

Two District 5 school board candidates compete for GMCS

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By Rick Abasta

Sun Correspondent



November 2 is Election Day.

Ten people are signed up to run for positions with the Gallup-McKinley County Schools Board of Education, five of them running to represent District 5. That means Michael W. Schaaf has four opponents as he runs for re-election as GMCS Board Member. So does Ester Macias. Both of them talked to the *Gallup Sun* about their races for seats on the Board.

MICHAEL SCHAAF

For the past five years, Schaaf has served as GMCS Board Secretary alongside President Charles Long, Vice President Chris Mortensen, and members Kevin Mitchell and Priscilla Benally.

Schaaf is proud of the school board's accomplishments during his first term and said he is seeking re-election to continue to work on behalf of the students.

"The students' education is my number one priority and [ensuring] that they receive the best education available," he told the *Sun*.

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Schaaf said that he has enjoyed the past five years representing District 5 on the school board and that he learned that the board does not run the schools.

“There are only three things the board allowed us to do: hire a superintendent, set board policies, and approve the budget,” he said. “The superintendent runs the day-to-day operations.”

In addition to serving on the school board, Schaaf continues to represent District 2 on the Gallup City Council.

According to the City of Gallup website gallupnm.gov, Schaaf was born in McCook, Neb. and moved to Gallup in 1966, when his father took a position working for the Public Health Service. He attended Roosevelt Elementary, Gallup Junior High, and graduated from Gallup High School in 1976.

Schaaf is also known in the Native American arts community, where he has worked throughout his entire career. He was employed with Turney’s Indian Goods from 1967-1990, then Winfield Trading Company from 1990-2019. He also volunteered his service for the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial since 1990.

During his time on the school board, Schaaf said full funding of Impact Aid to GMCS was a major accomplishment.

He credited this accomplishment to the work of Superintendent Mike Hyatt, Jvanna Hanks, Sen. George Munoz, D- Gallup, Rep. Patty Lundstrom, D- Gallup, Rep. D. Wonda Johnson, D-Rehoboth, and staff at the central office.

“Mike Hyatt and Jvanna Hanks fought tirelessly for Impact Aid, testifying before committees at the Roundhouse,” he said.

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"[Impact Aid] will have a big impact for our students. The money belongs to our students and I am glad they will receive it. Test scores have improved dramatically, showing that GMCS is moving in the right direction," he said.

During Schaaf's term on the GMCS Board, he expressed satisfaction that among the board's accomplishments were free lunches for all students, iPads and laptops, including internet connection and hotspots, free supplies for every student, and free tuition for the McKinley Academy Program.

Schaaf said the tuition at McKinley Academy Program was paid for by the GMCS budget. The program is a partnership between GMCS and UNM-Gallup challenging students to participate in the early college program.

The program is open to all students in the district, he said, adding that the school district also has partnerships with Navajo Technical University in Crownpoint.

"These are a few of the things I am proud of since I have been on the board," he said.

Thankful for the opportunity to serve the community, Schaaf said he hopes to serve another four years to see other projects through to completion, like construction of the new Red Rock School and raising student test scores to exceed the state's average score.

"All of the accomplishments have been due to the students, teachers, staff, and administration's hard work. I am proud to say I am a small part of these accomplishments," Schaaf said.

ESTER MACIAS

After serving as an educator for more than 25 years, Ester Macias believes now is the time to

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step up to serve as Gallup McKinley County Schools Board Member for District 5.

Macias is a graduate of Cobre High School in Bayard, N.M. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology and education from New Mexico State University. She earned a master's degree in prescriptive-diagnostic reading and curriculum development, educational leadership from Western New Mexico University.

"I believe I received an excellent education from these institutions. My education has offered me tremendous opportunities," she said.

Education has been a calling for Macias and she is now prepared to give back to the school district and community.

"Now that I am retired, I am able and willing to give the time necessary to keep the district focused on the present and future needs of all children, teachers, and our community," she said.

Since her retirement, Macias has worked for the Bureau of Indian Education for the past five years as a reading teacher and education specialist focused on leadership.

She believes GMCS could strengthen the school board for the benefit of all students by having its members truly represent the interests of their constituents.

"It is the job of the board members to understand that they do not work for the superintendent and that the superintendent works for them," she said.

In addition, board members need to keep abreast of important matters such as the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit while doing research on key issues.

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“Board members must be transparent on all issues that pertain to providing an equitable education for all students,” she said.

If elected, Macias said she would represent the interests of her constituents. Macias ran for office four years ago, but was not elected.

She believes that parents and students can strengthen the educational system by being active in education and communicating with teachers and support staff when they have concerns about academic achievement, personal well being, and student support at home.

“Students should learn to be self-starters when it comes to their education,” she said. “They should be able to ask questions and ask for assistance when they don’t understand what the teacher is presenting.”

Macias said all of the students in the school district are unique individuals.

“Use that fact to build a diverse and inclusive school culture,” she said.

Macias is aware of the importance of the school board in achieving student success.

The school board must be involved in seeking the best teachers, support staff, curriculum, instructional material, formative assessments, instructional resources, and providing professional development of teachers to stay on track with the latest educational research.

“GMCS needs assistance in keeping and recruiting teachers,” Macias said. “Our school district is currently facing a catastrophic teacher shortage. We need to find out why teachers are leaving and what it would take to attract and keep them here.”

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“Is the district listening to [teachers’] concerns and supporting their ideas and innovations?” she asked. “Have exit surveys been given to find out why they’re leaving?”

Creating an environment where teachers feel safe, supported and highly valued for the work that they do is important. Macias said she brings 25 years of educational experience as a teacher, curricula director for pre-K through 12th grade, associate superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment, and service as school superintendent to the table.

“I also supervised all of the Arizona BIE school principals while employed by the BIE,” she said.

“Voters should vote for me because I am familiar with the Elementary and Secondary Act. I know the workings of the district at the school and central office levels,” Macias said. “I have worked with the New Mexico Public Education Department and all of my educational experience has been in this area.”