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Moraga Teachers Association members hold a Feb. 21 rally at the Rheem Boulevard/Moraga Road intersection. Photo Vera Kochan

Moraga's teachers rally for fair wages

By Vera Kochan

The Moraga Teachers Association (MTA), who are members of the Classified School Employees Association (a labor union), held a very vocal rally at the busy intersection of Rheem Boulevard and Moraga Road during evening commute hours on Feb. 21. Its purpose was to bring attention to the current wage negotiations between MTA and the Moraga School District (MSD).

"We really hope to raise awareness to the community and parents about where we are at with our negotiations," explained MTA president and Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School teacher Christina Marin. "We would love for parents and community members to email board members on our behalf, and we feel like we need them to inform more folks of the situation if we want them to stand with us."

Educator rallies were simultaneously scheduled in Orinda, Dublin, Pleasanton, Byron, Antioch, Pittsburg, Rodeo, Concord, Pleasant Hill, and Martinez. "There are so many locations doing this on the same day so that we can stand in solidarity with each other and support each other in our effort to fight for the best for our students," added Marin. "We are a coalition, and we want all students in the East Bay to have the best education and teachers. The rally is to raise awareness. We're not on strike yet."

For over an hour, drivers passing through the intersection honked their horns in support of the over 100 educators who were holding signs and passing out statistic-laden flyers. At one point, approximately 20 Campolindo High School athletes, out for a training run to the other side of town, had to pass through the assemblage and began to recognize teachers they'd had while in the MSD system. As both teachers and former students glimpsed each other, the volley of joyful greetings between them spoke volumes.

"After four sessions of negotiations this fall and progress on many areas of mutual agreement in contract language, the District and MTA were not able to reach an agreement on compensation," MSD Superintendent Julie Parks stated in a Feb. 12 email message to parents. "In December MTA declared an impasse. An impasse is the next step in the negotiation process and includes working with a state-appointed mediator to help the parties navigate the negotiations process."

The email continued, "Prior to declaring an impasse, MTA's last salary proposal to the District was an 11% increase in salary for the current school year and ongoing."

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Poll workers prepare for March primary

By David Scholz

There's more than counting ballots at stake with elections these days; trust in the process that voters engage in is under scrutiny too.

On the front lines of that endeavor in Contra Costa County are thousands of poll workers who in February have been involved in required online and in-person training to help democracy go forward during the March 5 Primary Election.

Doug Ewert was among several dozen poll workers from the Lamorinda area who were on hand at the Veterans Memorial Building in Lafayette on Feb. 14 for one of the Elections Division's many hour-long training sessions being held around the county.

The fundamental idea of democracy motivated Ewert, participating in his first election as a poll worker, to

step forward. "I wanted to be part of the process," he said.

Lori Everett, another newcomer, expressed equal excitement about serving.

"Our volunteers are dedicated to doing their part in the community and are grateful to be a part of and learn more about the election process," said Jessamyn Hazzard, the county's Elections Services Supervisor.

The Election Division's goal is to have all 147 polling places in the county staffed with one inspector (the lead poll worker) and six clerks, bringing the total to 1,029 poll workers for the upcoming primary.

"We are on target to meet our goal; however, we do have vacancies in parts of the county," she said. "There are a wide variety of reasons,

but it's mostly due to volunteers not interested in traveling far from their residence or unable to commit to a full 15-hour shift."

Hazzard also has been mindful of the news coverage about threats to poll workers and county and state election staff since the last election.

"We have not received a lot, but a few poll workers have shared their concerns about security. Mostly, poll workers are more interested in how to deescalate a difficult situation, which we do train [on] and remind them that their safety is our main priority," she said.

With the number of qualified political parties, with their own ballot and rules, and the variety of ballots having increased, Hazzard noted poll workers following procedures on Election Day is important.

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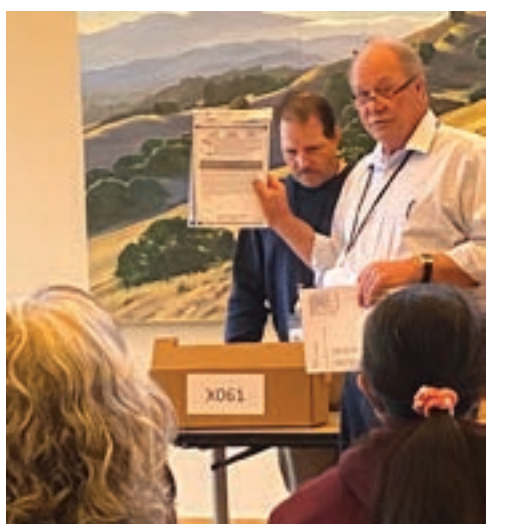


Photo David Scholz

Seasonal clerk Bill Cahill tells poll workers about organizing the different ballot types available at the polls during a training session Feb. 7 at Veterans Memorial Building in Lafayette.

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