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MSD Candidates Want to Keep Moraga Schools on Track

By Sophie Braccini



Jim Obsitnik David Harrison Joe Rosenbaum
Richard Severy

Four names will be listed on the ballots for the Moraga School District governing this November: one person, Jim Obsitnik, is running unopposed for the two-year term, while three are running for two four-year terms on the board: incumbent Richard Severy, David Harrison and Jim Obsitnik.

Jim Obsitnik

Jim Obsitnik says he was initially appointed for a two-year term back in 2014.

"Assuming I win (given that I'm unopposed), this would result in an effective total four-year term," he says to explain why he chose that option. He says he thinks it is good that board members continually reevaluate their commitment to improving children's education every four years, to make sure that the board is made of the right people.

For the past two years, Obsitnik says that he has focused on successful implementation of innovative curriculum programs that support the Common Core standards in English-language arts and mathematics, shepherded children's safety as a charter member of the Student Safety Committee, and ensured that the district is prudent in its fiscal management. He is especially proud that the board made the right decision regarding the start time at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, prioritizing sleep for that age group to improve educational outcomes.

The candidate says he is invested in the district's efforts to develop the "Whole Child" for lifelong learning, with curricula including music and arts, enabling students to be successful global citizens in the 21st Century.

"As a technology executive, I am excited about the strides the District has made to weave technology into our children's educational experiences and look forward to driving further innovation in this area," he says. He adds that if he is elected for a second term he will also empower teachers in their implementation efforts of the Common Core Standards, and support improving the facilities to create a 21st-Century learning environment for collaboration, innovation, and interactivity.

Obsitnik is the father of two girls currently in the MSD.

David Harrison

David Harrison has two children in Moraga elementary schools and feels his family is a direct beneficiary of the quality education the MSD provides.

"I wanted to give back, serve, and help improve the district as well," he says.

Harrison, who says he is passionate about education, would want to support extra-curricular chances to volunteer and to compete in both academics and athletics. He believes this type of engagement is not only good for developing well-rounded citizens who have compelling stories to tell on college applications, but also helps ignite children's passion for intellectual engagement and lifelong learning.

Harrison says he has worked closely with public sector entities as a private sector executive in both entrepreneurial start-ups and larger well-established companies, and that the board position would be his first role within the public sector. He believes that his background as a chief financial officer will help him assist with maintaining sound fiscal discipline without sacrificing programs that help children thrive.

"With strong budgeting, planning, financial analysis and negotiation we can get the most out of our limited resources," he says, adding that he is also very comfortable reviewing contracts and diving deeply into the details so potential concerns are proactively addressed while still staying focused on the big picture.

Harrison says he started being passionate about education when he discovered, while tutoring in college, different ways in which individuals learn. He says he even briefly started a company that sought to hire

tutors who could not only teach tailored to individual learning styles, but who could also begin to aggregate these insights about different types of learners to help develop targeted products and services based on them. Since then, his involvement in education has primarily been through volunteer activities such as teaching the BizWorld program in elementary school classrooms, coaching youth sports and leading a Cub Scout Den. He says he regularly attends school board meetings, has provided input for achieving small class sizes while still achieving a sound budget plan, and has advocated for the district to host programs like Math Kangaroo and other extra-curricular opportunities to increase student engagement. He supports measure V.

Joe Rosenbaum

Joe Rosenbaum says that he is running for the MSD position to assist administrators, teachers and staff to maintain the current high level of excellence of education in Moraga schools.

"The MSD schools are continually recognized among the best in the state, and this in turn benefits our community and home values," he says.

Rosenbaum is a longtime resident of Moraga who has been involved in community and youth sports activities for much of the last 20-plus years. His two sons attended and benefitted from the education received from the MSD. He believes that since he no longer has children in the MSD system, he will bring an objective viewpoint to the board.

Rosenbaum has been quite active supporting the community and youth activities including acting as chair of the ad hoc "Field of Dreams Committee," the joint committee of the Moraga Town Council and the Moraga School District that ultimately resulted in the renovation of the recreational fields at Camino Pablo Elementary.

"I have also served as President of Moraga Baseball Association, president of Moraga Sports Alliance, president of Campolindo Cougar Club, and board member of Lamorinda Rugby Football Club. I have also assisted with Moraga Boy Scout Troop 212," he says.

Professionally, Rosenbaum has worked as a certified public accountant for over 30 years, with leadership positions at large international firms. He currently serves as the chair of the California Board of Accountancy's Enforcement Advisory Committee and on the California Society of CPA's Forensic Services Steering Committee.

"I would bring valuable accounting, financial and leadership skills to the board," he says. Rosenbaum supports Measure V.

"The recent Facilities Master Plan revealed numerous repairs that need to be made in our schools including leaky roofs, deteriorating plumbing, heating and ventilation systems, improvements for seismic safety and upgrades to the electrical systems," he says. He is confident that the monies raised by this bond will be locally controlled and would only benefit Moraga schools, and will also have oversight and audits.

"The MSD could also become eligible for state matching funds. All in all, it is an investment in our local schools and our local community," he says.

Besides providing valuable insight and support to the administrators, teachers and staff, and making sure the needed upgrades are financed, Rosenbaum wants to strengthen ties to the community at large, especially those without children in the MSD.

Richard Severy

Richard Severy is an incumbent who was appointed to the board at the beginning of the 2016 when Parker Colvin moved out of Moraga. He is the co-chair of the Measure V committee.

Severy is an attorney who worked in Washington D.C. for a Supreme Court Justice before moving to California and working in the telecommunication industry, specifically in policymaking where he built consensus with different stakeholders.

He says he's always had an interest in local education, following his two children as they went through all the local schools. Severy says that his experience with public policy making has allowed him to jump in quickly in the thick of things with the district. Besides Measure V, he represents Moraga on the Contra Costa County School Board Association, he is on the legislative committee, meeting federal representatives and advocating policies that would benefit Moraga. He also participated in the California Schools Association leadership conference for Moraga.

He says he enjoys working with Superintendent Bruce Burns and his staff and is immersing himself in different aspects of the life of the MSD.

"Being retired, I have had the time to do it, as well as the passion and the interest," he says. He highlights that the results of this year's test scores show the excellence of the Moraga schools, scoring twice the state average. He believes that the challenge is to maintain that excellence for everyone, in an

environment where accountability metrics are changing for schools, and curriculum is changing as well, "which means for example that teachers need to be re-trained in an effective and cost effective manners," he says.

Finance is another priority for him. He says that the budget is balanced for now, but is dependent on state allocations, a source of funding that cannot be guaranteed moving forward, while salaries and benefits increasing as prescribed by state regulations. Severy thinks that the MSD can look creatively at different sources of funding, like going after federal funds for special education that would free some district money for other general education purposes.

His goal is to support developing an environment where students can develop creative and critical thinking skills, maybe with smaller classrooms, and professional development so teachers are made aware of new teaching practices such as flexible classrooms where students work in groups.

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