

**Napa County Latinx Democratic Club
Candidate Questionnaire
NVUSD & NVC Board of Trustees
DEADLINE FOR RETURN: September 11, 2020**

Candidates Name: Eve Ryser **Area/District:** Area 4

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Candidate Specific Questions

1. What qualifications do you have for the office you're running for and why do you deserve the Napa County Latinx Democratic Club's endorsement?

I believe I'm highly qualified to serve on the NVUSD Board of Trustees because I have a deep understanding of how schools work. I taught elementary school for fifteen years, most recently for ten years at a culturally and linguistically diverse public school in South Vallejo, where I worked first as a second and third grade teacher, and later as a reading intervention teacher and English Language Development specialist. After leaving the classroom, I spent five years as a research specialist and curriculum developer, at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education. During multiple, successive, grant-funded projects, I focused on the particular needs of English learners and the synergetic power of teaching literacy and science together. Also, I'm a parent of two children who have attended NVUSD schools since Kindergarten, and are now both students at Napa High School, so I would come to the board as an actively involved parent stakeholder as well. I have served for three years on the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Committee, and joined the Napa High School Site Council when it was brought back last year. I believe this broad array of experiences gives me an excellent understanding of our school communities, how they function, and how decisions made by the board will impact the various stakeholders. I hope that the Napa County Latinx Democratic Club will share my priorities, and find that the depth of my experience and passion for education will motivate your members to endorse me in this race.

2. What are your top three priorities, and how will you ensure that you accomplish those?

My top priorities center around ensuring the health and safety of students and staff in our schools.

1) Any return to in-person learning must be guided by scientific data and appropriate public health guidelines. As a board member, I would only vote to approve a return to school campuses if the chance for community spread of COVID were effectively minimized and teachers felt that their working conditions were safe. If my children's teachers don't feel safe to return, then I don't feel safe sending my children back. I can't definitively ensure this, but would carefully analyze the safety of implementing a return to "brick and mortar" schools and only add my vote to support a plan that can be implemented safely. This includes adequately circulated and filtered air in the classrooms, appropriate PPE, robust cleaning of all shared spaces and high touch surfaces at frequent intervals, and well considered plans for ensuring social distancing even during high traffic times between classes.

2) I will focus my energy, efforts and support on cultivating anti-racist school cultures that consciously embrace and support diversity so that schools are safe places for students no matter how they identify. As an elementary school teacher, I utilized many effective "community building" curriculum that emphasized positive communication and respecting others, but it is abundantly clear to me that teaching kids to treat each other the way they want to be treated" is not an adequate approach to address systemic racism and discrimination. I have already been meeting with current NVUSD high school students to hear about their experiences of discrimination and microaggressions, with the goal to amplify these student voices to push for a shift in approach. I believe we must begin to have the "uncomfortable conversations" that lead to growth and understanding. I know that these conversations can be facilitated appropriately across all grade levels, because it can't wait until high school. I also fully support the adoption of an ethnic studies course requirement at the high school level, and think that NVUSD shouldn't wait for the passage of AB 331 to initiate this requirement. (In my opinion, structuring the course around social justice history would have the added benefit of making sure the struggles of all disadvantaged groups would be highlighted, and students would be learning about civic engagement and activism as well as history.) Again, with only one vote on the Board, if I were a trustee I couldn't ensure that I would be able to implement these changes, but I would put my influence and support behind them.

3) My third priority is to shift budget resources away from the "Student Resource Officer" model of "security" we currently employ. I believe the presence of these officers can lead to alienation and escalation of conflicts; sadly, there is ample data that this model negatively affects students of color at higher rates than their white peers. The phrase "school to prison pipeline" was not coined in a vacuum. History has also shown us that an armed security officer does not ensure student safety in the event of an active shooter. Instead, these budget resources should be shifted to increasing mental health and other student support services. I believe this is the more effective way to keep our students safe, and I will advocate for and support these funding shifts in any vote that comes before the board.

Issues

3. How will you tackle the next upcoming natural and public health disaster and how will this plan actively engage the Latinx Community? What is your plan to ensure that disaster planning is culturally competent and provides language access to all parents, students, community members, and employees?

Science and educated expert input will always guide my decision-making in participating in decision making in response to a natural or public health disaster. I believe it's critical to communicate with complete transparency to all stakeholders, and to be readily available to answer any and all questions and concerns to the fullest extent possible. I will always ensure translation services were integrated into all forums and communications from the District. I would consult a diverse array of community members to ensure that the planned responses from the school district were respectful and culturally responsive.

4. What is your stance on Black Lives Matter? How do you link this movement to the needs of the Latinx community and your constituents?

I am an active and vocal supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement, and have participated in most of the local demonstrations this Spring and Summer with my daughters. I believe that we must work hard as a community to become consciously anti-racist, and that the struggles against racism cut across both the Black and Latinx communities. We have a much smaller cohort of Black students within NVUSD (I've recently learned more about why that's the case, as I've read about the egregious history of redlining in Napa, preventing Black families from renting or purchasing homes in Napa well into the seventies and eighties) but the Latinx students are certainly facing systemic racism, discrimination and damaging microaggressions within our schools. One of my main priorities if given a chance to serve on the NVUSD Board will be working on cultivating an actively anti-racist culture in our schools, which I think is long overdue and an important part of the Black Lives Matter movement's goals. I think that the Latinx community suffers from the same kind of toxic racism that our Black community members experience, and need and deserve the same vocal support for that racism to end. I have been heartened and encouraged to join a large and vocal Latinx presence at our local Black Lives Matter gatherings. Our young activist leaders at the People's Collective for Change have put this coalition at the forefront, along with support for LGBTQ equality. More and more people are understanding that inequality for any marginalized group does harm to all members of our community.

5. What is your stance on re-appropriating police funding? What does this mean to you in your role and what policies will you pursue to address this call to action? How do you implement restorative justice policies?

As it relates to schools, I support the shifting of funding away from the policing model of employing Student Resource Officers at schools. As an educator, I want our schools to be cultivating a supportive and emotionally safe partnership between schools and students. I don't really think the authoritative, unequal power dynamic

that I associate with an SRO "police" approach is necessarily emotionally safe or even productive. I agree with the point made often in discussions about defunding the police, that the presence of "an officer" often serves to escalate tensions and deepen alienation, therefore often operating contrary to our goals. I don't have the sense that troubled students seek out SROs for support and guidance. But this should not be considered an elimination of services, but rather a re-allocation of funding to a different array of support services focused on student health, safety and well-being.

Based on some recent conversations I've had with high school students, it doesn't seem that the current approach is serving them well. I asked my two daughters what they thought about the SROs at their schools, and they both said they didn't even really know what they did on campus other than walk around. My younger daughter attended River School when a legitimate shooting plot was uncovered. I asked her if she felt safe at school, and she said, "Mom, in this age of school shootings, feeling safe isn't a THING for us." Needless to say that's a tough thing to hear from any child, never mind your own, but it's the truth. I'm active in the group Moms Demand Action here in Napa (a national grassroots network of volunteers dedicated to ending gun violence) and I am convinced we are not going to "arm our way" to safe schools by hiring more security guards or allowing our teachers to carry weapons.. Our path to safety is to enhance student support services and mental health intervention resources. I've also recently learned that high schools use "no contact contracts" which bar students from interacting with each other if they have reported a serious conflict. This seems utterly bizarre and counterproductive to me. It prevents students from reporting problems (because students feel the "solution" is worse than the "problem"), prevents students from working to resolve their difficulties to reach a healthy understanding. Therefore, I would also support the implementation of a program like Restorative Justice, which is a much more grounded and constructive approach to addressing conflict. (In order to successfully implement a program like Restorative Justice, though, it's important to designate a staff member to facilitate the program in order for it to work. Teachers have so much on their plates as it is, and I don't believe the implementation will be effective if we just throw it onto teachers' plates with no support. All of these steps will be more constructive and positive than using a policing approach to discipline and safety.

6. Governor Newsome just signed ethnic studies to be part of the CSU curriculum. What would be your approach to ensure that an ethnic study is part of the core curriculum in your jurisdiction?

I believe we should have an ethnic studies course as a high school graduation requirement. In my view, I think that course could be framed by a study of social justice history- because studying the movements of oppressed groups fighting for equal rights is a critical lens through which to view our history and our differences, and emphasizes the role of civic engagement and activism in pushing for progress.

NVUSD passed a Diversity Policy in 2019. The language in this existing policy includes support for ethnic studies and diversity in curricular representation. They also state a desire to lead the way on issues; I think this positions the District and the Board to make this change, and I would use my influence as a board member to advocate for this change.

7. Families of all ranges, including educators, continue leaving our community because it is too expensive for them to live here. Many families are doing long commutes in order to work here, therefore increasing their carbon footprint, missing on important family time, and much more. Additionally, because families are leaving our community, we continue to see a reduction in enrollment, and a couple of schools have been forced to close.

What is your commitment, plan, and role to help improve the quality of life for students, families, and educators? And will those efforts help families that live here to remain here?

Declining enrollment in our schools seems to be primarily due to the high cost of living here. This has really put our district, and many others in the area, in a tenuous financial position. As it relates to the decisions that might come before the school board, I would support regular cost of living increases and incremental pay scale raises for our teachers and support staff, so that we can retain the best teachers in this competitive market. I would support the continued implementation of programs like ACE, which provide affordable after school care for students before and after the regular school day while their parents are working. I would support the continued implementation of food services, even during distance learning, to address the food insecurity that so many families who struggle financially are facing.

8. What hiring processes will you use to pursue and increase the diversity of your staff?

Sadly, I'm not sure how much hiring NVUSD will be doing in the coming year, since the declining enrollment leads directly to teacher layoffs. However, I believe representation is critical, and having a diverse array of perspectives makes any organization stronger, so I would emphasize hiring candidates from diverse backgrounds for positions which might become available. As a board member, I would support an HR requirement that candidates from underrepresented groups be part of every pool of applicants whenever there is an available position.

9. Although schools are closed, and students and families are doing online schooling, there is still a great and dire need for food access and wrap-around services provided by school services (like school lunch, after school, etc.), what would you do to ensure that these services are still accessible?

I think that NVUSD has done wonderful work in this area, and I would adamantly support the continuation of these efforts. Our school district, like so many across the country, has recognized the prevalence of food insecurity in our community, and has done a great job distributing meals during these months of distance learning, and even over the summer when school wasn't in session. I understand that the federal government has just funded this extended free food distribution through December. I'm so grateful that these services have been ongoing, and would always use my influence on the board to advocate for these kinds of crucial supports. I also commend the district and support the way it has partnered with several community groups like the Boys and Girls Club to help families with child care needs during this extended period of learning from home.

10. What is at least one specific thing you can do as an elected official to address the needs of LGBTQIA+ Students, Faculty, and Families?

This issue is, in my mind, intrinsically linked to my priority of cultivating an anti-racist school culture. I attended one of the online community forums presented by Women's March Napa Valley and the Rainbow Action Network, and posed this question to the panelists: What can be done to support LGBTQIA+ students, and students with LGBTQIA+ families, in our schools? Here are some of the suggestions that came out of the panelists responses, all of which I think are fantastic ideas: when teachers introduce themselves, they can specify which pronouns they prefer, and then ask all the students to do the same, to normalize this process; encourage teachers to just use a student's first name if they're unsure about preferred pronouns; stop the age old practice of dividing students by gender as the default (i.e. "all the boys line up on this side"); give teachers support/training and ask them to identify proactively as allies to LGBTQIA+ students, perhaps by wearing a pin or displaying a Pride flag in their classrooms; ensure that schools have books and curricular materials that represent LGBTQIA+ lives and stories, and provide "Rainbow Kits" to classrooms containing a starter library and other resources; ensure that there is fair representation of LGBTQIA+ people in models/examples of families, and in sex education/health curricula; encourage all middle and high school campuses to have a Gay Straight Alliance or other LGBTQIA+ student group that is positive and supportive, because studies show that LGBTQIA+ suicide rates are much higher than their straight counterparts, and that the presence of a supportive student club can have a significant impact on reducing that rate.

11. Would you consider making the jurisdiction you're running for a Sanctuary Jurisdiction? Yes ___ No

12. A large percentage of our students are considered "At Promise" youth. What will you do in your administration to actively close the achievement gap among our youth?
- At the college level, what are you doing to ensure that students apply and enroll in 4-year universities/continuation of their higher education?

The District's current Diversity policy lays out many requirements for monitoring and addressing the achievement gap, including disaggregating testing data ethnic group to track the gap and track progress towards closing it. I support this approach, because it will shine a light on the gaps where they exist so school teams can work hard to mitigate them. I support the continuation and expansion of academic support services like AVID classes which focus on developing college readiness. I understand, from my fifteen years as a teacher, the additional cognitive load that English learners carry while learning, and the way that can block their access to the core content. . I will work to be sure that all teachers are highly qualified to provide the modifications to instruction and support necessary to address this cognitive load. I support the new initiative to fund PSAT and SAT testing fees at the District level, both because it removes a potential financial obstacle for students to apply to college, and because it normalizes for ALL students the process of preparing to apply to college. Though colleges are currently re-evaluating their use of standardized test scores in their application process, this is an example of the kind of intervention I will pursue to support "At Promise" youth in fulfilling their true potential. I would also support using district resources to help these students take trips to visit college campuses, and help provide financial support for the application fees.

Additional Comments:

I think it's really important for voters to have a choice in their representation. While I absolutely recognize that diversity of representation on the Board is critical, I also know that I am committed to being an active ally to the Latinx community, and will continue to work hard, as I have for twenty years as an educator, to advocate for the needs of our Latinx students and families. I'd be honored to have your support.