

OUR VIEW

# Keep El Monte board intact

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2009



**T**HE challenges that come with being a board member of the El Monte Union High School District are many, perhaps more than in any other district.

This district includes only high schools: Rosemead High, El Monte High, Arroyo High, South El Monte High, Mountain View High and Ledesma High. The district manages an adolescent population with urban problems such as street gangs, low-income families and language barriers. There are 45 different languages spoken in the district, and for a large portion of students, English is not spoken at home.

Added to language and poverty, there are the problems of facilities. Some of these high schools are the oldest in the Valley.

These are *on top of* the draconian cuts K-12 education has taken from the state.

We see the job of school board member to include policy-maker, counselor, role model, budget watcher, builder and decision-maker. It is clearly the hardest of the elected offices, tougher than city council person, water board member or Assembly member.

The EMUHSD board — even after some veteran board members left four years ago — has been doing a very good job of tackling these challenges. It has steered a successful renovation of El Monte High to completion and is about to start new classroom/science building projects at Rosemead and Arroyo highs.

The board is diverse in background — like the district — and works together on problems. The district is not perfect — it needs to finish construction projects, help raise student performance and get more parents involved with their child's education. But it is working well from what we've seen and heard.

We see no reason to break up this group. That's why we are endorsing the three incumbents on the ballot on Nov. 3. It's not that change isn't good, it is that change now for this district is not recommended.

What the voters have are three different board members — one Asian, one Latino and one white — who are working on one goal: helping students achieve.



First, we give our endorsement to **Tonson Man**, one of the better board members in the San Gabriel Valley. Man is up on the numbers and proud of how the board and superintendent used early retirement to save the district money so it could hire back pink-slipped teachers as well as 31 new teachers. Man never loses sight of what he's there for: "I'm proud to say our kids are improving," he said. He voted against soda vending machines on campus before state law required and pushed for more physical education. "It is an honor and a privilege to serve" on the board, he said.

Next, **Carlos G. Salcedo**, a fifth-grade teacher in Los Angeles, is a dynamic, veteran board member who must be retained. He is working to get more graduates to attend college and is proud of the partnering with Rio Hondo College and University of California, Irvine. Students get a check-up on the UC "A through G" requirements in the form of a letter from the UCI chancellor. "When they get a personalized letter, they are feeling more motivated," he said. Salcedo, who joined the board eight years ago, was inspired to go back to school and earn a master's degree in education. "I've realized this is a true passion."

Last, but not least, is veteran board member **Tess Velasco**. During the past year, when cuts were handed down from Sacramento, Velasco as board chair helped the board weather the crisis by insisting it keep a healthy reserve. That will come in handy next year when Sacramento is likely to require more budget cuts. Velasco also correctly noted that no matter what language is spoken at home, the district will focus on teaching students how to speak, read and write English.

These three experienced candidates are needed at the helm to steer this district through more choppy waters.