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A quick Q&A with County Superintendent of Schools candidates

By John T. Miller



Lynn Mackey Photos provided Cheryl Hansen

Lamorinda Weekly reached out to Lynn Mackey and Cheryl Hansen, who will be facing each other in the upcoming Nov. 6 election for County Superintendent of Schools, about various topics involving education.

LW: What are you most proud of as an educator?

Mackey: I am proud of the work I have done to help students in our County get back on track, return to their district school, receive diplomas, enter college, and start careers. In my role at the County Office, I have developed partnerships with educational agencies such as the Community College District and community based organizations to bring services to students throughout the county. I am proud of my work, when, former students who had been unsuccessful in their district school and ended up in juvenile hall, say to me "Do you remember me? You were my principal and you helped

me get my diploma."

Hansen: I am proud of my contributions and dedication to the success of all students, from the most fragile to the most independent, in my roles as educator, from classroom teacher, to principal, to County Office of Education administrator to School Board President.

As a three-time MDUSD Board President, I provided leadership changing the district culture to a positive, forward thinking organization that attracts and supports the best staff, where students receive a comprehensive education preparing them for college and careers. I helped improve employee salaries and benefits, lifting MDUSD to one of the top three districts in Contra Costa, while maintaining a balanced budget.

As a County Office administrator, I developed and led credentialing and leadership training for over 1,700 administrators throughout the county and state, and provided professional development to our county's special education teachers to increase support for students with special needs.

As principal, I opened and led a new comprehensive high school in Fairfield-Suisun now serving more than 2,000 students.

LW: What are your qualifications?

Hansen: I am the only candidate with a breadth of authentic experience and proven leadership, from classroom teacher, to principal, to CCCOE administrator to school board president.

I have firsthand knowledge gained from 10 years as an administrator with the CCCOE, and have a deep understanding of districts, having served as vice principal, assistant principal and principal in three diverse K-12 districts. My experience has earned me the trust and respect of educators throughout the county.

As a current MDUSD board trustee, my record of organizational change, educational advocacy, governance expertise, and development of community partnerships makes me uniquely qualified to lead the CCCOE forward.

Mackey: As deputy superintendent I have a deep understanding of the role and responsibility of the superintendent. In addition to being a school administrator in Alameda County, I have worked at every level of the Office of Education over the past 21 years. My long tenure at the County Office is a result of the quality of my work. I have been consistently selected for steady promotion from classroom teacher, to principal, and director of large departments, before being appointed deputy superintendent. I have worked in departments from early education to adult education and everything in between. I am active on local and state levels in the work of statewide County Offices of Education, and have sat on a number of boards and committees. I have the experience to keep continuity, and the passion and enthusiasm to effect change that will lead to the future.

LW: What do you see as problems facing Contra Costa County Schools and how do you propose to fix them?

Mackey: One of the top concerns is the financial health of the districts, with rising costs and flat funding.

Many districts struggle to keep their most promising programs. Although the issue of funding is not one that the County Superintendent can "fix" unilaterally, I will ensure our agency works collaboratively with every district in the county to ensure their fiscal health. I am committed to providing high quality and cost effective services. I will continue to advocate for adequate funding for all of our classrooms.

Another area of concern across all districts is balancing the social-emotional learning of students with academic achievement. I will support our districts and the County Office programs by ensuring social emotional learning is given a high level of support through the county office, focusing on the whole student.

Hansen: One of the largest concerns is the lack of service and support for our 18 districts. The current management has narrowed its role to basic bureaucratic duties and has eliminated support services, student programs, and professional development. As Superintendent, I will provide new leadership. Change must begin at the top. My leadership and record of accomplishment will bring much needed credibility, new energy, and vision to our County Office of Education.

LW: Finally, what is your position on charter schools?

Hansen: Charter schools began with the goal of offering public school choice, letting student and parents choose a school setting or instructional program that could address their learning needs. These charters share the goal of providing the best education possible for students.

Unfortunately, there has been an increase of "for profit" charters run by noneducators whose primary focus is not on educating, but using the system to exploit funding streams. These "for-profit" charters do not understand they are public schools and subject to the same accountability as any other. "For-profit" charters use discriminatory admission practices, lack of innovative programs, questionable achievement data, high staff turnover, lack of financial transparency and fiscal accountability, and questionable governance practices.

Authorizing agencies such as the CCCOE must be proactive in their oversight, advocacy, and protection of students' educational rights and welfare.

Mackey: Charter schools should be held to the same level of accountability and transparency as traditional public schools and that academic and behavioral expectations should be held to a high standard. There are good charters and struggling charters. Issues facing some of our communities around charter schools need to be addressed at a state level to tighten the approval process and ensure that it happens on the local level with local involvement. As Superintendent, I will ensure the charter schools that have been approved by the County Board and receive thorough and transparent oversight while also receiving the support they need to ensure success for their students.

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