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2020 Election: Woodland Area 5 trustee candidates answer questions

Debbie Decker and Kandice Fowler both have ideas if elected to the Woodland School Board in November.



Daily Democrat Illustration

By **WOODLAND DAILY DEMOCRAT** |

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The Daily Democrat, working with the Woodland League of Women Voters, is hosting a series of questions posed to candidates for the Woodland Joint Unified School District. This format was taken for the Nov. 3 general election instead of the League's usual "in-person" forums due to concerns about spreading the coronavirus. This is the second of two stories and will feature candidates Debbie Decker and Kandace Fowler, who are seeking the Area 5 position on the board. Both are answering the same six questions.

Should the district have a Climate Action Plan and a climate change curriculum to prepare students to live and work in a changing world?

Debbie Decker: The District intends to collaborate with the city of Woodland and with Yolo County to support and develop a more holistic climate action plan for our community. The District is in the process of developing an Environmental Stewardship Committee. The Next Generation Science Standards has a large component on human impacts to the environment, including climate change. The standards are being incorporated across chemistry, biology and physics but it's a 1- to 2-year process for that to be totally integrated. In the interim, teachers are incorporating these environmental standards in various classroom activities and experiments.

Kandice Fowler: We experienced the brown skies as a result of the natural disasters caused by fires on the West Coast. We can all do our part to minimize our impact on the planet, which includes curriculum. In my opinion, all responsible organizations of a certain size that have an impact on the environment should have a Climate Action Plan that is reviewed and updated annually. The city of Woodland adopted a Climate Action Plan in 2017, and Yolo County in 1982, the district should also be aligned with this level of commitment towards stewardship, supported with the curriculum.





Woodland Joint Unified School District Area 5 Trustee Debbie Decker. CARLOS GUERRERO – DAILY DEMOCRAT

Discuss district programs for unhoused students and families that provide equal access to school, including outreach, remedial learning and tools required for classroom and distance learning.

Decker: The District employs a special project manager whose focus is to support unhoused students and families. In close collaboration with the local shelter, CPS, and Yolo County, along with SROs, Salvation Army and our schools, she finds out if children and families are unhoused and near homeless. She also works with these students' home schools to provide school-based supports and wrap-around services from City, County and state resources. The goal is to help families into stable housing.

Fowler: Data shows that the majority of our homeless youth are living with extended family/friends, with roughly 8% in temporary shelters, 3% in hotels/motels and 2% in shelter, for perspective. Working in special education, I know that part of our responsibility as educators include case management for vulnerable students, in addition to teaching. The district has Foster and Homeless Youth Outreach services designed to assist/support students with programs to improve educational outcomes. During COVID-19 and distance learning it is imperative that the district assess the needs of our most vulnerable students and ensure they have the support to perform academically.



What do you identify as the underlying issues leading to juvenile referrals to the justice system and how can schools address these issues?

Decker: I heard a statistic recently, and I apologize for not having attribution, that male students, primarily Hispanic males, who don't feel connected or incorporated into a school community by the time they're about 7th grade, the risks for them to end up in the juvenile justice system go up significantly. The transition from 6th grade to 7th grade is a critical one and it's important for schools to be mindful and watchful for those students who might be at risk of not making the connections — to a teacher or a staff person or a school community.

Fowler: The intersection of the juvenile justice and the education system are often the result of lack of support/resources, mental health, behavioral issues, and disparity in addition to continued budget cuts on educational resources, staff, and programs. Many school districts are progressing to a restorative justice model that focuses on relationships. While that may seem esoteric, there is substantial data supporting proven alternatives with great success. Yolo County has a Neighbor Court with an emphasis on restorative justice through the District Attorney's office. These programs are created to hold people accountable and acknowledge how their behavior and actions impact the community.



Kandice Fowler. CARLOS GUERRERO – DAILY DEMOCRAT

What proposals do you have to balance the 2021-2022 district budget if funding is cut next year?

Decker: Associate Superintendent Wiley and his team have so far balanced the budget without having to ask for layoffs and I commend their efforts. The District has benefited greatly from one-time funding from the state and the feds to support our pandemic response. But that's one-time money and it's irresponsible, from a budget standpoint, to use one-time funding to support on-going expenses such as salaries. If the state chooses to cut funding for education in the 2021-22 school year, we're going to have to face the heartbreaking facts of further cuts to a variety of programs and to consider staff layoffs.

Fowler: WJUSD was facing budget cuts prior to the coronavirus pandemic. The additional expenses incurred as a result of COVID-19, while offset by some grants and additional funding, will result in necessary cuts due to health and safety constraints. If the state continues to slash funding to education, as if fully funded schools educating our future leaders is not a priority, we will continue, as a district, to make tough choices which will include a reduction of staff and cuts to programs. We need to be competitive in our grant writing and developing partnership community organizations to support programs.

What is the district plan to obtain feedback from students and parents regarding the difficulties faced using distance learning and monitor student progress?

Decker: The California Department of Education requires the district to monitor student progress and has provided guidelines and expectations for monitoring and reporting. The guidelines also provide for interventions. Our teachers and staff have had significant professional development to recognize and support those students who may be struggling. A good survey instrument will use neutral language when querying our stakeholders ("difficulties" is not neutral language). The District will be surveying stakeholder groups regarding distance learning and how our families experienced distance learning. I will want the District to wait until a natural pause in the school year before we survey stakeholders.

Fowler: While I cannot speak to the current plans of the district to gather feedback from students and parents, it would be short-sighted to not actively engage parents in a meaningful format in this process. The Woodland Joint Unified School District Local Control and Accountability Plan has a goal to improve parent participation and engage. Parents have a ton of opinions, ideas and input concerning the response to COVID-19 that deserves more than 3 minutes per speaker and 20-minute public comments per Board Bylaws. Now is the time to engage parents in committees and task forces.

How can the district improve the quality, safety, and sustainability of cafeteria meals which many Woodland children rely on for breakfast, lunch, and after school snacks?



Decker: I wasn't aware there was a problem with our food service and the quality of meals provided. Families and students seem satisfied with meals provided. Most of the funding and meal requirements come from the Federal government so there isn't a great deal of flexibility. That said, our food service department has developed a relationship with the Yolo Food Bank to provide fresh produce and staples to our families, during "grab and go" meal distribution. This is a tremendous benefit to our families who may be struggling or who find it difficult to access Food Bank resources.

Fowler: Woodland is the Farm Front of California. WJUSD in relation, ought to be a pioneer in Farm to School programs. The district needs to implement programs that provides the resources, training, support and inducement to the culinary staff, for which there are grants and public-private partnerships. We can also develop a School Lunch Fee Donation programs to help support families that don't qualify for free/reduced lunch but still struggle to make ends meet. Many of our schools have school gardens we can bolster but no forging gardens where kids can grab safe fruit during breaks gathered following safety protocol.

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