

School Board candidates respond to local issues



Rob Brostoff



Chris Reitz



Kris Wilhelm

Three people are vying for the Hood River County School Board Position 1, on the May 19 ballot.

They are Rob Brostoff of Cascade Locks, Chris Reitz of Hood River and Kristine Wilhelm of Hood River.

The Position 1 area includes west Hood River and the Cascade Locks area, and is currently occupied by Liz Whitmore, who decided not to run again. (Kateri Osborn Lohr, the Position 3 incumbent, and Tom Scully, Position 5, are running unopposed.)

Ballots went out May 2 and should have arrived by now; call Elections at 541-386-1442 if you have not received yours. Ballots must be in the Elections Office hands by 8 p.m. on May 19.

Here are Position 1 candidates' biographies and "why I am running" statement, with further questions and answers (via emails) continuing on this page and A12.

Kris Wilhelm — A native of Hood River Valley, I attended Parkdale Elementary, Wy'east Middle School graduated from HRV. After graduating from OSU, I returned to Hood River. Our boys are in grades fifth and sixth. I'm a part-time Exercise Physiologist at Providence. I've been a school volunteer, PTO and previously appointed to Westside Site Council.

Why are you running for this position?

While I never aspired to run, I feel we're at a crucial turning point. Budgets are strained. Unproven testing has been federally mandated on our kids and teachers. Boards should be diverse, and I want to represent that change. My platform is simple: to represent kids, teachers, and taxpayers.

Chris Reitz — I have lived in Hood River since 2002 with my husband, Max. We have a son, Joe, who is in 5th grade and a daughter, Jill, who is in 3rd grade, both at Westside Elementary.

Neonatal Intensive Care Registered Nurse 1997-2006

Providence Center for Medically Fragile Children Board member 2013-present

Gorge Kids Triathlon Co-founder and Committee member 2011-present

Westside Elementary School PTO 2009-2011, 2014-present; Vice-president 2014/2015

Hood River Warming Shelter Volunteer 2013-present

SMART Reader 2014-present

Hood River Waterfront Park Adopt-a-plot Committee member 2010-2013

Westside Elementary School Site Council 2010/2011

New Parent Services of Hood River County Advisory Board member 2009-2011

Why are you running for this position?

My motivation to run for School Board is based on a simple commitment to education and children. I believe that as a community, it is our responsibility to provide the best education possible for our children to ensure they have the opportunity for a prosperous future.

Rob Brostoff — Currently retired, previously employed as an engineer for various computer manufacturers, working in Seattle, Portland and the bay area. Since retirement I've been involved in Cascade Locks city council, their budget committee and planning commission.

I've also done budget for the Port of Cascade Locks. I've worked with the Smart Program, mentoring chess at the elementary level and am currently serving on the school board. I've been involved with research on PERS, property taxes, and now minimum wage in Portland. My daughter lives in Tillamook along with her daughter and her three boys. My mother taught music at

the David Douglas district and the US Virgin Islands.

Why are you running for this position?

I'm running to maintain the confidence of citizens with their local schools, raise graduation rates, bring grade equity between our various communities and find stability in school financing. We also need to find ways to lower class size, lengthen the amount of days in our school year, and add back some of the lost classes such as PE, Music, Art, and add more STEM/STEAM classes.

CHRIS REITZ

What qualifies you to serve as a school board member?

With my diverse background and experience advocating for kids, I feel I am qualified to provide positive leadership as a school board member. Please see above for leadership experience.

What are your top goals?

First, I want to ensure that our kids are getting an enriched education experience that goes beyond bare bones learning. Second, I want to provide a supportive environment for our teachers. Ways that this can be accomplished would be to closely maintain appropriate class size and increase teacher's ability to have their voice heard by the board. Finally, I want to ensure a more consistent level of funding for the district

What are your thoughts on the District budget situation, current and future?

I believe that it is very difficult to provide students with the best learning environment and teachers with an efficient work place when there is a budget deficit for multiple years in a row. I think that we need to make our voices heard at the state level that funding for schools should be a top priority. It is hard to imagine our educational system improving with continued cuts to our school budgets.

What are your thoughts on Common Core and standardized testing?

The concept of a common core curriculum appears to be an effective model for guiding efficient teaching. I believe that standardized testing can be a valuable tool as well. That being said, it has to be the right test and be aligned with what the students are learning and community expectations. Ultimately standardized tests are only effective if the results are used to improve the education experience.

How can the District best meet the needs of the Hispanic community?

We need to find effective ways of communicating with the Hispanic community. By utilizing dual-language teachers and staff, having all written communications in both English and Spanish, providing district and school meetings that are given both in Spanish and English or providing interpretive services at those that are given only in English. We need to engage with known leaders in the Hispanic community and confer with them on the best ways to meet the needs of this population.

What is the main challenge to the District in the next 3-5 years and how should the board prepare for it and address it?

Funding is going to be the biggest challenge for the District. We need to look at our budget very closely and see if we are utilizing funds in the most effective way. This should include scrutinizing needs that could still be met but in a creative way that would save the district money. Another opportunity would be to encourage local fundraising to enhance school programs. The Gorge Kids Triathlon is a model for

this type of fundraising. Over the past 4 years, the \$31,000 raised by this event went directly to elementary PTOs to enhance the school's PE programs. We also need to ensure that local funding that the community has previously provided the district continues.

ROB BROSTOFF

What qualifies you for this position?

I've served on your school board for 3 years learning the needs of our children, how we're funded, the needs of the district and understanding the changes being undertaken with Common Core and Smarter Balance testing. I've also developed an understanding of PERS and the effects it has on schools and other agencies.

What are your top goals?

My goals for the schools are to increase graduation rates, close the grade gaps between rich and poor and our various cultural groups.

Increase and maintain reserves until the state improves funding. Lower class sizes and increase the length of the school year. I'd like to see an inventory done on our buildings and equipment and put in place a plan to prioritize our needs and accomplish it over time. We also need to add back lost electives.

What are your thoughts on the district budget, present and future?

The district can thank it's citizens for passing budget levies to help cover the constant cuts to school budgets over the last two decades, the legislature has left Oregon near the bottom of the 50 states in funding for schools, The Oregon Supreme Court just over turned PERS decisions made by the legislature. This hurts schools throughout Oregon, which have suffered loss of days, larger class sizes and loss of electives. These are state wide issues which date back to changes made to Oregon's property tax structure.

Please consider contacting your legislators in regard to increased funding.

What are your thoughts on Common Core and standardized testing?

Common Core is a standard to measure progress against. Smarter Balance, is the current test used, regarded as controversial by some, it's the test used and mandated by many states including Oregon. Passing it allows students from Oregon to enter over 200 colleges and universities without taking remedial classes as they will have demonstrated proficiency in those subjects.

How can the District best serve the needs of the Hispanic community?

There is an achievement gap between native English speakers and the Hispanic community, it's existed and stayed at the same level for several years. We need to offer more dual language courses, engage young Hispanic children early on to ensure they're prepared for school, engage them with more resources if and when they fall behind, make sure they are comfortable in their learning environment, and find learning fun and enjoyable.

What is the main challenge to the District in the next 3-5 years and how should the board prepare for it and address it?

The big challenge going forward will be raising graduation rates to an acceptable level given the current state financing. It's difficult to maintain services with what's been a constantly cut state school budget. It affects the length of the school year, and class sizes along with electives offered to students.

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