

Dist. 181 board members identify big issues

Elected officials offer likely agenda for next few years in advance of April election

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The residents of Community Consolidated Elementary District 181 face a choice on April 4 when they decide from among four candidates who they want to fill the three open seats on the district's board.

To get a sense of the issues those newly elected officials will face, current board members were asked via email to weigh in on the most pressing matters confronting the district. Board President Mridu Garg said curriculum concerns rise to the top of her list, including effectively implementing new Common Core standards and associated educational material to ensure students thrive.

"Related to the new curriculum and associated resources is adequate professional development for our staff to make sure all teachers and support staff are prepared to teach to the new curriculum and utilize new materials," Garg stated.

That was also on the mind of board member Leslie Gray, who noted that updates in science, social studies,

language arts and encore classes at both the elementary and middle school level are slated for next school year.

"The new curriculum will greatly enhance student learning for students of all ability levels," Gray stated. "However, the multiple changes that will be implemented next year will require a great deal of hard work and dedication on the part of staff."

Adopting and instituting a sustainable digital learning plan for the district was also a priority, she noted, specifically one "that allows for successful integration of technology into the curriculum while balancing parent concerns about increased technology use."

The successful completion of a new Hinsdale Middle School was at or near the top of the lists of Garg and Gray, as well as board members Rich Giltner and Jill Vorobiev.

"We need to complete the construction of a new HMS on time and on budget with minimal disruptions to students and the community," Gray said.

Digital learning made Vorobiev's

rankings, and she also identified pension reform as a significant issue.

Giltner submitted that attention is needed on "balancing the budget while minimizing tax impact on residents given challenges of state-level variables such as "property tax freeze, pension cost shifting and decreasing state funding."

The district, he stated, also needs to grapple with "expenses increasing at a greater pace than inflation including, but not limited to, employee wages and health care benefits."

Gray concurred.

"Currently (the salaries and benefits expense) outpaces the consumer price index — the amount we can levy — and therefore less money is available in the budget each year for student learning and facility needs," she stated.

Garg shared that sentiment, too, advising the board to craft "long-term budgets to allow for proper planning that ultimately lead to sustainable expenditures and take into account potential reduction of state funding and pension reform."

Garg also advanced the need to



think strategically about managing district facilities through the "implementation of a facility master plan that allows for current and future planning while taking into account maintenance needs as well as educational programming needs."

Giltner alluded to the turnover in the district administration office in suggesting it would behoove the new board to pursue "continuity and stability at the administrative level, but not at the expense of performance."

Gray stated that building trust among all district stakeholders is an imperative in order to achieve its goals efficiently and effectively.

"The district has a lot of balls in the air — we are trying to do a lot of things at the same time to enhance the district," she said. "The challenge is to successfully execute all outstanding initiatives in a fiscally responsible manner."