

EFO Town Hall Teaches Voters About 2012 Education Finance Ballot Measures

By Laurie Snyder



Education Funding Town Hall participants, from left: Orinda Union School District Dr. Joe Jaconette, NBC Bay Area News Anchor Diane Dwyer, Acalanes Union High School District Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson, League of Women Voters President Lee Lawrence, Assembly Member Joan Buchanan, Ken Coates, and Craig Cheslog, Principle Advisor to State Superintendent of Education Tom Torlakson.

Photo Ohlen Alexander

On November 6, voters will face a baffling array of ballot measures that have the potential to change everything from auto insurance in California to how government agencies protect public safety. But it is the two propositions regarding school funding statewide – Propositions 30 and 38 – which may have the longest lasting impact on its citizens.

The Educational Foundation of Orinda (EFO) strengthened Lamorindans' understanding of those initiatives at an Education Funding Town Hall October 18 moderated by NBC Bay Area News Anchor Diane Dwyer. Orinda's Library Auditorium was filled nearly to capacity with citizens of all ages trying to grasp how passage or failure of the propositions may impact local schools.

Dwyer was joined by Assembly Member Joan Buchanan (D-15th District), who was recently appointed as Chair of the California Assembly's Committee on Education; Craig Cheslog, Principal Advisor to State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson; League of Women Voters President Lee Lawrence and her colleague, Ken Coates; Orinda Union School District (OUSD) Superintendent Joe Jaconette; and Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Superintendent John Nickerson.

"We have the fourth most volatile revenue stream in the nation," said Buchanan during her outline of how State General Fund revenues are allocated. Addressing the ways in which legislation, litigation and the lottery have shaped K-12 and higher education since Ronald Reagan's tenure as Governor, she explained where good intentions went wrong or were

dragged down by debt and California's struggling economy. California has dropped from its ranking as one of the finest school systems in the nation to its current status as Number 45 in K-12 funding per pupil.

"We have a record number of school districts that are facing financial jeopardy," observed Cheslog. Because roughly \$6 billion in program cuts will be triggered if Prop 30 fails, he said school districts will be given the option of eliminating 15 days of instruction from their academic year calendars to help offset the damage.

OUSD and AUHSD could lose \$1 million and \$2.3 million alone, observed Jaconette and Nickerson in their respective presentations. While OUSD would be able to weather the first year funding loss through reserves set aside, AUHSD would face mid-year cuts.

Prop 30's passage, presenters said, has become less of a sure thing than it was just a few months ago – due in large part to negative campaigns that have confused and frustrated voters. California's PTA supports Prop 38, but is neutral on Prop 30. The California School Board Association has asked voters to pass both measures, as have three of the four candidates running for OUSD's school board, and Buchanan, Cheslog, Nickerson, and Jaconette. Both measures, said Buchanan, will serve as "a bridge to recovery."

Dwyer confirmed with Cheslog that, if voters do pass both propositions, the measure receiving the highest number of votes – and only that measure – will take effect. Voters will not be taxed twice, as some ads have alleged.



Assembly Member Joan Buchanan (D-15th District and Chair of the California Assembly's Committee on Education) discusses how far California's education system has plummeted in nationwide statistics – and why – at an EFO-sponsored Town Hall meeting October 18.

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