

Fresno Unified superintendent backs Hill in judge race

By Hannah
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Fresno Unified School District Superintendent Michael Hanson has endorsed Rachel Hill for Superior Court judge. |[Buy Photo](#)

In a rare — but not unprecedented — move, Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson has backed a candidate for political office, this time Superior Court judge hopeful Rachel Hill.

Hill has a “keen understanding” of what Fresno youth need from the criminal justice system, Hanson said. Hill, 51, has worked as a Fresno prosecutor, criminal defense lawyer and adjunct law professor.

Hanson said the justice system is unfortunately not far removed from the education realm and the courts need leaders who understand the value of remediation, especially when it comes to children.

“She represents a fairly unique take on the entire enterprise,” he said in an interview Thursday.

The endorsement marks Hanson’s second this week. The district leader announced his support for state schools superintendent candidate Marshall Tuck on Wednesday. Tuck is facing off against incumbent Tom Torlakson in the Nov. 4 election.

“It’s not just rare, it’s completely rare,” he said. “These are the only two political endorsements I’ve made in my decade here ... People shouldn’t be surprised if I never endorse a candidate again.”

Hanson is one of several local school officials who have thrown their support behind Hill, who is competing against longtime Fresno County prosecutor Lisa Gamoian for the seat being vacated by Judge Robert H. Oliver.

Sanger Unified Superintendent Matt Navo announced his endorsement before the June primary. Hill has a presence in the education community, he said, noting, “Whenever there’s an educational event, she’s there.”

“Honestly, no other candidate took the time to say, ‘I need his endorsement to run.’ I was flattered by the fact that she thought my endorsement would mean something to people,” he said Thursday.

Hill said educators have noticed her passion for juvenile justice and respect her supportive stance on issues like restorative justice. The superintendents for both Central and Clovis unifieds are also listed as supporters on Hill’s campaign website.

“I’m familiar with many of the things they’re trying to do to stem criminal activity in the schools and I think they’re pleased I’m engaged,” she said.

Gamoian, 56, has received nods from a fair share of local education leaders, including former Fresno County schools



superintendent Larry Powell and Fresno Unified trustees Luis Chavez and Valerie Davis. Dorothy “Dottie” Smith, a State Center Community College District trustee, has also endorsed Gamoian.

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