



Mineral Elementary School District Management Review

June 29, 2009

Joel D. Montero
Chief Executive Officer



CSIS California School Information Services

June 29, 2009

Brenda Wolfe, Superintendent/Principal
Mineral Elementary School District
38355 Scenic Ave
P.O.Box 130
Mineral, CA 96063

Dear Superintendent Wolfe:

In April 2009, the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) entered into an agreement with the Mineral Elementary School District for a review that required FCMAT to perform the following:

- 1) Review the present administrative (leadership) structure of the district, including charter school organization and make recommendations for long-term delivery system that would be most effective and efficient.
 - a. Review state testing policy and procedures used to test students in the charter School.
 - b. Review entrance and exit criteria for students at the charter school.
- 2) Review board adopted developer fee resolution and make recommendations on how the district can proceed forward with collecting and appropriately utilizing developer fees.
- 3) Review charter school compliance with special education laws including but not necessarily limited to assessment and identification of special education students, development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) and delivery of special education services.
- 4) Review other aspects of charter school and elementary school operations as identified by Superintendent/Principal.
- 5) Review the personnel and staffing structure in relation to NCLB compliance for core and elective curriculum courses, and monitoring of the service time to the charter school.

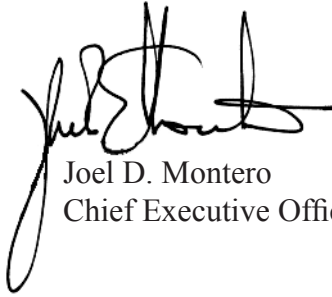
FCMAT

Joel D. Montero, Chief Executive Officer

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Administrative Agent: Larry E. Reider - Office of Kern County Superintendent of Schools

FCMAT visited the district to conduct fieldwork, interview staff, and review documents. This report is the result of that effort. We hope this document is helpful to all concerned, and please give our regards to all the employees of the Mineral Elementary School District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel D. Montero', with a stylized flourish extending from the bottom left.

Joel D. Montero
Chief Executive Officer

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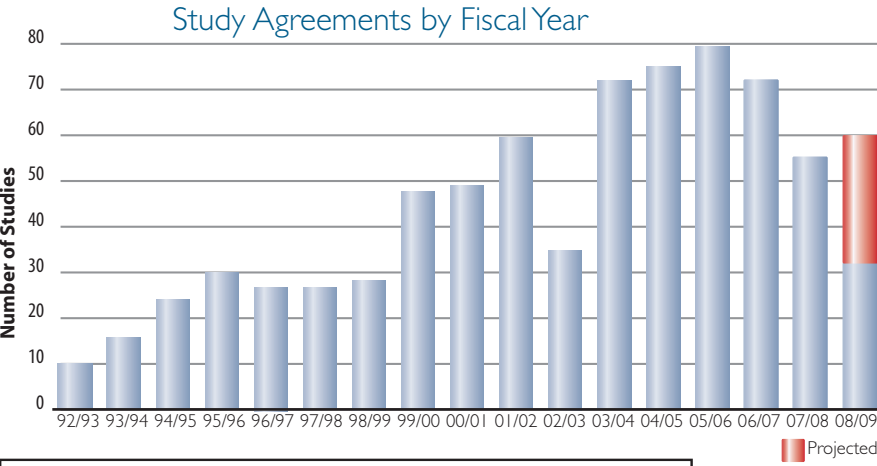
Foreword - FCMAT Background

The Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) was created by legislation in accordance with Assembly Bill 1200 in 1992 as a service to assist local educational agencies (LEAs) in complying with fiscal accountability standards.

AB 1200 was established from a need to ensure that LEAs throughout California were adequately prepared to meet and sustain their financial obligations. AB 1200 is also a statewide plan for county offices of education and school districts to work together on a local level to improve fiscal procedures and accountability standards. The legislation expanded the role of the county office in monitoring school districts under certain fiscal constraints to ensure these districts could meet their financial commitments on a multiyear basis. AB 2756 provides specific responsibilities to FCMAT with regard to districts that have received emergency state loans. These include comprehensive assessments in five major operational areas and periodic reports that identify the district’s progress on the improvement plans.

In January 2006, SB 430 (charter schools) and AB 1366 (community colleges) became law and expanded FCMAT’s services to those types of LEAs.

Since 1992, FCMAT has been engaged to perform nearly 750 reviews for local educational agencies, including school districts, county offices of education, charter schools and community colleges. Services range from fiscal crisis intervention to management review and assistance. FCMAT also provides professional development training. The Kern County Superintendent of Schools is the administrative agent for FCMAT. The agency is guided under the leadership of Joel D. Montero, Chief Executive Officer, with funding derived through appropriations in the state budget and a modest fee schedule for charges to requesting agencies.



Total Number of Studies.....	743
Total Number of Districts in CA....	982
● Management Assistance.....	705 (94.886%)
● Fiscal Crisis/Emergency.....	38 (5.114%)
Note: Some districts had multiple studies.	
● Districts (7) that have received emergency loans from the state. (Rev. 1/22/09)	

Introduction

Background

Located in East Tehama County, the Mineral Elementary School District serves approximately six students in grades kindergarten through eight at Mineral Elementary School, which is approximately 45 miles east of the city of Red Bluff.

The district also operates an online charter high school in Red Bluff. The eScholar Academy charter school serves 125 students in K-12, although most are in high school.

In April 2009, the district entered into an agreement with the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) that requires FCMAT to perform the following:

1. Review the present administrative (leadership) structure of the district, including charter school organization and make recommendations for a long-term delivery system that would be most effective and efficient.
 - a. Review state testing policy and procedures used to test students in charter school.
 - b. Review entrance and exit criteria for students at charter school.
2. Review board adopted developer fee resolution and make recommendations on how the district can proceed forward with collecting and appropriately using developer fees.
3. Review charter school compliance with special education laws including but not necessarily limited to assessment and identification of special education students, development of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and delivery of special education services.
4. Review other aspects of charter school and elementary school operations as identified by superintendent/principal.
5. Review the personnel and staffing structure in relation to NCLB compliance for core and elective curriculum courses, and monitoring of the service time to the charter school.

Study Team

The study team was composed of the following members:

William P Gillaspie, Ed.D.
FCMAT Chief Management Analyst
Sacramento, CA

Robert Rice, Ed.D.
FCMAT Consultant
Rio Vista, CA

Leonel Martínez
FCMAT Public Information Specialist
Bakersfield, CA

Study Guidelines

FCMAT visited the district on May 11, 12, 13, 2009 to collect data and review documents. This report is the result of those activities and is divided into the following sections:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Administrative Structure
- III. State Testing Procedures
- IV. Charter School Entrance and Exit Criteria
- V. Developer Fees
- VI. Special Education
- VII. Operations
- VIII. No Child Left Behind
- IX. Appendix

Executive Summary

The Mineral Elementary School District has experienced declining enrollment for several years. The district receives necessary small school funding which mitigates the impact of declining enrollment at Mineral Elementary School. With only six children attending this site, the district could be forced to close the school if enrollment falls to zero. The district also operates a charter school in Red Bluff.

The Mineral site includes two classrooms, a library, a multipurpose room and a spacious playground. Each child can receive an individualized education. With such a small enrollment, the demands to meet educational and social needs are challenging. However, the governing board and community are committed to maintaining the school and take pride in having a small facility where each child can receive individual attention.

The charter school receives ADA funding through the Charter School General Purpose Block Grant and the Charter School Categorical Block Grant. Mineral Elementary School is funded through the Necessary Small Schools Funding Model, in which it receives a set amount for one teacher when maintaining an ADA of one to 24.5 students. The district maintains a stable reserve, but is deficit spending.

To maintain state funding the district must have at least one full-time student and one full-time teacher. The decline in enrollment is caused by broad and long-term demographic shifts and patterns in the area. A loss of timber harvesting has reduced overall employment, decreasing the population. Reductions of employees of the National Park and National Forest Services and Cal-Trans have also affected enrollment as well as a change in requirements for on-site residential living for some employees.

eScholar Academy opened in 2002 in an attempt to support the district enrollment numbers and provide students in contiguous counties with an opportunity to receive an education through online instruction. The charter school has succeeded in increasing the district's overall enrollment.

It is essential for the district to continue operating the charter school and develop administrative arrangements between the school and the district. When one of the administrators leaves the district for any reason, the district should reduce administrative costs by employing only one administrator and contracting with Tehama County of Education for administrative and fiscal technical support.

In the meantime, the charter school administrator and the district superintendent/teacher/principal should communicate and work together to maintain fiscal and educational program requirements. Each has strengths that benefit the district.

The district superintendent has extensive background and knowledge in special education that could help the charter school identify and serve special education students. The superintendent should be involved in all placements and in the development of individual programs for these students.

Findings and Recommendations

Administrative Structure

The Mineral Elementary School District administrative staff is composed of one superintendent/principal/teacher and a director of the charter school. In addition a chief business official works one day per week, an insufficient amount of time to provide oversight for both the charter school and Mineral Elementary.

The district's administrative organizational structure is appropriate as long as both positions are filled with the present employees. There is a lack of communication between the superintendent and the director, largely because of different interpretations of the chain of command.

The perception of the director and the chief business official (CBO) is that they report directly to the board, not the superintendent. This results in poor communication and strained relationships.

The district contracts one day a week for the services of a CBO that works with two other small districts. The workload necessary to handle charter school and district operation requires a CBO that can work two or three days per week. If the CBO's workdays were increased, the district would need to clearly define the responsibilities between working with eScholar and the district.

The charter expires June 30, 2011, and the board is considering a request to increase the director's salary over the next two years. The board is pleased with the director's performance, and the addition of the charter school has increased overall district enrollment. As a result, the district plans to review the extension of the charter school agreement.

The director has discussed an increase in salary with the governing board. The board supports the increase with the stipulation that the charter school agreement is extended.

Several tasks are required of the superintendent/principal, including coordinating numerous meetings, compiling board meeting agendas and minutes, developing policy updates of education requirements, initialing all invoices, coordinating site councils, developing safety plans, and monitoring insurance inspection logs. When the district superintendent and the charter school director are consolidated into one position, the county office should be able to provide fiscal and program oversight through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the district. Administrative and fiscal technical support from the Tehama County Office of Education would be beneficial because of the many responsibilities involved in serving as charter school director and district superintendent.

Several steps can be taken to improve communication and professional working relationships. They include the following:

- The charter school director should invite the superintendent to weekly charter school staff meetings, and should inform the superintendent in advance of other school functions involving teachers, students and/or the community. The superintendent should also be provided with minutes to all staff meetings.
- The director should consider holding staff meetings on a day that allows the superintendent to attend more frequently. The director should also be more diligent and timely in attending to issues such as the site council, the safety plan, fire drills, insurance inspection log sheets, and physical education testing.
- Before each board meeting, the director should provide the superintendent with a written report on the charter school. This report should be discussed with the superintendent before being presented to the board. The director should provide the superintendent and board with regular updates on student academic progress. The director and the chief business official should also provide the superintendent with regular reports on budget expenditures. Expenditures of more than \$500 should have the prior approval of the superintendent.
- The director should invite the superintendent to school site council meetings and provide agendas and minutes. The director should also involve the superintendent in all matters related to hiring and other personnel issues.
- The director should provide the superintendent with online access to all student work. The superintendent should assist in evaluating student progress so that the program can be appropriately individualized for each student.
- The director should provide the superintendent with access to Google School to allow communication with students and teachers. Any communications to teachers and students should first go through the director. The chain of command should be followed and respected in both directions.
- The director should give the superintendent access to the student information system, which will provide information such as reports of student progress, student enrollment and average daily attendance calculations.
- The director should discuss with the superintendent any significant plans for changing programs, policies or procedures. In implementing or changing plans, all pertinent laws, district policies, rules and regulations are to be followed.

- The superintendent should help arrange staff development for the charter school in areas such as special education and all state testing programs and should assist as necessary in organizing and directing Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR). The superintendent should also provide input and direction regarding entrance and exit criteria and procedures for charter school students.
- The superintendent should schedule and lead administrative team meetings that include the superintendent, the director, the CBO and the office managers from the district and the eScholar Academy. These meetings should be held at least monthly and more often if necessary. All four positions should have advance input into the agenda items for these meetings.
- The superintendent and the CBO should meet weekly to review district income and expenditures, budget planning, interim reports and other relevant business matters concerning the district and the charter school. It would be beneficial for the Tehama County Office of Education business office to provide some on-site support, training, mentoring and advice to these business matters. The budget is developed with limited communication between the director, the CBO and the superintendent. No base budget development occurs.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Consider consolidating the positions of district superintendent and charter school director when there is an opening in either position. At that time, a half-time teacher should be hired at Mineral Elementary School since the district administrator position will no longer be able to teach.
2. Consider entering into an MOU with the county office for administrative support when the administrative positions are consolidated.
3. Consider revising and renewing the charter on a rollover basis before June 30, 2009, which would extend the charter to June 30, 2014. Two years remain on the current charter agreement. If the board extends the agreement by three years, it would cover a total of five years.
4. Base budget development and planning on school and student programs as well as on the money available. The budget should be jointly developed and planned by all members of the administrative team after receiving input from teachers regarding student needs and the budgetary support required to fulfill those needs.
5. Grant the requested salary increase to the director after the extension of the charter to a new five-year agreement. This increase should include agreed-upon additional increases during the five year period.

8 | ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

6. Approve the salary increase of the director based on renewal of the charter before June 30, 2009. The rollover renewal and the increase should be contingent on each other.
7. Increase the CBO position to two or three days per week to provide more fiscal expertise and responsibility for human resources, particularly with respect to credentialing issues.
8. Implement the recommendations included in the section above regarding communication between the director and the superintendent.

State Testing Procedures

The district administers STAR and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in accordance state requirements. The director and the teacher testing coordinator of the eScholar Academy do not receive annual in-service training on administering the state tests. Students complete the writing portion of the STAR test on a computer that includes spelling and grammar correction applications. Using these applications could invalidate test results.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Closely monitor students completing the STAR writing test on computers to ensure they do not use spell check or any other device that alters the measurement and score of their writing samples.
2. Provide the director and the teacher testing coordinator with annual training on the administration of state tests.

Charter School Entrance and Exit Criteria

The charter school's entrance and exit criteria have recently been updated and improved. Entrance and placement criteria are based on objective data such as test scores, interviews with students and parents, information in student files and a completed enrollment application that is detailed and reflects student needs. Special education qualification is part of the entrance criteria. However, no student is denied admission to the charter school regardless of whether he or she is identified as a special education student.

Several students have been enrolled in the charter school for as long as three consecutive semesters without completing the minimum required assignments, yet others were dropped after one semester of not completing these assignments. The school should develop a more consistent process for dropping students.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Assign the director and superintendent to develop clear, written and detailed entrance and exit criteria and procedures and submit them to the board for approval.
2. Include teachers in the process of developing the student academic action plan.
3. Review the entrance and exit criteria for students at charter school.

Developer Fees

In August 2008, the district performed a detailed developer fee justification study. This study primarily demonstrated the continuing need for school facilities modernization and new construction eligibility because of new development in the community. The board adopted a resolution establishing developer fees of 97 cents per square foot of residential construction and 47 cents per square foot of commercial industrial construction. The district had not previously levied developer fees. The board may levy developer fees in accordance with Education Code Section 17620. The district has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Red Bluff Joint Union High School District to share future fees.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Identify facility projects that are growth related and related to Education Code requirements.
2. Consider spending general fund money reserves on facilities projects until adequate developer fees are available.
3. Hire a consultant to perform a cost analysis of projects, write bid specifications, advertise and seek bids and assist in the selection of the contractor for various projects.
4. Reimburse the general fund from developer fees once these fees are collected. Funds for facility project expenditures can initially come from the general fund (fund 01). Developer fees are received into the capital facilities fund (Fund 25), and transferred to the general fund for reimbursement and proper project accounting.

Special Education

The eScholar Academy serves some students who have been identified as requiring special education services. In the past year, problems with records have arisen because there is no consistent system of identifying students who previously received special education services.

Some students were identified with a checkmark on the school application/enrollment form, but no follow-up occurred in the form of an IEP meeting that would review the placement and determine the educational needs of the student.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Thoroughly review the records of students entering the charter school to determine whether they were previously identified as qualifying for special education services.
2. Ensure IEP meetings are provided to review the placement and determine the educational needs of students who were identified as qualifying for special education services.
3. Ensure the superintendent and the director are present at IEP meetings with other appropriate and required staff members.
4. Continue to ensure the director and teachers work together to identify students already served by the charter school who qualify for special education services.

Operations

Teacher contracts at the charter school require a seven-hour workday and 183 workdays per year, 175 for student instruction and five for staff development. Teacher contracts for Mineral require a 7½-hour work day. Since charter school teachers spend part of their workday at home or away from the charter work site, it is impossible to determine whether teachers routinely work a seven-hour day. The director's perception is that teacher workload is determined by the number of student assigned to each teacher rather than by work hours.

Community consultants are used as needed to provide instruction in music piano, guitar, photography, computer graphics and sewing. These consultants are paid \$35 per hour for time spent with students, and some are paid for planning time.

FCMAT verified with the California Department of Education's Charter School Division that charter school enrollment is included with the district that authorized the charter. As long as the district has at least one full-time teacher and one pupil enrolled at Mineral Elementary who generates more than zero average daily attendance, it is eligible to receive necessary small school funding. This information was verified by the California Department of Education School Fiscal Services Division.

Recommendations

The district should:

1. Implement an accountability system to document that charter school teachers are working a verifiable seven-hour workday and a 180-day work year.
2. Require accountability of teacher work hours to prevent audit exceptions and meet community expectations. It is appropriate to assign a specific number of students to a teacher, but accountability should still be expected.
3. Discontinue the practice of paying community consultants for planning time. If necessary, hourly rates could be increased, but consultant pay should be based only on actual instructional time spent with students. It is not an acceptable fiscal practice for community consultants to submit invoices that includes hours for planning time because this time is not verifiable.

No Child Left Behind

All charter school teachers are credentialed, but some have multiple subject credentials without supplementary single-subject authorization for the subjects they teach. The superintendent, CBO, and director have worked with the county office and State Department of Education Commission on Teacher Licensing and Preparation to develop a plan for properly credentialing all teachers in the subjects they teach.

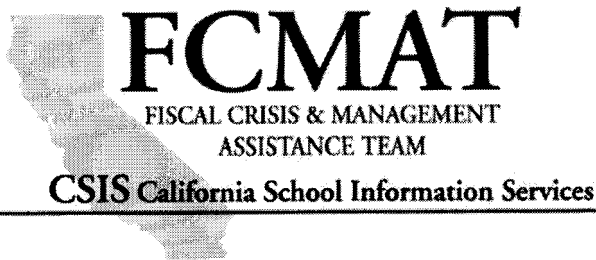
Recommendations

The district should:

1. Ensure all teachers are properly credentialed in the subjects they teach.
2. Put the plan to remedy the credentialing issue in writing even if it is only partially completed.
3. Assign the superintendent and director to make periodic presentations to the board on the progress made in bringing the charter school into compliance with NCLB credentialing requirements.

Appendix

A. Study Agreement



FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM
STUDY AGREEMENT
April 6, 2009

The FISCAL CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM (FCMAT), hereinafter referred to as the Team, and the Mineral Elementary School District, hereinafter referred to as the District, mutually agree as follows:

1. BASIS OF AGREEMENT

The Team provides a variety of services to school districts and county offices of education upon request. The District has requested that the Team provide for the assignment of professionals to study specific aspects of Mineral Elementary School District operations. These professionals may include staff of the Team, County Offices of Education, the California State Department of Education, school districts, or private contractors. All work shall be performed in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement.

2. SCOPE OF THE WORK

A. Scope and Objectives of the Study

The scope and objectives of this study are to:

- 1) Review the present administrative (leadership) structure of the district, including charter school organization and make recommendations for long-term delivery system that would be most effective and efficient.
 - a. Review state testing policy and procedures used to test students in Charter School.
 - b. Review entrance and exit criteria for students at Charter School.
- 2) Review board adopted developer fee resolution and make recommendations on how the district can proceed forward with collecting and appropriately utilizing developer fees.
- 3) Review charter school compliance with special education laws including but not necessarily limited to assessment and identification of special education students, development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) and delivery of special education services.
- 4) Review other aspects of charter school and elementary school operations as identified by Superintendent/Principal.

- 5) Review the personnel and staffing structure in relation to NCLB compliance for core and elective curriculum courses, and monitoring of the service time to the charter school.

B. Services and Products to be Provided

- 1) Orientation Meeting - The Team will conduct an orientation session at the District to brief District management and staff on the procedures of the Team and on the purpose and schedule of the study.
- 2) On-site Review - The Team will conduct on-site meetings at the District office to gather documentation and conduct interviews. The Team will request assistance from the District in setting up interview schedules with staff.
- 3) Progress Reports - The Team will hold an exit meeting at the conclusion of the on-site reviews to inform the District representatives of significant findings and recommendations to that point.
- 4) Exit Letter - The Team will issue an exit letter approximately 10 days after the exit meeting detailing significant findings and recommendations to date and memorializing the topics discussed in the exit meeting.
- 5) Draft Reports - Sufficient copies of a preliminary draft report will be delivered to the District administration for review and comment.
- 6) Final Report - Sufficient copies of the final study report will be delivered to the District following completion of the review.
- 7) Follow-Up Support – Six months after the completion of the study, FCMAT will return to the District, if requested, to confirm the District’s progress in implementing the recommendations included in the report, at no costs. Status of the recommendations will be documented to the District in a FCMAT Management Letter.

3. PROJECT PERSONNEL

The study team will be supervised by Anthony L. Bridges, Deputy Executive Officer, Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office. The study team may also include:

- A. Dr. William Gillaspie, FCMAT Chief Management Analyst
- B. Robert Rice, FCMAT Consultant

Other equally qualified consultants will be substituted in the event one of the above noted individuals is unable to participate in the study.

4. PROJECT COSTS

The cost for studies requested pursuant to E.C. 42127.8(d)(1) shall be:

- A. \$500.00 per day for each Team Member, while on site, conducting fieldwork at other locations, preparing and presenting reports, or participating in meetings.
- B. All out-of-pocket expenses, including travel, meals, lodging, etc. Based on the elements noted in section 2 A, the total cost of the study is estimated at \$5,500. The District will be invoiced at actual costs, with 50% of the estimated cost due following the completion of the on-site review and the remaining amount due upon acceptance of the final report by the District.
- C. Any change to the scope will affect the estimate of total cost.

Payments for FCMAT services are payable to Kern County Superintendent of Schools-Administrative Agent.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DISTRICT

- A. The District will provide office and conference room space while on-site reviews are in progress.
- B. The District will provide the following (if requested):
 - 1) A map of the local area
 - 2) Existing policies, regulations and prior reports addressing the study request
 - 3) Current organizational charts
 - 4) Current and four (4) prior year's audit reports
 - 5) Any documents requested on a supplemental listing
- C. The District Administration will review a preliminary draft copy of the study. Any comments regarding the accuracy of the data presented in the report or the practicability of the recommendations will be reviewed with the Team prior to completion of the final report.

Pursuant to EC 45125.1(c), representatives of FCMAT will have limited contact with District pupils. The District shall take appropriate steps to comply with EC 45125.1(c).

6. PROJECT SCHEDULE

The following schedule outlines the planned completion dates for key study milestones:

Orientation:	May 11, 2009
Staff Interviews:	May 11-12, 2009
Exit Interviews:	May 13, 2009
Preliminary Report Submitted:	June 26, 2009
Final Report Submitted:	to be determined
Board Presentation:	to be determined
Follow-Up Support:	If requested

7. CONTACT PERSON

Please print name of contact person: Brenda Wolfe, Superintendent/Principal

Telephone 530 595-3322

FAX 530-595-3298

Internet Address bwolfe@tehamaed.org

Brenda Wolfe 4/8/09
 Brenda Wolfe, Superintendent/Principal Date
 Mineral Elementary School District

Barbara Dean

April 6, 2009

Barbara (Dean) Murphy, Deputy Administrative Officer Date
 Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team

In keeping with the provisions of AB1200, the County Superintendent will be notified of this agreement between the District and FCMAT and will receive a copy of the final report.