

Published January 4th, 2023

## Lafayette School District board looks ahead to the new year

By Sharon K. Sobotta



From left: Meredith Meade, Rob Sturm, Katy Foreman, Dave Smith and Suzy Pak Photo provided

After an intense election cycle in November, the Lafayette School Board members are excited to roll up their sleeves and get to work. They say they're ready to lean in, listen, engage with the community, as they work toward the ultimate goal of serving children in the district and ensuring that they continue to have access to the high quality education that defines the community.

Suzy Pak, who has been on the board for nine years and has served as the liaison for Springhill Elementary School, was elected to the seat of board president. Meredith Meade continues to represent Happy Valley Elementary. Incumbents Dave Smith, who liaisons for Stanley Middle School, and Rob Sturm, for the Lafayette Elementary School were reelected to their seats in November. Katy Foreman, who represents Burton Valley Elementary School, is serving her very first term on the board or as an elected official.

"It's a goal of ours to remain student focused and work toward the well-being of the more than 3,000

students we represent. We (remain) committed to academics (and to) teaching and taking care of the whole child," Pak said. This is put into practice by integrating diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging efforts into the curriculum along with efforts to support the social, emotional learning and wellness of children. What does DEIB work and social, emotional well-being of students have to do with overall education? Everything, Pak says. "When a child feels like they're safe and secure and taken care of - whether that is through the lunch and breakfast program that's now available to all schools in California, or being able to have a conversation with a teacher or a counselor that helps them feel safe and secure - then they're open to doing more (learning) in the classroom."

Lafayette's reputation as a place of 'green hills and great schools' seems to attract a broad swath of families and children to the district. Pak says that living up to that reputation is important. "I think public schools are the backbone of our communities. We want to make sure we're honoring commitments with parents and caregivers, and as a public school district, we have no choice but to be very transparent about everything we're doing," Pak said. "The other part (that's important) is the staff and teachers that we employ. Our goal is to be an employer of choice. We understand that great teachers and great staff (are the cornerstone of) great education."

After being an engaged parent volunteer and serving in the PTA, Katy Foreman is excited to make her debut as an elected member of the Lafayette School Board.

"I've really benefited from our schools and I've appreciated being able to send my kids to our schools," Foreman said. "This sort of felt like a natural next step in my service to the schools." The election was an illuminating experience for Foreman. "(It confirmed) part of what I already knew, which was that people care deeply about schools in Lafayette. There are a lot of different viewpoints. (A lot can be gained) when we can have honest, brave, open collaborative conversations with people who have different perspectives."

Even in what felt like a tense political landscape leading up to the election, where some residents' chosen candidates weren't elected, the board members say it's important that all residents feel represented. "I want Lafayette to be a place of belonging for everybody, no matter who you voted for. I will listen with an open mind and open heart and continue to think about what's genuinely the best for our students."

Rob Sturm served as school board president for the past two years and he's been a part of the school board since 2017. "This was my third election cycle. I think this one was a little unique in that there was so much attention locally on the election. It reminded me how passionate our community is about schools and maintaining excellence with our schools so they can continue to evolve and become even better," Sturm reflected. "I spent many hours canvassing with my family and engaging in really interesting conversations. People are really craving information and wanting to stay informed."

The school board plans to continue to hold regular town hall meetings to keep the community informed about what is in the works and on the horizon in Lafayette schools. They also say they're committed to taking to heart the issues that are raised by parents and community members during the open forum, as they say is evidenced by the district's response to the after school childcare needs.

"In addition to serving on the school board, I'm a constituent. It's also my job to remain open to receiving public comment in board meetings. Even if we can't engage in dialogue in the structure of our meetings, we really do listen (and take action/make recommendations accordingly)," Pak said. "The issue of after school care came to us because parents brought it up during open comment. As a working parent, I understand that and I appreciate the vulnerability that comes with sharing that. We were able to say OK, we have a lot of working parents unable to find childcare, we need to do something. So we work together with our superintendent and now we're doing something about that (as early as January)."

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[back](#)

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