

We have choices in the school district

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Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:10/04/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

Representative government is the foundation of democracy. Yet, BVSD school board elections have often failed to provide voters with a choice for each open seat. This year is different. There are three Boulder Valley Board of Education director seats up for election with two well-qualified candidates for each seat. While individual board members must reside in the district which they represent, each is elected by all district voters. Candidates are: District B (Boulder) -- John Kettling and Lesley Smith; District E (East) -- Tom Miers and Jim Pollicita, and District F (Broomfield) -- Jennie Belval and Louise Benson. Given the challenging and time-consuming demands placed on school board members, I want to thank them for their willingness to serve.

BVSD is at a critical crossroads. While funds have never been plentiful, the District was forced to make painful cuts this year, and will likely need to cut even deeper next year. The school board sets strategic direction, provides fiscal oversight, creates policy and monitors the district's performance by reflecting the community's values and priorities and operating within the framework of state and federal laws. It is a tough balancing act and is going to get even harder! When voting for school board members, I recommend thinking about:

The issues the district will face, how the candidates understand the challenges, and what viewpoints and ideas they bring to the table.

The candidate's background -- education, expertise, relationships and the professional and life experiences that shape their perspectives and personalities, and will influence how quickly and effectively they will contribute.

How candidates enhance board diversity, and whether their viewpoints and style will build bridges to other board members, BVSD, and our communities.

The three most pressing issues on the district's plate are: 1.) Financial. The budget situation will effect how well BVSD is able to balance its goals of excellence and equity. Further budget cuts could jeopardize progress and force difficult trade-off's and/or create opportunities for widespread innovation. 2.) Relationships with teachers. However it is resolved, the current dispute between the district and the Boulder Valley Education Association will likely result in hard feelings. Helping to repair the damage and move forward respectfully and collaboratively to focus on student success will be critical. 3.) Community Partnerships. The school board is often criticized for failing to effectively engage the community and, in the past, has had disagreements with various city officials over land use issues. Finding creative solutions to more challenging problems will involve sharing increasingly limited resources and a concerted effort by each board member.

Each of the candidates is an educated person and successful professional. Belval is a former lawyer who coordinates talented and gifted students at Aspen Creek K-8. Benson is a medical doctor, working part-time at the VA in Denver. Kettling is a retired BVSD educator and volunteers extensively. Miers is a senior manager/engineer at Ball Aerospace. Pollicita is a Ph.D. and retired higher education administrator and management consultant. Another Ph.D., Smith is at the University of Colorado's Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences and a \$2.5 million NSF grant supporting science education in BVSD.

Candidates have many similar and different touchpoints with BVSD. Belval, Benson, Kettling and Smith have extensively volunteered. Miers' wife teaches in BVSD. Belval is currently Chair of the Citizens Bond Oversight Committee and Pollicita serves on the District Accountability Council. Miers, Pollicita and Smith have children currently attending BVSD and Belval, Benson and Miers have graduated children. Belval and Kettling are/have been BVSD employees. Incumbent Smith has served on the school board for four years, including as its Vice President. As a committee member of BVSDWatch.org, a watchdog group, Benson is a BVSD critic and supporter.

Current board members are white, over 50 and the board is gender-balanced, and will remain so regardless of who wins. All candidates have roots in their communities, having lived there six years or longer. We in the Boulder Valley are blessed to have such well-qualified and committed candidates willing to serve on what has historically been perhaps the most contentious arm of local government. Your mail ballots should arrive in mid-October. Between now and the time you fill out your ballot, get to know the candidates and where they stand on the issues. And most importantly, once you do, please vote in these important races!

Francie Anhut is the CEO of Impact on Education, an independent nonprofit community partnership for BVSD. The organization does not endorse candidates.

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