Turnbull: A new voice with education experience

Publisher's note: ***Lake Tahoe News asked candidates for South Lake Tahoe City Council, Lake Tahoe Community College, Lake Tahoe Unified School District, Douglas County School District, South Tahoe Public Utility District and Lake Valley Fire Protection District a series of questions. We are running the responses in the order received. All profiles may be found under the Special Projects listing and then the 2106 November Candidate Profiles category.***



Bonnie Turnbull is running for the Area 3 seat on the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board.

Name: Bonnie Turnbull

Age: 57

Job/profession: Master's of arts in teaching, California certified teacher

I was a classroom teacher for 12 years for grades 5, art and PE at Pioneer Elementary in Colorado Springs, Colo., and grades 4-6 at Grass Valley Charter School in Grass Valley.

After becoming an Air Force family, it better supported my family to take temporary and part-time work. These listed below represent the range of my work.

– tutoring economically-disadvantaged students in basic skills

– teaching art and puppetry in summer program,

– substitute teaching regularly in a class of developmentally delayed preschoolers

– teaching ESL to adults at LTCC

– teaching art, most recently our Juvenile Treatment Center

-substituted in classrooms at every age level throughout the LTUSD system

What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?: I am serving my second term on the Parks and Recreation Commission. I am the former co-vice president of Friends of the Library.

I am an active community volunteer. Here area some examples of educational programs I do.:

Master gardeners of Lake Tahoe classroom presentations

Bringing Arts To School

South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition programming: i.e. Children's Forest, Wonders of Water field trips

Tahoe Science Center's Science Expo local organizer and presenter

Lake Tahoe History Museum third-grade tour guide

Why are you seeking this position?: This my first campaign ever so this is a big step out for me. I have been encouraged and inspired by our wonderful local leaders to take on more of

a leadership role in our community.

Why should voters vote for you over another candidate?: I offer fresh enthusiasm, a new voice, and decades of educational experience, which I would love to use to benefit our community. I am a hard worker, visionary, and would value the opportunity to help lead our district through the adoption of new state standards and in energy innovation.

What distinct experience or competency makes you uniquely qualified to lead effectively as an elected official?: I have an exceptionally wide and deep experience at the cutting edge of public education. While I taught at Pioneer Elementary, we won the highest national award, the Blue Ribbon.

Grass Valley Charter School implements Expeditionary Learning, a project-based learning model. Project-based learning is at the cutting edge of education today and can offer strategies to help balance more traditional teaching strategies.

I am a graduate of the city's leadership program, Citizens' Academy, am serving my second term on the Parks and Recreation Commission, have gathered support and shepherded the Tahoe Discovery Center project through to concept development stage, and have numerous other leadership experiences throughout the city.

Public agencies have been under scrutiny the last few years for lack of transparency and accountability. What will you do to ensure both?: Electing representatives who have the courage to dialog with the community and stakeholders and to make clear decisive decisions in the open is the best solution. Representatives must also have the commitment to stand behind their decisions and to continue the dialog with the community as changes are enacted..

What stands out for you in the current budget that you support and that you would change?: The district has taken a great step forward by contracting with Climatec to evaluate

investments in future energy savings. We must plan for the transition to alternative energies. I would like to evaluate how energy might be more efficiently, and cleanly, applied

Similarly, we should look at transit dollars. Perhaps we can find ways to more efficiently support access to our schools of choice, availability of transit for field trips, after school programming and sports, while reducing our carbon footprint through strategies like innovative scheduling and sharing of resources.

Money saved should be allocated to core services such as teacher training and collaboration time. The teachers are the center of education and need the tools, time and training to implement new and challenging programming, services and strategies.

Do you support current legislation for $15 minimum wage? Please explain: I support a higher minimum wage. As one of our larger employers, the school district can help support our families by offering a living wage. When families can afford the basics of food, clothing and housing, they can better support their children's education and development.

Do you support Proposition 55? Please explain: California schools already spend less per pupil, and have higher class sizes than the national average. It is essential to, at a minimum, sustain our current level of funding. Prop. 55 will extend a current tax on the wealthiest Californians to support public health and education. As a great society, we must take care of our people through basic health and education services.

Describe three attributes for a successful board: 1. Open mind. Values diverse perspectives and can team effectively in working toward a common long-term vision

2. Time to devote to research, communications, meetings, and

3. Integrity and trustworthiness to operate openly, respectfully, and always with the best interest of students in mind

What are your thoughts about public employee defined benefits?: Defined benefits for our public school employees are an essential part of the employment package. The specifics are subject to negotiation.

Please explain your position on contracting out work normally done by staff: The school system, as major employer in our community, has a moral obligation not to “outsource” jobs from the community and undermine support for our local workers.

However, contracting out work may be useful in some situations.

For examples.

– Temporary work which would otherwise overburden staff

– Gains a higher level of expertise not generally affordable or needed long term

– Offers a cost-sharing opportunity

What is your 10-year vision for the school district?: The past boards have guided the district through the building of a world-class high school facility and other infrastructure upgrades.

Let’s keep working to make sure our delivery is as gorgeous as the building. Education is more than test scores. We must chart with solid agreement on what qualities are essential. I believe that we must start with the child and connect him or her to the wonder of the world by offering moments of discovery, the opportunity to follow passions, the blending of disciplines through project-based work, and fostering social and emotional development

The community into the schools, the schools into the community. It takes a village—and the great outdoors—to raise our next generation. The entire community—especially the school board—needs to be responsive to and flexible to the community whom they represent.

Look to the future. The board needs a plan that supports the demands of a new century. Let's support the adoption of Common Core standards—with their focus on critical thinking and problem-solving skills and Next Generation Science standards—with the focus on by offering the time and opportunities for training, planning, parent communication and collaboration.

Lower district carbon footprint and increase energy independence.

What one vote in the last four years that the current board made do you disagree with and why?: Before committing to reopen of Al Tahoe, I think we need a comprehensive cost benefit analysis. Opening a new building incurs the costs of structural upgrades, hiring more administration, adding bus routes and leaves the Boys and Girls Club homeless. A rec center may be able to accommodate them, but we are years away from a building. We need to be clear that any growth in school population is a significant enough, long term trend that it warrants a permanent solution.

The board has guided the district through the building of a world-class high school facility and other infrastructure upgrades. Now, I would like to see focus shift to teachers, the key to our kids' success. Let's support their adoption of Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards by offering the time and opportunities for training, planning, parent communication and collaboration.

How many meetings have you attended this year for the board you are running for?: Few. I have dedicated many, many hours

to working directly with students over the last decade. I am inspired to run for office because I want help craft larger solutions with, and for, my community. People who know me will vouch for my extreme diligence in researching and preparing for any role or project I undertake. To that end, I am have been studying minutes from past meetings, board policies and current trends in education in preparation for this role.

What do you know about the strategic plan, finances, debt, goals of the school board?: If elected, of course, I will immediately dedicate myself to learning everything that I can about the district. As a homemaker and high school parent, I have the time to dedicate to understanding this complex institution at the heart of our community.

Being on the school board means working as a team. How will you work with the next board for the greater good of the community?: The board members are community representatives, and our community has diverse voices so opinions and experiences will naturally differ. The board receives and consolidates the range of community, student, and teacher concerns and ideas, then helps shape policy to address those concerns keeping student success as number one priority.

Therefore, working as a team to find common ground is crucial. Steady, wise progress rests on compromise. Therefore the board is designed with a democratic structure which means nothing meaningful is accomplished without the agreement of a majority—and preferably more.

What should be the three main priorities for the board?: Advocating for school policies, budget allocation and curriculum which best support children's achievement. Establishing a long-term vision which drives every aspect of the district's program.by being responsive to the values, beliefs and priorities of our entire school community, then evaluates the school system's progress toward accomplishing the district's vision

Communicates that progress to the local community. An ambassador for public education. Board members are advocates for students, the districts' educational programs and public education. They build support within their communities and at the state and national levels.

Setting strategic goals for achieving energy independence throughout our school system which will help ensure our schools remain viable into the future.

What do you know about Common Core? What is your opinion about it?: Common Core standards, in concept, are a significant improvement over earlier national standards. They focus more on developing thinking skills and less on rote learning of information. Vast amounts of data are readily available on the world wide web. Being able to wisely adapt and apply that data to the rapidly changing conditions is key to student success.

However, the devil is in the (test) detail. Any high-stakes, national testing program carries great risks because the test questions—both content and style— drive the curriculum. Unless we have a national dialog about what makes high quality education, we leave it to test developers to determine it.

Content: Science is embedded into the literacy test for elementary grades. Science may be reduced to knowledge of vocabulary. We will likely sacrifice time spent learning the analytic thinking skills of the scientific process like critical thinking, accurate testing of hypotheses, and problem solving. Also, if we do not regularly test and publicly post results from distinct science tests as with other subjects, science will be de-valued in classrooms.

Style: To keep testing profitable and affordable, four for-profit publishing companies distill learning into small, easily-tested bits. So, for example, we may test spelling but not the complex task of writing though, in the world of word processing, teamwork and rapid change, effective communication

is a key skill for success.

How can the school district partner with the city to improve high school graduation rates?: Our graduation rates are already wonderful. However, getting out of our silos benefits everyone by maximizing resources and opportunity. Coming to agreement on most effective management of our playing fields is a good start. Exploring opportunities with TTD to bring public buses to the high school to support transit for after school programs may support broader participation in after school opportunities. Strengthening our partnership with LTCC can offer new opportunities for our highest achieving students. If district facilities, like the theater, were more available as the public the schools would better serve as welcoming centers of community life.

What is your opinion about career and technical education at the high school level?: We have invested in extraordinary career and technical education facilities and a dedicated program coordinator. We provide high school students with highly motivating experiential, hands-on, and whole child education. I would like to see these strategies permeate education at every level. They are highly motivating to students and build the classroom community.

However, I also hear community concerns that more fundamental skills like financial management, are not sufficiently addressed.

Do you support the expansion of charter schools? Why or why not?: Charter schools fill a need or desire not met by traditional schools. Therefore, they can provide valuable alternatives to families However, the implementation of charter schools can be problematic without proper oversight.

The fundamental issue is that public schools must be aware of and responsive to community needs in a way that fills the desire for an alternative school.

I have been a teacher in both traditional and charter schools, but I am a staunch supporter of public schools so fundamental to a democracy. The best solution is for to traditional schools to embrace the charter school practices of responsiveness, community engagement and innovation.

What are you thoughts on the accreditation status at STHS?: I wait to see if procedural errors—as have been suggested—are the cause of the loss of accreditation. Until then, I have no opinion.

Tell us something about yourself that people may not know: I love the Tahoe lifestyle. Whether it's paddling a six-person outrigger canoe, hiking, road or mountain biking, skiing or tending my vegetable garden, I love to be outside, I am a strong supporter and participant in the arts. I sing in TOCCATA, a regional choir that brings classical choral music to the Reno-Tahoe area.

You often are aggressive in how you go about getting what you want. How will this work in a team setting like the school board?: Yes, I do have a passion for making a great idea come true. But I love few things better than working with an inspirational team to accomplish great things. In fact, job sharing for four years as a teacher remains one of the highlights of my career.