

Principal takes helm of Hermosa Beach school district

By Robb Fulcher April 18, 2012 | News



New Hermosa Beach school superintendent Patricia Escalante

Last year, longtime resident Patricia Escalante returned to town, professionally speaking, to become principal of Hermosa Valley School. Now she has climbed the ladder to the school district's top post.

The school board last week unanimously named Escalante superintendent of the 1,300-student Hermosa Beach City School District, to replace interim Superintendent Alan Rasmussen on July 1. The district hopes to name Escalante's replacement as Valley School principal by about June.

"I'm very excited for Pat — I know she's going to do a terrific job, she's well qualified, and she knows our community," Rasmussen said.

The small school district has had trouble keeping superintendents longer than about three years, when they have often been tempted away by larger, better-paying school districts. Hermosa school district officials stressed ties to the community in their search for the new superintendent.

"Not only are we extremely excited to have someone so well qualified but someone who is also closely tied to the Hermosa Beach community," school board member Carleen Beste said.

"We are so lucky to have such a highly qualified, passionate educator step into this role," board member Patti Ackerman said.

"We are moving in the right direction at the district. We are doing good work on all levels," said board President Jack Burns.

Before taking the helm of the second-through-eighth grade Valley School, Escalante served as an administrator in the Beverly Hills Unified School District for eight years. She served as an assistant principal at the K-8 Horace Mann School for two years, as principal of the K-8 El Rodeo School for five years, and as the director of the adult school, preschool development and alternative education for one year.

Before that, she taught fifth grade for one year at Grandview School in Manhattan Beach and served for three years as a teacher on special administrative assignment. During that time she attended the University of LaVerne, earning a master's degree in school management and an administrative credential.

She earned an undergraduate degree in education and a teaching credential from USC, after graduating from Palos Verdes High School.

She began her career in education as an elementary school teacher in the Hawthorne school district for seven years. Twelve years ago, after her sons graduated from Mira Costa High School, she resumed her career.

"Remarkably, Hermosa Valley School is my neighborhood school where for many years I was an active parent and from where my two sons, Michael and Matthew were educated and guided into the wonderful men they are today," she wrote last year in an introduction letter to the school community.

Hermosa's previous non-interim superintendent, Bruce Newlin, came out of retirement for the job and then resigned last summer, sticking to a timetable he announced when he accepted the post.

He was replaced by Rasmussen, who came out of retirement for the interim post. Rasmussen had previously served as Hermosa superintendent for three years ending in 2000, when he was lured away by a district more than eight times larger.

"Coming back to Hermosa has been really special for me," Rasmussen said. "But I'm ready to let Pat take over, so I can re-retire."