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Live Oak Superintendent Named

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Sentinel Staff Writer

Dr. Sally Peterson, an assistant superintendent for a Southern California school district, was unanimously approved as new superintendent of the Live Oak Elementary School District by trustees Tuesday night.

Peterson, who will officially take over on August 1, replaces Neil Schmidt, who has been superintendent of the three-school district for the past three years. He resigned recently to become superintendent in Ventura.

The new superintendent comes to Live Oak with a wide range of experience and more than 20 years in the educational field.

She has been assistant superintendent of the Newhall Elementary School District in the Newhall/Valencia area near Burbank for the past two years. She also served as that district's director of special services for four years and was a principal for five years. Before that, she was a longtime teacher and counselor.

Peterson was selected over 54 other candidates, according to Board President Barney Bricmont.

Bricmont cited Peterson's "positive mental attitude — besides all the experience and credentials" — as being a decisive factor in her selection.

He also pointed to the similarity between the Live Oak district and Peterson's Newhall district. During an earlier interview, Peterson herself said the similarities "were what first attracted me."

"I like the possibility of face-to-face interaction," she explained. "In Newhall, the superintendent was no stranger and it is that same way here."

She noted that she wasn't particularly actively looking for a superintendency. "My youngest child just graduated from college, so I just felt the time was right. This opportunity just opened up."

When asked what she felt her strong point was, Peterson cited her "people skills." She expanded: "I've been in the people's service business all my life with my earlier education in psychology. I have a high interest in people and enjoy interacting with them."

Peterson also felt she was particularly strong in "curriculum instruction."

She has no immediate plans for her new district, other than to get to know it and the people in it.

"The Live Oak people I've met so far are very sincerely interested in providing a good education for the children," she said. "The nurturing style is very warm."

Peterson said the financial picture for school districts isn't bright at this time with local revenues from the state still up in the air.

"It's very hard when school districts don't know how much money they're going to get. School budgets are just like house budgets. You can't decide what needs to be done unless you know how much money there is."

Peterson's formal education is as wide as her experience. She holds a Ph.D from Brigham Young University in education psychology and education administration. She obtained her master's degree in counseling and school administration from Cal State Northridge. Her bachelor's of science degree was from Chatham College in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Trustee Karen Palmer, who traveled to Southern California for an on-site interview with Peterson and her colleagues, explained that the new superintendent "simply rose to the top."



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Dr. Sally Peterson and Board President Barney Bricmont.