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Orinda School Board welcomes new members, reflects on pandemic

By Sora O'Doherty



Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen (second right) with Katie Shutte Shogan, Eve Phillips, and Edda Collins Coleman. Photo provided

a full-time job," Glimme noted. "You exemplify what a great board member is: you've put in countless hours and you have provided vision and guidance through some of the most challenging times any district has ever gone through. You had to go through the pandemic, when no decision was welcome, but you were able to keep our core values as your guide."

Former Superintendent Caroline Seaton joined the meeting remotely from Colorado. She also referred to the pandemic, a time when, she said, "even experts disagreed on what was the best thing to do during a pandemic." She added, "People just don't understand how difficult it is to be a board member." She praised the board for putting students first, as well as developing the Diversity Equity and Inclusion program, "Everyone Belongs Here," which she noted was also adopted by the city of Orinda. Turning her focus to the incoming board, she stated, "I know that Edda, Eve and Katie are going to do an outstanding job."

Other speakers included Charles Shanahan of the Orinda Educational Association, who said that although he was not feeling well, he wanted to express his gratitude to the outgoing board members. Patsy Templeton, principal of Sleepy Hollow Elementary School, and Emily Allen, executive director of the Orinda Network for Education (ONE) also offered encomiums. Allen, an OUSD parent for 12 years, praised the outgoing board as being "unwavering in your dedication" and acting "with professionalism and grace." She concluded, "In a world when differing viewpoints can cause such strife, you have been a model of cooperation and respect."

Weiner told the outgoing board members, "It has truly been a privilege to know and work with you. We have accomplished so much," adding, "It has been such an honor to work together. It's been a real blessing to make friends out of colleagues," her voice thick with emotion. She spoke about working through the pandemic, explaining, "It was not easy working with Brown Act restrictions, having to discuss really difficult issues for the first time in public."

Liz Daoust, who was board president in 2021, thanked everyone, saying she was truly humbled and touched. She said that she had actually gone back and looked at the statements she made at the beginning of board meetings at the height of the pandemic. She summarized the experience by saying, "I was really struck by what a unique, complicated and desperate time in which we were situated. Serving our community these past four years was one of the most challenging and stressful things I've ever done, but it was also the most rewarding. I've learned a tremendous amount. We all suffered and we all grew in different ways," Daoust concluded. "I'm so tremendously proud of our team; we kept students at the forefront of our work." Looking forward, Daoust added, "I'm leaving the board to five smart, independent, strong women and Aida, and I can't ask for anything more than that. I promise I will continue to serve this district and this community."

Kaune mentioned that he felt that the high point of those meetings was the way Daoust started each meeting. "The difference we have been able to make, I am so proud. I couldn't be more proud and grateful for this group of people, who have been completely respectful of each other; it was a tremendous experience to be a part of this," he said, adding, "Like Liz, I'll be around," and thanked everyone with whom he's shared this incredible journey.

It was an emotional afternoon on Dec. 12 when the Orinda Union School Board bid farewell to outgoing board members Carol Brown, Jason Kaune and Liz Daoust and welcomed new board members Edda Coleman, Eve Phillips and Katie Shogan, who were sworn in by Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen. The board was then reorganized, with Hilary Weiner once again becoming the board president and Cara Hoxie vice president.

Outgoing board president Carol Brown opened the meeting with her last official act, seeking approval of the agenda, which was unanimously approved. This was followed by accolades to the outgoing board members. Brown and Kaune each served eight years and Daoust four years.

Superintendent Aida Glimme thanked them for volunteering their time to do an incredibly difficult but hopefully rewarding job. "Many members of the public do not know that this is not a paid position, yet at times it is

Brown said, "I am so proud of the three new board members; I'm really confident that you will carry on the way we've been able to work together, disagreeing without being disagreeable." She noted that this gave her, "in the words of that song, a peaceful easy feeling." Brown said that after working in the publishing industry, then working to help foster children, she is "really retiring now." She concluded, "Without doubt, this is the best work I've ever done," and proceeded to thank the staff individually.

A representative of Assemblymember Rebecca Baurer-Kahan, who had a scheduling conflict, presented Assembly certificates of recognition to the outgoing board members, which was followed by a brief reception.

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