

Area 6 Trustee

Elba Gonzalez-Mares, Incumbent

1. Why are you running for Trustee and what are your biggest priorities.

I am running for re-election because I believe deeply in public education and in the role NVUSD plays in creating opportunity for children and families. Napa has been my home for more than 30 years, I am an NVUSD graduate, and I have had the honor of serving as a Trustee since 2016. Today, I also have an even more personal connection to the district as the parent of a future NVUSD student.

I believe we are on the right path and have made meaningful progress, particularly in strengthening our financial stability, adopting a long-term Strategic Plan, and investing in our schools through Measure B. My priorities for the next four years are to protect that progress while continuing the work that remains: maintaining financial stability as we address declining enrollment, ensuring Measure B investments are delivered responsibly, and keeping student achievement, well-being, and college and career readiness at the center of our decisions.

I also believe strong governance matters. The Board needs to work collaboratively with educators, families and our community, make difficult decisions when necessary, and remain focused on what is best for students.

2. What do you believe are the biggest challenges facing public education, particularly NVUSD, in the next four years? What specific actions or programs would you advocate?

For NVUSD, I believe the biggest long-term challenge is declining enrollment and the financial and operational decisions that come with it. Fewer students affect funding, staffing, facilities and how we plan for the

future. We need to be thoughtful while protecting the programs and opportunities that students and families value. That requires using enrollment and financial data to make long-term decisions rather than reacting to year-to-year changes.

At the same time, we need to stay focused on student outcomes. I would continue supporting the implementation of our Strategic Plan, with clear measures for academic achievement, student belonging, and college and career readiness for all students. I also want to see us continue expanding career-connected learning, CTE, internships and partnerships with community colleges, universities and local employers.

Finally, we need to maintain the progress we have made on financial stability and facilities. Measure B is addressing significant deferred maintenance and modernization needs, but we also need a long-term facilities maintenance plan so that the investments we are making today remain sustainable. The goal is to make sure that financial stability translates into strong schools and better opportunities for every student.

3. How do you see the use of school vouchers and the development of charter schools affecting NVUSD? What actions should NVUSD take to ensure its schools meet any unmet needs that vouchers and charter schools may provide?

I think it is important to differentiate between school vouchers and charter schools. California's public education system already includes charter schools, while the conversation around vouchers is part of a broader national debate about how public education is funded and delivered. I do not believe vouchers are the solution to the challenges facing public education. California currently does not have a state program providing public funding for private school tuition.

When it comes to charter schools, my responsibility as a trustee is to make sure NVUSD follows the law and the required process when considering a

charter petition. California Education Code establishes the process for local school districts to review and act on charter petitions, and I have a track record of taking that responsibility seriously. We need to evaluate each proposal based on the requirements of the law, the educational plan being proposed, and the information available to the Board.

Regardless of the type of educational option families consider, I believe the overarching responsibility of NVUSD is to listen to families and understand what they are looking for—whether that is specialized programs, career education, different learning environments, smaller class settings, or other supports—and make sure our schools are responding to those needs. At the same time, we have to be responsible stewards of public resources and let the data inform our decisions.

I believe NVUSD has demonstrated meaningful progress, and we need to build on that work. Our responsibility is to provide high-quality public schools that families choose because they offer strong academics, safe and welcoming environments, meaningful college and career pathways, and opportunities for students with different interests and learning needs. That means continuing to evaluate our programs, engage families, and invest in areas where we see unmet needs. Our Strategic Plan provides the framework for that continuous improvement.

4. If elected, how will you ensure that students have access to libraries and curricula that are diverse, bias-free, and historically accurate? How will you respond to challenges to books and or curriculum?

I believe students should have access to libraries and curricula that reflect the diversity of our community, provide accurate historical context, and expose students to a broad range of ideas and perspectives. We should also ensure that materials are age-appropriate and aligned with California standards and NVUSD's instructional goals.

When a parent or community member challenges a book or curriculum, I believe the district should have a clear and transparent process for reviewing that concern. We should listen respectfully, rely on established educational and professional standards, and make decisions based on the educational value and appropriateness of the material.

As a Board member, and through my experience serving on the Policy Committee for multiple years, I believe my role is to make sure our policies are clear, can be implemented consistently, and provide clarity for both educators and families. We can respect that families may have different perspectives while also ensuring that one individual concern does not automatically determine what every student is allowed to learn or read.

Our goal should be to provide students with a strong, accurate and well-rounded education that prepares them to understand their community, their history and the world around them.

5. What measures will you advocate to address the issues of equity, harassment, bullying, and sexual assault on campus, ensuring the safety and well-being of all students regardless of their ability, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual identity?

Every student deserves to feel safe, respected and supported at school, regardless of their ability, race or ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or background. NVUSD already has policies and reporting processes addressing discrimination, harassment, bullying and sexual harassment. The responsibility of the Board is to make sure those policies are understood, consistently implemented and taken seriously.

I also believe this work goes beyond having policies in place. Our Strategic Plan gives us an opportunity to be intentional about the kind of school community we want to create. More than 70,000 unique entries of our NVUSD community—including students, parents and caregivers, staff,

community partners and community members—provided the input into the development of the plan. That input helped shape our vision for what we want our graduates to know, be and be able to do, as well as what we need from the adults in our system and from the system itself to help students get there.

Our Graduate Portrait, Adult Portrait and System Portrait, along with our Core Values, help define those expectations. They give us a framework for asking not only whether we have the right policies, but whether we are creating the conditions for students to feel a sense of belonging, develop strong relationships with trusted adults, and have opportunities to participate and contribute to their school community.

I would continue to use our Strategic Plan dashboard and district data to identify patterns and disparities and ask whether our policies, programs and interventions are actually improving student safety, belonging and well-being. At every Board meeting, we have an opportunity to look at the strategies being implemented and the progress being made.

Prevention is just as important as response. That means building strong relationships between students and trusted adults, teaching students how to recognize and report harmful behavior, providing appropriate mental health and counseling supports, and making sure students know where they can go for help. This is one of the reasons I supported NVUSD investing in student wellness centers across our middle and high school campuses. These centers provide another place for students to access support and connect with trusted adults when they need it.

As a trustee, I would approach this work with both accountability and compassion: protect students, listen to families, support staff, and make sure our policies are working in practice—not simply existing on paper.