

EDITORIAL: Tuck has ideas and experience to improve California schools

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By The Bee Editorial Board

The choice for state superintendent of public instruction is starker than any other competitive statewide race this election: the status quo of a troubled system vs. innovation and the prospect of a brighter future for California's public education.

We support the latter, and the candidate who represents that choice is Marshall Tuck.

Seven of the eight races for statewide offices will continue in November regardless of the outcome of June 3 primary. The only exception is this race, because it is nonpartisan. It is possible -- indeed very likely -- that one of the two top candidates will win outright June 3.

Tuck, a Democrat, is challenging incumbent Tom Torlakson, also a Democrat. Torlakson is a former teacher and longtime legislator who has been an adequate, though uninspiring, superintendent.

By contrast, Tuck is burning with energy and full of ambitious ideas about improving California's public education system, which is among the nation's poorest-performing. Ideas aren't enough, we realize. But he has the experience and track record in some of the state's toughest schools to convincingly plot a turnaround of California's schools.

The 40-year-old Tuck led the 17 failing public schools that Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa took over as part of his Partnership for L.A. Schools. The changes in these chronically failing schools were dramatic; in five years the school improved graduation rates from 36% to 58%.

Tuck also distinguished himself as president of Green Dot Public Schools, a nonprofit charter operator that took over some of L.A.'s poorest and most academically challenged schools.

Some have characterized the superintendent's race as a proxy battle between unions and school "privatizers" -- charter schools. Torlakson has support from a variety of unions and trades, including the powerful California Teachers Association. Tuck has support from charter schools operators and tech companies as well as wealthy philanthropists who back education reform. Nor is Tuck anti-union -- Green Dot schools are unionized charter schools -- and he does not support private school vouchers.

The Bee didn't endorse Torlakson in the general election in 2010 because we had reservations about his close relationship with the CTA. Those concerns have proven to be well-founded.

Tuck is far and away the better choice for helping students and improving our state's public schools.