

MAR - 8 2010

Allen's P. C. B. Est. 1888

Former Berkeley School Board Member Joaquin Rivera To Run for County Board

By Riya Bhattacharjee
Wednesday March 03, 2010



Former school board member Joaquin Rivera looks on as former Berkeley Unified Superintendent Michele Lawrence announces her retirement in Sept. 2007.

350

Former Berkeley Board of Education member Joaquin Rivera will run for trustee of the Alameda County Board of Education in the June 8 election.

Although Rivera didn't immediately return calls for comment, Alameda County Superintendent Sheila Jordan confirmed Wednesday that Rivera had joined the race for board trustee.

Rivera, who retired from the Berkeley school board in Nov. 2008 after serving for 12 years, will run for retiring incumbent Jacki Fox Ruby's seat in Area 1, which covers Albany, Berkeley, Piedmont and parts of Oakland that include North Oakland and Chinatown. Both Jordan and Fox, who announced her retirement some

time back, have endorsed Rivera.

"I think Rivera will be an excellent representative for the district," Jordan said. "He knows the area very well and his expertise and proven dedication to issues of equity and achievement gap will serve the county well."

Jordan herself is up for re-election this year and will host a kick-off party March 11.

"I feel very proud of what we have accomplished in the county office and the leadership we provided in the district," she said. "I am anxious to continue the work throughout this difficult period."

. The last day for candidates to get on the ballot is March 14.

At the time he stepped down from the Berkeley school board, Rivera was its longest serving member.

Community leader and activist Beatriz Leyva-Cutler—who won one of the two school board seats in the Nov. 2008 election—replaced Rivera.

"Joaquin has experience and breadth and education," Ruby said, detailing his stints on the Berkeley school board and the California School Board Association and various other committees and subcommittees at the state and county level. "He's also been a long-term union activist and been in the bully pulpit to get funding for students."

Rivera, who teaches chemistry at Skyline College, was first elected to the Berkeley school board in November 1996 and went on to be reelected in 2000 and 2004, serving a total of three terms on the board.

~

A graduate of the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, he received his masters in Chemistry from UC Berkeley in 1990.

He has served as school board president on three occasions, most recently in 2007, and has also been a delegate to the California School Boards Association.

When he left, school board members and Berkeley Unified Superintendent Bill Huyett thanked Rivera for leaving the district in a better shape financially.

At that time, Rivera said that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's decision to slash education funds had turned him against running for a fourth term.

"I thought, I have been there done that, maybe again in the future, but right now I want to enjoy," he said. He had said that he would be back to help the district when it was ready to introduce bond measures to Berkeley voters in 2010.

A staunch opponent of Prop. 8, Rivera lives with his husband. He is perhaps best known for his involvement in desegregating BUSD.

The county board of education runs schools at the San Leandro Juvenile Hall as well as Hayward and Fruitvale.

When asked about some of the biggest challenges county board members faced at the moment, Ruby said, "money, money, money."

The Alameda County Office of Education is facing a 20 percent cut, Ruby said.

"We serve the neediest children—the ones in juvenile halls and community schools," she said. "On one side they are talking about closing the achievement gap and on the other side they are cutting counselors and teachers. You can't have it both ways." The board is also responsible for overseeing charter school proposals passed on by local school districts, expulsions and appeals—which Ruby described as "very difficult,"—and land transfers.

"The legislature keeps piling more work on the county offices and cutting funds," she said.

As for why she decided to step down at the end of eight years on the board, Ruby said, "I am 72, I have been doing service work since I was 14. I have been a teacher, a union activist and served on both state and local levels. I think I deserve a rest. We need to turn it over to the younger people."

Ruby said she would keep up with education news by reading the newspaper and legislative newsletters.

"I am going to check out the Planet online tomorrow," she said.