

Board selects Mazzei to fill vacant seat

March 3, 2020



For Charlaine Mazzei, the second time proved to be the charm.

When Roger Delay vacated his District 4 seat on the Del Norte Unified School District Board of Education on Jan. 6, five community members threw their hats in the ring to fill out the remainder of his term through November.

The remaining board members voted Feb. 27 for Mazzei to join their ranks. Mazzei previously ran for the District 4 seat in 2016, losing out to Delay and fellow replacement candidate Judith Cordts. The other candidates interviewing for the vacancy included Joey Borges, Mike Mealue and (Albert) George Olson.

Mazzei admitted she had mixed emotions when she came out on top.

“I’m kind of excited and a little nervous. It will be a big challenge. I hope to do it justice,” Mazzei told The Triplicate.

After being interviewed by the trustees in public forums and interviewed by a combined Del Norte Teachers Association/California State Employees Association board, the trustees laid out their criteria for selecting a

replacement and the nominations were not unanimous.

District 5 Trustee Jamie Forkner said she was impressed that there were five candidates and had worried the district wouldn't get one person. After the interviews, she had one clear choice.

"Charlaine had very good answers to all the questions we asked. She has shown prior that she wants to do the job because she ran for the job before. Her heart is in the right spot and wants to put her best foot forward. Additionally, someone who has a special-needs child would be good on the board," Forkner said.

District 1 Trustee Don McArthur agreed that Mazzei's answers were all on point. He said his criteria for a new trustee included maintaining board diversity, have a problem-solving ability, ability and credibility to represent the board and conviviality to get along with follower trustees.

"In terms of a comprehensive awareness of what the board does and how boards work, I was inclined to find Charlaine meets my criteria," he said.

District 2 Trustee Angela Greenough listed among her criteria a need to emphasize a diversity of knowledge on the board. Greenough said current board membership has backgrounds in psychology, human resources, business and a loud, former student in her case. That's why she nominated Olsen for his extensive institutional knowledge in education locally and internationally.

In the end, the majority held 2-1 for Mazzei as Board President Frank Magarino abstained from voting for a nominee.

With no submitted written comments from the public, teacher Paige Thompson, as a resident of District 4, was the only speaker during public comment. After attending four of five interviews, including the DNTA-CSEA session, she too was impressed by the quality of candidates.

"Reading through all the applications, I was amazed we had five applicants given the current climate," Thompson said, alluding to the unresolved contract negotiation between the school district and the DNTA. "It makes me feel good that people want to still be a part of the school district. I was really impressed with Charlaine's responses. I think she offers a unique perspective because she is a current parent and has a student with special needs. I appreciated she didn't have to know every answer. In the DNTA-CSEA she said, you know, I would have to look into that. These are the things I would look for while researching it."

Mazzei, the executive director at the Del Norte Senior Center for the past nine years, agreed being a parent of a special-need child does bring a needed perspective to the board.

"I ran in 2016 because I saw things that needed to be improved. At that point, my son had just started in school. But I was amazed how ill-prepared it was for his needs, and how difficult it was to get his services," Mazzei said. "I'm in a better place now for my child, but I see others still struggling. I bring ideas, I'm a problem-solver. I like to help. I know a lot of people who work in the district. Now is a harder time. Trust in the district and working for them is not at a good level. I want to help them feel valued."

Mazzei said her biggest goal when she joins the board at its first work-study session in March, is to nurture the notion there is not an adversarial relationship between the administration and teachers.

“How we get there, I don’t know. We shouldn’t have morale be as low as it is. We should as a board or administration not treat them as unreasonable when they’re asking for decent health and welfare raise. I hope to help be a part of the solution,” she said.

Having been married to her husband Michael for 19 years, Mazzei ironically said she is non-committal when it comes to what comes next after serving out the District 4 term through November.

“I’ll leave myself an out. I will most likely run again, but it depends on the support I get. I had support in 2016, but at that time, the unions declined to endorse anybody. If I get their support and people saying I’m doing a good job, I will run again. But if a better choice comes along, we’ll see who it will be,” Mazzei said. “I’ll hit ground running and do the best I can then see where it goes.”