

El Paso Independent School District Board of Trustees District 2

El Paso Matters Staff



Will Veliz, 28, is a Realtor.



Enrique Herrera



Alejandro Cuellar

Alejandro “Alex” C. Cuellar, 39, is an Assistant El Paso County Attorney.

Enrique “Henry” Herrera, 49, is an assistant superintendent with the Socorro Independent School District. **Herrera has informed El Paso Matters that he is no longer seeking election to the board.**

Candidate Questionnaires

Candidates were asked to limit their responses to 100 words. Responses have been lightly edited for grammar.

▼ What experience do you have with curriculum, overseeing budgets, or setting and analyzing policy? Please explain.

Will Veliz: I’m a trustee of the El Paso Police and Firemen’s Pension Fund since 2017 that has about \$2 billion in investments. I’m currently on the Investment Committee and serve as chairman of the Audit/Risk Management Committee. I’ve been on the Board of Directors in the Greater El Paso Association of Realtors and have served as chairman to their Governmental Affairs Committee. I’m also head of investments of two real estate companies, so I’ve had a wide breadth of dealing with different sizes of budgets and navigating different applicable policies.

Enrique “Henry” Herrera: As a classroom teacher for 11 years, curriculum played a major role in my duties. As an administrator for 10 years at both middle school and high school levels, I dealt with the campus budget every year. As a cabinet member, we deal with budget/policy on a regular basis depending on our assigned duties and departments.

Alejandro “Alex” C. Cuellar: As an adjunct faculty member with Park University at Fort Bliss, I created a curriculum that was student centered with frequent feedback. As an assistant county attorney, I

am a contributing member and am responsible for contract review for million-dollar contracts and I analyze internal policy from several county departments on a daily basis. I was a legislative assistant in Kansas for two years and reviewed and wrote proposed legislation for immigration reform, health care and economic development.

▼ What are your budget priorities and how would you balance funding those priorities while keeping property taxes in check?

Will Veliz: Working with colleagues to analyze contracts, to analyze proposed ideas and projects already in progress to ensure efficient spending, and working with colleagues to pursue grant money.

Enrique “Henry” Herrera: Budget priorities should be in continuing to update our current facilities to reflect the 21st-century post-secondary opportunities that await our students after graduation. In addition, making sure that employees/teachers feel that they are valued at all levels and that their pay is a suitable salary for them and their families. Any investment in our schools is a proactive approach in guiding our students to become contributing members of our communities.

Alejandro “Alex” C. Cuellar: EPISD needs to operate in the green. I have innovative ideas to reduce the budget, while expanding programming for students, hiring new employees, and implementing equity into the district. All students, no matter their location in El Paso, should have access to the same resources and attend schools in safe, sound buildings. I would propose to lease several properties owned by EPISD as opposed to selling these properties. Long-term leases allow for a steady stream of income for EPISD.

▼ What recommendations would you make for the district to recruit and retain quality teachers and other employees?

Will Veliz: Implementing salary-based comparisons to similar-sized school districts to make sure our teachers are compensated competitively to their peers. Survey constantly to hear directly from teachers/staff on how to better create a great environment to learn/teach in. Highlighting collaboration between staff across campuses and in-campus. Providing support through substitutes and class-room resources to aid in their day-to-day work.

Enrique “Henry” Herrera: At minimum, we would want to make sure that salaries meet the market value for our region and then look to create a phase-in system that moves us to the top of the list. We have to be mindful of current programs/personnel and decide if we will continue to support them, restructure them, or strategically abandon them to create better use of those funds.

Alejandro “Alex” C. Cuellar: Maintain a strong partnership with UTEP’s Teacher Prep/Residency Program. Create a tiered bonus structure for those employees who stay with EPISD for a certain number of years. Create systems for teachers to receive promotions for those wanting to remain in the classroom, which is coupled with the tiered bonus pay. Providing professional growth opportunities for all faculty and staff. And we need campuses that

are supportive of their faculty and staff to enable a positive work environment.

▼ How would you address the district's enrollment trends?

Will Veliz: Modernize campuses/learning/teaching across campuses. Highlight the district's successes through marketing. Maintain contact with graduates from the district to create a stronger alumni core with more avocation towards the district.

Enrique "Henry" Herrera: We need to be responsible and make sure that school enrollment is at 90% plus at each campus in order to maximize the resources of those campuses. We need to continue to consider consolidating neighborhood campuses that fall below acceptable student enrollment numbers and, instead, build 21st-century facilities for our communities. For some, that might mean leaving their current school and taking a short bus ride to a nearby new school that is comparable/better than our neighboring districts.

Alejandro "Alex" C. Cuellar: The message to our community must be clear: EPISD is coming back to the forefront. Schools are the strongest when their respective communities are strong. Our board and superintendent must advocate for the betterment of the district; there should be a media campaign centered at how the district is changing for the better and how equity will be addressed in the future to make sure that no students or communities are left behind.

▼ How would you respond to special interest groups or parents who want to limit access to existing curriculum or library books they perceive to be in conflict with their personal beliefs?

Will Veliz: I would encourage dialogue with those groups/parents to get to the root of their issue, compare policies with similar-sized/successful school district's, then work together to identify options to the curriculum/books in question that doesn't hinder the education of the these groups/parents students, while not compromising the remaining students ability to take part in the curriculum/read the books in question.

Enrique "Henry" Herrera: Censoring is never the answer. We want to make sure that families are given options when this concern directly impacts their family. Age-appropriate materials should be an important consideration for all of our schools along with giving families a voice to speak about their concerns.

Alejandro "Alex" C. Cuellar: Education is the studying and learning of all different cultures, societies, and disciplines. The purpose of educators, administrators, and faculty should be to expand the learning realms of our students, not to stifle that learning. I would be opposed to those groups and parents who seek to limit access to diverse curriculum. History is the study and understanding of our failures and successes; if we forget the mistakes we made, we are doomed to repeat them. Diversity and acceptance is key.

▼ Aside from free breakfast/lunch programs and after-school care

through partner organizations, what other resources and social services should schools offer the community to help ensure overall student success?

Will Veliz: Expand extracurricular/STEAM clubs/programs and work with the El Paso Community College and UTEP to aid in providing those. Along the same vein, expand not only college-readiness programs, but also college-navigation programs for alumni. Expand tutoring programs for students that are both falling behind and also want to get ahead.

Enrique “Henry” Herrera: I feel that schools currently offer many opportunities outside of the regular school day to include extended support in a child’s academic, athletic, and/or fine arts interests. Tutoring is offered daily at all levels to include Saturday’s. Elementaries could benefit from intramural sports. A shared dialogue between the community and school should be constant in order to address specific areas of need.

Alejandro “Alex” C. Cuellar: Mentor programs for any students wanting more information and exposure in all career fields. Students’ parents and caregivers come from all different backgrounds and professions. These programs can be used either after school or implemented during the school day for certain curriculum. I would also propose more mental health professionals to be available to our schools; whether in the form of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers or any licensed professional who is willing to help.
