

On April 27, the Manhattan Beach Unified School Board announced their selection of a new School District Superintendent Tuesday night — Michael Matthews, Ed.D.

We wish Mr. Matthews welcome and best wishes.

However, we also remember that at one time our School Board recognized the benefit of involving the residents in such a decision, a process missing from this current appointment.

As reflected an August 2, 2006 Beach Reporter article on the appointment of interim superintendent Bev Rohrer:

"[Gwen] Gross did not go through an extensive interview process nor meet with community members before being appointed by the School Board. This lack of transparency outraged many in the community.

"I don't believe what happened was ethical or democratic," said [one] parent who attended the meeting to make sure that the board knew that she wanted a cross section of residents to be involved in the hiring process of the next superintendent.

School Board members, four of whom are new to the five-member board since Gross took over, acknowledged the distrust that many in the community felt over how Gross was hired.

"There was a lot of discomfort in the last process," said Howorth. "We don't know how the process is going to work (this time), but I'm here to tell you that it will be methodical and well-thought-out. It is one of the most important decisions you make as a school board member."

The following week's August 9, 2006 Beach Reporter reflected: "The School Board has not yet decided how it will go about searching for a new superintendent, but has promised constituents at prior meetings that the process will be well-thought out and transparent due to the community's misgivings over how [Gwen] Gross had been hired in 2003."

Bev Rohrer, the current superintendent, is retiring June 30, 2010. Bev Rohrer served as interim superintendent for one year immediately after Gwen Gross's resignation, and was appointed permanent superintendent April 18, 2007. Bev Rohrer served as the Redondo Beach superintendent from 1993 to 1998, and as temporary superintendent in subsequent years for Redondo and Hermosa Beach. Upon Bev Rohrer's appointment in April 2007, a Beach Reporter article summarized the process as follows:

"After eight months of surveying the community and hiring consultants to prepare an 18-page dossier on what the district needs in a head administrator, the School Board identified Beverly Rohrer as the best candidate for the job."

The Board recognized the advantage to the school district of involving the community in the hiring of a superintendent, a process that seems missing from the current appointment process. Perhaps the Board believed that the benefit received from the prior superintendent search process carried over to the recent selection. Regardless, by not validating this assumption, the Board may have missed a valuable opportunity to further buttress city/school goodwill.