

# **WCCUSD School Board Candidate Forum**

Debate Watching Tips  
and  
Candidate Bios

Monday, October 6, 2014  
6:30 - 8:00 P.M.  
Harding Elementary Auditorium  
7230 Fairmount Avenue, El Cerrito CA 94530

Sponsored by: The PTAs of Kensington Hilltop, Harding, Madera, Mira Vista,  
Fairmont, Washington & Fred T. Korematsu Schools

## **Excerpts from: DEBATE WATCHING 101 - League of Women Voters**

<http://www.lwv.org/content/debate-watching-101>

### **During the Debate**

When watching the debate, ask yourself questions like these to help you judge the fairness of the debate and the performance of the candidates.

#### **The debate format and questions:**

- Does the format give each candidate an equal opportunity to speak and respond to questions?
- Are the questions clear, fair and equally tough on all candidates?
- Do the questions cover the issues that are important to you?
- Is the moderator in control of the debate? Does the moderator need to say less and let the candidates say more?

#### **The candidates:**

- Do they answer questions directly, or do they evade them or fail to answer the specific question?
- Do they give specifics about their stands on the issues, or do they speak in generalities? Do they support their positions and arguments with facts and figures?
- Do they talk about their own policies and positions, or do they mostly attack their opponents?
- Are their proposals realistic? Can they actually carry out the promises they are making?
- Do they appear sincere, confident and relaxed?
- Do they show how their backgrounds and experience qualify them to hold the office?
- Are their answers consistent with their previous positions, and if not, do they explain why?
- What image are they trying to create?
- Do their responses appear overly rehearsed or “canned”?

## **After the Debate**

It will help clarify your thoughts about the candidates and the issues if you take some time after the debate to reflect on what you have just seen and heard. You can do this by:

- Comparing your impressions with others who watched the debate;
- Asking yourself, based on the information you got from watching the debate, which candidate appears most qualified for the office;
- Identifying the issues on which you agree with a candidate and those on which you disagree, and deciding whether that makes you more or less likely to vote for a particular candidate;
- Asking yourself if you learned something new about the issues or the candidate;
- Thinking about whether you have more questions about the issues or the candidates that you want to follow up;
- Getting more information about the candidates' positions from news reports, candidate Web sites and nonpartisan voter information Web sites such as [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org).
- Watch later debates for more information or to confirm your current impressions of the candidates

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## **CHESTER R. STEVENS**

Mr. Stevens is a resident of Hercules since 2004 with his wife and school age children. He is a retired software engineer and has mixed his scientific career with various advocacies on behalf of parents and students.

Mr. Stevens has served as advisor to the superintendent of the East Side Unified School District. He was featured on television and radio talk shows for his successful challenge to the book, "Huckleberry Finn" where it was deemed "inappropriate" for the grade level and how it was being used in the classrooms.

He served as President of the Hercules Education Commission, President of the Hercules Education Foundation, Member of the Allocations Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse. He was invited by the National Urban League as a Guest Lecturer at two urban colleges on the east coast, invited to Berkeley University to engage the ACLU in opposing view, invited as a participant with Senator Diane Feinstein at a local Town Hall meeting.

He is a published author, musician and married with one sixth grader in the WCCUSD and one eighth grader in the Oakland School of the Arts. He spends most of his time as an educator. He is a substitute teacher in the WCCUSD and tutor of students in Algebra and Science.

## **MISTER PHILLIPS**

Mister Phillips is an attorney, labor relations representative with the California School Employees Association, and former substitute teacher and instructional assistant in the West Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Fairfield-Suisun Unified School Districts.

Currently, Mister Phillips has the honor and privilege of representing District 1 on the Contra Costa Democratic County Central Committee. District 1 includes the cities of El Cerrito, Pinole, Richmond, and San Pablo and the unincorporated areas of East Richmond Heights, El Sobrante, Kensington, Montalvin Manor, North Richmond, and Tara Hills. Mister Phillips also has the honor and privilege of representing Contra Costa County on the California Democratic State Central Committee, where he is a member of the Finance Committee and regional director of the African American Caucus.

Mister Phillips has served on the boards of several organizations, including the California Democratic Council (trustee), the El Cerrito Democratic Club (vice president), the First 5 Contra Costa Children and Families Commission (member), the NAACP Richmond Branch (counsel), and the Providence Missionary Baptist Church (deacon). He is a past president of the Rotary Club of Pinole.

Mister Phillips served in the U.S. Navy Reserve and AmeriCorps for which he received an Honorable Discharge and Segal AmeriCorps Education Award. Mister Phillips' other honors and awards include: Honorable Judge George Carroll Community Service Award, Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition, Contra Costa County Certificate of Recognition, California State Senate Certificate of Recognition, California Democratic Party Veterans Caucus Democratic Achievement Award, California State Assembly Certificate of Recognition (twice), North Richmond Green Certificate of Appreciation, 7th Congressional District Barack Obama Volunteer Award, The City and County of San Francisco Certificate of Honor, Strathmore's Who's Who, and Golden Key National Honor Society.

Mister Phillips was inspired to public service by his parents, retired peace officers Tommie and Cynthia Phillips. Mister Phillips earned his Juris Doctor from the University of California Hastings College of the Law, Bachelor of Arts in English and Political Science with honors from San Francisco State University, and Associate of Arts in English, Liberal Arts, and Social Science from Solano Community College. Mister Phillips attended Richmond High School. Mister Phillips is a former Consumers Union Esther Peterson Fellow and graduate of The Washington Center for Academic Internships and Seminars.

Mister Phillips is a fourth generation West Contra Costan. He resides in Richmond with his wife, Angela. They have one daughter, Merist.

## **ELIZABETH “LIZ” BLOCK**

Liz Block has been serving students for over 32 years as a Principal, Special Education Administrator, and School Psychologist. In the last three years of her career she was hired to lead one of the lowest performing elementary schools in the state, which she successfully led through a transformation that resulted in a 61-point gain in API test scores in one year. As a Special Education Administrator, she started a center for early intervention of autism, which provides early intervention services for children as young as 18 months of age. Liz has always fought to improve the educational experience for all children and firmly believes that all policy decisions should be based on what is best for children.

Liz grew up in Ohio where she was the first person in her family to graduate from college. She attended Duke University from 1971 to 1975 where she majored in Psychology and Developmental Psycholinguistics. Liz moved to the Bay Area in 1975 to attend graduate school at UC Berkeley, where she earned her Masters in Education and a School Psychologist credential in 1980. Later, in 2001, she attended St. Mary’s College, where she earned her Administrative Services credential. Later, wanting to serve a broader group of students, she started studying Spanish, becoming nearly fluent, and able to work in schools with large Latino populations.

Liz has lived in El Cerrito for over 35 years and during that time she has been dedicated to improving the community. She served on the Human Relations Commission for the City of El Cerrito from 2010 to 2012. Ten years ago, she helped support students, teachers and parents in the March for Education, a protest against the inequitable funding for WCCUSD by the state. On a more personal note, she co-founded a monthly neighborhood soup night that has been bringing neighbors together for over seven years.

Liz lives with her husband, David, and their yellow lab Weslia. She and David have two grown children, Robbie, a screenwriter, and Brian a doctor. In her free time, she likes to ride her bike, hike, visit with friends, and read.

## **OTHEREE CHRISTIAN**

I am a Richmond resident and product of the Richmond public schools. I have been a youth advisor for NAACP, currently serving as the President of the NAACP Richmond Chapter, Community Organizer, Design Review Board Commission in Richmond, Building Blocks for Kids, Campus Security Officer at El Cerrito High School and Currently President of the Iron Triangle Neighborhood Council in Richmond.

I have mentored youth in various capacities in the inner cities of Washington D.C., Dallas TX, R-PAL, El Cerrito and Kennedy High Schools. My work with at-risk youths has taught me every kid has the potential to succeed.

### Education Background:

- Graduated from Kennedy High School with the Class of 1985
- Graduated from Howard University with the Class of 1994 with a B.A, Degree in Criminal Justice and a Minor in Political Sc.

I am passionate about education and want the best schools for our students and teachers.

## **PETER NICHOLAS CHAU**

Peter Chau grew up in Richmond and raised by a single mom. At an early age, he had to learn how to manage the family's finances, stand up to predatory lenders and debt collectors, and advocate for his mother. Peter found success in school, where he was the Captain of his Speech and Debate team and was recognized as the City of Pinole's Student Citizen of the Year.

In 2004 Peter was elected Student Board Representative for WCCUSD.

When devastating budget cuts were proposed that would fire teachers, eliminate sports, counselors, the music program and 10% of staff, Peter stood firm and was the sole Board member to oppose the cuts. His courage resulted in national media coverage. He worked tirelessly to pass a parcel tax that saved many of those jobs and services.

Thanks to great mentors, teachers, and staff members, Peter found success in school and earned a full scholarship to Dartmouth College. Wanting to give other WCCUSD students the same chance he had, Peter helped support the Ivy League Connections program in its early days, organizing fellow alums, raising money, and working side-by-side with parents and teachers to ensure that the ILC was fully funded by private donations. Today, the ILC sends over 50 kids every summer to experience the country's finest colleges and universities, and the program has changed the lives of many WCCUSD students.

Peter returned to Richmond in 2008 to help campaign for the renewal of the parcel tax he had championed as a Student Board Member. He coordinated the field operations for the grassroots campaign that earned 79% voter approval, the highest in the school district's history, and ensured funding for K-3 class size reduction, librarians, music and athletic programs.

After graduating from Dartmouth, Peter attended UC Hastings College of the Law. He graduated in 2014 as a Dean's Scholar, works in the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office as a certified law clerk, and volunteers for WCCUSD's Mock Trial program.

Peter currently lives in Richmond.



## **VALERIE CUEVAS**

A third-generation Californian, Valerie Cuevas is the oldest of six kids raised in a hardworking union family. She grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood just like the Richmond community she calls home. From early learning in Head Start -- the federally funded program for low-income preschoolers -- to testing into the state's Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program, Valerie is a proud product of California's public education system.

Great expectations and a strong determination to succeed paved a solid pathway for Valerie. She became the first in her immediate family to graduate from college and now serves as the interim executive director of The Education Trust - West, a prominent statewide education policy, research and advocacy organization that works for the high academic achievement of all students in California.

With an expertise in educational equity, state legislative policy and K-12 governance, Valerie is a well-known leader and advocate. Recently, she brought additional education dollars to West Contra Costa Unified by leading state advocacy for the successful passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the most significant change in education funding for K-12 schools in four decades. A staunch advocate for kids, she is frequently featured in the media for her respected expertise and advocacy.

Valerie has a wide range of national, state and local education experience. She is a former director with the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), where she worked with hundreds of elected officials across the country on advancing student success. She previously served as an aide to the chair of the California Assembly Committee on Higher Education and as chief of staff to a member of the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education. As an education practitioner, Valerie held student affairs positions at various 2- and 4-year colleges and universities across the state where she was a member of the California State University Employees Union (CSUEU).

A long-time volunteer, Valerie was recently named Board President of the California Latino Environmental Advocacy Network, a non-profit community based organization that advocates for clean air, clean water, and neighborhoods to be free of toxics and pollution. She holds dual bachelor's degrees from the University of Southern California and a master's degree in Educational Psychology, Administration and Counseling from California State University, Long Beach.

**ELAINE MERRIWEATHER**

(Incumbent, Elected 2010)

Currently on the West Contra Costa School Board since 2010 and a proud parent of an eleventh grader at De Anza High School. I have taught for 30 years in the San Francisco Unified School District.

I started volunteering in 1990 at Harding Elementary School as a Parent, Member of the PTA, and SSC. I Started the Harding Multicultural Library for Parents. I Served as PTA President at Adams Middle School, and the School Site Council Chair at Richmond High School.

In my first term on the board I advocated for increased funding at the state and local levels, resulting in Proposition 30 and local control funding. I promoted Full Service Community Schools and Transitional Kindergarten in WCCUSD. As Chair of the Safety Committee I worked for safer schools and reduced suspension and expulsion rates. As Co- Chair of the Academic Subcommittee we discussed key academic issues around transitional to the Common Core with teachers and staff.

My ultimate goal has been to address the achievement gap and ensure that our students are College and Career ready.

## **RAQUEL DONOSO**

My name is Raquel Donoso and education was a game changer in my life. I am the daughter of immigrants who came to this country to build a better life for their family. Education was the key to that success.

As a public school parent, volunteer, and education advocate, I offer on-the-ground experience and the power of absolute commitment. I currently direct a \$30M Department of Education Promise Neighborhood Initiative focused on developing cradle-to-career strategies that will increase educational opportunities for youth in the Bay Area.

I came to the Bay Area as a single mother with my son Nathan after putting myself through undergraduate and graduate school at UCLA. I have been an active and involved parent in my children's education. When my older son was in Berkeley public schools I was a leader in the PTA and member of the school site council because I knew parent involvement would be crucial to his success. Nathan is currently a senior at Clark University in Massachusetts.

I am now a parent of an 8th grader at Korematsu Middle School in El Cerrito and prior to that he attended Madera Elementary School. In my previous role as the CEO of the Latino Community Foundation, I worked hard to bring parent voices to Sacramento to pass the Local Control Funding Formula. This led to participating in the district meetings to develop the Local Control Accountability Plan. It was at that point that I decided to run for school board.

## **AYANA KIRKLAND YOUNG**

Ayana Kirkland Young, Attorney at Law, active member of Stewart PTA, President of Coventry Home Owner's Association and member of Berith Christian Fellowship Praise Team.

Before becoming an attorney I was accepted into the Special Ed Masters/Credential program at San Francisco State University, but after a semester of teaching in the Oakland Unified School District, I realized that teaching was too emotional draining, so I took a different career path. However I couldn't stay away from children and found my way back into the classroom as a Substitute teacher for the WCCUSD. Once I passed the California State Bar, I stopped being a substitute and started my own law practice where I currently practice Employment Law, Violations of the Department of Fair Employment and Housing.

Even though I was out of the classroom, the connections I received while in them have been unbreakable. Students still see me and yell out, "hey Mrs. Young," and I always respond, "hey honey!" I am the candidate who knows this district. I have lived in this district for over 30 years. I was even Student Body President at Pinole Valley High School in my senior year. I met my husband when we were in elementary school, in this district. Now I'm all grown up, an attorney and a mother of seven, and my husband and I are raising our children in the same area we grew up. When you live in an area for nearly your entire life, it becomes a part of who you are. That's why making this district the best it can be is so important to me. I know what our district needs because I've been here. I know the people, I know how we once\_were, and because of that I know what we can become.

## **MADLINE KRONENBERG**

(Incumbent, Elected 2006 & 2010)

Madeline Kronenberg grew up in New York. She went to work after completing high school and worked as a secretary for the FBI. She attended college at night. Mrs. Kronenberg moved to Hawaii and then California and kept attending college at night while working in a variety of law firms during the day as a secretary. Eventually, she became a teacher of legal secretaries at Hayward Adult School and completed her college career with a teaching credential from UC Berkeley.

Mrs. Kronenberg was a full-time Adult Education Career/Technical teacher from 1980 until June 2010 and won the Adult Education State Excellence in Teaching Award in 2003.

She spent 15 years as an active parent (she has five children) serving on several District-wide committees including the Redistricting Committee, the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee and the Facilities Subcommittee. In 2005, she served as Co-Chair of Measure J. The successful passage of Measure J raised \$400 Million to continue the upgrades of our antiquated schools.

Mrs. Kronenberg was actively involved in PTA/PTSA. She continuously served in a volunteer capacity as President, Co-President, Site Council Chair and on many other boards and committees beginning in 1991. She has been a dedicated parent volunteer for our school district and has advocated on behalf of ALL children in our district for many years.

As a teacher and parent leader, Madeline brought her unique perspective to the School Board. She values the safety and security of our students and staff above all else. She collaborated with cities to find additional funding to keep schools from closing and to develop daytime curfew programs to reduce truancy and drop-outs.

As a Board member, she has served on the all district board committees: the Facilities Subcommittee, the Technology Subcommittee, the Academic Subcommittee, the Citizens Budget Advisory Committee, the Ivy League Connection, the Safety Subcommittee, and the Strategic Plan Steering Committee. She is an active member of the Contra Costa County School Boards Association and served as its chair in 2013. In addition, she strongly advocated for the Local Control Funding Formula which will bring more revenue to our students.

She actively supports the rebuilding of our dilapidated schools – Co-Chairing the Board's successful bond measures in 2010 and 2012 which will bring about the renovation or rebuilding of almost all district schools. She also supported the successful renewal of the District parcel tax to support counselors and librarians in 2012.