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Four in the running for Hillsborough school board

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Adjusting to new standards, grappling with new technology and keeping the Hillsborough City Elementary School District one of the top districts in the state are important issues for those running for the district's Board of Trustees.

The four seeking seats on the board — incumbent Lynne Esselstein, Don Geddis, Kaarin Hardy and Pearl Wu — visited the Daily Journal office last week for an endorsement interview. Candidates were concerned with infrastructure changes needed to usher in the new computer-based Smarter Balanced assessments that come with the Common Core curriculum shift and continuing to have a strong school district.

Upcoming changes

The state's new Common Core standards shift to more team collaborative learning, with less time spent on lectures and more of an emphasis on classroom technology. New Smarter Balance aligns with these new standards and will go into effect during the 2014-15 school year.

Making sure teachers are prepared to have kids ready for the new assessment standards was a concern for Geddis.

"Hillsborough is well-prepared, but we don't even have the textbooks yet," Geddis said. "It's a lot of work."

Hardy works in change management consultation and said there's going to be some navigation through this curriculum change. She noted teachers are excited because they know it means it's what is best for kids. Also, being a test site for the Smarter Balance tests allowed the district to see how students interacted with them, she added.

Moving forward with cautious optimism with the transition is Wu's approach to the shift.

Esselstein noted that the district changed the middle school schedule to build in Common Core planning time for teachers. She did say that there will be a high quantity of technology devices needed for the change.

In terms of the district's balance of using technology in the classroom, Wu said overall the use is good when it's used in the right setting, at the right time.

"My basic philosophy is technology is a tool and part of what we do for critical thinking," Esselstein said, who said she represents the board's institutional memory. "More technology is coming and we're building up our Wi-Fi infrastructure. It's not effective if you don't have good teaching; otherwise it's not a good use of money."

Keeping pace with technology and considering device replacement costs is something to consider, Hardy said.

Geddis, who has a Ph.D. in computer science, said it needs to be considered whether the technology serves the school's needs or not, but that the district has been doing a good job using technology in the classroom. He also stressed the need for professional development to use SMART Boards and other technology correctly.



**Lynne
Esselstein**



Don Geddis



Kaarin Hardy



Pearl Wu

Praise for the district's work

When the issue of the capital appreciation bonds took the table, all candidates were in support of how the district used the funds. Back in July, a civil grand jury reported that capital appreciation bonds used by 13 San Mateo County school districts are expensive "ticking time bombs" that will drain future taxpayers.

"They were a great tool for us at the time," Esselstein said. "The property tax was in flux. There was misinformation in the grand jury report that could have been corrected if they approached us. The board was very conscientious about the program."

When Wu first read the news, she said she was ambivalent, but then went to a board meeting and felt reassured.

"We're ahead of the game," Wu said. "In the last 11 years there's been new buildings, learning spaces have been renovated and the district has been exercising fiscal responsibility. The lesson learned is you do not want to plunge in for short-term gains."

The district had the number one Academic Performance Index ranking in the state for K-8 schools this year, Esselstein said. To continue the success of the district, Hardy said the district's current strategic planning process will be helpful in deciding on what curriculum should be the focus.

Esselstein said she'd like to see students do more writing, while Geddis said his main priority would be making sure students are motivated and excited about going to school.

An expansion of the world language program is one of Wu's priorities as well.

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