PVFT Candidate Questionnaire-Dr. Misty Navarro

PVUSD Board of Trustees, Area 7

Candidate Background

1. Please attach a copy of your resume.

(See attached)

2. Have you previously held any public or elected/appointed offices? If so please list them with the title and time served.

Yes, I currently serve as the appointed Trustee for PVUSD, Area 7 (2024–present).

3. PVFT represents teachers, librarians, psychologists, counselors, SELPA, and other certificated non-management education workers. What is your experience working with these groups?

I have met with and interacted with all of these groups, both collectively and individually. I have consistently made myself available to anyone who wishes to meet with me to discuss their concerns. I have met with mental health clinicians, social-emotional counselors, teachers, principals, students, parents, trades unions, and interested community members to listen to their thoughts and concerns.

4. Have you ever been a union member? If yes, please name the union. Are you or have you ever been an officer in a union?

No.

5. Please list if you are involved in any community groups and what roles you have played.

Trustee, PVUSD School Board (2024–present)

Volunteer, Monterey County Disaster Response (2009–present)

Aptos High Boosters Club and Site Council (2023–present)

Salinas Valley Health Foundation, Board of Governors (2016–2024)

Salinas Valley Health Summer Health Institute: volunteer mentor for high school students aspiring to careers in health care (2013–2025)

Volunteer Clinical Faculty, CSUMB Physician Assistant training program

AZ-1 Disaster Medical Assistance Team: physician team member (2006–2024)

Arizona Search and Rescue (2005–2008)

Big Brothers Big Sisters

Volunteer, Second Harvest Food Bank

I have also served as a parent volunteer for numerous youth sports teams, spoken at high school career days and to pre-med student groups about careers in medicine, and sponsored families every holiday since 2006.

Why Are You Running?

1. Why do you want to serve as a trustee for the Pajaro Valley School Board?

I have seen firsthand the power of public education as an equalizer. My mother was a teenager who struggled to finish high school and then struggled to raise and support two children on her own, with little to no support, after divorcing my stepfather when I was seven. Despite her own academic

struggles, she always emphasized education, hard work, a strong work ethic, being fully invested in what you do, and being honest to a fault. I may not always say what folks want to hear, and I may not always say it in the right way, but what you will get from me is straight, honest talk, all of the time and every day.

I joined this board because I look at our schools and know we can do better. Too many of our students are not performing at grade level in reading, writing, and math. That is multifactorial and certainly affected by COVID, but many districts have already recovered and PVUSD has not. That is a systems failure, curriculum, intervention, and support structures, not a reflection of the effort our teachers are putting in every day.

I witnessed firsthand, with my own children, psychologically unsafe environments where students were bullied and tormented for being perceived as different. I have cared for numerous pediatric patients who suffered mental health crises because of bullying, online and in person, challenging life circumstances, family dynamics, or simply not being accepted for who they are. I see schools in disrepair, with roughly one billion dollars in deferred maintenance. And I see teachers who are exhausted, stressed, and burned out from not being supported and not being adequately compensated for the hard work they do.

That is why I supported the stipend for LETRS training, as a way to compensate our teachers for taking on difficult additional work and training. Several of my friends in education have told me that paying teachers for that kind of training is almost unheard of in most districts. Most of my closest friends are educators, and I lean on them for perspective, frank advice, and the ability to help me see this work from the outside, grounded in research, facts, and experience.

I deeply respect teachers and appreciate the hard work they do. If I controlled state and federal budgets, I would prioritize education as one of our most important investments. I said I would not allow our teachers to take a pay cut while I am on this board, and I meant it. I want our teachers not only to earn a living wage, but to have benefits that make them feel secure and protected.

While I am not directly involved in negotiations, I have encouraged both sides to listen, to acknowledge the fear surrounding this process, to be frank and direct, and to negotiate in good faith, understanding that concessions will have to be made on both sides. This is not 2017, when we had a $16 million surplus. We are deficit spending, and until the structural deficit is addressed this district is not safe from fiscal insolvency, regardless of what is in the bank right now. While our total compensation is roughly average compared with other districts, our salaries are woefully low. I would like to see our teachers earning higher salaries, which benefits them long term through their pensions and allows them to live more comfortably in the community they serve.

I recognize that change is difficult and that trust is not at an all-time high. What I can point to is that I have been consistently honest and transparent about my thinking, my beliefs, and how I read the facts.

I also want to improve working conditions for teachers. I have advocated for a standardized, districtwide disciplinary policy so that teachers have meaningful consequences available short of the maximum. I believe in getting back to basics, detention, a conversation with a counselor or administrator, Saturday school, additional work. We do a disservice to our students when the only options are no consequence or the most severe one. Graduated, predictable consequences teach accountability while keeping students connected to school, and they give teachers realistic tools short of removal. I want students, families, teachers, and staff treating one another with respect, dignity, and open-mindedness.

Finally, I want teachers to be able to focus on teaching. Work assigned to teachers should be work that genuinely requires a teacher, not administrative tasks that belong elsewhere in the system. I believe these burdens contribute significantly to burnout and job dissatisfaction, and addressing them is a low-cost way to relieve real pressure on our educators. Doing that well requires a strong, efficient district office team that can carry those responsibilities.

I would not be where I am today were it not for public education, and I am grateful every day for the teachers, academic counselors, librarians, and administrators who supported and encouraged me to reach my full potential.

2. What qualifications and strengths will you bring to the School Board?

I bring a life of service and a long track record of advocating for people who cannot or will not advocate for themselves. Rather than repeat what I have said above, I will say simply that my work history, community involvement, and life experience are what brought me to this board. I do this work not as a stepping stone to something else, but because I know what public education can do for someone who did not have the easiest circumstances and was still able to achieve her dreams and return to give back to her community.

3. What are some things you think the district does well?

Bringing in research-based professional development focused on student achievement

Paying teachers to participate in and train in research-based literacy and phonics-based reading intervention

Managing a complex district of 34 schools, roughly 15,000 students, and more than 4,000 employees during a period of economic uncertainty, while working to maintain strong academics and student supports

Engaging the community in major decisions, including budget priorities and questions of school consolidation

Working to address structural financial issues that predate this board and this superintendent

4. What are three areas that you would target for improvement in the District and what new ideas do you have for improvement?

Better communication with teachers, staff, families, and students, including reinstating questions for the superintendent in local news outlets

Clearer guidelines for teachers on stepwise disciplinary measures, so teachers can teach and students can learn

A stronger sense of collaboration, respect, and trust between our teachers and the district office

5. How will you engage with your constituents and the stakeholders in our school communities such as parents, students, staff, and voters?

I will continue doing what I have done: meeting with any person or group who wishes to reach out and have constructive dialogue. I see my role as a conduit between the community and the district office, and it is my job to carry the values and concerns of my constituents into that room.

Labor

1. Describe your views on the collective bargaining process and the role of unions in today's society.

Unions exist to make sure workers are not exploited, that they have fair wages, strong benefits, a seat at the table, and a real mechanism for having their concerns addressed. Collective bargaining works when both sides come willing to negotiate, willing to make concessions, and with a shared understanding of the challenges ahead.

2. What do you think are the biggest misconceptions about the PVFT or teachers' unions in general?

That they are being unreasonable. I think fear and uncertainty drive a great deal of the friction between the union and the district right now. Open, transparent, fact-based communication offered in good faith is what leads to the best path forward. Both sides need to take the ten-thousand-foot view and recognize the pressures the other is operating under.

3. How will you seek out information from PVFT members and representatives to gather more information about situations and board agenda items that you hear about from management?

I have had numerous meetings and conversations with PVFT leadership, including a period of regular meetings with the PVFT president. I would welcome resuming a regular cadence of communication. I also continue to meet with any teacher or staff member who reaches out to me directly.

4. How will you ensure that communication is open between district management and the union?

As one of five trustees, my only employee is the superintendent, so I will not promise something I cannot personally deliver. What I can do is raise communication breakdowns directly with the superintendent, ask about them in open session, and press for clear communication expectations in the goals and guardrails we are developing. I would rather commit to what I can actually do than promise what I cannot.

5. How will you oppose efforts to contract out certificated and classified jobs?

I will advocate for keeping jobs local, and I support using local tradespeople and staff wherever possible. There will be occasions when the necessary expertise does not exist locally, and in those cases outside help may be necessary, but that should be the exception, and the default should be investing in the people who live and work in this community.

Budget and Funding

1. What is your understanding of the different funding sources our district receives and how it is allocated?

I understand the difference between restricted and unrestricted dollars and how each may be allocated. As a district we have done well at securing grant funding to sustain programs and professional development. Much of that grant money, restricted funds, is what pays for the consultant contracts that come before the board.

Those restricted dollars cannot be used to increase salaries or benefits. Only unrestricted dollars can. Currently, salaries and benefits exceed 90% of our unrestricted dollars. That ratio is high, and it reflects the chronic underfunding of California public education far more than it reflects anything excessive about what our employees earn. But it does mean that until the structural deficit is addressed, we have very little flexibility to invest in either compensation or our school sites.

2. What are your funding priorities for the district budget? If or when the district is faced with extreme financial hardship, what difficult decisions would you be prepared to make?

My priority is keeping this district fiscally solvent so that our teachers and classified staff keep their jobs and their benefits, and so that we maintain local control rather than falling into state receivership. A district that becomes insolvent cannot protect anyone.

I have already made difficult decisions of this kind. I voted for the measures that addressed our structural deficit and moved us from a Qualified back to a Positive budget certification. I support the Sustainable Schools Advisory process and will consider its recommendations seriously, including on consolidation, even though I know those conversations are painful. My commitment is that I will look for savings outside the classroom first, administrative overhead, duplicated functions, and operational inefficiency, before anything that reaches students or the people who work directly with them. And I will explain my reasoning publicly, whatever the decision.

3. What is your current understanding of our rate of turnover in PVUSD? How can we recruit and retain experienced, competent staff given the high cost of living and the historically low wages educators receive?

We have experienced significant turnover recently, much of it related to the supplemental early retirement offer taken by dedicated staff and teachers.

There is no getting around the cost of living here. My hope is that if we can find common ground on benefits, we can direct real money toward significant salary increases, so that our educators can actually afford to live in the community where they teach.

Early Childhood / Adult Education

1. Do you support early childhood educators earning a living wage that reflects the importance of their profession, training, and responsibilities to prepare our youngest students for school?

Yes. I support every educator earning a living wage that honors the importance of their profession, their training, and their responsibility. I also wish our state and federal governments funded that commitment as seriously as it deserves.

2. How would you promote collaboration between Adult Education and other departments within PVUSD?

Through frequent, open dialogue and deliberate opportunities for programs to work together rather than in parallel.

SELPA

1. PVUSD currently runs its own SELPA department. How will you ensure that student and staff needs are being met within the programs offered?

I will work to ensure that every legal obligation is met, and that where we fall short, families receive compensatory services. SELPA educators are historically difficult to recruit, and that is a real constraint we have to solve creatively rather than accept. This is an area of intense focus for the board, and I am hopeful that with new leadership and sustained attention we can rebuild this department to meet both our legal and our moral obligations.

2. What is your experience working with this special population and your understanding of the legal rights of these students?

From the time I was thirteen, my mother ran a licensed home for children with disabilities. Every morning before school, our family helped care for those children. That experience shaped everything I believe about what our most vulnerable students deserve.

I have always advocated for vulnerable populations, and I support making certain our SELPA students receive the services they are legally owed, in the least restrictive environment, with real focus on preparing them personally and professionally for adulthood.

3. How will you ensure we are staffed at levels that support our students and families, for nurses, psychologists, counselors, and teachers to maintain recommended caseloads and class sizes?

State-mandated staffing levels are the floor, not the goal. I will push for caseloads and class sizes that allow our nurses, psychologists, counselors, and teachers to actually do this work well. I also recognize that recruitment, not only budget, is a genuine constraint, and that solving it will require creativity — pipeline partnerships, incentives, and grow-your-own approaches — alongside funding.

K-12 Education Issues

1. What specific ideas do you have on improving the teaching and learning environments?

Less emphasis on screens, particularly at the elementary level. COVID is over; it is time to get back to basics.

Shared accountability across the whole system, students, families, educators, site leadership, and the district office alike.

Developing rubrics and measures that ensure our students are building critical thinking skills, media literacy, and practical life skills that prepare them for an uncertain future.

2. Some PVUSD schools have the resources to offer more electives, programs, field-trips, etc. than other schools. How would you help ensure that all students in the district receive an equal educational experience?

Aligning bell schedules across our comprehensive high schools so that every student can access signature programs and pathways at any campus, regardless of which school they attend. [VERIFY: confirm whether this initiative covers three or all four comprehensive high schools before submitting.]

3. What is your understanding of charter schools and the different types of charters?

Dependent charters operate under the district's authority, following their own mission and instructional model while the district retains oversight of academic and fiscal performance. Independent charters operate autonomously with their own governing boards and are separately responsible for their finances and operations. Charters may be authorized by a district, a county office of education, or the state. In all cases the authorizer is responsible for holding the school to its academic and financial commitments.

4. What do you see as the role of board members, district staff, teachers, and parents in assisting English language learners?

These are among our most vulnerable students, and the responsibility for their success belongs to all of us. The board's role is to make sure the resources, staffing, and programs are in place; the district's role is to implement them coherently; and teachers and families need to be genuine partners in that work. I speak conversational Spanish and use it every day with my patients, this district serves families in English and in Spanish, and so do I.

5. Do you believe textbooks should support cultural diversity, including for LGBTQ youth and gender non-conforming students?

Yes. Students learn better when they see themselves reflected in what they read, and every student in our schools deserves to feel they belong there.

6. How do you see yourself advocating for the safety and well-being of students, teachers, and staff?

I have consistently said that every student should be able to come to school and feel both physically and psychologically safe. If a child does not feel safe, they cannot learn, and the same is true for the adults who work in our buildings. That means taking bullying seriously, online and in person; protecting student mental health services; and making sure staff have the support and clear expectations they need to do their jobs without fear.

7. What is your understanding of the role that alternative education programs play in supporting students, and how would you advocate for these programs?

Alternative education programs are vital to meeting the needs of all students. I would like to see our programs — New School, Renaissance, and PV Elevate — functioning as a genuine continuum, so that students' academic, social, and emotional needs are met and every one of them graduates prepared for college or a trade.

Campaign Assessment

Do you seek the support of the PVFT? If yes, what form of support do you desire?

Yes. I understand this may be a difficult ask, and I am not naïve about the position I am in.

I completed this questionnaire because I think it matters that teachers hear directly from me, my priorities, my reasoning, and where I am coming from. I would welcome the chance to speak with members or leadership in whatever format is useful, and I would value your endorsement.

Whatever the outcome of this process, I will keep working for better pay, better working conditions, stronger disciplinary support, and a district office that supports the people doing the hardest work in this system. That commitment does not depend on this endorsement.