

Three Golden Valley Unified trustees recalled

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Three Golden Valley Unified School District board members were ousted Tuesday in a recall election sparked by their decision earlier this year to fire the district superintendent.

Incumbents Kathleen Crumpton, John Moseley and Carla Neal were recalled by wide margins, according to returns from the Madera County Election's Office. Turnout ranged from 33 percent in Area 4 to 39 percent in Area 2.

Neal will be replaced by Mona Diaz in Area 1, Crumpton by Maria Knobloch in Area 2, and Moseley by Brian Freeman, who defeated Dale Overbay for the Area 4 seat.

"Our community spoke loud and clear," Diaz said. She served on the board from its inception in 1998 until 2014, when she left for an unsuccessful run for Madera County supervisor. "Now we can move our focus back to educating our children and supporting our great staff."

In Area 1, 89 percent of the voters favored recalling Neal. In Area 2, the margin supporting Crumpton's recall was 84 percent, and in Area 4, 76 percent favored recalling Moseley. Neal and Moseley were first elected to the board last November.

The recall election came in response to a newly configured school board's abrupt ousting of Superintendent Andrew Alvarado in February. The three trustees fired Alvarado even though more than 400 parents, teachers and citizens showed up at a board meeting to support him. The district serves an area around Madera Ranchos.

Neal, one of the three ousted trustees, said the voting public was misinformed about Alvarado's dismissal.

"We never fired Andy Alvarado," she said. "It was a mutual separation. He left of his own volition."

The board paid Alvarado a buyout of \$135,699.

Neal also said the low voter turnout doesn't accurately represent the community as a whole. She added that she will "remain committed to the district and community" until the new board takes over.

Steven Lewis, one of the remaining board members, said he and fellow surviving trustee Mike Kelly are ecstatic about the election results.

"This vote sends a strong message to every (school) board in the country: If you govern with a disruptive agenda, as they (Crumpton, Moseley and Neal) did, you will be removed," he said.

Lewis said the ousted trustees forced Alvarado into the mutual separation. Alvarado, he added, did not want to leave, but did so to protect his family.

Alvarado was replaced on an interim basis in February by Kevin Hatch, the district's deputy superintendent of curriculum. The board permanently hired Hatch on June 16.

Lewis said the former board did not hire a replacement for Hatch, choosing instead to eliminate the position. He believes this move hurt the district's teachers, who need this curriculum instruction in the wake of adoption of the Common Core standards.

"Right now, Kevin Hatch is our superintendent, and I have the utmost faith in him," he said. "But when we reconvene

as a new board, we will discuss the future of the district and its administration.”

The new board’s first official meeting is scheduled for Sept. 15.

Two developers funded the majority of the \$13,550 raised for the recall campaign – Igal Treibatch, who hopes to build Liberty Groves near Liberty High School, and Tim Jones, who is constructing a project called Riverstone.

The new board could soon have to negotiate with Riverstone over how much the developer will have to pay to build new schools. In April, a bonds attorney for Madera County informed the old board that its development agreement with a previous developer had several legal holes in it.

The election will be certified next week. At that point, the three board members will be out of office.

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