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OUSD Board Candidates Talk Arts, Libraries and Learning

By Laurie Snyder

Each candidate for the Orinda Union School District Board of Trustees has budget management experience. All agree that, while sometimes helpful in mitigating funding shortfalls, the cuts U.S. schools make to the arts and other "soft" programs when struggling through economic crises ultimately are detrimental to America's long-term health.

"Do we have enough elementary level arts?" asks Julie Rossiter. "Not necessarily. There are so many requirements for other subjects that kids need, but school shouldn't just be about language arts and math. It should be about creating well rounded kids."

"Each child has a different way of expressing himself or herself," says Hillary Weiner. "It's critical for all kids to have some other outlet than just the basic core subjects. The same is true of having physical education programs at the schools."

"My mother-in-law and older son are artists so I know the power of the arts," says Jason Kaune.

"My son has this creativity; not every child has that, and that's fine. It's not a 'soft' ability. It's a talent like mathematics or sports."

"Corporations are hiring more liberal arts majors because they know how to think," says Carol Brown. "The arts and humanities are critical for learning. They teach us about the humanity of the other, and that informs everything we do in life."

On Libraries and Reading

"Books are essential," says Kaune. "The first thing you want your children to do is to enjoy picking up a book and see the world through it. Even though libraries are changing in the 21st century, they're still the heart of the community and school. Even in tough budgetary times, libraries are important to a full education."

"Ideally, I think the adoption of cost-saving, digitized textbooks should progress more rapidly in high schools and colleges, but libraries are also important, whether in our community or schools," says Rossiter. "My mother was an elementary school librarian for 25 years. When you're lying in bed with your child at night reading, having the book there is really important."

"Books are life giving. I don't think you get that same life from a glowing screen," says Brown. "I used a Kindle for book club, but eventually realized that I wasn't remembering the books. I've since learned through Scientific American that you remember a book better when you have it in your hands and are turning the pages."

"Personally, I now read on the Kindle," says Weiner. "But technology has its place. With bookstores and libraries, you glance through the shelves and your eyes settle on books you might not have otherwise read, and there's something to be said about going through a book and making notes. You don't get the same perspective when you're online."

Council and School Board Candidates to Discuss Orinda's Most Pressing Issues

Orinda City Council Candidate Forum: 7 p.m. on Oct. 6

OUSD Board of Trustees Candidate Forum: 7 p.m. on Oct. 16

Location: Orinda Library Auditorium. Sponsor: Orinda Association.

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

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