

Nov. 8 Election Coverage

Three Candidates Battle for Two Seats on the LUSD Board

By Pippa Fisher



Mark Kindhouse

Mark Kindhouse lives in Lafayette with his wife and two sons who attend Burton Valley School. His background is in engineering and he currently serves on the Capital Projects Assessment Committee, the Government Relations Committee for the American Society of Civil Engineers, and participated in the "Measure C" bond campaign. He works as capital projects manager at Pricewaterhouse Coopers in San Francisco.

Kindhouse is running for the Lafayette School District governing board because he says he can make a difference in the future of this community. "One of the biggest issues facing our district currently is the management of the \$70 million 'Measure C' bond. As a seasoned capital projects manager at an international firm, I have spent my career collaborating with boards, executives, and staff to make sure projects are built on time and under budget. Citizens can breathe easier with someone on the board familiar with responsible management," Kindhouse said.

As an engineer, Kindhouse says that STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) is increasingly important. "Parents I've talked to want to integrate more STEM into the overall school

experience. This will rely heavily on improving our aging and insufficient infrastructure," he says. "Wise financial planning and timely management are crucial."

The Lafayette dad says his family has had a wonderful experience with teachers and staff in Burton Valley. However, budget projections for the school district show a shortfall requiring use of money from the reserve fund. He says that the district is still trying to catch up from the 2008 cuts, but that it is a high functioning district. "We may never receive the same dollars per pupil that other districts receive. Like any family knows, this means we raise revenues and/or cut expenses. The challenge is to do that while continuing to attract and keep the best teaching talent."

When people know they can truly help in a situation, the candidate says it's their duty to do so. "I would be honored to be of service on the board. I'm a civil engineer by trade, a Cub Scout dad, and a taxpayer who wants the best for our children and this community," Kindhouse said.



Meredith Meade

Meredith Meade is a lifelong Californian who attended U.C. Berkeley and has lived in Lafayette for 17 years with her husband and three children who have all gone through or are still in Lafayette's

public schools. Since 2006, when her oldest was a kindergartner, she has been actively involved in Lafayette schools. Meade has volunteered in many ways, including as a two-term PTA president at Lafayette Elementary and for the past two years as president of Lafayette Partners in Education (LPIE). She also served for six years on Report, the districtwide stakeholders committee composed of representatives from all five schools, parent education reps, LPIE reps, a teacher rep and district administration. "This experience makes me uniquely qualified to serve on the Lafayette School Board, as I have an in-depth knowledge of how the district works, the opportunities that it seeks and the challenges that it faces."

Meade points out that California still lags behind most states in funding for schools, which is a contributing factor, she says, in the district's passing an unbalanced budget this year. "Our community has made up for this lack of adequate funding by passing local parcel taxes and supporting the schools through donations to LPIE. I hope to use the advocacy skills I have learned to continue to work with state legislators for better funding for our schools, and also to help the district devise new sources of revenue, while helping to identify areas for saving—without affecting our students' educational experience."

Meade says the second issue facing Lafayette schools is ensuring that the district is focused on educating the "whole child." Lafayette schools are admired for their use of the workshop model, she says, and the district has done a great job in transitioning to the Common Core, providing professional development for teachers with strategies to delve deeper into subjects, encouraging more collaboration and critical thinking in the classroom. But, she says, "I see students still struggling. We can do so much more through our partnerships with Challenge Success and Character Counts, as well as other expert sources, to ensure that we are also meeting the emotional needs of all of our students."

Finally, Meade points out that the district's five-year strategic plan is up for renewal next year

which she sees as "a unique opportunity for the board to get community input on key areas of focus for educating and preparing our students to become healthy and happy citizens who contribute to make our world a better place!"



Rob Sturm

Rob Sturm and his wife, Kristina, moved to Lafayette from San Francisco in 2009, drawn by the community's small-town feel, access to nature and, most importantly, preeminent schools. Their oldest son attends Burton Valley Elementary School and his brother and sister will soon join him, assuring family enrollment in the Lafayette School District for almost the next two decades.

Sturm is an attorney with 25 years' experience, much of it in labor and employment law specializing in identifying and implementing solutions to benefit both the employees and company. He joined CSAA Insurance Group (AAA) in 2008. As Vice President and Associate General Counsel, he oversees the Employment Law, Corporate Litigation and Legal Operations practice groups, including short- and long-term operational planning. Sturm says, "I've consistently been recognized for successfully identifying and implementing cost-efficient solutions that have literally saved millions and millions of dollars. I have never had a budget deficit, not once." Additionally, Sturm has served on volunteer boards such as CASA and Northern California Employment Round Table, and is a volunteer for youth causes.

Sturm says that most importantly, the district needs fiscal stability. With a massive deficit spending of almost \$1 million dollars he says, "Our ability to main-

tain a rich curriculum and class sizes urgently requires improved cost-efficiency."

Upwards of 85 percent of the Lafayette School District's budget is allocated toward compensation, employee benefits and litigation expenses, the attorney says, so his distinct background makes him uniquely able to identify and promote cost efficiencies to enhance academic excellence and bring imminently needed fiscal stability. Sturm touts his long and unblemished track record of doing exactly that. Referring to a passage from the district 2016-17 budget report stating that the projections highlight that deficit spending will erode reserves significantly by 2018-19 and that absent increase in revenues, the district needs to reduce expenditures to remain fiscally viable and financially solvent, Sturm says "It confirms my view that this particular school board election is especially important and that we must address this fundamental problem with particular care, skill and time urgency."

Secondly, Sturm says that all students should be intellectually engaged to their fullest so learning is enriching and instruction promotes character development, integrity and ready pursuit of academic interests. To this end he would like to see the Lafayette School District more actively consider accelerated academic offerings (e.g., math) as other model school districts do, and mindfully encourage both girls and boys to pursue their interests in science, technology, teaching or other professions that have historically been underrepresented.

Sturm also says there is a need for an improved approach to support special needs children. He says that the district has made progress and more is needed. "We must apply the district's scarce resources toward the children, not costly legal expenses".

"As an attorney with almost 25-years' experience providing equal opportunity counseling, training and formal instruction, I am exceptionally capable of adding value. Not only will our special needs community benefit but so too will our district's long-term financial stability by avoiding particularly costly legal fees and litigation and settlement expenses," Sturm said.



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Cheslog to be New Face on AUSD Board

By Pippa Fisher



Craig Cheslog

Two people will be taking their places for a new term on the Acalanes Union High School District board this fall. One face needing no introduction after many years on the board is Kathy Coppersmith, the incumbent running unopposed.

The other unopposed candidate is Craig Cheslog, who may be the new face on the board, but is no stranger to education-related issues.

Living in Lafayette with his wife and two sons who attend Stanely Middle School and Acalanes High School, he currently serves as vice president for California Policy and Advocacy at Common Sense Kids Action, the advocacy arm of Common Sense Media. In this role, Cheslog helps

fight for children's rights, takes action to improve education policy, and provides parents with the resources they need to enrich their kids' lives.

From 2011 to 2015, Cheslog served as principal advisor to State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. In that role, he served as the department's liaison to external stakeholders and organizations. He coordinated major initiatives to revitalize science, technology, engineering, art, music, civics and math in school. Cheslog also managed the state's awards programs that recognize schools, teachers and staff from around California.

Cheslog says that he believes his time working for the Department of Education and Common Sense Kids Action has "provided me with a rare perspective on our schools and the transformations that have taken place in our state's education system over the past five years. I look forward to channeling this experience to better serve my community on the Acalanes Union High School District Governing Board."

He says the biggest issue facing our schools and our students right now is the need to ensure every child receives the high-quality

education they deserve while providing them with the strong support they need to navigate the stresses they face every day as teenagers.

He recognizes the need to work hard to keep the district financially sustainable by working with board members, community leaders and statewide advocates to ensure funding for schools to adequately meet students' 21st-century needs.

"We must ensure that the AUHSD successfully implements the state's new academic standards, the district's newly adopted graduation requirements and our schools' new block schedule in ways that serve the best interests of all students," Cheslog says.

Regarding these issues he points out that the Mental Health Task Force is reporting to the board but says that there is more work to be done. He plans to listen closely and work with his fellow board members, students, parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders to discuss how these issues impact schools and students.

"I also want to work with the leaders of each of the elementary districts that send their students to our high schools to ensure we do everything possible to help our students succeed in school and in life," he says.

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