opinions. And I want to hear them.

I also want to hear about non-educational things that may be getting in the way of a child's education. Kids may be worried about having enough food to eat, concerns about ICE raids, or violence at home. We need to hear these things and address them so that students are in a headspace to learn. We need to hear them.

I have a strong commitment to student equity, deeply grounded in human connection. Before joining the board, I provided free housing in my own home for multiple years to two Latina teachers in our district. Listening to their daily realities has completely reshaped my understanding of the systemic inequities facing our classrooms—a perspective that is continually reinforced through my collaboration with fellow Trustee Lizet Cortes and through my regular conversations with teachers, staff, and administrators.

My eight years on the Board have given me experience in student-focused policy, steering a large organization, and overseeing a Superintendent. This student focus, coupled with a collaborative spirit, is what makes the job a rewarding part of my life. I feel prepared to hit the ground running on day one to continue the work we are doing to make a difference in a child's life.

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

Affordability is our #1 issue, as it is in California and beyond. This is driven primarily by skyrocketing housing costs and inflation in many basic goods, from groceries to gasoline, which is once again rising. Providing fair wages is a challenge for small businesses already strapped by these costs, yet it is essential for our frontline workers – including farmworkers, service workers, and even many school employees – and their families to thrive.

On the Coastside, we are also challenged by limited access to medical care (particularly mental health, urgent and emergency care), unreliable internet and electricity, limited transit, and roads naturally constrained by our topography. Inequitable school funding formulas are a major challenge for public education.

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? *

No conflicts of interest. Here is my list so far; more to come!

Elected Officials

Ray Mueller	San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, Vice President
Hector Camacho	Superintendent, San Mateo County Office of Education
Lizet Cortes	Cabrillo Unified School District Board President
Patricia Murray	South San Francisco Unified School District Board President
	California School Board Association Region 5 Director
Teri Chavez	San Mateo Union High School Board President
	California School Board Association Delegate
Ligia Andrade Zuniga	San Mateo Union High School District Board Trustee
	Executive Director, Center for Independence for Individuals with Disabilities
Greg Land	San Mateo Union High School District Board Clerk
	California School Board Association Delegate
Carmen Daniel	Cabrillo Unified School District Board Trustee
Susan Alvaro	San Mateo County Board of Education Trustee
Mike O'Neill	San Mateo County Board of Education Trustee
Patricia Love	San Mateo County Board of Education Trustee
Beverly Gerard.	San Mateo County Board of Education Vice President
Amy Koo	Sequoia Union High School District Board President
Alida Fisher	San Francisco Unified Board of Education Trustee
Bridget Hardt	Pacifica School District Board Vice President
Andy Lie	Jefferson Union High School District Board Trustee
	California School Board Association Delegate
Amanda Anthony	South San Francisco Unified School District Board Trustee
Alisa MacAvoy	Former Redwood City School District Board President and
	California School Board Association Region 5 Director

Community Leaders

Lenny Mendonca	Former Chief Economic and Business Advisor for the Governor of CA
	Owner, Half Moon Bay Brewing Company
Jamie Hayes	Executive Director of an Early College High School
Tina L. Seelig, PhD	Executive Director, Knight-Hennessy Scholars
	Faculty Director Emeritus, Stanford Technology Ventures Program
Stacy Owens	President, S.E. Owens & Company
Patrick Ryan	Past and Present Board of Directors for several local nonprofits

If the formatting is weird with this I am happy to email you a copy!

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.

One of the challenges for CUSD is that we are in a high-cost-of-living area relative to school funding levels, which often vary threefold among neighboring districts (e.g., \$15K/student at CUSD and \$40K/student at Woodside SD). Part of the solution to this is to make funding more equitable, which will take action at the state level to fix the funding formula.

As a California School Board Associations Delegate, this is one of my focus areas. There are a few different approaches to addressing this from experts in the field. I support the initiative to enable these trained individuals to implement changes that will level the playing field.

There are other ideas, such as seeing whether the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF) can return funds to districts. This is being looked at by the San Mateo County Board of Education. State Senator Dave Cortese is also encouraging the creation of a State endowment fund to help. I am supporting these efforts in my roles on my County and State School Board Associations.

I also traveled to Washington, D.C., this year with the California School Boards Association to meet with our Congressional Rep. Sam Liccardo to discuss priorities and issues. I was able to speak with Rep. Liccardo about our Agriculture Career Technical Education (CTE) program at HMBHS, the importance of CTE, and the need to fund it. We also talked about how our CTE classes are able to bring students together from different backgrounds, and how important this is. He was very supportive, as are many other Congressional Representatives, and I hope to continue receiving funding at the same level or higher.

But in the meantime, for our district, it means using our funds effectively. Most of a school district's funds go to staffing, so we need to be efficient with staffing and carefully add supports where needed.

We can also explore adding workforce housing to our staff compensation packages – similar to health care benefits, it may not be individually necessary for all staff, though by offering it to those who do (e.g., early career educators and lower-wage support staff), it can help ensure full staffing at all times (e.g., results at Jefferson Union High School District) as well as a holistically healthier whole. Exploring alternative compensation models to increase both teacher compensation AND student outcomes, such as the one successfully employed at Ravenswood SD, can lead to further win-wins.

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? *

One of my concerns as a Board member is ensuring that staff represent those groups and are prioritizing engaging with these stakeholders. Right now our staffing does not mirror our student population, so our HR department is working to change that. They are reaching out to support local talent and contacting teaching programs to attract top teachers who want to live in our community.

For stakeholder engagement, we had a Vice Principal who worked diligently to reach out to these families and bring them to meetings. He was the most successful that we have seen, so staff is holding that up as an example and encouraging other staff to follow suit.

I try to listen to all the different voices that aren't always heard, including those who typically do not participate in education-related meetings for a variety of reasons, such as discomfort or fear of speaking in public, being recorded and made publicly available on YouTube, child care responsibilities, work schedules, and more. These factors most acutely affect families of English Learners, low-income students, students with special educational needs, and LGBTQ+ students, among others who are historically underserved.

It is essential that we not take for granted that the voices heard in Board meetings represent all our students, families, and others – we must also make it a priority to meet them where they are, literally and figuratively. Whether at a community occurrence like food distribution, or in day-to-day life (e.g., bumping into people at Safeway, at a coffee shop, or on the Coastal Trail), these conversations have been essential in informing my work on the Board in representing not only my personal perspective or that of folks in my demographic, but a much broader and equally important slice of the Coastside.

I also support fellow board member Lizet Cortes, the first and only Latino Trustee ever elected to the Cabrillo USD Board, as her leadership and example are essential for creating a sense of belonging for this (majority) population in our schools. She consistently provides her Trustee comments in Spanish and English and, more generally, works to ensure Spanish-speaking families feel welcome at our schools and meetings.

As an ally to many historically underserved groups, I do everything I can to listen and support. I talk with friends and community members from different backgrounds to understand their concerns, and I am always on the lookout for someone from our community who can offer a different perspective and encourage them to pursue leadership roles, including running for the Board. I believe that many different voices can make us stronger.

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

Safety is our number one concern; therefore, we need strong policies and procedures in place that all employees must follow for security and emergency purposes. These policies are written by experts in the field, reviewed and approved by our Board and district/school administrators, and should change over time as new laws, procedures, and data become available.

We partner with the San Mateo County Office of Education, through the Coalition of Safe Schools and Communities, to adopt its Big 5 Immediate Action Responses. These resources are woven into our policies and procedures, and are updated every single year.

We also have Immigration Resources that appear when you visit the CUSD homepage. The pop-up link goes to our Immigrant Support Plan, CUSD Board Policy, and Administrative Regulation, which shows our Response to Immigrant Enforcement.

All of our employees are mandated reporters and receive training upon hiring. Every year, there is also mandated refresher training.

Our facilities have many safety improvements. From safety locks on classroom doors to HVAC filters for transmittable diseases, there have been many upgrades. With ADA ramps and elevators, fire safety protocols and procedures, and driving and pedestrian safeguards, much has been done. But there is always more to do as things change. We need to be diligent and flexible to keep up.

While these policies and procedures are integral to an encompassing safety plan, it must also be ingrained in our values and day-to-day actions. We can't just rely on a rote process to keep our schools safe. We must live those values every day and see them in our actions. Safety is our #1 concern!

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

What do you believe is going well?

For key opportunities, I want to improve educational outcomes for all students, attract and retain great staff, use our bond funds judiciously to make generational updates to our schools, and continue refining our fiscal health. This is detailed in the earlier question regarding my priorities.

Here is what I think is going well:

Expanded Early Childhood Education

- Number of preschool kids greatly increased
- New campus for preschool kids
- TK implemented across all campuses
- Increased capacity for after-school programs
- New curriculum in place

Environmental Literacy and Campus Green Initiatives

- One of ten districts in the nation to win the Green Ribbon Award in Washington, D.C.
- Environmental literacy embedded across all grades
- Solar added in multiple locations
- Student green initiatives implemented

Budget Stabilization

- Curbed deficit spending
- Signed a three-year contract with our unions
- 38% raises given over my tenure (compounded)
- 5% in raises already negotiated and budgeted for 2027-2028
- Expensive contracted positions brought in-house, more to come

College and Career Readiness

- Expanded career technical education opportunities
 - Increased partnership and participation in community college classes
 - Policy changes to support dual and concurrent enrollment at the community college
-

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

We do not have any plans for the El Granada property at this time. We are busy with school rebuilding and remodeling, which will take years to complete. We looked at the El Granada property while planning for workforce housing. We decided that this was not the best place to do it, so it is off our radar.

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. *

Yes, I think it is very important to visit schools regularly. In addition to showing interest, care, and support, it is essential to learn more about the actual goings-on across our nine campuses, both in an informational sense and in terms of the 'vibe'.

That said, I am a strong advocate of – and obliged by Board policies to – empowering district/school staff, including teachers, to make decisions about their work as appropriate for their jobs. When this is done in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including students, families, community partners, and one another, we can achieve our goals with the greatest levels of both efficiency and success.

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>

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