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Orinda School Board Candidates Discuss Key Issues

By Laurie Snyder



Jason Lurie, Sarah Genn Butler, and Matt Moran (left to right) engaged in thoughtful, civil debate at the October 15 school board candidate debate. Photo Ohlen Alexander

cuts all along the way since 2007-08. "The District runs pretty lean. I don't want to see us forfeit what makes our District so terrific... I'd like to look at revenue enhancement options, such as potentially another parcel tax. Nobody wants to pay more in taxes. I certainly don't, but I would support it for our kids." As for cuts, he said those should be a collaborative effort.

Incumbent Matt Moran reassured voters, "Our budget is set - we have a million dollars set aside if neither 30 or 38 pass for this year... You've got to do a lot of planning, and that's one thing I think we do great in our District- we have significant reserves through conservative budgeting processes, and we're able to ride out the storms coming from the State."

Asked about potential upcoming curriculum changes, and specifically the California Common Core Standards, Lurie explained, "It's a nationwide movement that a lot of states are adopting. California has modified it." It will narrow current standards that are "a mile wide and an inch deep," he said. "The kids are going to get a much better understanding of the core concepts. Along with that will come a more collaborative, interactive, application-based teaching methodology."

Butler clarified further, noting that there will be less emphasis placed on test scores. It's "so important to have the critical thinking skills and 21st century learning, project-based learning. It's been proven that kids really remember things when they have hands-on experiences and work on projects... The Common Core Standards is a huge step in that direction."

Moran confessed that he's not enamored of the "top-down, 'this is what you're going to teach' approach," but also said that "as a District, we're planning for it... I trust that, as we get down to the teacher level, teachers will be able to work with it enough to be able to make it a workable curriculum for our kids." He also said that what those standards really come down to are "critical thinking ... group work, and it comes down to reading and writing. And maybe it's a new way to teach those things, maybe it's a new way to look at those things, but I think those are skills we've been teaching kids for a long time in this District, and will continue to."

Three of the four candidates running for the Orinda Union School Board engaged in thoughtful dialogue October 15 before a crowd of parents, community members, and school district personnel. The fourth candidate, Bekki Gilbert, was unable to participate due to a family emergency. Ann Flynn of the League of Women Voters, Diablo Valley served as the moderator.

Each candidate identified school funding as the greatest challenge to be addressed by the school board over the next two years, and urged voters to pass both Propositions 30 and 38. All three demonstrated their understanding of the impact California's budget situation is likely to have on Orinda's schools if those ballot measures fail. (Read a related article on page B3.)

Sarah Genn Butler stated she is focusing on Proposition 30 because it is what was agreed upon when the State budget passed in June. The budget was, she pointed out, approved with a shortfall and is "dependent on the tax initiative, which is what we now have as Proposition 30. If Prop 30 doesn't pass, it's \$6 billion in cuts, and \$5 billion of that is from education.... If Prop 38 were to pass and Prop 30 failed ... we'd still have trigger cuts."

Asked how to address any resulting million dollar cut to the District's budget, Jason Lurie said OUSD has made

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