



Vallejo City Unified School District

Governance and
Community Relations
Comprehensive Review
November 2004

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Community Relations/Governance

Communications

The district does not have a strategic communications plan. Few avenues are utilized by the district to communicate consistently to parents and the community about district operations and issues. The district's web site is out of date and underutilized. Spokesperson and media relations protocols either do not exist or are not uniformly understood or adhered to. The district also has not effectively initiated efforts to generate positive news coverage about the district's schools, programs, students and staff.

In the past, a great deal of the responsibility for communicating with parents and the community fell to the individual school sites and school leaders. Several sites regularly send information about local campus events to parents through newsletters and through the district's broadcast phone message system; however, these efforts are uneven across the district, and there is little coordination or support from the central office.

In addition, many individuals expressed concerns regarding internal two-way communications, including perceptions that past district leadership did not always communicate in an open and straightforward manner — especially with regard to budget matters. Many felt that a small group of top district administrators (the “senior cabinet”) tightly controlled the flow of information, leading to gaps in the level of information that went to the board and community as well as to site-level staff and district staff directly responsible for administering specific programs. The accuracy and timeliness of communications from individual district departments varied; site staff reported particular frustrations having to interact with the human resources, maintenance and finance departments. Finally, many staff and community members perceived that their input on districtwide matters was not welcomed.

The district must develop a comprehensive plan that identifies goals for internal and external communications, target audiences, strategies for reaching those audiences, etc., and an accountability mechanism for raising awareness about the plan and implementing it. Responsibilities for these efforts must be clearly assigned at the district level and widely understood by all staff. The state administrator has begun this process by hiring an individual to oversee community and media relations. A wide range of staff, parents and the community, as well as the board, should be engaged in developing the communications plan.

Parent/Community Relations

While the district has complied with many of the legal standards in this area, such as those related to sending out annual parent notices, issuing school accountability report cards, and disseminating uniform complaint procedures, overall the Vallejo City USD has had major difficulties engaging parents and volunteers. Widespread parent/community involvement does not appear to have been a consistent priority.

Some promising activities appear to have been undertaken in the past, such as a districtwide Parent Partnership Conference held in December 2002 and some parent education programs and events at individual school sites. Most of these efforts have not been sustained by the district. A few individual school sites also appear to engage in numerous, positive activities to involve

parents and volunteers, but this effort is uneven across the district and heavily dependent on individual principals. Parent-teacher organizations are not in place or active at all sites. Again, district leadership and support for these efforts appear to have been minimal.

Many parents and community members believe they are not made to feel as if they ultimately have ownership in the district's schools and programs. Individual teacher interaction with students and parents is a key ingredient. Some teachers initiate and place a great emphasis on parent outreach and these teachers are recognized and highly regarded. However, other teachers appear to make few or no efforts to interact with parents, nor have they been encouraged to do so. Some interviewees also stated that they believe some parents need to take greater initiative in their own children's education, instead of simply dropping their children off at the schools and not becoming involved in any other ways.

A common theme among interviewees was that parents don't know how to navigate the school system; also that school or district staff could be nonresponsive to parents' inquiries or requests and it was tolerated in the past. Even the most sophisticated parents seem to have to really work to get answers or get the results they want. Parents who don't have that level of sophistication about school organizations, or who are not that persistent, tend to simply not engage.

In the future, the district must make a strategic and relentless effort to involve more parents and the entire community. In general, site staff need to make parent/community relations a higher priority, and should receive greater assistance from the district in their efforts to do so. Such assistance might include related professional development for principals and other site-level staff, help with publicity for school events and activities, or other strategies developed with the involvement of staff, parents and community members. Also, the district needs to give greater clarity to specific ways that parents and volunteers can get involved and in what ways this involvement is meaningful and supportive of the district's goals.

Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

The district's efforts to form partnerships and collaboratives with community organizations, agencies and businesses appear to have dropped off in recent years. The district participates in some positive and successful partnership programs, but it appears that these efforts are driven mostly by partnering organizations. Overall, there appears to be little district-level initiation or coordination of partnership programs. Additionally, several community members perceived that the previous district leadership was slow to respond to new, outside proposals for partnerships.

The district has at times worked closely with the City of Vallejo and other public agencies. An Interagency Commission exists which enables leadership from the district, city, library district and recreation district to meet and discuss collaborative efforts. Relations between the previous district administration and the city police were strained, partly because the district cut school resource officers during the fiscal crisis. The state administrator has since restored these resource officers. Communication between the district and county office of education was often inadequate, and this relationship was a factor in the escalating fiscal crisis. The district does not appear to have particularly strong collaborative relations with the Vallejo business community, although one board member in particular is positively engaged in the Chamber of Commerce and sits on the Chamber's board and on its education committee.

To better serve the needs of students and families, the district should develop and implement a coordinated district strategy for building community collaborations and partnerships. This strategy should align partnership-building to the district's key goals and identify roles and responsibilities of the board and key staff.

Within the district, there have been a number of advisory councils and committees involving parents, community members and staff, but again the level seems to be dropping off. One of the most successful examples appears to be the School Bond Oversight Commission established as a result of the school bond measure passed in 1997; its members appear to receive adequate information, fulfill their stated responsibilities and regularly report to the board. A district Budget Advisory Committee that includes board members, employee organization representatives and community members was seen as functioning less effectively in the past year, due in part to concerns about staff support and clarity of role.

Other districtwide citizens advisory committees have come and gone, including a Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council, Student Discipline Task Force, Curriculum Advisory Council, Community Advisory Committee for Special Education, Elementary Task Force, Secondary Task Force and School Attendance Boundaries Committee. Perceptions of the usefulness of these groups varied. The district should review its committee structure to ensure that it effectively uses and supports committees to provide broad-based input in support of the district's key goals.

Finally, policies exist for the establishment of school site councils, and these councils are established at each site as appropriate. Participation varies on councils throughout the district. Most site leaders report difficulties involving any more parents than is minimally required. School site staff generally express satisfaction in the past with the support and responsiveness of the Special Projects department, which oversees activities related to site councils, as well as the English Language Advisory Council and the District Advisory Council. School site councils have met their obligations with regard to developing and reviewing school plans that contain the components required by law.

Policy

The district has a fairly well-maintained and organized policy manual. In addition, the district has adopted nearly all of the policies mandated by state or federal law. However, nearly half of the district's policies have not been updated since 1994. Especially during the past two to three years, there appears to have been relatively little policy development or revision. The district subscribes to external policy services that provide information about changes in law as well as sample policies and administrative regulations; the district must more diligently and routinely use these resources to develop or revise its own policies to reflect current law and district practice.

Views on how much input staff and citizens had into policy development were mixed. The policy-updating process was largely seen as driven by senior district staff. While some principals provided input on certain policies, principals as a whole were not consistently asked to give input, nor did they seek to do so. Members of the public had opportunities to provide input during board meetings; no other regular avenues for soliciting public input were evidenced. For those topics of most importance to staff or the public, the district should develop additional methods to solicit broad-based input on proposed policies.

Staff are generally kept informed of changes to policies after they are made. All principals and district managers are made aware of policy changes through a system that requires them to sign off upon receipt of new policies. Policy manuals are kept at the district office and at each school site, and the executive secretary has access to the manual through CD-ROM. However, technology could be more effectively used to increase access for the board, all staff and the public.

The major issue relative to policies in the Vallejo City USD is an apparent lack of consistent and uniform adherence. Sometimes the board's policies are not widely known or else they have been interpreted or enforced differently by district staff or by site staff. Policies related to placement of administrators on the salary schedule, inter/intra district transfers, and student discipline were most often cited for lack of uniform adherence. The policy-related documents that most consistently seem to drive activities in the district are the contracts with employee groups. In the future, the state administrator and board should be more assertive in requiring reviews of policies and policy implementation practices.

Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Board members are frequently characterized as well meaning, dedicated, caring about kids, and relatively representative of the community. The board has placed an emphasis on working effectively as a team in addressing important district matters. Board members appear to have generally understood their policy-setting role, and there were no indications that board members acted inappropriately by attempting to exercise individual authority or to interfere with administrative or operational matters.

Many staff members and community members believe the board placed too much trust in the previous superintendent and senior district administrators, and that the board allowed the superintendent and senior staff to "drive" the direction of the district. At the same time, many believe the administration did not provide accurate information to the board or to the public; that senior staff members either deliberately or non-deliberately misled and misinformed the board on critical financial matters; and that certain senior staff did not demonstrate sufficient professional competence.

Neither the Vallejo City USD board nor the former Solano County Superintendent of Schools established effective accountability structures, especially pertaining to budget matters. There were well-documented budget and fiscal operational concerns in the district for many years that were allowed to persist, though it was understood that district and county office of education staff were communicating in an ongoing way to resolve these matters. In the future, the district must establish clear policies and practices related to budget development and oversight; the board and staff must be clear about roles and expectations in this area, and intervention must be swift when expectations are not being met.

The framework for the district's vision, goals and strategic plan was largely developed in the mid-1990s by a previous superintendent, with significant community input. Subsequently, four generic goals were used to communicate district priorities. An effort was underway last year, led by a team that included one board member and several staff, to begin work on updating the strategic plan, but this effort dropped off in the face of the fiscal crisis. In August 2004, the state administrator established five key goals that have been widely communicated to staff and the community. It will be important for the district to continually assess progress toward these goals.

In addition, in order to build long-term capacity to sustain improvements once local authority is restored, the state administrator and board should develop a long-term strategy for involving the board, staff, parents, students and the community in processes to periodically identify student needs and to update the district's vision/mission and goals.

To regain the faith of the entire community, the board must demonstrate that it acts for the community and for all the students in the district. For example, although some individual members of the board were consistently recognized as being very active in visiting sites and attending community and school functions, not all board members are perceived as actively engaging a broad cross-section of the community or attempting to understand the needs of all sites. In particular, some parents and community members feel that some board members do not effectively understand or represent the needs of students of color or students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The board and district administration must also work to overcome a perception of a "closed network" by continually reaching out to invite parent and community involvement with the district and schools.

Board Meetings

School board meetings generally follow processes described in board bylaws and are consistent with legal requirements. Agendas are posted in accordance with law, and opportunities for public input are provided at meetings. The board also appears to be respectful of the staff and public at meetings. A majority of board members appear to be adequately prepared for meetings, although the lack of consistent and detailed background materials and analysis of all agenda items provided by staff to the board is a major concern. The state administrator and board should form agreements as to what types of information, data and analysis are necessary prior to meetings.

There were also indications that some budget-related matters which should have been discussed in open meetings were discussed to some extent during closed sessions. All board members and staff must be clear about and adhere to the requirements of the Brown Act.

Agendas might also be reorganized to better emphasize important student achievement matters. There did not appear to be frequent, substantive reports on student achievement issues. There were positive efforts in the past year to ensure greater awareness about each of the local school sites by requiring site leaders to provide an annual presentation to the board, highlighting programs and activities.

1.1 Communications

Professional Standard

The district has developed and implemented a comprehensive plan for internal and external communications, including media relations.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Parent and community member interviews
4. Parent focus groups
5. Media representative interviews
6. District policies
7. District Web site
8. Site newsletters
9. Staff surveys

Findings

1. The district does not have a comprehensive communications plan. In the past, many of the district's communications activities do not appear to have been centrally directed or coordinated, but have been dependent on the efforts of individuals at school sites.
2. The district has adopted policies and administrative regulations related to communications and media relations (BP 1100 and BP/AR 1112), which include direction for the development of a communications plan. In addition, one of the four main goals of the district in the past three years involved working toward improvements in the area of public relations. However, these policies and the goal do not appear to have driven communications efforts.
3. A previous superintendent attempted to establish a permanent communications position and revise media protocols (see also Standard 1.4). However, these efforts met with resistance due to the financial impact, and a position was not created. For a brief time, the district contracted for some communications/public relations assistance.
4. The Vallejo Times-Herald, a daily with a circulation of approximately 20,000, is the primary newspaper that covers the district. The San Francisco Chronicle and Contra Costa Times also provide some coverage. In the past several years, the district office appears to have made minimal proactive efforts to build media relations and generate positive coverage of the district's schools and programs. Relations between the district administration and the local newspaper were not functional, due in part to a perceived lack of accessibility and responsiveness on the part of a previous superintendent in locating and/or providing requested information. There were also perceptions among some district leaders that the local newspaper did not accurately present information or quotations provided to it by district leaders.

5. Teachers and classified staff surveyed for this study tended to disagree or strongly disagree that the media paint an unfair picture of the district's situation, with the classified staff showing a higher level of disagreement. Among teachers, 32.4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 28.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 29.6 percent were neutral; 9.2 percent had no opinion. Among classified staff, 41.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 22.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 26.6 percent were neutral; 9.7 percent had no opinion.

On the other hand, teachers were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree that the schools are considerably better than shown in the media (36.2 percent vs. 23.4 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed; the rest were neutral or had no opinion), whereas classified staff leaned in the other direction (33.9 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 25.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed).

6. Interviewees say in past years they received information about the district primarily from what they read in the local newspaper; from phone messages generated by the school sites; from site newsletters and occasional district newsletters and letters sent home by the superintendent; and through word of mouth or contact with school employees. Taped broadcasts of regular board meetings are shown on the local cable TV station. The district does not appear to make extensive use of e-mail communications or districtwide mailings. The district's Web site contains some useful information and might become a more important vehicle for effective communications in the future. However, much of the information on the site is not current.

Staff indicated in surveys that they get information about district activities from the newspaper, the principal and other staff members (see Standard 1.2).

7. During the recent budget crisis, many parents and community members expressed concerns about not being kept better informed by the district. There is a perception by many that the size of the district's budget deficit became an issue "overnight" and that the district's top financial staff had previously reported in a public meeting that the district was on solid financial ground. Following the revelation of the magnitude of the deficit, the district attempted to hold a series of community forums to provide information and solicit input, although only one of these forums was held.
8. When asked whether parents have the opportunity to be well informed about what is happening at their school, most teachers surveyed (60.4 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that they do (16.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 21.2 percent were neutral; 2.2 percent had no opinion). Classified staff also were more likely to agree or strongly agree (44.1 percent) than to disagree or strongly disagree (22.8 percent). However, both groups were evenly split when asked whether parents have the opportunity to be well informed about what is happening in the district.
9. Many individual board members, staff, parents and community members identified poor communications by the district as one of the most significant problems. They identified a need for the district to strengthen its internal and external communications in an effort to better engage the community, improve the reputation of the school district and promote attendance.

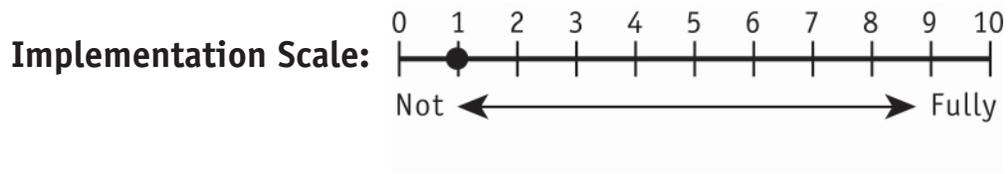
10. In summer 2004, the state administrator established a part-time contract position to assist in coordinating the district's communications and community/public relations activities.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should develop a comprehensive, long-term communications plan that encourages proactive internal and external communications.
 - a. The plan should be developed with input from board members, district and site staff, parents and community members.
 - b. The district should consider organizing the communications plan around priority issues. For those issues identified as priorities, the plan should delineate target audiences, strategies for reaching those audiences, persons responsible for each activity, and timelines.
 - c. The plan should specifically consider strategies to improve overall public perceptions of the school district, strengthen media relations and address the district's role in working with sites to strengthen communications with all parents.
 - d. The plan should be adopted by the board and state administrator.
 - e. The plan and aligned materials such as protocols and procedures should be distributed to all staff, board members and school sites in a timely and efficient manner.
 - f. The district should ensure a process for maintaining current lists of media contacts as well as parent and community leaders.
2. The district should implement the strategies in the communications plan in a coordinated and timely manner.
 - a. The district should provide more proactive information to the media about important district issues, programs and activities, including highlighting achievements of the district's students and staff.
 - b. Communications/public relations staff should be responsible for tracking the district's communications efforts and regularly reporting to the state administrator, board and others regarding the status of implementation.
3. The state administrator or designee should periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the district's communications efforts and make ongoing improvements in the communications plan as necessary.
 - a. The district might use surveys, focus groups or other methods that encourage participants to freely give their opinions about district performance. Such assessments should be aligned with critical issues and key messages identified in the district's communications plan.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 1



1.2 Communications

Professional Standard

Information is communicated to the staff at all levels in an effective and timely manner.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. District administrator interviews
3. Staff interviews
4. Staff surveys

Findings

1. At this time, the district does not have a comprehensive communications plan that includes procedures and systems to ensure that information is provided to staff (see Standard 1.1).
2. District and site staff stated that they primarily receive district information through staff meetings, by word-of-mouth, by attending board meetings or watching them on TV, from direct supervisors, from colleagues, through employee organizations, and by reading the local newspaper. Teachers receive much of their information about district matters from their employee organization communications.

Surveys conducted for this study asked teachers, classified staff and district staff to indicate their primary sources for being informed about what is happening in the district. Multiple responses were allowed. Among teachers, the most frequent four responses included staff meetings, the principal, what other staff tell them, and the newspaper. For classified staff, the newspaper and what other staff tell them were most frequently indicated as the source for district information, followed by the principal and district communications. District office staff listed what other staff tell them, the newspaper, district communications and staff meetings. There is an over reliance on the newspaper as a primary source of district information on the district's schools and programs for all groups (see Standard 1.1). Also, what other staff say may or may not be reliable.

3. Senior administrators (the senior cabinet) met with the previous superintendent on a weekly basis, and all members of the district cabinet met with the superintendent every two weeks. All K-12 principals met once per month with each other and the superintendent, and 2-3 other times per month in groups of elementary and middle/secondary principals with the district directors.
4. District managers and principals had varying opinions as to the accessibility of the previous superintendent. Some principals felt the previous superintendent made frequent site visits and was responsive to their phone calls and e-mails, while others perceived that they could not approach her as directly and that she did not have much presence on their sites.

5. Elementary principals interviewed generally expressed a higher degree of satisfaction with the information provided to them by the former Director of Elementary Education. Middle school principals in particular expressed concerns about the flow of information to them in the past.
6. Site-level managers and staff frequently singled out certain district departments — human resources, maintenance and finance — as doing particularly poor jobs of communicating, providing information, and being responsive to questions and requests.
7. Among site-level managers and staff interviewed, many expressed concerns about the accuracy of information provided to them by the district office, especially budget-related information. Many perceived that the former superintendent and the senior cabinet tightly controlled the flow of information to other managers and staff. During the district’s fiscal crisis in the fall of 2003, managers report that regular meetings were not held with the superintendent and that communication about fiscal matters was especially sparse and sporadic.
8. A number of questions related to staff communications were asked in surveys conducted for this study. In general, the responses indicate consistent perceptions that staff did not receive adequate information about what was happening in the district, although information about school sites or work sites was better.

Teachers, classified staff and district office staff all assigned an average grade of “D” to the effectiveness of the previous district administration in communicating clearly with teachers and staff.

Staff at all levels also indicated general disagreement that changes in board policy are communicated to them in writing (see Standard 4.1).

The majority of survey respondents in all groups (66.8 percent of teachers, 53.2 percent of classified staff and 68.1 percent of district staff) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are given full and complete information when asking questions of district or other school officials.

Teachers tended to disagree or strongly disagree that they have had the opportunity to be informed about what is happening in the school district as a whole (46.4 percent disagreeing vs. 20.6 percent who agreed or strongly agreed; 32.4 percent neutral; 0.5 percent no opinion). Classified staff and district staff also tended to disagree, although not to the same extent.

Staff perceptions were more positive regarding information about school sites: 59.7 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they have had the opportunity to be informed about what is happening at their school site (17.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 22.6 percent neutral; 0.6 percent no opinion). Classified staff also tended to agree or strongly agree (43.4 percent vs. 22.1 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed; 32.3 percent neutral; 2.4 percent no opinion). District staff, however, were fairly

evenly split in their opinions as to whether they have had the opportunity to be informed at their work site.

Overall, staff at all levels disagreed that the level of communication they have received is appropriate to their needs as a teacher/staff member. Among teachers, 50.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 16.1 percent agreed or strongly agreed, 30.0 percent were neutral and 3.6 percent had no opinion. Among classified staff, 40.5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 26.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed, 31.4 percent were neutral and 1.7 percent had no opinion. Among district staff, 53.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 17.0 percent agreed or strongly agreed, 27.7 percent were neutral and 2.1 percent had no opinion.

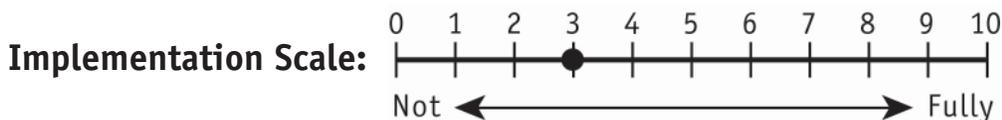
9. Many staff interviewed reported an improvement in the frequency and quality of communication they have received from the district office since the state administrator arrived. Several managers especially noted the responsiveness of the state administrator. However, some staff also indicated that they do not yet know the new organizational reporting structure or to whom they should go for certain information.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. As the district develops and implements its comprehensive communications plan (see Standard 1.1), it should emphasize strategies for ongoing internal communications to staff at all levels.
 - a. Discussion and feedback on internal communications issues should become an ongoing topic at cabinet and principal meetings.
 - b. Feedback from all staff should be sought on a regular basis in order to strengthen communications.
2. District staff in all departments should be held accountable for responding to requests for information or assistance from site-level staff.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



1.3 Communications

Professional Standard

Staff input into school and district operations is encouraged.

Sources and Documentation

1. District and site administrator interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Staff surveys

Findings

1. At this time, the district does not have a comprehensive communications plan that includes strategies for encouraging input and feedback from staff (see Standard 1.1).
2. Several interviewees characterized cabinet and managers' meetings as times when senior administrators "talked at them." Many participants perceived that their input on district matters was not generally welcomed or well received by top district administrators. They believe that the superintendent and senior cabinet made significant decisions among themselves and "behind closed doors," even when those decisions impacted particular programs or managers and required their understanding for effective implementation.
3. In general, elementary principals reported more satisfaction with their opportunities to provide input on some matters through the former Director of Elementary Education.
4. The board and district administration do not extensively use committees and task forces as opportunities to obtain broad-based input (see Standard 3.2).
5. Leading up to and during the recent budget crisis, the district does not seem to have provided widespread, significant opportunities for a wide cross-section of staff to provide input on budget issues. Some staff did provide input at board meetings. Some site managers stated that after they raised issues at one principals' meeting, the group was not reconvened for several months.
6. Although district administrators are involved in the development of district policies, site administrators and other staff are not consistently engaged in the policy development or review process (see Standard 4.5).
7. Teachers and classified staff generally offer input and feedback through their principal. Many staff members interviewed reported a high degree of satisfaction with the opportunities provided to them by their principal. They expressed a sense of empowerment related to site matters, though not district matters.

For teachers, these perceptions are confirmed in surveys, where 49.6 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their principal encourages teacher input into decision-making about school and district operations (29.6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 18.6 percent were neutral; 2.2 percent had no opinion). However, classified staff and district office staff were more likely to disagree than agree that their supervisor encour-

ages staff input into decision-making. The results were close for classified staff (36.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 31.2 percent agreed or strongly agreed), but were pronounced for district staff (51.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 14.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed).

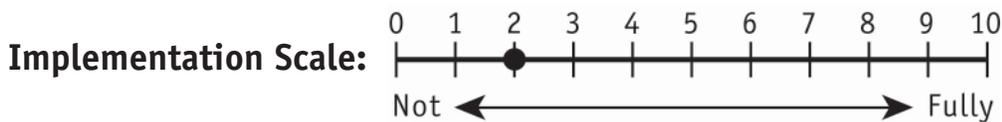
All levels of staff, however, disagreed that the previous district administration encouraged their input into decision making (68.8 percent of teachers, 59.2 percent of classified staff and 66.0 percent of district staff). Furthermore, all levels of staff tended to disagree that the school board actively welcomes teachers/staff members to come and give their opinions during board meetings. Among teachers, 52.7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed while 16.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed. Among classified staff, 35.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 23.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed. Among district staff, 40.5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 29.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. As the district develops its comprehensive communications plan (see Standard 1.1), its internal communications strategies should address opportunities for communications and suggestions from staff to their supervisors, district administrators and the board.
2. The district must expand opportunities for all staff to provide input regarding school and district operations. Staff should be reassured that they are welcome to offer their input and suggestions.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 2



1.4 Communications

Professional Standard

Media contacts and spokespersons that have the authority to speak on behalf of the district have been identified.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Media interviews
4. District policies

Findings

1. The district does not currently have a communications plan that delineates roles and responsibilities for district spokespersons or media relations procedures (see Standard 1.1).
2. The board has adopted policies (BP 1112 Media Relations, 2003) specifying that media inquiries are to be routed to the superintendent and establishing the board president and superintendent as the primary spokespersons for the district, although other board members and staff may be asked by the superintendent to speak to the media on a case-by-case basis. Related regulations (AR 1112, 1994) authorize principals and department directors to release information regarding routine matters of the school or department, such as student awards, school accomplishments and events of special interest.

However, there appeared to be minimal or conflicting awareness among most interviewees about the existence of these policies or about the preferred practices to be followed during the previous administration. At one point, the superintendent did attempt to establish policies that would more clearly define media relations roles and more formally centralize media relations through her office. Local media perceived this as an attempt to restrict access to district personnel and to “control” information; local media also believed the superintendent was not appropriately responsive as the central spokesperson.

3. It was generally understood by the board that the previous superintendent served as the district’s primary media contact and spokesperson. The superintendent delegated some of these responsibilities to a deputy superintendent. The executive secretary also played a role in fielding initial media inquiries and referring them to staff or coordinating a response. Other district staff were also called upon, either directly by the media or through the superintendent’s office, to respond to reporters. Some managers expressed reluctance and discomfort about directly fielding media inquiries. Understanding among staff about laws related to media access and basic media relations skills appear to be very uneven throughout the district.
4. It was also generally understood by the board that the board president was designated to represent the board and district as a spokesperson on significant issues. However, all board members were authorized to respond to media inquiries.

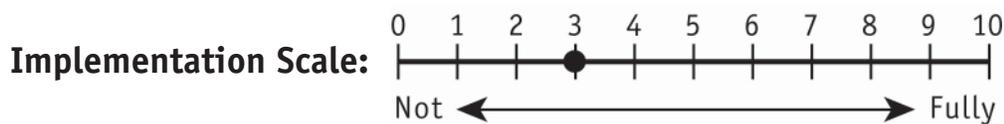
5. The state administrator has issued direction to all managers and district office staff with regard to media contacts, which are now to be handled through the communications/community relations staff person.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. As the district develops its comprehensive communications plan (see Standard 1.1) and reviews and updates its policies, it should clarify in writing the roles and responsibilities of board members, district staff and the administration with respect to responding to media and public inquiries and serving as spokespersons.
2. All district staff should be informed in writing as to the protocols and procedures regarding public and media inquiries.
3. Individuals assigned to media relations should ensure that all requests receive a prompt response.
4. Key district staff, including principals, should receive basic training to strengthen media relations skills.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



1.5 Communications

Professional Standard

Individuals not authorized to speak on behalf of the district refrain from public comments on board decisions and district programs.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews

Findings

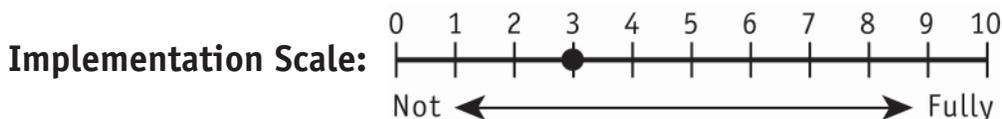
1. As referenced in Standard 1.4, during the previous administration, awareness among staff about protocols for district spokespersons was minimal or conflicting.
2. District and site managers sometimes fielded calls directly from the media or had calls referred to them by the superintendent's office. It was unclear to staff whether in all of these instances they were authorized to speak on behalf of the district.
3. Board members and staff reported some past incidents where individual staff members inappropriately contacted the media directly regarding school or district matters or when site employees would be quoted in the newspaper without the district being aware they had been contacted.
4. Individual board members do appear to have a clear understanding of the need to distinguish when they are speaking on behalf of the district or as individuals.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. When district protocols regarding media contacts have been clarified and distributed, district staff and board members must follow these protocols in order to improve the coordination of communications and present a coherent district message.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



1.6 Communications

Professional Standard

Board spokespersons are skilled at public speaking and communications and are knowledgeable about district programs and issues.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Media interviews
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Observations of board meetings

Findings

1. Board members have not participated in media trainings or other briefings to discuss media skills, protocols and procedures. Several board members believe one of the areas the board most needs to strengthen is outreach and communication to parents and the public.
2. Board members and the previous superintendent are/were generally perceived as articulate and professional when communicating in public.
3. Most concerns raised in this area had to do with the level and accuracy of information district spokespersons provided to the public. In particular, many staff members, parents and community members interviewed perceived that district spokespersons, especially former top administrators, withheld important financial information or consistently sought to downplay the severity of the budget crisis. People who attended or observed board meetings frequently said they felt that the senior administrators were not forthcoming with information or answers during these public meetings.
4. There appears to have been little or no effort in recent years to develop key messages related to any of the district's priorities. Concern was expressed by some interviewees that district staff did a poor job of anticipating likely questions on critical district issues and proactively preparing or disseminating information or communications strategies to address these questions.
5. The previous superintendent was perceived as articulate, though perhaps not fully knowledgeable or aware of all of the district's financial issues. Relations between the local daily newspaper and the previous superintendent were strained.

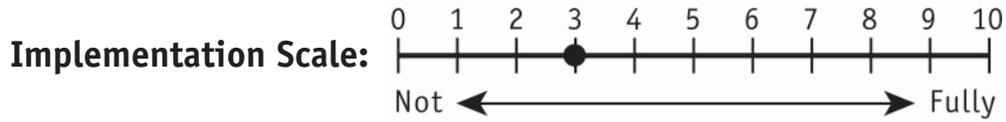
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. Board members should consider individual or group training in all aspects of communications in order to maximize board effectiveness.
2. All district staff members who are authorized to serve as spokespersons should receive media training.

3. To better ensure that all spokespersons are fully knowledgeable regarding issues prior to speaking publicly, the district should develop more proactive public information strategies around important topics and issues. This might include such things as fact sheets, FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), and other informational devices to help inform the public and communicate consistent messages.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



2.1 Parent/Community Relations

Legal Standard

Annual parental notice of rights and responsibilities is provided at the beginning of the school year. This notice is provided in English and in languages other than English when 15 percent or more speak other languages. (Education Code 48980, 48985)

Sources and Documentation

1. Parent notifications 2003-04
2. Staff interviews

Findings

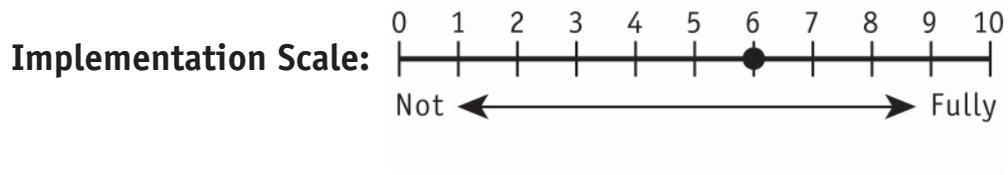
1. District staff report that a handout of “Parent Notifications Required by Law Including Student Behavior Standards” is distributed annually. Notices were verified for 2002-03 and 2003-04 for this study. As of mid-September 2004, notifications for 2004-05 were prepared but not yet distributed due to malfunctioning photocopying equipment. There was a report that prior-year notifications were delayed until October, but in general the district makes an effort to distribute notifications as early as possible in the school year.
2. Of the 18 notifications specified in Education Code 48980, the 2003-04 handout of “Parent Notifications Required by Law Including Student Behavior Standards” included 17. Notice regarding the availability of state funds for Advanced Placement fees is not included in this handout, but is handled by the appropriate district department and provided directly to affected students.
3. Parental notifications are provided in Spanish and in Tagalog. No other languages are spoken by 15 percent or more of the parents.
4. Parents are asked to sign a letter acknowledging that they have been informed of their rights through these documents.
5. District staff receives information about legal requirements for notifications from the California Department of Education’s Web site. The district also has adopted a policy and exhibit (February 2000) detailing the parental notifications required by law. These materials are substantially complete but do not reflect some changes in law that have occurred since 2000.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should ensure that parental notifications are distributed in a timely manner at the beginning of each school year.
 - a. The district should establish alternative mechanisms for producing notifications in order to ensure consistency in the timely distribution of notices.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 6



2.2 Parent/Community Relations

Legal Standard

A school accountability report card is issued annually for each school site. (Education Code 35256)

Sources and Documentation

1. School accountability report cards for 2002-03 (published in 2003-04)
2. Staff interviews

Findings

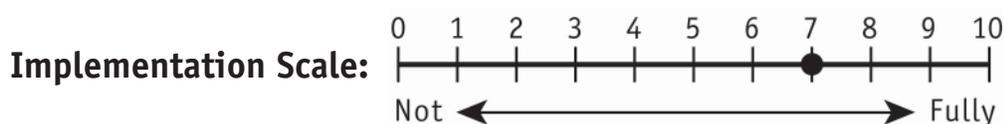
1. District staff report that school accountability report cards are issued annually, and report cards were verified for 2002-03 (published during 2003-04) for this study. Report cards are issued in spring following the issuance of statewide data.
2. The full school accountability report cards appear on the district's Web site for all district schools.
3. The district distributes a flyer notifying parents when the school accountability report cards are available on the district's Web site, and also notifying them that they may obtain a hard copy of the report card at the school site.
4. The 2002-03 school accountability report cards followed the template provided by the California Department of Education. The only missing component was a description of the types of services funded (the final item on the template, required by Education Code 33126(b)(1)(3)). Staff indicate that this component will be added to the next report cards. (Note that verification of the accuracy of the data contained in the report cards was beyond the scope of this study.)
5. Because the district follows the state template each year, it has access to current information regarding legal requirements.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. As the district prepares school accountability report cards to publish in 2004-05 and beyond, the district should ensure that each report card reflects the most recent requirements of law.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 7



2.3 Parent/Community Relations

Legal Standard

The district has developed and annually disseminates uniform complaint procedures. (Title 5, Sections 4621 and 4622)

Sources and Documentation

1. Parent notifications 2003-04
2. Employee notifications 2002
3. District policies
4. Staff interviews

Findings

1. Written uniform complaint procedures are contained in board policies and regulations (BP/AR 1312.3) and were last adopted in September 2002. These materials appear to substantially reflect current state regulations: (1) They ensure confidentiality and protection from retaliation; (2) they specify the person who will receive and investigate complaints; (3) they address available civil law remedies and appeals procedures; and (4) they clarify that the procedures are for complaints about the failure to comply with federal and state laws, including types of unlawful discrimination and applicable programs. However, they do not specify that uniform complaint procedures shall be used for complaints of discrimination based on age (as specified in the California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 4610) or gender (which Coordinated Compliance Reviews distinguish from “sex” and “sexual orientation”).
2. The district annually distributes uniform complaint procedures to parents in its handout of parent notifications (see Standard 2.1), which the parent must sign to indicate receipt. The procedures are also available at school sites.

Employees annually receive the procedures with the September payroll. In addition, uniform complaint procedures are included in a statement of other required annual legal notices, which they must sign to indicate receipt.

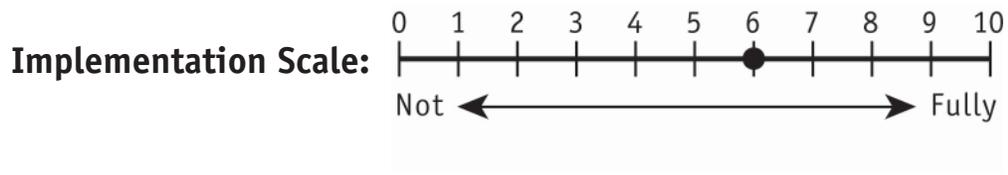
3. The district subscribes to external policy services that provide updated sample policies and regulations as changes in law occur.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should review and update its uniform complaint procedures to ensure that the procedures fulfill the requirements of current law and state Coordinated Compliance Reviews.
 - a. The district may use its external policy services and/or other resources to update its uniform complaint procedures.
 - b. The district should regularly monitor any changes in law pertaining to uniform complaint procedures.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 6



2.4 Parent/Community Relations

Professional Standard

Parents' and community members' complaints are addressed in a fair and timely manner.

Sources and Documentation

1. Staff interviews
2. Parent and community member interviews
3. Parent focus groups
4. District policies
5. Parent notifications
6. Staff surveys

Findings

1. The district's policy manual includes uniform complaint procedures (see Standard 2.3). In addition, the district has established other informal and formal complaint processes through BP 1312 Complaints Concerning the Schools (1994), BP/AR 1312.1 Complaints Concerning School Personnel (1994/2001), and BP/AR 1312.2 Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials (1994). These procedures appear to reflect current law and provide for fair treatment of all parties.
2. Uniform complaint procedures are distributed annually with parent notifications. In addition, the annual parent notifications include a statement advising parents regarding the process and who to contact when they have other concerns related to situations in a classroom. Nevertheless, parents and community members interviewed did not seem to be widely aware of these or other formal complaint procedures and may not know who to contact at the district office. They are most likely to contact the site when they have a concern, as appropriate in most instances.
3. Principals interviewed indicated general satisfaction with the way complaints have been handled in the district. Many said that they prefer to try to resolve complaints directly at the school site first. The previous administration was reported to have referred complaints to the site level when possible. Some elementary principals noted that the district's Office of Elementary Education was supportive in handling complaints.
4. Among parents interviewed and in focus groups, there was a common sense of frustration that parents must be overly assertive in raising and following up on any concerns or else the site or district staff was apt not to address them. Several parents expressed a feeling that the district's structure was "difficult to navigate" by all except the most sophisticated parents. These parents felt that, although some individual principals are very responsive, overall the district was slow to respond to certain complaints or did not initially respond in a way that satisfied the parent. Staff and parents indicated that occasionally some parents were verbally hostile when lodging complaints.
5. Several years ago, partly in response to concerns and complaints about the disparity in suspension and expulsion rates among African American students, the district received a

grant to create an Educational Justice for African-American Students program. As part of this program, the district identified advocates to work with students and parents to help them understand processes and to make sure the district followed its processes. Some African American parents interviewed thought this was a good program, although it is no longer operating in the district.

6. Among staff surveyed, large numbers of district staff (66.0 percent), teachers (47.0 percent) and classified staff (40.4 percent) were neutral or had no opinion as to whether the district handles complaints by all parents in a uniform manner (i.e., there are established procedures and all are treated equally). Among those with an opinion, teachers were the most likely to agree or strongly agree that complaints are handled in a uniform manner (44.3 percent of the sample, compared to 8.8 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed). District staff were also more likely to agree or strongly agree, although to a lesser extent (19.1 percent vs. 14.9 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed). Classified staff were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that complaints are handled in a uniform manner (42.8 percent vs. 17.7 percent who agreed or strongly agreed).

7. When asked in the survey whether charges or complaints against school employees are handled in a timely and professional manner, teachers again were the most positive group, with 59.7 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing (23.2 percent neutral or no opinion; 17.0 percent disagree or strongly disagree). The majority of district staff again tended to have no opinion or to be neutral (57.4 percent); the others were slightly more likely to disagree or strongly disagree (23.4 percent) than to agree or strongly agree (19.1 percent). Classified staff also tended to be neutral or have no opinion (46.5 percent) or to disagree or strongly disagree (26.6 percent), compared to 16.9 percent who agreed or strongly agreed.

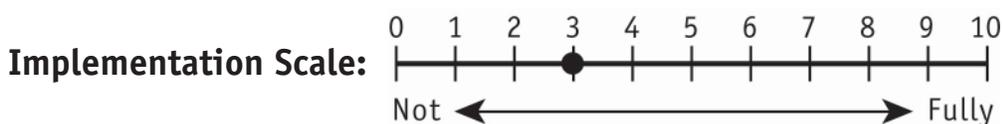
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should ensure that district and site staff are aware of all complaint procedures and are capable of informing parents and community members about them.
 - a. Staff members who frequently interact with parents should receive training in effective techniques for customer service, including complaint resolution.

2. The district should hold staff accountable for the fair, consistent and thorough implementation of the complaint procedures.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



2.5 Parent/Community Relations

Professional Standard

Board members refer informal public concerns to the appropriate staff for attention and response.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. District policies

Findings

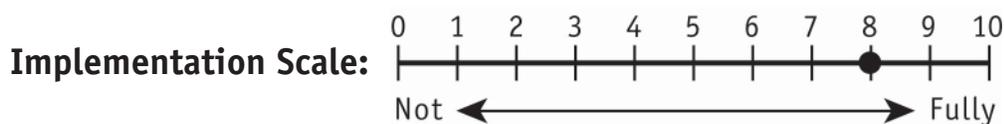
1. During the previous administration, board members generally followed a practice of referring concerns to the superintendent's office, as requested by the superintendent. Board members also occasionally referred site-specific concerns directly to the principals.
2. Board policies and administrative regulations (BP 1312 Complaints Concerning the Schools, 1994; AR 1140 Responsibilities of the Governing Board, 1994) provide that the board and individual board members will refer any complaints, constructive criticism or suggestions they receive to the superintendent for appropriate investigation, consideration or action.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The board and state administrator should review district practices and policies for referring informal public concerns in order to ensure common understanding of appropriate processes.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 8



2.6 Parent/Community Relations

Professional Standard

Parents and community members are encouraged to be involved in school activities and in their children's education.

Sources and Documentation

1. Parent and community member interviews
2. Parent focus groups
3. Board member interviews
4. Staff interviews
5. Staff surveys
6. District policies

Findings

1. A few school sites have a successful record of pursuing multiple and creative ways of engaging parents and the community. These sites report extremely high turnouts for certain campus events such as Back to School night, student performances and school carnivals. In the past, one or two sites held a series of parent training nights, family reading nights and cultural days/events, all of which helped bring families to the campuses. Other successful strategies have included monthly parent-administrator breakfasts, parent sessions related to testing and homework, and interactions and greetings initiated by individual principals with parents before and after school.
2. The level of effectiveness in engaging parents and community members is driven by the effort and skill of individual principals. Overall, the district office has not provided strong, consistent direction, coordination or support for these efforts.

One exception is the district's Special Projects department, which provides a generic "tips for parents" document that can be incorporated into site newsletters, as well as support and guidance for School Site Councils and English Language Advisory Councils (see Standard 3.4). In addition, the district has developed a parent handbook that includes information on the district's standards and how parents can provide support at home to assist their children in mastering the standards. The handbook includes reading lists, games and other instructional strategies that parents can use at home to reinforce learning at school, and is translated into Spanish.

3. Formal parent organizations such as PTAs/PTOs do not exist at some schools. Recent changes in site administration, as well as the grade levels in the school, may have a bearing on whether these groups exist or are well established. Where these groups do exist, their effectiveness varies across the district. A handful appear to be fairly successful in raising funds and involving parents.

Among teachers surveyed for this study, there was a tendency to disagree or strongly disagree that parent-teacher organizations play a meaningful role at their school site (46.7 percent, compared to 28.1 percent who agreed or strongly agreed; 19.8 percent neutral; 5.5 percent no opinion). Classified staff were more evenly split in their opinions (31.7

percent agreed or strongly agreed; 30.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 22.0 percent neutral; 16.3 percent no opinion).

4. Principals do not appear to receive specific staff development or direction on how to more effectively involve parents and the community. Parent outreach is not a topic that is frequently discussed at principals' meetings.
5. The adult school has historically been a way for the district to connect with parents. Several interviewees expressed a desire for adult school courses to be offered at some of the local school sites to make them more accessible throughout the community, especially for those who might not have transportation.
6. Site staff and parents who were interviewed indicated that it is often the same small cadre of parents who are active and involved.
7. Parents interviewed and in focus groups generally perceive that some principals and teachers invite participation, while others resist it and are not very welcoming. Other parents believe that a lot of parents are too busy to get involved, don't know how to get involved, or may feel intimidated by the district or school staffs. Safety concerns and the lack of language translation at some sites also seem to inhibit some participation.
8. Staff surveyed for this study were asked to grade the effectiveness of their principal in encouraging parent participation at the school level. Nearly half of the classified staff (48.8 percent) and teachers (47.4 percent) gave a grade of "A" or "B"; the average grade assigned by both groups was a "C+."

In addition, teachers tended to agree or strongly agree that parents are generally supportive of their school site and its activities (43.8 percent compared to 24.2 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed; 29.5 percent neutral; 2.5 percent no opinion). A similar but less pronounced pattern appeared among classified staff surveyed: 32.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed that parents are generally supportive of the school; 25.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 30.1 percent were neutral; 12.2 percent had no opinion.

Parents' level of support for the district and its activities was viewed less positively by both teachers and classified staff. When asked whether parents are generally supportive of the district, 34.8 percent of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed; 16.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 35.9 percent were neutral; 12.4 percent had no opinion. Similarly, among classified staff, 38.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 14.1 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 28.9 percent were neutral; 19.0 percent had no opinion.

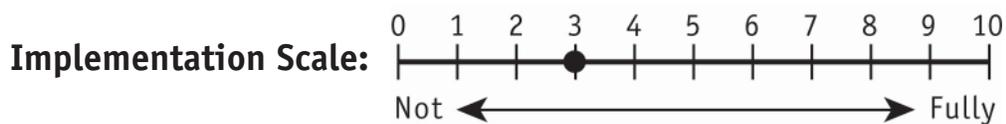
9. The district has adopted policies and administrative regulations encouraging parent and community involvement, including but not limited to BP 1200 Participation by the Public (1994), BP 1210 School-Community Associations (1994), BP/AR 1220 Citizen Advisory Committees (1994), BP 1221.7 Parent Involvement Policy for Categorical Programs (1994), BP 6020 Parent Involvement (2000), BP/AR 6171 Chapter I Programs (1994), BP/AR 1240 Volunteer Assistance (1994), BP 5020 Parent Rights and Responsibilities, and BP 1700 Relations Between Private Industry and the Schools (1994).

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should increase its support and facilitation of site-level efforts to encourage parent and community involvement in the schools.
 - a. The district should provide ongoing professional development to all principals, and to other site-level staff as necessary, to assist them in promoting positive parent/community relations.
 - b. As part of the comprehensive communications plan (Standard 1.1), the district should involve staff, parents and community members in identifying specific strategies for enhancing involvement at all sites.
 - c. The district should assist in publicizing school events and activities through appropriate means.
 - d. Annual staff evaluations should hold principals and other site staff accountable for promoting parent/community involvement based on clearly established district goals.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



2.7 Parent/Community Relations

Professional Standard

Volunteers receive appropriate training and play a meaningful role that contributes to the educational program.

Sources and Documentation

1. Parent and community member interviews
2. Parent focus groups
3. Staff interviews
4. District policies
5. Parent notifications

Findings

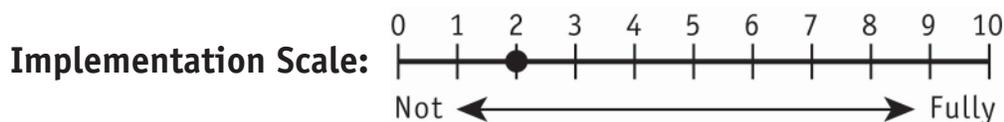
1. Districtwide, encouragement of parent/community involvement in general appears to be problematic (see Standard 2.6). Lack of outreach to parents and community members has an impact on the recruitment of volunteers to assist in the classroom and on campuses.
2. Recruitment of volunteers is primarily site-driven. Some schools actively reach out to involve volunteers while others are less assertive. Economic and other factors, as well as the grade levels in the school, may also affect the success of individual schools in securing volunteers. No evidence of a formal, coordinated recruitment program or other district support was apparent. Some interviewees felt that the most effective way to recruit volunteers was through personal contact and invitation.
3. Training/orientation of volunteers also appears to be site-driven and inconsistent or sporadic. Some parent/community member interviewees noted that parent education may be needed to help some parents who feel inadequate to assist the schools.
4. Many parents interviewed and in focus groups felt that getting more adults onto campuses as volunteers would help with student behavior and campus safety problems.
5. A common theme in parent/community member interviews was the need for the sites and district to clearly identify the ways that parents and community members can get involved. Some parents expressed a willingness to help if they better understood where and how their help was needed.
6. The district has brief board policies and administrative regulations (BP/AR 1240 Volunteer Assistance, 1994) encouraging volunteerism and addressing supervision, tuberculosis testing and other requirements. These materials do not currently address recruitment, orientation/training or specific ways in which volunteers can be meaningfully involved.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should provide support to school sites in the recruitment of volunteers.
 - a. The district might involve principals, other key staff, parents and community members in developing a coordinated plan for recruiting volunteers, including underrepresented groups of parents and community members and untapped sources such as seniors and businesses.
 - b. The district should review and expand its policies and regulations on volunteer assistance to address recruitment, training/orientation and appropriate roles of volunteers.
 - c. The district should consider adding information to its Web site, annual parent notifications and other printed materials regarding volunteerism.
2. The district and/or all school sites should be prepared to provide training/orientation for volunteers in the specific responsibilities they will be asked to perform, particularly those that involve student contact or instruction.
3. The district should periodically assess the effectiveness of its volunteer assistance program.
 - a. District and school staff should review the current duties of volunteers and ensure that volunteers play a meaningful role that contributes to the educational program, enhances student safety or provides a needed service.
 - b. District and school staff might be asked to provide an annual report to the state administrator and the board regarding the increase or decrease in the number of volunteers and the efforts undertaken to recruit volunteers.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 2



2.8 Parent/Community Relations

Legal Standard

The district has established procedures for visitor registration and posts registration requirements at each school entrance. (Penal Code 627.2, 627.6)

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies
2. Staff interviews
3. Personal experience of project staff

Findings

1. Board policy (BP 1250 Visitors/Outsiders, 1994) encourages visits to the schools and requires registration in the principal's office upon arrival at the school. There is some lack of clarity within the policy with regard to whether all visitors are "required" or "encouraged" to register. As currently written, the policy appears to require registration only for those persons identified by law as "outsiders," but it authorizes the superintendent to establish regulations requiring "all visitors" to register. The accompanying administrative regulation (AR 1250, 1995) appears to limit registration to "outsiders" as defined by law, which excludes from the registration requirements students, district officers or employees, public employees on school grounds for purposes related to their employment, any person on school grounds at the school's request, representatives of a school employee organization, elected public officials and media representatives. Per the policy, parents/guardians and other adults who come to the school regularly to volunteer or attend meetings are not considered visitors in the same sense as occasional visitors.

The regulation also includes appeal procedures for denial or revocation of registration privileges. Legal requirements to post the registration requirements at each school entrance are not reflected in the district's policy or regulation.

2. In practice, the district requires volunteers and others who expect to visit a site more than once to register at the district office, where they are issued a photo identification badge that must be worn at all times while on a campus. FCMAT consultants were not asked for any form of identification when they received their ID badges, nor were the badges or ID typically checked at school sites.
3. Registration requirements were prominently posted at the entrances to most, but not all, school sites visited by project staff.

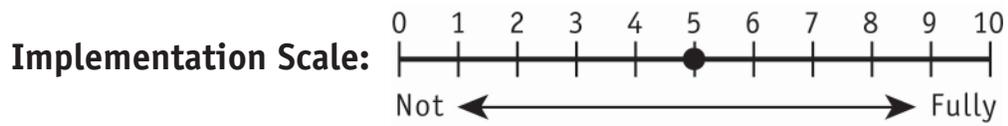
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should review its policies and procedures to clarify who is subject to visitor registration requirements.
2. The district should ensure that notice is posted in accordance with law at every entrance to each school and school grounds. The notice should set forth visitor registration requirements, hours during which registration is required, the registration location, the route to take to that location and the penalties for violation of registration requirements.

- School staff must consistently check the identification of individuals entering school facilities and ensure proper registration.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



2.9 Parent/Community Relations

Professional Standard

Board members are actively involved in building community relations.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Parent focus groups
6. Staff surveys

Findings

1. Most individual board members have ties to different groups and organizations within the community. For example, one member is active with the Chamber of Commerce, another with the Filipino community, and another with the adult school and parents of English language learners.

Some individual members attend functions and events where they interact with parents, staff and community members, including at student performances and sporting events, churches, boys and girls clubs, and senior groups. Some members have been involved in district collaborative projects, and some also speak to various groups and at community events.

2. Individual board members state that they get information and input by talking to teachers and parents. A number of staff and community members interviewed for this study indicated that they personally know board members. However, a number of other parents and community members stated that they never saw board members and did not feel there were opportunities outside of regular meetings to express input. In the past few years, the board appears to have rarely held public or community forums on issues outside of regular board meetings. During the height of the fiscal crisis last winter/spring, the board held one public forum on budget matters.
3. Although individual board members pursue activities, there does not appear to be a coordinated plan or effort to build systemic relationships between the board and many community constituencies (see also Standard 3.1).
4. Many community members and parents interviewed felt that the board and district have not made adequate attempts in the past several years to create a sense of community ownership of the district's schools nor to demonstrate that they actively welcome the community's input. There is a perception that the district's leadership has, in some ways, traditionally reflected an insiders' network and that leadership is closed off from the community at large.

5. The passage of a major school bond in 1997 was often cited as the last time the district leadership made a sweeping effort to engage all segments of the Vallejo community in a common effort on behalf of the schools.
6. District staff interviewed tended to regard board members as dedicated individuals who try to interact with and involve all sectors of the community. In contrast, site-level staff and some parents and community members were more likely to feel that the board has done a poor job of reaching out to and communicating with the community.
7. Board meetings allowed for regular opportunities for board members and the superintendent to give reports about community or school events they had attended or participated in.
8. The board has an “adopt-a-school” program for board members, where members select sites that they will visit and communicate with. Some board members appear to have regularly visited school sites, and one in particular was consistently recognized by staff and parents as actively visiting schools. However, not all members were viewed as having much presence at sites. A number of site staff said they rarely, if ever, saw certain board members. Site visits were sometimes viewed as superficial by staff who sought more opportunities to inform the board about site and classroom issues and practices. (Also see Standard 5.12.)
9. When asked in a survey to grade the school board’s performance in maintaining good community relations, teachers, classified staff and district staff all assigned an average grade of “D.”
10. Overall, a number of community members, staff and board members interviewed felt that one of the areas the board most needs to strengthen is its ability to communicate better with the total community and build stronger relationships. This includes helping the public to be more aware of and understand important district issues.

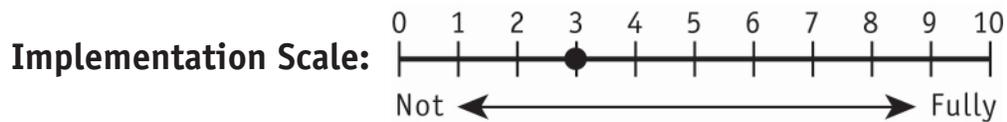
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The state administrator and board should consider developing a plan to coordinate and strengthen community relations. The participation of board members in community relations might also be addressed as part of the district’s comprehensive communications plan (see Standard 1.1).
 - a. The state administrator and board should identify ways in which board members’ participation in community relations efforts can best be linked to the district’s key goals.
2. Each individual board member should proactively seek opportunities to increase his/her visibility at school sites and in the community, both to serve as an ambassador for the district and to increase his/her personal awareness of the needs and interests of parents and the community.

- a. Board members should create opportunities to meet with parents and community members from all segments of the community, especially those who have traditionally been less involved in district affairs.
- b. Board members should work with the state administrator to develop a plan to ensure regular and meaningful visits to all school sites in the district.
3. The board should consider participating in continuing education specifically related to strengthening communications skills and building community relations, including working collaboratively with local governments and agencies.
4. The board should periodically assess its performance in this area.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



3.1 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Professional Standard

The board and superintendent support partnerships and collaborations with community groups, local agencies and businesses.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Parent focus groups

Findings

1. There does not appear to be a formal coordination of partnership-building efforts throughout the district, nor a goal or strategy for enhancing collaboration.
2. Individually, board members are engaged in a fair amount of individual community outreach with different constituencies (see Standard 2.9).
3. The most successful district partnerships seem to be in the areas of substance abuse prevention (e.g., “Fighting Back Partnership,” which helps fund student assistance counselors); mentoring for limited numbers of needy students (the Adkens Scholars program); some joint recreational-athletic programs with the Greater Vallejo Recreation District (GVRD); and some collaboration with the local Boys and Girls Club.

Some parents and community members indicated that the district and school sites need to do a better job of making parents aware of these types of programs and collaborations.

4. The district is represented on an Interagency Commission that also includes representatives from the city, library district and GVRD. In the past this commission has undertaken initiatives such as a program to rebate the district’s water fees to a fund that helped pay for refurbishing school and GVRD athletic facilities.
5. Relations between the school district and city police were reportedly strained during the previous district administration. One prominent issue was the district cutting school resource officers because of the budget crisis. The city had a similar budget crisis and could not pay for these officers either. The officers were restored this fall by the state administrator, who is attempting to strengthen the district’s relationship with the police and the city.
6. Relations between the district and the county office of education and county superintendents have been mixed through the years; they have been heavily dependent on personal relationships and not always precise in terms of roles. During the recent fiscal crisis, communication between the district and county office was inadequate.

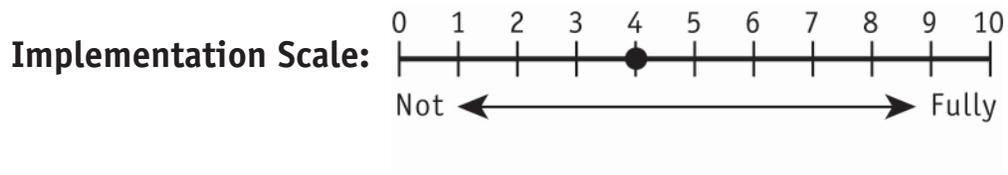
7. The district does not appear to have particularly strong ties with the business community, although one board member is active with the Vallejo Chamber of Commerce and serves on its board and education committee. The Chamber also annually coordinates and raises funds for a program that provides dictionaries to all third-grade students in the district.
8. Some community members and potential collaborators interviewed for this study felt that district leadership was slow to respond to their proposals to form new partnerships to meet the needs of children. As a result, at least one program was set up outside the district even though it serves district students.
9. A few school sites appear to be modestly aggressive in pursuing partnerships and building local relationships with community groups. Principals at these sites gave examples of successful site-level collaborations with individual businesses, community members and/or organizations. However, a few other principals indicated that they do not have time to devote to partnership-building, especially given the limited staffing capacities at their sites, and/or they were cautious about becoming beholden to the terms of a partnership or grant that might not fully align to site priorities.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should develop a coordinated district strategy for building community collaborations and partnerships that serve students and their families and facilitate sharing of resources.
 - a. The district's strategy should be linked to the goals of the district.
 - b. The district's strategy should identify roles and responsibilities of the board and key staff, including designation of a coordinator to follow up on the district's implementation of the strategy.
2. The board, state administrator and appropriate district staff should be assertive and creative in initiating partnerships and relationships with community groups, agencies and businesses.
 - a. The board, state administrator or designee should initiate contacts with appropriate community agencies and organizations to invite their participation in meetings designed to develop a common vision for the community and consider ways in which community services may be coordinated.
 - b. The district should work with the county office of education to strengthen two-way communications.
3. The district should consider how it can provide greater support for site-level efforts, such as by providing technical assistance, resources and/or other incentives for participation in collaboration.
4. The district and school sites should regularly provide information about partnerships to parents, staff and the board.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



3.2 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Professional Standard

The board and the superintendent establish broad-based committees or councils to advise the district on critical district issues and operations as appropriate. The membership of these collaboratives and councils reflects the full cultural, ethnic, gender and socioeconomic diversity of the student population.

Sources and Documentation

1. Staff interviews
2. Parent and community member interviews
3. Parent focus groups
4. District policies

Findings

1. Board policy (BP 1220 Citizen Advisory Committees, 1994) recognizes the value of using citizen advisory committees to obtain input on attitudes and opinions of the school and community. It authorizes the board or the superintendent to establish citizen advisory committees as needed to consider school problems, needs and issues, and gives them discretion to dissolve advisory committees at any time.
2. Currently the district has a School Bond Oversight Commission, established as a result of the school bond measure passed in 1997, which includes community members. A Budget Advisory Committee that included board members, employee organization representatives and community members was also active until earlier this year.
3. In past years, a Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council was established that met approximately monthly. Other districtwide committees included a School Attendance Committee, Student Discipline Task Force, Curriculum Advisory Council, Community Advisory Council for Special Education, Elementary Task Force and a Secondary Task Force. None of these committees or councils is currently active.
4. The state administrator has indicated plans to begin a task force that would include parents and community members to help address issues related to school climate and campus safety.
5. School sites have established School Site Councils and English Learner Advisory Councils in accordance with law (see Standard 3.9), with representatives participating on the District Advisory Council and District English Learner Advisory Council.
6. The diversity of membership varies across committees and councils. For example, the rosters of districtwide bodies such as the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council reflected a good cross-section of the community. Each site was asked to select one or two representatives. At the same time, some community member interviewees perceive that in establishing councils and committees in the past, the district tended to draw on the same active individuals rather than working to involve new members.

Participation at elementary sites was generally seen as greater than at middle and high schools. District staff members report that it has also been difficult to interest teachers at the high-school level in serving on site councils. Most site administrators also report difficulties involving more parents than is minimally required.

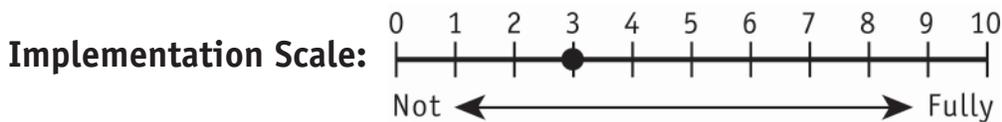
Although it is difficult to thoroughly document the ethnic, gender and socioeconomic diversity of School Site Councils, district staff believes that these groups are largely ethnically balanced. In particular, staff at several sites reported an increase in the number of Latino parents participating on site councils. In the past, meetings of the English Language Advisory Councils were often conducted in Spanish, and speakers of other languages may have felt discouraged from participating. Currently meetings are conducted in English, with headsets available to help with translation in an effort to facilitate involvement from other language groups. There is no evidence that the composition of membership has changed yet as a result of this effort.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The board and state administrator should review the existing committee structure within the context of the district's key goals.
 - a. If needed, additional advisory committees or task forces should be established to provide broad-based input on critical district issues.
2. The district should implement strategies to involve a broader cross-section of parents and community members on councils and committees.
 - a. The district and school sites should disseminate information about the purpose, responsibilities and successful results of these groups to parents, community and staff to generate interest in participation.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



3.3 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Professional Standard

Community collaboratives and district and school advisory councils have identified specific outcome goals that are understood by all members.

Sources and Documentation

1. Staff interviews
2. Parent and community member interviews
3. Parent focus groups
4. District policies
5. District handbook
6. California Department of Education handbook
7. District Advisory Committee minutes
8. District English Learner Advisory Council minutes
8. Coordinated Compliance Review 1997-98

Findings

1. The goals and objectives of School Site Councils, English Learner Advisory Councils and School Advisory Committees are detailed in a handbook provided by the district. Some information is out of date (e.g., references to Program Quality Review and the CAP testing program), but generally the handbook provides comprehensive information about the responsibilities of each council. School Site Council members are also provided with the California Department of Education's Guide to the Single Plan for Student Achievement, which details the council's responsibilities in that area. In addition, instructional associates receive a handbook on their roles and responsibilities that includes detailed information about the various site councils they are expected to support. This handbook was revised in May 2004. (Also see Standard 3.4.)

Related board policy (BP 0420 School Plans/Site Councils, 2000) contains only a brief overarching statement of the responsibilities of School Site Councils in the "development, review and modification of school plans within their program area and for other duties as prescribed by law."

2. The goals of the Bond Oversight Commission appear to be clearly understood by members, as well as the board. The role of the Budget Advisory Committee, especially during the last year, was less clear to all members, especially in terms of the committee's ability to analyze issues and offer independent recommendations. Views about the goals and function of the previous Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council were also mixed among members, indicating a lack of clear, common understanding.
3. Board policy (BP 1220 Citizen Advisory Committees, 1994) directs that when committees are appointed, members will receive a written statement of the specific charges of the committee, including its topic(s) for study or well-defined area(s) of activity, along with other specified information about the term of service, committee structure, available resources, and reporting requirements.

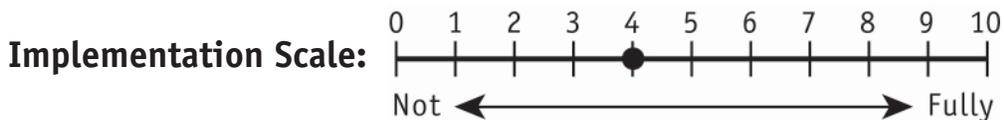
4. Members of School Site Councils generally understood their responsibility for developing school plans, although their understanding about how to effectively carry out this role, as well as the adequacy of training provided to them by staff, varied among schools (see Standards 3.4 and 3.5).

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. Each committee or council should have a written protocol or statement of goals that is adopted by the board and state administrator.
 - a. The district should update its handbook for councils and committees to reflect current law and district practice.
2. Written protocols or goal statements should be communicated to all committee/council members and prospective members, and made available to members of the public through such means as the district's Web site.
3. Written protocols or goal statements should guide the work of each committee or council.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



3.4 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Professional Standard

The district encourages and provides the necessary training for collaborative and advisory council members to understand the basic administrative structure, program processes and goals of all district partners.

Sources and Documentation

1. Staff interviews
2. Parent and community member interviews
3. Parent focus groups
4. District policies
5. District handbook
6. California Department of Education handbook
7. Evaluations by SSC/ELAC members
8. Coordinated Compliance Review 1997-98

Findings

1. Written information on roles and responsibilities is provided to members of School Site Councils, English Learner Advisory Councils and School Advisory Committees, as well as some other citizen advisory committees appointed by the board or superintendent. These materials also describe the organizational structures of councils/committees and other requirements.
2. The district's Special Projects department provides training as well as ongoing support and guidance for School Site Councils and English Learner Advisory Councils. Training for principals regarding their role with site councils has occurred in at least the past two years, but may have been focused more on compliance issues than on meaningful outreach and inclusion. The department also conducts an annual evaluation of these groups' understanding of the various categorical program elements (e.g, site council responsibilities, school plans) and the extent to which they feel they receive adequate support from the district office in those areas.

Instructional associates (IAs) play a key role in guiding the work of councils at many sites. The IAs receive training on the School Site Council handbook and are relied upon to provide training and support to their site councils. Parent training on the handbook varies from site to site.

3. District staff indicates that training is on the agenda for the 2004-05 district English Learner Advisory Council members.
4. New commissioners on the Bond Oversight Commission receive a binder with bylaws and other information as part of their orientation. There is also an item on every agenda for questions by commissioners. Members generally report a high level of satisfaction with the staff support for this commission.

Specific training for members of the Budget Advisory Committee does not appear to have been provided, although some individual members may already possess relevant knowledge based on their positions in the district. This committee was not viewed as being well staffed. The district's fiscal staff was unable to provide the community with accurate data.

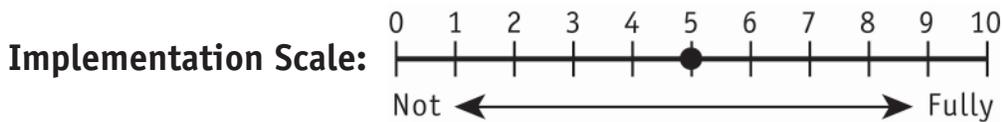
5. The level and effectiveness of training provided to previous districtwide committees and task forces (e.g., Curriculum Advisory Council, School Attendance Boundaries Committee, etc.) could not be determined.
6. In the past, members of the District Advisory Committee also received training as part of a program to help teach other parents in the district about effective techniques for helping their children succeed in school.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should continue to provide training, information and support to assist both district and school site advisory committee and council members in the fulfillment of their responsibilities.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



3.5 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Professional Standard

Community collaboratives and district and school advisory councils effectively fulfill their responsibilities (e.g., researching issues, developing recommendations) and provide a meaningful role for all participants.

Sources and Documentation

1. Staff interviews
2. Parent and community member interviews
3. Parent focus groups
4. Staff surveys
5. Board agendas and minutes
6. District documents
7. District Advisory Committee minutes
8. District English Learner Advisory Council minutes

Findings

1. School Site Councils generally met their obligation to develop and review school plans (see Standards 3.6 and 3.8). Many schools appear to have very active councils. However, the overall effectiveness of School Site Councils appears to vary widely across schools.

Teachers surveyed for this study tended to support the usefulness of School Site Councils by disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that the councils are not very visible or active in the district (40.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 19.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 26.4 percent neutral; 12.9 percent had no opinion). Classified staff were fairly evenly split in their opinions, and a large percentage had no opinion. Parents and community members participating on councils reported varying degrees of satisfaction with their roles.

2. Some sites indicated that attendance by the site representatives at the District Advisory Committee meetings was inconsistent, and that communications and information flow between School Site Councils and the District Advisory Committee were often poor.
3. Many sites reported that they had difficulty getting many people to attend School Site Council and English Learner Advisory Council meetings. A common comment was “we get the minimum” or “we get enough for a quorum.” Several principals and instructional associates stated that parents sometimes view the governance meetings as “boring” or feel that they are not knowledgeable enough about educational matters to participate in a meaningful way. Those who do serve indicate that parent and community members often tend to defer to staff at these meetings.
4. The district diligently tracks the number of School Site Councils that meet for the requisite five meetings during the school year. Documentation provided by the district as of July 2004 showed that 10 school sites failed to hold five meetings in the 2003-04 school year. Two of those School Site Councils met only twice during the year.

5. The chair of the Bond Oversight Committee regularly attends board meetings and presents reports. The commission is seen as effectively fulfilling its duties. The District Advisory Committee occasionally addressed the board, usually as part of the community forum rather than as a separate agenda item. Some members of the DAC felt that their capability for helping to strengthen communications with parents throughout the district was not fully developed or utilized.

Participants on other district committees and task forces in the past few years did not feel that their work was always productive. For example, the Student Discipline Task Force was viewed by some parents as staff-driven. Members indicated that staff initially produced a list of things that parents needed to do. Opinions also appear to be mixed among participants on the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council as to the value of these meetings. The School Attendance Boundaries Committee appeared to have been unorganized and not properly staffed. Also, the Budget Advisory Committee was hampered by inaccurate or unavailable data.

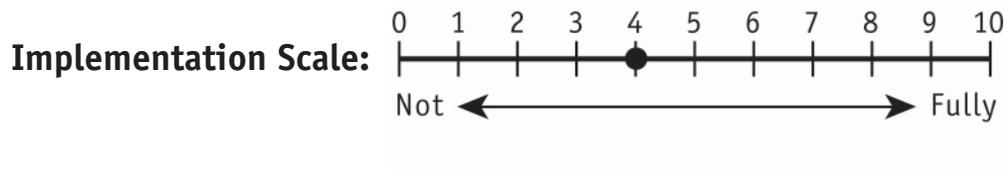
6. Development of the Local Education Agency plan was primarily seen as a responsibility of the district's Special Projects department and received little input from district or school groups, nor from the board and some district administrators. Principals had an opportunity to provide feedback.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. Each committee or council should have a written protocol or statement of goals that is adopted by the board and state administrator (see Standard 3.3).
2. District and school site committees/councils must encourage each individual member to play an active and meaningful role.
 - a. The chair of each group must ensure that all members have an opportunity to present their views in a respectful environment. The chair should also ensure that members receive adequate background information on an issue and have an opportunity to hear divergent viewpoints.
3. Board meetings should include regular reports by district advisory councils/committees and task forces.
 - a. Each district advisory council, committee or task force should be informed of expectations and the schedule for sharing recommendations and reports.
 - b. Minutes of council, committee or task force meetings should be provided to the board and made available to the public through means such as the district's Web site, as appropriate.
 - c. The board and state administrator should regularly recognize and express appreciation to the service of members on councils, committees and task forces.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



3.6 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Legal Standard

The school site council develops a single plan for student achievement at each school applying for categorical programs through the consolidated application. (Education Code 64001)

Sources and Documentation

1. School plans
2. District policies
3. Staff interviews
4. School Site Council member interviews
5. Coordinated Compliance Review 1997-98

Findings

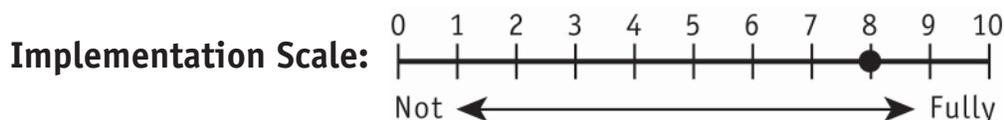
1. School sites approve a single plan for student achievement. The extent to which the School Site Council is actively involved in the development of the plan varies from site to site.
2. School Site Council members receive information about their role in developing school plans through district and California Department of Education handbooks and through meetings (see Standards 3.3 and 3.4).
3. The board's policy and administrative regulations pertaining to school plans (BP/AR 0420 School Plans/Site Councils, 2000/1994) do not reflect the requirement of Education Code 64001, as amended by SB 374 in 2001, for a single plan for student achievement. Details about school plans for School-Based Program Coordination appear in AR 0420.1 School-Based Program Coordination (2000).

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should review and update its policies and administrative regulations pertaining to school plans to reflect current law requiring the development of a single plan for student achievement.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 8



3.7 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Legal Standard

School plans are comprehensive and have sufficient content to meet the statutory requirements. (Education Code 52853, 64001)

Sources and Documentation

1. School plans
2. Staff interviews
3. Staff surveys
4. Coordinated Compliance Review 1997-98

Findings

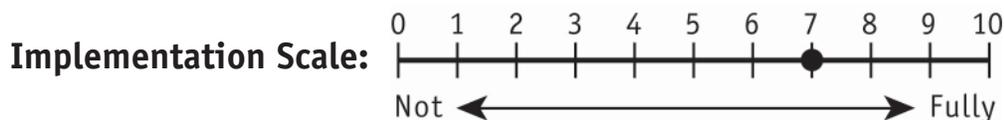
1. School plans, and the Local Education Agency plan that includes elements of the site plans, fulfill the statutory requirements related to the content of the plans.
2. The district's Special Projects department reviews site plans and ensures compliance with legal requirements.
3. Teachers surveyed for this study tended to agree that school staff members consult the school plan when making decisions about educational programs and school budgets (49.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 20.6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 18.3 percent were neutral; 11.4 percent had no opinion).

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The board should approve only those school plans that provide sufficient discussion of required components and hold promise as a useful strategy for increasing student achievement.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 7



3.8 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Legal Standard

The school site council annually reviews the school plan and the board annually approves or disapproves all site councils' plans. (Education Code 52853, 52855, 64001)

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Board agendas and minutes
4. District policies
5. Staff surveys
6. Coordinated Compliance Review 1997-98

Findings

1. It appears that the district is compliant in annually reviewing and approving school plans. The district's Special Projects department is responsible for ensuring that School Site Councils fulfill this legal requirement.
2. In past years, school plans were either provided to the board as part of the agenda materials, or were made available for board members to review. Board members typically received all of the site plans at the same time, thus limiting their ability to thoroughly review or hold discussions about them before approving the plans.
3. Legal requirements for the review process are reflected in AR 0420.1 School-Based Program Coordination (2000) for that specific program. However, the district's policies and regulations do not reflect the requirements of Education Code 64001 for review of a single plan for student achievement for all categorical programs funded through the state's consolidated application process.
4. In a survey conducted for this study, teachers' opinions were fairly evenly split as to whether school staff members regularly work with the School Site Council to review and update the school plan, with slightly more tending to agree that staff members do (35.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 30.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 22.0 percent neutral; 12.4 percent no opinion). A larger percentage of classified staff had no opinion (36.9 percent); among the others, more tended to agree or strongly agree (24.6 percent) than to disagree or strongly disagree (16.4 percent).

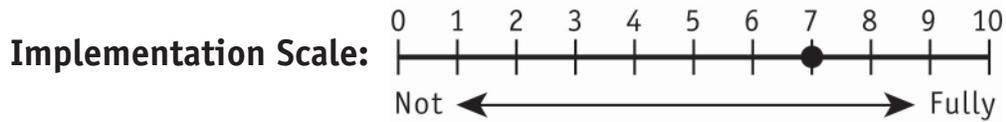
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. School plans must be annually reviewed and approved in accordance with law, paying attention to whether each plan will enable the school to meet its improvement goals.
 - a. To increase support for the school plan, School Site Councils might seek the input of all school staff in the development and review of the plan.

- b. Because of the number of schools in the district and the length of school plans, the review process must provide adequate time to allow board members to thoughtfully review each plan in order to effectively fulfill the board's oversight responsibility.
- 2. The district should review and update its policies and administrative regulations pertaining to school plans to reflect current law pertaining to the review of a single plan for student achievement.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 7



3.9 Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Legal Standard

Policies exist for the establishment of school site councils. (Education Code 52852.5)

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies

Findings

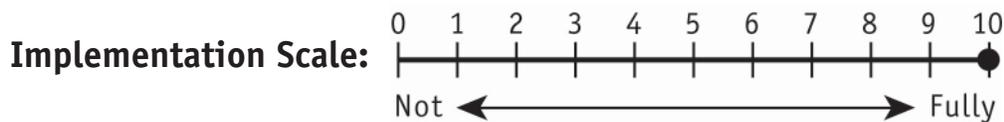
1. The district's policy manual contains Board Policy and Administrative Regulation 0420 School Plans/Site Councils, which address the establishment of school site councils. Both the board policy (2000) and the administrative regulation (1994) reflect current legal requirements regarding the membership of site councils.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Sustained

November 1, 2004 Rating: 10



4.1 Policy

Professional Standard

Policies are well written, organized and readily available to all members of the staff and to the public.

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies
2. Board member interviews
3. State administrator interview
4. Staff interviews
5. Staff surveys

Findings

1. The district's policy manual is organized using the California School Boards Association's indexing system, which is used in most California school districts.
2. A hard-copy manual is maintained at the district office and each school site. The policy manual is available to the executive secretary on CD-ROM through an external system that offers quick access, a keyword index and links to related laws and valuable policy resources. Neither the board nor other staff has access to the policy manual on CD-ROM. Also, district policies currently do not appear on the district's Web site, although the state administrator has indicated plans to add them.
3. Principals receive copies of board agendas by e-mail so that they are informed when policies will be discussed. They later receive copies of board minutes informing them of board actions. In addition, when policies are newly adopted or revised, principals receive the new materials along with a slip of paper that they have to sign and return to the executive secretary indicating receipt. Principals interviewed generally seemed satisfied with communications from the district office regarding policies.
4. When district office staff was asked in a survey to indicate whether policy changes are communicated to them in writing, 61.7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed (25.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 12.8 percent were neutral or had no opinion). Both teachers and classified staff also tended to disagree that policy changes were communicated in writing (44.8 percent of teachers and 44.0 percent of classified staff), although over one-third of both groups were neutral or had no opinion.
5. No major concerns were expressed regarding the maintenance of the policy manuals. It appears that the policy manuals contain all the most recent policies adopted.

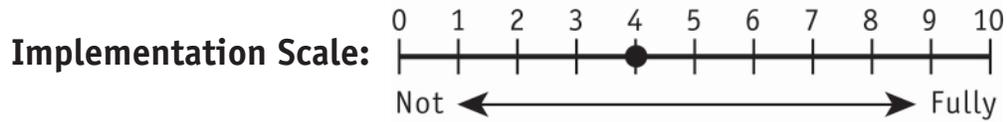
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should take full advantage of technological opportunities to provide more convenient access to district policies to the board, staff and public.

- a. The district should consider providing board members and key staff with CD-ROM versions of the policy manual or subscribing to similar services online.
- b. The state administrator should move ahead with plans to add some or all of the district policies to the district's Web site.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



4.2 Policy

Professional Standard

Policies and administrative regulations are up to date and reflect current law and local needs.

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies
2. Board member interviews
3. Staff interviews
4. Board agendas

Findings

1. The district last completed a comprehensive review of its entire policy manual in 1994. Subsequently, it appears that policies were not regularly updated until early 2000.

Nearly half of the district's policies have not been revised since 1994. The majority of the remaining policies were adopted between 1998 and 2001, with only a few policies being revised and updated between 2002 and 2004.

2. In a sampling of 52 mandated district policies, 50 met the specific mandate for policy language (see Standard 4.3). However, over half of these show adoption dates that pre-date the most recent sample policies available from the California School Boards Association, indicating that further changes in law affecting other content in the policies may have occurred since the district's policies went into effect.
3. Since 1994 the district has subscribed to external policy services that provide information about changes in law as well as sample policies and administrative regulations.

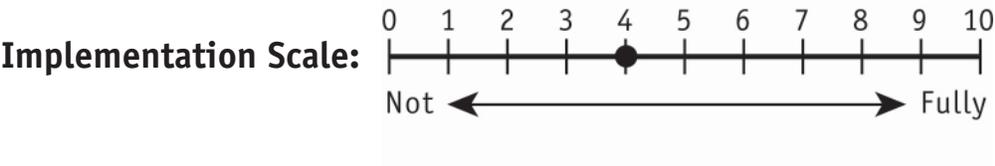
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should establish a process and timeline for conducting a review of its policy manual in order to provide consistent direction to staff, students and the public and ensure that the district is complying with current law.
 - a. The district should use the sample policies to which it subscribes as a starting point for reviewing the district's policies and administrative regulations.
 - b. If the policy manual cannot be reviewed in its entirety in a timely manner, the district should establish priorities and a schedule for policy review and revision (e.g., beginning with mandated policies, with the oldest policies, with specific sections or with policies that have the most impact on student learning).
2. Once the policy manual is brought up to date, the district should establish a process to ensure continual monitoring and regular updating of policies.

- a. The district should more diligently use currently available external resources, district staff and legal counsel to trigger the need for policy reviews based on changes in law.
- b. District staff should be held accountable for regularly reviewing policies related to their areas of operation and making policy recommendations that meet local needs.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



4.3 Policy

Legal Standard

The board has adopted all policies mandated by state and federal law.

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies

Findings

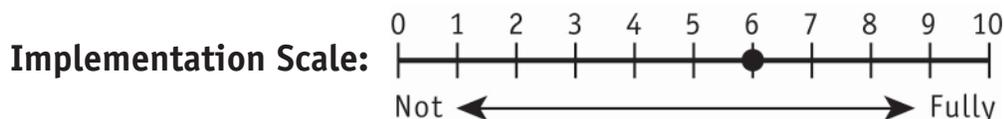
1. The California School Boards Association has identified 52 applicable cases in which state or federal laws require the board to adopt a policy or specific policy language. The district's policy manual contains 50 of these (96 percent). The only mandates that do not appear to be reflected in district policies or regulations pertain to (1) the fingerprinting, health examination and tuberculosis testing requirements for employees exempt from the classified service (mandated by Education Code 45106); and (2) appointment of surrogate parent for special education (mandated by 20 USC 1415(b)(2)).
2. In the 50 existing mandated policies, the specific policy language addressing the mandates appears to substantially comply. Other portions of these policies, however, may not fully reflect current law and district practice (see Standard 4.2).
3. As a subscriber to external policy services, the district regularly receives a list of policies mandated by law as well as sample policy language that would fulfill those mandates.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district must update its policies and administrative regulations to fully comply with mandates of state and federal law.
 - a. The district should establish a process and timeline for conducting a review of all mandated policies (see Standard 4.2).
2. Once the policy manual is brought up to date, the district should establish a process to ensure continual monitoring and regular updating of mandated policies.
 - a. The district should more diligently use currently available external resources, district staff and legal counsel to trigger the need for policy reviews based on changes in law.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 6



4.4 Policy

Legal Standard

The board annually reviews its policies on intradistrict open enrollment and extracurricular/cocurricular activities. (Education Code 35160.5)

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies
2. Staff interviews
3. Board agendas

Findings

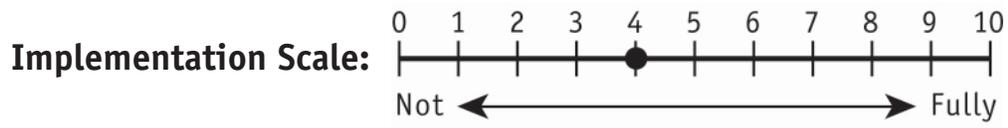
1. The district's policies and administrative regulations on intradistrict open enrollment (BP/AR 5116.1) were originally adopted in June 1994. In recent years, they were reviewed in both 2002-03 (December 2002) and 2003-04 (February 2004).
2. The district's policy and administrative regulation on extracurricular and cocurricular activities (BP/AR 6145) was adopted in 1994. District staff stated that this policy was last reviewed in 2001-02 (March 2002), although no revisions were adopted at that time. It is currently under review again and may be submitted for approval soon. As currently written, the eligibility requirements pertaining to grade point average appear less stringent than required by law.
3. BP 5116.1 contains language reflecting the requirement for an annual review of the policy, but BP 6145 does not.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district must annually review those policies for which annual review is mandated by law.
 - a. The district should complete its review of BP/AR 6145 and schedule a review of BP/AR 5116.1 for the current school year.
 - b. When BP 6145 is revised, the district might include a statement regarding the legal requirement for annual review.
 - c. To ensure sustained compliance, the district might consider scheduling an annual review of these policies at a designated time each year.
 - d. Even if the district does not revise these policies following review, the review itself must be noted in board minutes and/or the policy should be readopted with a new adoption date so that the district's compliance with the annual review requirement can be evidenced.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



4.5 Policy

Professional Standard

The district has established a system of securing staff and citizen input in policy development and review.

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies
2. Staff interviews
3. Staff surveys
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Board agendas
6. Observation of board meetings

Findings

1. The district's board bylaw addressing the development, distribution and maintenance of the policy manual (BB 9310, 1994) declares the importance of the policy development process and the Governing Board's desire to have staff and community input in the development of the district's policies.
2. Policy reviews were generally initiated by district administrators. Typically, sample policies provided by the California School Boards Association were distributed by the executive secretary to district administrators, who then tailored them as needed before they went to the board for first reading.
3. Members of the public had opportunities for input during the board's first and second readings of policies at board meetings (also see Standard 6.8).
4. There has not been a formal, consistent process for engaging staff at all levels in policy development. Among staff interviewed and surveyed, there was a general perception that input into district-level operations was not encouraged (see Standard 1.3). Most principals reported having little formal input into many district policies, although some principals and staff were involved in the past on committees or teams that developed policy priorities in specific areas.
5. Teachers, classified staff and district-level staff surveyed for this study assigned relatively low ratings to the effectiveness of the board and previous administration in encouraging parental and public participation in policymaking. All three groups assigned average grades of "D" or "D+" to both the board and previous district administration.

Similarly, all three groups tended to disagree that parents have a large say in board decisions. Among teachers, 54.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that parents have a large say; 6.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 13.9 percent were neutral; 25.0 percent had no opinion. Among classified staff, 49.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 8.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 15.3 percent were neutral; 26.6 percent had no opin-

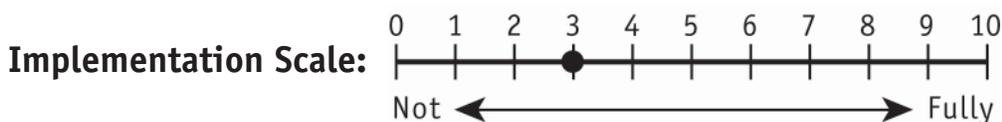
ion. The majority of district staff surveyed (59.5 percent) also disagreed or strongly disagreed; 4.3 percent agreed; 19.1 percent were neutral; 17.0 percent had no opinion.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should implement an effective policy development process that includes greater opportunities for input from staff at all levels.
 - a. Staff should be notified of appropriate channels to submit suggestions for issues that require new policies or policy revisions.
 - b. The district should develop methods to solicit district-level and site-level staff input on proposed policies. Such methods might include distribution of draft policies to appropriate staff by e-mail or through staff meetings, establishment of a policy review committee that includes staff members, and/or encouragement for staff to attend board meetings where policy issues will be discussed.
 - c. The district might expand its bylaw describing the policy development process to specify the methods that will be used to obtain staff input.
2. The district should expand opportunities for parent and community member input into district policymaking.
 - a. As the district develops new policies or revises existing policies, it needs to identify those policies that are of most interest to parents and community members and would most benefit from their input. For example, policy changes that are being made to comply with law may require less input than issues with greater district discretion, and policies pertaining to student testing or discipline would generate more parent concern than district operational matters.
 - b. The district might consider using existing councils or committees, establishing a policy review committee that includes parents and community members, and/or holding public hearings to provide an opportunity for citizen input on critical policies.
 - c. The district might expand its bylaw describing the policy development process to specify the methods that will be used to obtain citizen input.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



4.6 Policy

Professional Standard

Board bylaws, policies and administrative regulations are supported and followed by the board and district staff.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Board agendas and minutes

Findings

1. The most common concerns regarding policies in this district involve policy implementation, enforcement and accountability. Many interviewees cited a lack of adherence to policy by staff throughout the district. Some interviewees perceive that some administrators hired from outside the school district were arbitrarily placed on the salary schedule.

Discrepancies among school sites were noted with regard to policies on safety, student discipline, dress codes, tardiness and interdistrict transfers, as well as media relations (see Standard 1.4). Principals have been allowed to interpret and enforce policies differently. Some principals feel that this approach can be positive since they can take into account site circumstances rather than making “one-size-fits-all” decisions. However, nearly all principals acknowledged that inequities have occurred and that this is a weakness in the system.

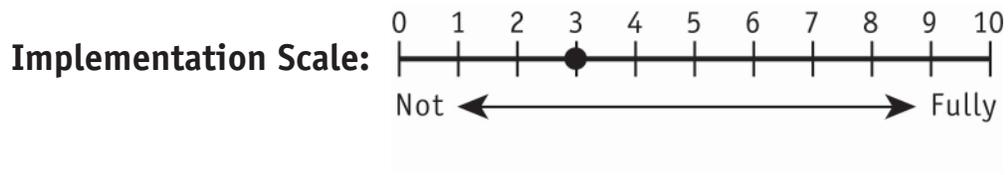
2. Background materials for board agendas often refer to relevant district policies, although the references typically describe why the item is being brought to the board (as per a certain policy). It does not appear that policies are routinely or consistently referenced at meetings as part of the decision-making or reporting process.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. All district and site staff should be held accountable for adhering to district policies. If a policy ceases to meet the district’s needs or is perceived to be enforced unevenly, the district should initiate a review and revision of the policy.
 - a. The state administrator should communicate to all staff his expectations regarding the consistent implementation of policies.
 - b. Accountability should be maintained through periodic reviews of critical policies and through the staff evaluation process.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



5.1 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Legal Standard

Each board member meets the eligibility requirements of being a board member. (Education Code 35107)

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews

Findings

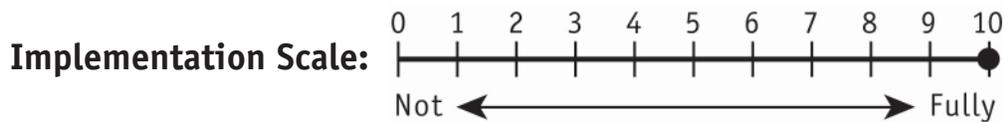
1. Each board member meets the eligibility requirements of Education Code 35107, which include requirements that a board member be: (1) 18 years or older, (2) a citizen of the state, (3) a resident of the school district, and (4) a registered voter.
2. Education Code 35107 also specifies that district employees may not be board members. None of the board members is an employee of the district.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed at this time.

Standard Implemented: Fully – Sustained

November 1, 2004 Rating: 10



5.2 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

Board members participate in orientation sessions, workshops, conventions and special meetings sponsored by board associations, and have access to pertinent literature, statutes, legal counsel and recognized authorities to understand duties, functions, authority and responsibilities of members.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. CSBA records on conference attendance
3. District records on conference attendance
4. Staff interviews
5. Parent and community member interviews

Findings

1. During the past four years, individual board members have participated in formal continuing education offered by the California School Boards Association. Each year several board members attended CSBA's Annual Education Conference, all five in 2002. In addition, individual members attended conferences/workshops related to special education mandates, student health and achievement, legislative action, and back-to-school updates on a variety of state legislative and policy issues. One member also graduated in the past from the Masters in Boardsmanship program after attending a series of required conferences.

Four board members participated in a workshop on school budgets offered by School Services of California, Inc., in 2003.

2. In the past, the board held occasional study sessions focused on specific district topics such as the budget, where district staff presented information for discussion.
3. The district does not have any formal process for providing an orientation to new board members, although the district's new members attended CSBA's institute for new board members in 2002, covering the board's basic governance responsibilities. Prior to the last board election cycle, the superintendent held an orientation session for prospective candidates.
4. Although individual board members attend workshops and conferences, participation in continuing education does not appear to have been coordinated among the governance team nor focused on identified areas of need.
5. While the board generally understands principles of effective governance, the specific responsibilities and duties of the Governing Board in relation to district administration — especially as they pertain to the board's role in setting direction, providing structure through policy, and ensuring accountability — have not been effectively understood by all board members and administrators.

6. The district is a member of CSBA and thus has access to publications and other sources of information about board functions and responsibilities.
7. It does not appear that district and county office of education staff have consistently provided pertinent information to the board related to duties and functions. The district has retained various outside legal counsel on specific topics, such as for negotiations or personnel issues. Board members have not been provided with easy access to reference materials such as state education statutes.
8. Individual board members currently or recently have served as representatives or members of school board, education or locally elected official organizations or bodies where information is regularly shared and networking opportunities exist, including the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, the Solano County School Board Members Association, and CSBA's Board of Directors and Delegate Assembly. One board member serves on CSBA's Conditions of Children Council. Another member served on a district team that attended workshops last year geared toward strategic planning.
9. Some staff and community members believe that not all board members demonstrate a significant depth of knowledge about school and instructional issues, educational reforms, and/or school budgets and school finance. Those expressing this belief acknowledged the complexity of some of these areas, especially school finance.
10. The most common topics identified by interviewees as areas where they believe the board needs additional information and/or continuing education were: fiscal oversight, how to understand budgets, holding people accountable, withstanding political pressures and building better community relations/communicating with the public.

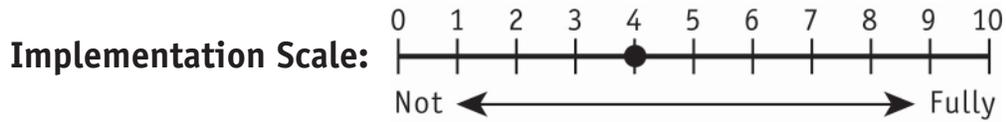
Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. All board members should participate in continuing education to keep abreast of education issues and improve their governance skills.
 - a. The state administrator and board should consider developing a continuing education agenda that addresses the district's greatest needs. This agenda might include specific education related to school finance and budgets, the board's role in oversight and accountability, collective bargaining and community relations.
 - b. Board members and the state administrator should consider attending workshops and conferences together whenever possible, or participating in "single district" workshops tailored to the district's unique circumstances.
 - c. As appropriate, senior district administrators should also be encouraged to participate in continuing education to ensure a common understanding about governance roles and responsibilities.
 - d. The state administrator should consider holding more frequent workshops and study sessions for the board and community on critical education topics.

- e. The district should ensure that all board members have easy access to pertinent statutes and policies.
- 2. The board should consider developing a formal plan for the orientation of new members, including formal assistance for each member-elect to understand the board's functions, policies and procedures and the general operation of the school system.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



5.3 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

The board has established a districtwide vision/mission and uses that vision/mission as a framework for district action based on the identified needs of the students, staff and educational community through a needs assessment process.

Sources and Documentation

1. District documents and Web site
2. Parent notifications
3. Board member interviews
4. State administrator interview
5. Staff interviews
6. Parent and community member interviews
7. Board agendas and minutes
8. Observations of board meetings
9. District policies
10. Staff surveys

Findings

1. In August 2004, the state administrator identified five key goals for the district. The goals focus on improving student performance for all students, accelerating achievement for historically underperforming student groups, improving the school climate so that every student and staff member feels safe, developing a long-term solution to the district's fiscal crisis, and preparing the district to sustain achievement, fiscal and school climate improvements when local control is regained.
2. The current goals have been communicated to district and site staff and to parents and the community. They do not yet appear on the district's Web site.
3. In the previous administration, four annual goal statements were communicated to all staff and to parents as part of the parent notifications packet. The goals focused on: (1) students showing continuous improvement toward meeting grade-level expectations as identified in the content standards, and ensuring that teachers demonstrate continuous improvement toward achieving the knowledge and skills needed to prepare students; (2) maintaining the fiscal solvency of the district by adhering to sound business practices; (3) working toward improvements in public relations; and (4) the development and support of leaders within the district who can carry out the goals related to achievement, fiscal solvency and improved public relations.

These goals were routinely referenced in board meeting agenda materials, although the meetings were not necessarily organized around consistent monitoring of the goals.

4. In 2003, a district team that included a board member and district and site staff members participated in workshops at Stanford University as part of a process to develop a new

strategic plan for the district. This team was beginning to develop a plan for involving the community in the process when the fiscal crisis suspended it. The board held a special study session related to this work.

5. In the mid-1990s, the district had engaged the community in building a vision statement and strategic plan as part of a project called Vision 20/20. Many interviewees cited this as an extremely positive process, and the ensuing strategic plan was perceived as driving district operations for many years. The Vision 20/20 work appears to have involved a wide range of stakeholders. One of the most notable actions pursuant to the plan was the passage of a school facilities bond measure.
6. In general, board members and staff believe that most activities in the district, including goal setting, are “administrator driven” rather than board or community driven. Interviewees perceive that most discussions about district goals and strategic planning appear to have occurred among senior district administrators. The board is perceived as mainly being reactive in this regard.
7. Several principals indicated frustration that the district’s emphasis on particular strategies related to attaining the goals seemed to change from year to year during the previous administration. These principals felt that priorities communicated at the start of a school year were not further pursued, nor did they feel all principals were held accountable for demonstrating progress related to those goals or priorities.
8. The majority of teachers (68.5 percent), classified staff (54.8 percent) and district-level staff (57.5 percent) surveyed for this study disagreed or strongly disagreed that the board has generally done a good job identifying the needs of Vallejo’s students, staff and educational community. The remainder were largely neutral, and few agreed or strongly agreed.

Similarly, these staff tended to disagree or strongly disagree that board members are very clear about the goals of the district: 49.7 percent of teachers, 37.2 percent of classified staff and 46.8 percent of district staff disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared to 13.1 percent, 17.3 percent and 19.2 percent, respectively, who agreed or strongly agreed. The remainder were neutral or had no opinion.

Teachers also tended to believe that conflict among board members over district goals has increased in the past few years (29.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 15.6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed), although the majority was neutral or had no opinion (55.0 percent). Classified staff were even more likely to hold this position (43.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 14.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 19.8 percent were neutral; 22.3 percent had no opinion). A similar pattern appears among district-level staff (42.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 17.0 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 12.8 percent were neutral; 27.7 percent had no opinion).

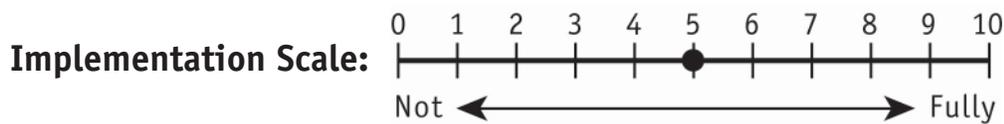
9. The board and district have actively participated in the FCMAT comprehensive review process in August-September 2004 as one way of more effectively assessing the needs of the district.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The state administrator should ensure processes are in place for measuring progress on established goals and holding district personnel accountable.
2. The findings and recommendations of the FCMAT review related to student achievement, fiscal management, facilities management, personnel management and governance/community relations should be reviewed and discussed by the board, state administrator and staff to identify district needs, establish priorities and develop improvement strategies.
3. The state administrator and board should develop a long-term strategy for involving the board, staff, parents, students and the community in processes to periodically identify student needs and to update the district's vision/mission and goals, as part of the effort to build long-term capacity in the district to sustain improvements once local authority is restored.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



5.4 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

The board makes decisions based on the study of all available data, including the recommendations of the superintendent.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Board agendas and minutes
5. Observations of board meetings

Findings

1. The board appears to have relied heavily on the recommendations of the superintendent and other senior administrators.
2. Many interviewees, including board members, staff and community members, perceive that consistently accurate and thorough information was not provided by the administration to the board, especially data and analysis related to budget matters. For example, some staff analysis of proposals did not include adequate estimates of costs. There was a perception that even when board members asked questions or sought additional information or clarification, it was either not provided or it was not provided in a forthright manner. Board members indicated that they occasionally did not receive important information related to board agenda items “until the last minute.” Sometimes board members did not receive information at all, such as a critical communication from the county office of education regarding the district’s budget that appears to have been withheld by district staff.

Many interviewees expressed anger that the board was placed in a position by the administration of having to make difficult decisions and cuts to programs based on inaccurate or incomplete data. There is a perception by board members and several staff members that when the board asked questions of the staff — specifically the superintendent and top financial officer — either a “plausible answer” was provided or they would commit to providing more information at a later time. The board and others also perceived that data provided by staff often conflicted with previous data or with data provided by other agencies such as the county office of education.

Members of district staff also expressed a feeling that certain information was kept highly confidential among the top administrators. Some parents and community members perceived that the board was reluctant at public meetings to share certain information.

3. Staff, parent and community member interviewees who participated in or observed meetings generally believed that the board made efforts to ask appropriate questions of staff. However, some interviewees, including some parents and teachers, felt very strongly that the board was not assertive in questioning staff or demanding more data and analysis before making decisions. They believe the board tolerated the staff’s pattern of providing

insufficient data and relied too heavily on recommendations made by top administrators, rather than on analysis or on the input of a wider circle of people.

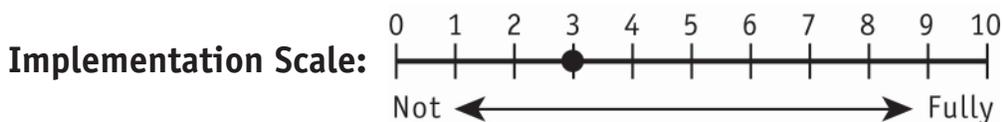
4. Board members do not appear to have consistently and proactively sought widespread input or information from parents, community members, staff or others prior to important decisions. There was little outreach to seek input other than through regular board meetings (see Standards 1.3, 3.2, 4.5 and 5.12).
5. Some board members and staff indicate instances where the board perceived it had to take a specified action recommended by the staff because an agreement “had already been negotiated.”
6. While the overall accuracy of financial information was rated poorly, as was data related to campus safety and student attendance, board members felt that curriculum information provided to them was generally good.
7. The state administrator has placed an emphasis on building a district culture in which the accuracy and integrity of data are paramount.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The administration should ensure that appropriate materials and information are provided to the board to facilitate thoughtful discussion and informed decision-making.
 - a. As appropriate, board agendas should include cost estimates of proposals, related board policy, data on student achievement or program effectiveness, staff recommendations and/or other information of the level and types agreed upon by the board and state administrator.
2. The state administrator should continue to focus on building and sustaining internal systems and accountability structures that enable the district to generate accurate and reliable data.
3. The board should consider continuing education related to understanding budget analysis and data-based decision-making.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



5.5 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

Functional working relations are maintained among board members.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Parent focus groups
6. Observations of board meetings
7. Board bylaws

Findings

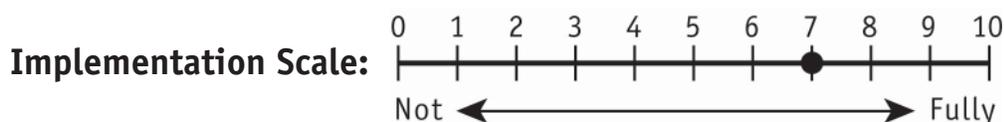
1. Members of the board recognize that each member brings valuable experiences and perspectives to the board and that each member shares a common commitment to students. There appears to be a high level of trust among board members.
2. Board members appear to function well as a team and to treat each other respectfully, even when members disagree on issues.
3. A few community members and staff interviewed believe that the board sometimes places too much emphasis on getting along with each other and with the superintendent, and not enough emphasis on asking tough questions. These interviewees felt that the board was often motivated by a desire to avoid conflict.
4. In 2001, the board adopted professional governance standards (Board Bylaw 9005) that include expectations for all board members to build unity and create a positive organizational culture. These standards include communicating a common vision, operating openly with trust and integrity, and governing in a dignified and professional manner.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. Board members must continue to model respectful behaviors toward each other to increase district credibility.
 - a. The board should periodically review governance standards, protocols and expectations for effective teamwork, especially when there are newly elected board members.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 7



5.6 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

Individual board members respect the decisions of the board majority and support the board's actions in public.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Community member interviews
5. Media interviews
6. Observations of board meetings
7. Board minutes

Findings

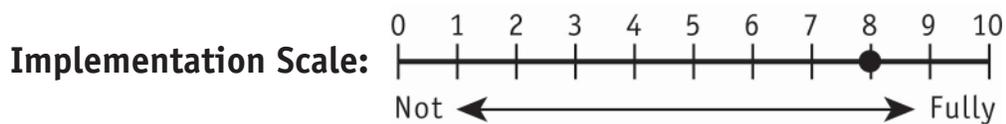
1. Board members demonstrate an understanding of the importance of not undercutting majority decisions. There is no evidence that board members engaged in this negative behavior.
2. During the past decade, there had been a perception among many on staff and in the community that the district's business was often adversely affected by conflicts among board members and the administration. Therefore, the current board made a strong effort to project a more "unified front" and was generally perceived as doing so.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed at this time.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 8



5.7 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

Functional working relations are maintained between the board and administration.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Parent focus groups
6. Media interviews
7. Observations of board meetings
8. Board bylaws

Findings

1. District policies, regulations and bylaws distinguish basic roles of the superintendent and board. BP 2110 Superintendent Responsibilities and Duties (2001) expresses the board's desire to set clear expectations for the superintendent, states the superintendent's general management authority, and refers to law, board policy and the superintendent's contract for detailed administrative responsibilities. The board's roles are delineated in Board Bylaw 9000 Role of the Board (1998) and Board Bylaw 9005 Professional Governance Standards (2001).
2. The board generally felt it had positive, amicable relations with the most recent superintendent for most of the three years that she served in that position. The superintendent communicated to the board through regular "Friday letters" that included information prepared by her and other staff. Board members felt she was responsive to their questions and accessible to them. The board demonstrated its satisfaction with the superintendent's performance during the most recent evaluation process by approving a salary increase.
3. In the past decade, the school district is perceived to have had a culture of board and superintendent conflicts and divisions that have led to a number of different individuals being employed as the superintendent. Members of the current board felt they were working hard with the most recent superintendent to change that past image of a district hindered by board-superintendent conflict and instability.
4. Significant dissatisfaction was expressed in interviews regarding the performance of the district's chief business official and the superintendent in handling and communicating the recent fiscal crisis. After the magnitude of the district's fiscal crisis was revealed last winter/spring, board members felt "lied to" by the CBO. In particular, many interviewees cited a presentation by the CBO in October 2003 in which the CBO communicated that the district's budget was balanced and that it would include a 3 percent reserve as required by law. At subsequent meetings, board members and the public began to learn the magnitude of the actual budget deficit.

Detailed information about meetings between county office of education and district fiscal staff does not appear to have been communicated to the board. Many people expressed a view that the superintendent and CBO often projected a sense that problems identified by the county office were being addressed. Excerpts from some letters sent to the district by the county office are cited as evidence that the district was, in fact, making progress in addressing the county office of education’s concerns about the district’s finances.

Some community members and site-level staff interviewed perceived that the board did not assert its proper oversight authority in terms of its relationship with the superintendent. Others feel that the superintendent may not have been fully aware of the CBO’s activities. There is a perception that because the district’s financial condition had been a subject of serious concern for many years, without appropriate steps being taken, a fiscal crisis like the one that unfolded in fall 2003 was “only a matter of time.”

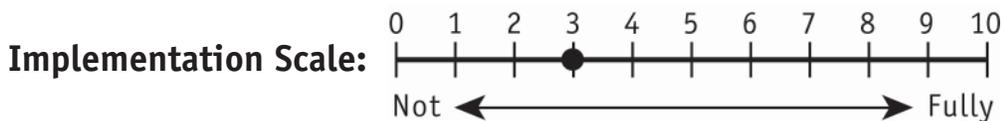
5. Initial relations between the board and state administrator appear to be generally positive. The state administrator has tried to meet with each individual board member and has indicated that he intends to operate in a participatory manner with the board. He is regarded as being very direct and communicates well. As is common in these situations, however, the board’s current advisory role is not well understood.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The state administrator and board should form agreements regarding their expected and appropriate roles and responsibilities.
2. The board and state administrator must engage in regular, proactive communications with each other.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 3



5.8 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

The board publicly demonstrates respect for and support for the district and school site staff.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Observations of board meetings
5. Board agendas and minutes
6. Staff surveys

Findings

1. At board meetings, the board and administration frequently compliment staff and thank them for their efforts. Time is regularly devoted near the beginning of meetings for recognition of specific staff as well as students and community members. Individual members also make a point to acknowledge outstanding achievements and efforts of staff and students during their board member reports. During the past year, a process was established to enable a different school to make a presentation at each board meeting in order to highlight successful programs and receive recognition.
2. In the past, the district had a staff recognition committee that included a board member and developed a recognition program that included acknowledging outstanding contributions by staff on a quarterly basis.
3. Staff who regularly attended meetings felt there were a few times after the budget crisis peaked when individual members may have acted rudely or disrespectfully to district staff in the way they were demanding information and questioning answers, but there were no indications of this type of behavior prior to that.

One board member was regarded by many staff members interviewed as being highly critical of certain staff, or of publicly embarrassing them in an unprofessional way.

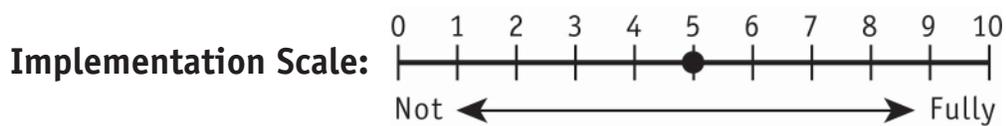
4. Many site staff, especially teachers, felt that a more substantial measure of the board's lack of respect and value for them was demonstrated by board actions, such as the district issuing a large number of layoff notices and later rescinding them, and eliminating class-size reduction in two grades. These decisions were seen as dramatically impacting staff morale; at the same time, the board believed it was making painful but necessary budget reductions.
5. Teachers, classified staff and district-level staff surveyed for this study assigned an average grade of "D+" to the willingness of the previous administration to be supportive and encouraging toward teachers/staff.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The board must continue to treat staff members with respect at board meetings and at site visits.
2. The district should periodically assess the satisfaction of employees through methods such as surveys, and develop plans to address issues of concern.
3. The district should consistently promote the accomplishments of staff to the media and community as part of the comprehensive communications plan (see Standard 1.1).

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



5.9 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

The board publicly demonstrates respect for public input at meetings and public hearings.

Sources and Documentation

1. Parent and community member interviews
2. Parent focus groups
3. Board member interviews
4. Staff interviews
5. Observations of board meetings
6. Board minutes

Findings

1. A community forum session is held early in each board meeting at which members of the public are invited to address the board (see Standard 6.8). The board and district have not frequently engaged in outreach or provided other opportunities to solicit public input on issues (also see Standard 5.4).
2. The state administrator is holding a series of community forums at various sites to share information and obtain public input. The first two of these forums took place on September 22.
3. Public participation varies at board meetings but is typically low, with about 10-15 members of the public attending most meetings. However, turnout at a few meetings has been as high as several hundred individuals, especially when the board was considering significant budget cuts to programs such as class size reduction.

Community forums and public hearings have not been well attended. Sometimes as few as five people would attend these meetings. Two recent public forums held at school sites by the state administrator generated a turnout of 50-60 individuals at each site.

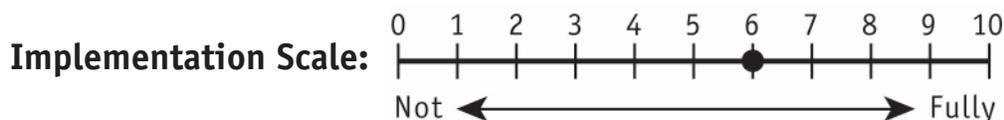
4. Generally the board listens attentively to speakers and treats them respectfully.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should continue to sponsor public hearings and forums on critical issues to allow additional opportunities for members of the public to provide input. The district should widely publicize these events.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 6



5.10 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

Board members respect confidentiality of information by the administration.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. State administrator interview
3. Staff interviews
4. Board bylaws

Findings

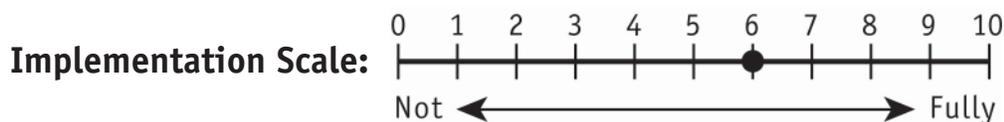
1. Board policies and bylaws (e.g., BP 1120 Governing Board Meetings, BB 9011 Disclosure of Confidential/Privileged Information, BB 9321 Closed Session Purposes and Agendas, BB 9321.1 Closed Session Actions and Reports) reflect legal requirements regarding confidentiality of information obtained in closed sessions.
2. Board members appear knowledgeable of their legal obligation to maintain confidentiality in certain circumstances. However, some board members believe that there have been a few occasions in the past when information related to contract negotiations was not kept confidential.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. All members of the board must maintain legal obligations for confidentiality at all times.
 - a. The board should periodically review confidentiality requirements with the state administrator and legal counsel.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 6



5.11 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

Board members do not involve themselves in operational issues that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff.

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies
2. Board member interviews
3. State administrator interview
4. Staff interviews
5. Board agendas and minutes
6. Observations of board meetings
7. Staff surveys

Findings

1. Board Bylaw 9200 Members (1994) clarifies that authority rests with the board as a whole and that individual board members have no authority to commit the district to any policy, act or expenditure. Other board bylaws, policies and regulations distinguish between appropriate roles of the superintendent and the board (e.g., BP 2110 Superintendent Responsibilities and Duties, 2001; BB 9000 Role of the Board, 1998; BB 9005 Professional Governance Standards, 2001).
2. Interviews and observations indicate that board members clearly understand the superintendent's and staff's responsibility for administering programs. There is no significant concern about individual board members attempting to exceed their authority.
3. Board members regularly adhered to a practice of referring concerns or complaints to the superintendent (see Standard 2.5); they did not attempt to involve themselves directly in these matters.
4. Teachers, classified staff and district-level staff surveyed for this study all assigned an average grade of "C" regarding the willingness of the board to let district administrators and staff manage the day-to-day operations of the schools without "excessive interference." It should be noted that approximately 20-25 percent of the respondents had no opinion.
5. In terms of the board's involvement in site-level operations, teachers, classified staff and district-level staff all tended to agree or strongly agree that the principal is allowed to make plans and set priorities without excessive interference from the board. Among teachers, 38.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed vs. 23.1 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among classified staff, 32.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed and 12.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among district staff, 44.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed and 12.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remainder were neutral or had no opinion.

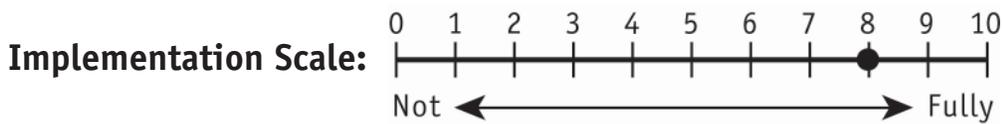
An even stronger positive pattern was observed when staff was asked whether the board often tries to involve itself directly in the day-to-day operations of their school. Teachers were the most likely to disagree or strongly disagree (64.5 percent vs. 6.8 percent who agreed or strongly agreed; 8.2 percent neutral; 20.5 percent no opinion). The majority of district-level staff also disagreed or strongly disagreed (53.2 percent vs. 10.7 percent who agreed or strongly agreed; 12.8 percent neutral; 23.4 percent no opinion). A larger percentage of classified staff was neutral or had no opinion, but among those with an opinion there was overwhelming disagreement that the board tries to involve itself in the school's day-to-day operations (46.7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 6.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed).

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed at this time.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 8



5.12 Board Roles/Boardsmanship

Professional Standard

The board acts for the community and in the interest of all students in the district.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Parent and community member interviews
4. Staff surveys
5. Parent focus groups

Findings

1. The Vallejo City USD board is generally representative of the community. The board has ethnic and gender diversity, and members bring a diversity of experience in their professional lives, as parents, and as active community members. Some members were born and raised in Vallejo, and graduated from district schools. Two members taught in the school district prior to being elected to the board; one member is employed by the county, one by a federal agency, and one owns a local business. Several members served the district as parent volunteers, on councils and on parent-teacher bodies prior to being elected. One member's children currently attend district schools.
2. A majority of board members reside in the same general area of the school district and have historically close ties to the schools in that area.
3. When describing the board, many interviewees made comments such as "board members are well meaning," "devoted," "their hearts are in the right place," "they take their jobs seriously" and "they care about kids."
4. Board members are aware that they are elected to represent all students in the district. The ethnic diversity of individual board members is generally viewed as positive in terms of enhancing awareness about the needs of particular ethnic groups. However, some interviewees expressed concerns that the board has not provided adequate leadership to focus the district on meeting the needs of African American students and students from low-income families. Some staff, parents and community members expressed concern that the board as a whole does not have a deep understanding of many educational issues or of issues that impact certain communities that make up a significant portion of the school population.
5. Several parents, community members and site staff interviewed perceive that in the past the board and district leadership often operated in a "closed" fashion, rather than actively inviting input and participation among all segments of the community. Some perceive that a few individual employees and school sites in the district received "preferential" treatment due to long-standing relationships with particular board members or district leaders. Those who hold this perception believe that on many important decisions, the board was heavily influenced by a small group of individuals that includes a few select site principals.

6. Some principals and staff feel that the district has not placed a consistent emphasis on raising achievement at traditionally lower performing school sites. Even when some promising progress has been demonstrated by those schools, these individuals believe that the district did not provide adequate support to sustain the progress.
7. While board members are aware of disparities in achievement among subgroups of students, in recent years there have not been focused efforts by district leadership to engage the full community in developing a plan or strategies to address this matter. Individual schools have participated in the state II/USP program, which requires an improvement plan to be adopted.
8. The state administrator has established a specific goal of “accelerating the achievement districtwide and at each school of students from various language/ethnic groups that have historically under performed in the district.”
9. As individuals, most board members do not appear to actively and consistently seek to build relations and obtain input from a broad spectrum of the community (see Standard 2.9). In recent years, it does not appear that the district made many proactive efforts to engage a cross-section of the community to help identify student needs, or to help develop goals or strategies to address these needs (see also Standard 5.3).
10. Although each board member serves as liaison to a group of schools each year, perceptions are mixed as to how often board members and the most recent superintendent visited sites. Some sites appear to have been visited frequently, while staff at other sites stated that they rarely or never saw board members on their campus, even those assigned to them. Some staff and parents felt that not all board members demonstrated a strong awareness of what goes on in the classroom. These individuals perceived that some of the board members therefore are not able to make fully informed decisions on behalf of students.
11. Some interviewees perceived that the board’s desire to maintain positive relations among each other and with the administration may have come at the expense of acting in the best interests of students. These individuals perceive that the board did not challenge or question the administration enough.
12. The Vallejo Education Association, which represents certificated staff, is perceived as having significant influence in the district. During the past decade, many individuals perceive that the board often sought to take actions in the interest of the VEA. Several of the current board members were not endorsed by the VEA during their election.
13. Several staff, parents and community members interviewed felt that the lack of accurate information and analysis provided by staff to the board significantly inhibited the board’s ability to make decisions in the best interests of all students.
14. Staff surveys conducted for this study included a number of items regarding the ability of the board to govern well and the general effectiveness of the board in improving the district’s educational programs. These findings generally suggest that staff hold a somewhat

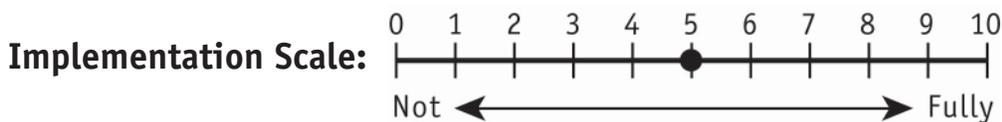
negative view of the board’s governance abilities. For example, when asked the extent to which they agree that the board’s efforts have been generally helpful in terms of improving Vallejo’s schools, 61.7 percent of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed; 11.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed; 17.0 percent were neutral; 9.5 percent had no opinion. Classified staff and district-level staff showed similar but less pronounced patterns.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The state administrator and board should work assertively to demonstrate that no particular individuals or groups receive “preferential treatment” and that all decisions are based on the interests of all students in the district.
 - a. The district should ensure that accurate, disaggregated data and solid analysis are utilized to assess student achievement, including the extent and nature of the achievement gap among different student populations.
 - b. The district should develop plans to raise the achievement levels of low-performing students, involving parents and the community in discussions on these issues.
2. The board and state administrator should reach out to parents and community groups to invite their continued involvement with the district and schools.
 - a. As the district develops a comprehensive communications plan (see Standard 1.1), it might develop strategies for communicating more effectively as to how board policies, actions, discussions and activities relate to the interests of the entire community and students.
 - b. The district should consider establishing committees, councils or task forces that include a cross-section of members from the community to provide input on important district matters (see also Standard 3.2).
3. Board members and the state administrator should frequently visit school sites and familiarize themselves with site issues.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



6.1 Board Meetings

Legal Standard

An adopted calendar of regular meetings exists and is published specifying the time, place and date of each meeting. (Education Code 35140)

Sources and Documentation

1. Staff interviews
2. District master calendar
3. District Web site
4. District policies/bylaws
5. Board agendas and minutes

Findings

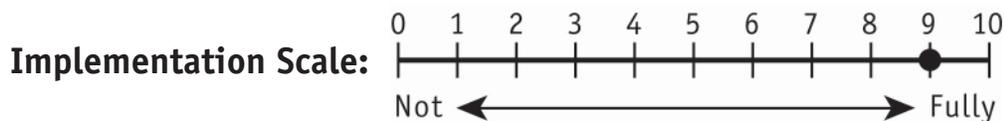
1. A calendar of regular meetings has been reviewed and adopted annually at the board's organizational meeting. Typically, regular board meetings are held on the first and third Wednesdays of the month at the district office.
2. Meeting dates are specified in board bylaws, distributed to all school sites, publicized on the district's Web site. These dates are included on the district's master calendar and in some site-level calendars that are distributed to staff and parents.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed at this time.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 9



6.2 Board Meetings

Legal Standard

The board agenda is made available to the public in the manner and under the timelines prescribed by law. (Government Code 54954.1, 54954.2)

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. District Web site
4. District bylaws
5. Board agendas

Findings

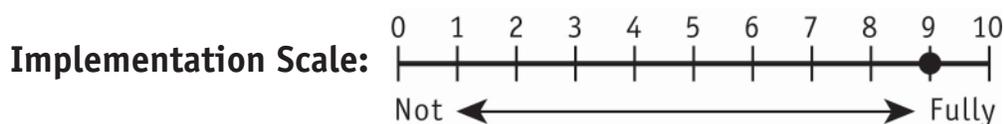
1. Board agendas are generally posted on the front and back doors of the district office in compliance with Government Code 54954.2, which requires that the agenda be posted at least 72 hours prior to a regular meeting and 24 hours prior to a special meeting at one or more locations freely accessible to the public.
2. The district also appears to comply with Government Code 54954.1, which requires the district to mail the full agenda packet to any person upon request, charging a fee if desired to cover costs.
3. Board agendas and supporting materials are generally distributed to all board members on the Friday prior to regularly scheduled Wednesday meetings. The district's executive secretary maintains a "listserv" of all individuals who have requested agendas, as well as other individuals whom the district is required to or wishes to inform, such as employee group leaders, local legislators, the local newspaper and all principals. These individuals are sent a copy of agendas electronically prior to meetings. The agenda also is typically posted on the district's Web site prior to meetings, often including the support materials.
4. Board Bylaw 9320 Meetings and Notices reflects the legal requirements regarding posting and distribution of agendas.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 9



6.3 Board Meetings

Professional Standard

Board members prepare for board meetings by becoming familiar with the agenda and support materials prior to the meeting.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Parent and community member interviews
4. Board agendas and minutes
5. Observations of board meetings

Findings

1. Board members typically receive agendas and support materials on the Friday prior to regularly scheduled Wednesday meetings (see Standard 6.2). They receive additional district information through a “Friday letter.”
2. Background materials, including reports, data, analysis and recommendations from staff, are generally provided for agenda items, often as individual attachments as opposed to part of a uniform agenda binder or packet. The quality and completeness of these supporting materials have varied in the past, in part depending on which district department prepared the materials. A review of board agenda materials during the past three years revealed that occasionally on significant agenda topics there was little analysis or narrative material provided to the board in writing in advance of meetings.

Many board members, staff and community members interviewed felt that the board did not always receive adequate or accurate levels of information or analysis from the staff in advance of meetings, most notably with regard to fiscal and attendance data. Data were not always available or may have been intentionally concealed.

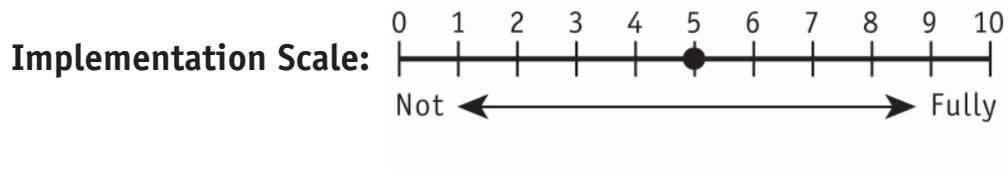
3. Most interviewees felt that a majority of board members were typically prepared for meetings by becoming familiar with agenda materials. Some board members made it a positive practice, when possible, to ask questions or clarifications of the superintendent or staff on agenda items prior to meetings. There is also a general perception that the board asked thoughtful questions during the meetings, and questions that reflected an understanding of their appropriate role, although one individual board member was sometimes noted as asking questions at meetings that would have been answered by information contained in the agenda packets.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. District staff should ensure that the board consistently receives adequate and accurate information and analysis related to all agenda topics in advance of meetings.
2. All board members should familiarize themselves with agenda materials in advance of meetings, and continue to strive to be as knowledgeable as possible about education issues in general and district issues in particular.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



6.4 Board Meetings

Professional Standard

Board meetings are conducted according to a set of bylaws adopted by the board.

Sources and Documentation

1. District bylaws
2. Board minutes
3. Observations of board meetings
4. Board member interviews
5. Staff interviews
6. Community member interviews
7. Board agendas and minutes

Findings

1. To establish processes for meeting procedures and conduct, the board has adopted Board Bylaw 9323 regarding meeting conduct, Board Bylaw 9320 regarding meetings and notices, and Board Bylaw 9322 regarding agendas and meeting materials. All these bylaws reflect current law.

These bylaws address such practices as agenda setting, the role of the board president as presiding officer, definition of a quorum, voting procedures and public participation (see also Standard 6.8).

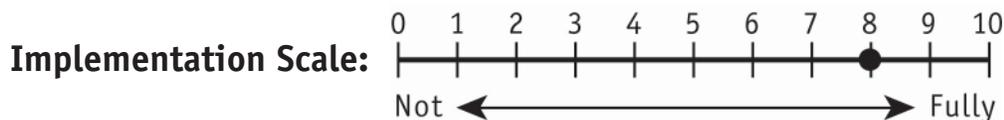
2. Board meetings appear to generally be conducted in accordance with the district bylaws. No evidence exists that the board has deviated from these adopted procedures.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The board and state administrator should review district bylaws and update them, if appropriate, given the status of the board under a state administrator.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 8



6.5 Board Meetings

Legal Standard

Open and closed sessions are conducted according to the Ralph M. Brown Act. (Government Code 54950 et seq.)

Sources and Documentation

1. District policies/bylaws
2. Board agendas and minutes
3. Board member interviews
4. District staff interviews
5. Observations of board meetings

Findings

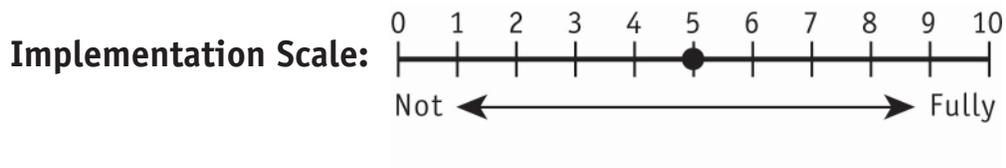
1. The board has adopted bylaws that provide for the conduct of open and closed sessions according to the Brown Act. BB 9321 Closed Session Purposes and Agendas (1998) substantially reflects current law but does not reflect some minor changes in law made since then. BB 9321.1 Closed Session Actions and Reports (1999) fully reflects current law.
2. The district holds regular and special meetings inside district boundaries in accordance with the Brown Act.
3. In open sessions, there were no indications that topics or discussions have come up or been discussed that were inappropriate to open sessions or that the board discussed or took action on non-agendized items.
4. The district does not ask persons attending board meetings to register their name, provide other information or complete a questionnaire in order to attend board meetings. Persons wishing to speak during the meeting are required to submit a card indicating that desire.
5. Agendas appear to meet requirements for listing topics of discussion at closed sessions. In accordance with law, the board president reports back in open session any decisions made in closed session.
6. There are some indications that budget-related issues that must be discussed in open session may, on occasion, have been discussed during closed sessions. A few individual board members indicate that they occasionally raised questions in a closed session as to whether a topic needed to be discussed in open session; they were assured by staff that the discussions were appropriate to closed session because they related to personnel.
7. During the winter/spring of 2004, the board held frequent special meetings, usually on Friday afternoons, the main purpose of which was to discuss personnel actions in closed session. These meetings appear to have been properly noticed.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The district should update its bylaws on open and closed sessions to ensure that they reflect current law.
2. All board members and staff participating in closed sessions should ensure that the subject matter adheres to Brown Act requirements.
 - a. The district should ensure that all new board members receive an orientation about the Brown Act upon their election.
 - b. Legal counsel should be sought whenever questions arise.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 5



6.6 Board Meetings

Professional Standard

Board meetings proceed in a businesslike manner while allowing opportunity for full discussion.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board member interviews
2. Staff interviews
3. Parent and community member interviews
4. Observations of board meetings
5. District bylaws
6. Board agendas and minutes

Findings

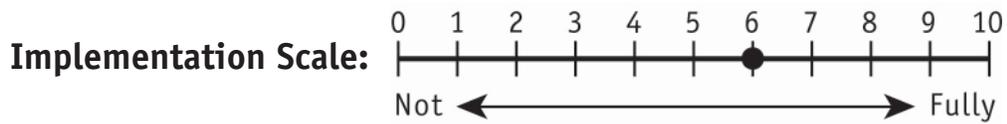
1. The board president facilitates meetings and calls on board members to speak upon request.
2. Many individuals who regularly attend or observe meetings, including the board members, believe that meetings generally proceed in a businesslike manner and are productive in enabling the board to conduct its business. However, agendas do not always appear to be structured in a way that enables individuals to easily identify what important matters are to be discussed or to allow for maximum focus to be placed on certain high-priority matters.
3. For public input, Board Bylaw 9323 Meeting Conduct establishes a time limit of three minutes for each individual speaker and a total time limit of 15 minutes for each topic, although there is flexibility for the board to increase or decrease the time depending on the topic and the number of people wishing to be heard. An individual representing an association, organization or group of people present at the meeting may have up to five minutes to address the board. Thirty minutes are allowed for the community forum at the beginning of the meeting. All these time limits appear in the agendas. The board president generally appears to adhere to these timelines, although exceptions are occasionally granted.
4. Meetings are generally characterized by decorum. Comments directed at the board during the community forum session of meetings are occasionally viewed as hostile, especially comments made by some teachers. The board, except on a few occasions, does not respond to these comments. (See also Standard 5.9.)
5. A number of individuals who attend or observe meetings believe the board often does not ask enough questions at meetings or engage in sufficient discussions about important matters, such as budget-related items. Teachers, in particular, tend to feel that the board does not engage in substantive discussions at meetings.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The board and state administrator should review the purpose and goals of meetings and form common agreements as appropriate to ensure that meetings allow for substantive discussion on high-priority items.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 6



6.7 Board Meetings

Legal Standard

The board has adopted bylaws for the placement of items on the board agenda by members of the public. (Education Code 35145.5)

Sources and Documentation

1. District bylaws
2. Board member interviews
3. Staff interviews
4. Parent and community member interviews
5. Parent focus groups

Findings

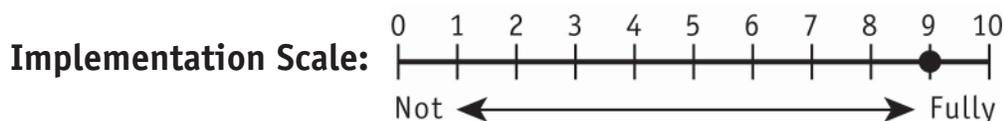
1. Board Bylaw 9322 Agenda/Meeting Materials (2001) allows for members of the public to have the opportunity to place items pertaining to the district on the agenda for board review. This bylaw also establishes guidelines requiring members of the public who want to submit items to do so by making a request in writing to the superintendent or designee at least one week before the scheduled meeting date.
2. Generally, prior to the appointment of the state administrator, the board president and superintendent met to go over agenda items prior to formalizing the agenda. The superintendent also met weekly with the cabinet and staff to discuss and prepare agenda items. It was generally felt by board members and staff that agendas were primarily determined by staff. However, staff indicates that, on occasion, parents or members of the public made suggestions for agenda items, which were included.
3. Interviews with parents and community members did not indicate any concerns regarding their ability to place items on an agenda.
4. The public also has an opportunity during board meetings to raise non-agendized issues (see Standard 6.8).

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 9



6.8 Board Meetings

Legal Standard

Members of the public have an opportunity to address the board before or during the board's consideration of each item of business to be discussed at regular or special meetings, and to bring before the board matters that are not on the agenda. (Education Code 35145.5)

Sources and Documentation

1. District bylaws
2. Board agendas and minutes
3. Observations of board meetings
4. Board member interviews
5. Staff interviews
6. Parent and community member interviews
7. Parent focus groups

Findings

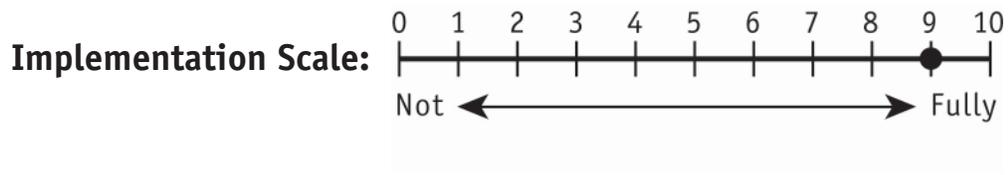
1. The board has adopted a bylaw (BB 9323 Meeting Conduct, 1999) that allows for and encourages members of the public to participate at board meetings. It also establishes rules and guidelines for public participation, such as providing the opportunity for the public to address the board either before or during the board's consideration of each item of business to be discussed at regular or special meetings.
2. Regular and special meeting agendas consistently contain an item called "community forum" where any member of the public, including staff and employee organization representatives, may address the board to discuss either agenda items or non-agenda items.
3. Individuals wishing to speak are asked to fill out a card and return it to the board president prior to the community forum session.
4. The board president generally adheres to established time limits for individual speakers and topics (see Standard 6.6).
5. Members of the public did not express concerns about not having opportunities to address the board at meetings.
6. On average, between four and eight individuals generally speak at board meetings, although attendance and the amount of public input was much greater during meetings when certain actions on budget cuts were being considered.

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

None needed.

Standard Implemented: Fully - Substantially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 9



6.9 Board Meetings

Professional Standard

Board meetings focus on matters related to student achievement.

Sources and Documentation

1. Board agendas and minutes
2. Observations of board meetings
3. Board member interviews
4. Staff interviews
5. Parent and community member interviews
6. Staff surveys

Findings

1. During the previous administration, agenda topics were generally developed by the superintendent, who met regularly with district administrators to solicit their input. The superintendent and board president also reviewed the draft agenda.
2. Board agendas do not seem to be structured in a way that ensures a maximum focus of time on matters related to student achievement. While the board receives regular reports on some matters, such as student attendance, thorough reports or presentations on topics related to instruction and achievement, as well as parent involvement, safety, etc., appear to be infrequent. An annual presentation of the district's standardized test scores was, and continues to be, provided. In the past year, the board initiated a new practice where a few individual schools made presentations to the board at each meeting about their programs. Some of these reports focused on achievement issues at the individual sites. In recent years, the board also has focused on a few policies such as those related to student promotion/acceleration/retention, but there does not appear to have been significant or systemic policy review related to achievement matters.
3. Regular reports by the superintendent and board members at board meetings are primarily used to communicate the events and meetings that these individual leaders have attended.
4. Background materials for agenda topics often referenced one of the district's previous four overarching goal areas, in an attempt to provide context as to how the item fit into the district's overall mission and goals. However, it does not appear that regular reports were provided as to the effectiveness of particular strategies or programs that were pursued to achieve the goals.
5. The dominant issues addressed by the board in the previous 12 months related to making cuts to try to balance the district's budget. Many of those proposed or approved cuts can have a significant impact on achievement. However, perceptions are divided as to the extent to which even these matters were focused on or fully discussed at meetings. For instance, the board's decision to eliminate class-size reduction for grades kindergarten and 3 appears to have been discussed substantively at meetings; the board's decision to eliminate counselors at middle schools does not appear to have been discussed as substantively.

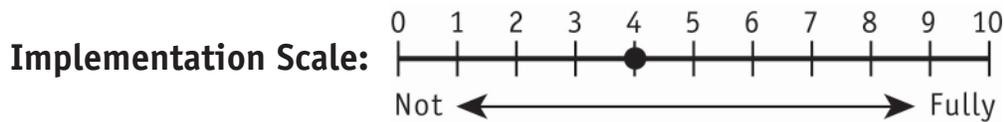
6. Some staff members and community members noted that the board sometimes devotes too much time to issues that are a particular interest of one board member.
7. In surveys conducted for this study, teachers assigned an average grade of “D” to the board’s effectiveness in promoting student achievement, and both classified staff and district-level staff assigned an average grade of “D+.”

Recommendations and Improvement Plan

1. The state administrator should ensure that matters related to student achievement are a primary focus of board meetings.
 - a. The state administrator (and board as appropriate) should develop meeting agendas that consistently relate to the district’s key goals for student achievement, and that allow for frequent discussions of relevant district policies and reports/analysis of program effectiveness.
 - b. Agendas should more clearly delineate high-priority topics, and be planned in a manner that will allow for maximum time to be spent on those important items.

Standard Implemented: Partially

November 1, 2004 Rating: 4



Standard to be addressed		Nov. 2004 Rating	May 2005 Focus
1.1	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNICATIONS The district has developed a comprehensive plan for internal and external communications, including media relations.	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNICATIONS Information is communicated to the staff at all levels in an effective and timely manner.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNICATIONS Staff input into school and district operations is encouraged.	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNICATIONS Media contacts and spokespersons who have the authority to speak on behalf of the district have been identified.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.5	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNICATIONS Individuals not authorized to speak on behalf of the district refrain from making public comments on board decisions and district programs	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.6	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNICATIONS Board spokespersons are skilled at public speaking and communication and are knowledgeable about district programs and issues.	3	
2.1	LEGAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS Annual parental notice of rights and responsibilities is provided at the beginning of the school year. This notice is provided in English and in languages other than English when 15 percent or more speak other languages (EC 48980, 48985).	6	
2.2	LEGAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS A school accountability report card is issued annually for each school site (EC 35256).	7	
2.3	LEGAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS The district has developed and annually disseminates uniform complaint procedures (Title 5, Section 4621, 4622)	6	
2.4	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS Parents' and community members' complaints are addressed in a fair and timely manner.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.5	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS Board members refer informal public concerns to the appropriate staff members for attention and response.	8	

The identified subset of standards appears in bold print. These standards, indicated by , will be targeted for in-depth review for the May 2005 report.

Standard to be addressed		Nov. 2004 Rating	May 2005 Focus
2.6	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS Parents and community members are encouraged to be involved in school activities and in their children's education.	3	
2.7	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS Volunteers receive appropriate training and play a meaningful role that contributes to the educational program.	2	
2.8	LEGAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS The district has established procedures for visitor registration and posts registration requirements at each school entrance. (Penal Code 627.2, 627.6)	5	
2.9	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS Board members are actively involved in building community relations.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.1	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS The board and Superintendent support partnerships and collaborations with community groups, local agencies and businesses.	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS The board and the Superintendent establish broad-based committees or councils to advise the district on critical district issues and operations as appropriate. The membership of these collaboratives and councils should reflect the full cultural, ethnic, gender and socioeconomic diversity of the student population.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS Community collaboratives and district and school advisory councils have identified specific outcome goals that are understood by all members.	4	
3.4	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS The district encourages and provides the necessary training for collaborative and advisory council members to understand the basic administrative structure, program processes and goals of all district partners.	5	

The identified subset of standards appears in bold print. These standards, indicated by , will be targeted for in-depth review for the May 2005 report.

Standard to be addressed		Nov. 2004 Rating	May 2005 Focus
3.5	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS Community collaboratives and district and school advisory councils effectively fulfill their responsibilities (e.g. researching issues, developing recommendations) and provide a meaningful role for all participants.	4	
3.6	LEGAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS The school site council develops a single plan for student achievement at each school applying for categorical programs through the consolidated application (EC 64001).	8	
3.7	LEGAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS School plans are comprehensive and have sufficient content to meet the statutory requirements (EC 52853, 64001).	7	
3.8	LEGAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS The school site council annually reviews the school plan and the board annually approves or disapproves all site councils' plans (EC 52853, 52855, 64001).	7	
3.9	LEGAL STANDARD - COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES, DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SCHOOL SITE COUNCILS Policies exist for the establishment of school site councils (EC 52852.5).	10	
4.1	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - POLICY Policies are written, organized and readily available to all members of the staff and to the public.	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - POLICY Policies and administrative regulations are up to date and reflect current law and local needs.	4	
4.3	LEGAL STANDARD - POLICY The board has adopted all policies mandated by state and federal law.	6	
4.4	LEGAL STANDARD - POLICY The board annually reviews its policies on intradistrict open enrollment and extracurricular/cocurricular activities (EC 35160.5).	4	
4.5	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - POLICY The district has established a system of securing staff and citizen input in policy development and review.	3	

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Standard to be addressed		Nov. 2004 Rating	May 2005 Focus
4.6	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - POLICY The board supports and follows its own policies once they are adopted.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.1	LEGAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Each board member meets the eligibility requirements of being a board member (EC 35107).	10	
5.2	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Board members participate in orientation sessions, workshops, conventions and special meetings sponsored by board associations, and have access to pertinent literature, statutes, legal counsel and recognized authorities to understand duties, functions, authority and responsibilities of members.	4	
5.3	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP The board has established a districtwide vision/mission and uses that vision/mission as a framework for district action based on the identified needs of the students, staff and educational community through a needs assessment process.	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.4	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP The board makes decisions based on the study of all available data, including the recommendations of the Superintendent.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Functional working relations are maintained among board members.	7	
5.6	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Individual board members respect the decisions of the board majority and support the board's actions in public.	8	
5.7	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Functional working relations are maintained between the board and administrative team.	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.8	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP The board publicly demonstrates respect for and support for the district and school site staff.	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.9	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP The board demonstrates respect for public input at meetings and public hearings.	6	
5.10	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Board members respect confidentiality of information by the administration.	6	

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Standard to be addressed		Nov. 2004 Rating	May 2005 Focus
5.11	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP Board members do not involve themselves in operational issues that are the responsibility of the Superintendent and staff.	8	
5.12	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD ROLES/BOARDSMANSHIP The board acts for the community and in the interests of all students in the district.	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.1	LEGAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS An adopted calendar of regular meetings exists and is published specifying the time, place and date of each meeting (EC 35140).	9	
6.2	LEGAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS The board agenda is made available to the public in the manner and under the time lines prescribed by law (Government Code 54954.1, 54954.2).	9	
6.3	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS Board members prepare for board meetings by becoming familiar with the agenda and support materials prior to the meeting.	5	
6.4	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS Board meetings are conducted according to a set of bylaws adopted by the board.	8	
6.5	LEGAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS Open and closed sessions are conducted according to the Ralph M. Brown Act (GC 54950 et seq.).	5	
6.6	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS Board meetings proceed in a businesslike manner while allowing opportunity for full discussion.	6	
6.7	LEGAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS The board has adopted bylaws for the placement of items on the board agenda by members of the public. (EC 35145.5)	9	
6.8	LEGAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS Members of the public have an opportunity to address the board before or during the board's consideration of each item of business to be discussed at regular or special meetings and to bring before the board matters that are not on the agenda (EC 35145.5).	9	
6.9	PROFESSIONAL STANDARD - BOARD MEETINGS Board meetings focus on matters related to student achievement.	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

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