

## The Bee recommends: Darden, Davis and Ashjian for Fresno Unified's board of trustees

By The Fresno Bee Editorial Board



Fresno Bee recommendations for Fresno Unified board of trustees. Above is the district headquarters.

### BEE FILE

Voters in Fresno Unified have a chance to continue the school district's academic improvement by electing two new trustees in the four board races on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Graduating more students from high school and preparing them to succeed in college or the workplace are essential to bringing Fresno's long-underperforming economy up to speed and cutting crime. With so much at stake, voters should pay extra attention to Fresno Unified races and candidates with the experience, enthusiasm and backbone to provide thoughtful, top-notch leadership.

We recommend challenger Debbie Darden in District 1, incumbent Valerie Davis in District 3 and political newcomer Brooke Ashjian in District 7, where incumbent Michelle Asadoorian is retiring after two terms.

Incumbent Christopher De La Cerda is unopposed in District 4, the McLane High School area. The Editorial Board does not make recommendations in uncontested races.

Darden is well-qualified to represent District 1, which includes Edison and Roosevelt high schools. She is an Edison graduate, a former Fresno Unified teacher's aide and chair of the Golden Westside Planning Committee, which advocates for sustainable growth in southwest Fresno. Darden has 23 years' experience in the private sector and

holds a bachelor's degree in business management from University of Phoenix.

Most notable about Darden is her passion for her community. She was a longtime advocate for building a middle school in southwest Fresno and worked hard alongside many others to see it to fruition with the opening of the Rutherford B. Gaston Middle School in August. We believe that Darden's communication skills, willingness to engage the community and independent thinking make her a better choice than incumbent Cal Johnson.

We are recommending Davis, who represents the Sunnyside High School area, because of her work ethic and knowledge of district operations. She is being challenged by Esmeralda Diaz, who is making her third run for the board. Diaz, a retired physician, is critical of Fresno Unified, saying it hasn't done enough to cut dropout rates and trancies, and it provides inadequate inadequate programs for English learners.

Davis has a more global view of Fresno Unified's needs, strengths and weaknesses than Diaz does and has been an effective representative for students and their families in the Sunnyside area. We are recommending Davis with the hope that she will more fully embrace a trustee's watchdog responsibility and not merely sign off on what the superintendent or other high ranking administrators want to do.

Ashjian is chief executive officer of Seal Rite Paving and Grading, the owner of other local businesses and active in the community. He has the brainpower and horsepower to make the board a more forceful voice in determining Fresno Unified's priorities and seeing them implemented by Superintendent Michael Hanson.

Ashjian says that the district must expand its partnerships with the business community and offer more robust career technical education pathways. The Editorial Board concurs with his assessment and believes that Ashjian will insist on funding to expand "vocational ed" and recruit effective, highly motivated teachers for these courses. Ashjian is far and away the better choice than Ruben V. Martinez, the other candidate for the seat held by Asadoorian.

On Nov. 4, vote for Debbie Darden in District 1, Valerie Davis in District 3 and Brooke Ashjian in District 7 on the Fresno Unified School District Board of Trustees.

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