

West Contra Costa Unified School District

*Fourth Six-Month Progress Review
July 2, 2003*

Submitted by

Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team

Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the West Contra Costa Unified School District with the results of a systemic, comprehensive assessment in the following five areas of district operation:

1. Community Relations
2. Personnel Management
3. Pupil Achievement
4. Financial Management
5. Facilities Management

This report is the fourth and last of four six-month progress reports, reviewing the efforts of the West Contra Costa Unified School District Governing Board, administrators and staff to address the recommendations for improvement made in the West Contra Costa Unified School District Assessment and Improvement Plan, first presented to the district by FCMAT on July 2, 2001. This report provides data to the district, community and Legislature to assist in facilitating more effective collaboration and to build the necessary capacity within the district to promote student learning. The report also provides critical information related to site and facility issues that interfere with effective teaching and learning.

This assessment has been based upon existing legal and professional standards applicable to all California school districts. Independent and external professional experts from both the private and public sectors assisted in the research, identification and categorization of the standards utilized in the assessment of the West Contra Costa Unified School District. The Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team monitored the use of the standards in the assessment process to ensure necessary fairness and rigor in their application. The standards provide a clear path to improvement when implemented in a manner that considers the nature of the current organization and endeavors to impact functions directly at the school site and classroom level. When the designated standards are implemented with this sort of depth and focus, improved pupil achievement, financial practices, personnel procedures, community relations, and facilities management can be expected.

This process of systemic assessment, prioritization and intervention lays the foundation to increase the overall capacity and productivity of the district by establishing a baseline by which progress can be measured. The process must also engage the parents, students and the community in the partnership of improving student learning. Parent and community participation, effective school leadership and communication tied with a strong curriculum are an interrelated theme of this report.

The West Contra Costa Unified School District can meet its most difficult challenges by implementing a focused and consistent strategy for improvement that understands the most significant needs of the district and deals with those needs that are most critical to the basic functions related to organizational structure and student learning. FCMAT has provided both an analysis of the issues in West Contra Costa and a priority listing of those needs that are most pressing through its comprehensive review.

The findings presented in this report represent a snapshot of the district, and the recommendations are based on the improvement of student learning. In the time since the data-gathering portion of the review, the district has begun to address certain areas of concern, making progress that is not reflected in this report.

FCMAT would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the district Governing Board, administration and staff during the review process.

Study Guidelines

FCMAT's approach to implementing the statutory requirements of AB 2265 is based upon a commitment to a standards-based, independent and external review of the West Contra Costa Unified School District's operations. FCMAT performed the assessment and developed the improvement plan in collaboration with four other external providers selected through a competitive process. Professionals from throughout California contributed their knowledge and applied the identified legal and professional standards to the specific local conditions found in the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

Prior to beginning work in the district, FCMAT adopted five basic tenets to be incorporated in the assessment and improvement plans. These tenets were based on previous assessments conducted by FCMAT in school districts throughout California and a review of data from other states implementing external reviews of troubled school districts. The five basic tenets are:

1. Use Professional and Legal Standards

Our experience indicates that for schools and school districts to be successful in program improvement, the evaluation, design and implementation of improvement plans must be standards-driven. FCMAT has noted positive differences between an objective standards-based approach versus a non-standards-based approach. When standards are clearly defined, reachable, and communicated, there is a greater likelihood they will be measured and met.

In order to participate in the process of the West Contra Costa Unified School District review, potential providers responded to a Request for Applications (RFA) that identified these standards as the basis of assessment and improvement. Moreover, the providers were required to demonstrate how the FCMAT-identified standards would be incorporated into their work. It is these standards on which the improvement plans for the West Contra Costa district were based. The standards, while identified specifically for the West Contra Costa Unified School District, are benchmarks that could be readily utilized as an indication of success for any school district in California.

Every standard was measured on a consistent rating format, and each standard was given a scaled score from zero to 10 as to its relative status of completeness. The following represents a definition of terms and scaled scores. The single purpose of the scaled score is to establish a baseline of information by which the district's future gains and achievements in each of the standard areas can be measured.

Not Implemented (Scaled Score of 0)

There is no significant evidence that the standard is implemented.

Partially Implemented (Scaled Score of 1 through 7)

A partially implemented standard lacks completeness, and it is met in a limited degree. The degree of completeness varies as defined:

- 1) Some design or research regarding the standard is in place that supports preliminary development. (Scaled Score of 1)
- 2) Implementation of the standard is well into the development stage. Appropriate staff is engaged and there is a plan for implementation. (Scaled Score of 2)
- 3) A plan to address the standard is fully developed, and the standard is in the beginning phase of implementation. (Scaled Score of 3)
- 4) Staff is engaged in the implementation of most elements of the standard. (Scaled Score of 4)
- 5) Staff is engaged in the implementation of the standard. All standard elements are developed and are in the implementation phase. (Scaled Score of 5)
- 6) Elements of the standard are implemented, monitored and becoming systematic. (Scaled Score of 6)
- 7) All elements of the standard are fully implemented, are being monitored, and appropriate adjustments are taking place. (Scaled Score of 7)

Fully Implemented (Scaled Score of 8-10)

A fully implemented standard is complete relative to the following criteria.

- 8) All elements of the standard are fully and substantially implemented and are sustainable. (Scaled Score of 8)
- 9) All elements of the standard are fully and substantially implemented and have been sustained for a full school year. (Scaled Score of 9)
- 10) All elements of the standard are fully implemented, are being sustained with high quality, are being refined, and have a process for ongoing evaluation. (Scaled Score of 10)

2. Conduct an External and Independent Assessment

FCMAT employed an external and independent assessment process in the development of the Oakland assessment and improvement plans. The report represents findings and improvement plans based on the external and independent assessment from four separate professional agencies:

- California School Boards Association (CSBA) – Community Relations and Governance
- Schromm and Associates – Personnel
- MGT of America – Pupil Achievement
- School Services of California – Financial Management and Facilities Management

Collectively, these professional agencies constitute FCMAT's providers in the assessment process. Their external and independent assessments serve as the primary basis for the reliability, integrity and credibility of the review.

3. Utilize Multiple Measures of Assessment

For a finding to be considered legitimate, multiple sources need to be utilized to provide the same or consistent information. The assessments and improvement plans were based on multiple measures. Testing, personal interviews, group meetings, public hearings, observations, review

and analysis of data all provided added value to the assessment process. The providers were required to utilize multiple measurements as they assessed the standard. This process allowed for a variety of ways of determining whether the standards were met. All school district operations with an impact on student achievement, including governance, fiscal, personnel, and facilities were reviewed and included in the improvement plan.

4. Empower Staff and Community

The development of a strong professional development plan for the board and staff is a critical component of an effective school district. This report includes the importance of a comprehensive professional development plan. The success of the improvement plans and their implementation are dependent upon an effective professional and community development process. For this reason, the empowerment of staff and community is one of the highest priorities, and emphasizing this priority with each of the four partners was critical. As a result, a strong training component for board, staff and administration is called for consistently throughout the report.

Of paramount importance is the community's role of local governance. The absence of parental involvement in education is a growing concern nationally. A key to success in the West Contra Costa Unified School District is the re-engagement of parents, teachers, and support staff. West Contra Costa parents care deeply about their children's future and want to participate in improving the school district and enhancing student learning. The community relations section of this report provides necessary recommendations for the community to have a more active and meaningful role in the education of its children.

5. Engage Local, State and National Agencies

It is critical to involve various local, state and national agencies in the recovery of the district. This was emphasized through the Request for Applications (RFA) process, whereby state-recognized agencies were selected as partners to assist with the assessment and improvement process. The California Department of Education, city and county interests, professional organizations, and community-based organizations all have expressed and shown a desire to assist and participate in the improvement of the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

Study Team

The study team was composed of the following members:

For FCMAT:

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For California School Boards Association – Community Relations and Governance:

Davis W. Campbell
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For Schromm and Associates – Personnel Management:

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For MGT of America – Pupil Achievement:

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For School Services of California – Financial Management:

Ken Hall
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For School Services of California – Facilities Management:

Ron Bennett
Curt Pollock

Executive Summary

On September 22, 2000, Assembly Bill 2265 was signed into law. In part, the bill required the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team to conduct assessments of the West Contra Costa Unified School District in five major operational areas. The bill allocated \$800,000 to FCMAT for that purpose, and required the team to file status reports every six months through July 2003 with various entities, including the Legislature, on the school district's progress in meeting the recommendations of the improvement plans.

This report is the fourth and last of four six-month progress reports, reviewing the efforts of the West Contra Costa Unified District Governing Board, administrators and staff to address the recommendations for improvement made in the West Contra Costa Unified School District Assessment and Improvement Plan, first presented to the district by FCMAT on July 2, 2001. This report provides new ratings on several standards that were reviewed during this latest six-month period, an overview of the progress made by the district since July 2001, and a continuing analysis of the district's fiscal condition.

The Assessment and Improvement Plan (July 2, 2001) includes a complete list of the various findings and recommendations for district improvement in five areas of school district operations: Community Relations and Governance, Personnel Management, Pupil Achievement, Financial Management and Facilities Management. FCMAT assessment teams initially visited the district in spring 2001 and FCMAT published the Assessment and Improvement Plan for the district in July 2001. The first six-month progress report, reviewing the district's progress on specific, targeted standards, was published in early January 2002. The second six-month progress report, published in July 2002, provided an assessment of additional targeted standards identified for the district to address. The third six-month report published in January 2003 again provided an assessment of specific targeted standards identified for the district to address.

This last of four required six-month progress reports reviews the district's progress on specific targeted standards addressed during the last six-month period, provides an overview of the district's progress during the two-and-a-half years of FCMAT's involvement with the district, and an analysis of the areas that the district must still work to address.

Principal Findings

The district has made significant progress in addressing many of the recommendations made in the initial Assessment and Improvement Plan. The progress made on several standards that were targeted to be addressed during the last six-month period are detailed in this report. The average of the ratings in each of the five operational areas has continued to increase over time.

Areas of District Improvement

- Fiscal management in the district has been improved. New leadership in the business division has resulted in a reorganization of the business division and the filling of key positions with qualified staff. Budget adoption, reporting and filing of the first and second positive certification reports have been completed on time, and commended by the Contra Costa County Office of Education. An internal auditor position has been established and a board policy regarding fraud prevention and detection has been developed. Training of site personnel on SASI attendance accounting has been con-

ducted. Guidelines for the development of collective bargaining parameters have been achieved, and employer-employee trust has been enhanced.

- There has been significant improvement of the district's facilities due to the passage of two local bonds, Measure M, a \$150 million General Obligation Bond passed in November 2000, and Measure D, a \$300 million General Obligation Bond passed in March 2001, and due to the district's administration and utilization of funds and facilities priorities. The district recently opened the Lovonya DeJean Middle School in the heart of Richmond. While the school was only opened a few months ago, the district has not had a single graffiti abatement request. The community has made the school its own.
- The district has shown significant growth relative to all Pupil Achievement standards. The district's success is likely attributable to the vision for student success that has been created and implemented over the past two and a half years. More important than the district's growth in implementing the pupil achievement standards has been the district's student performance growth on the STAR. In addition, strategic priorities in the district are clear and well understood. The district utilizes assessment data to inform instruction, and school site administrators are operating as instructional leaders.
- The district has fully implemented the standards relative to media relations, internal and external communications, and the maintenance of a proactive communications plan. The district has made significant gains in the area of Parent/Community Relations. A comprehensive work plan has been developed to focus on a variety of venues for expanding parent involvement, and to strengthen district support for schools in enhancing parent involvement. The superintendent and board have made improving governance a major priority. The Board Roles and Relationship standards have been fully met and appear to be sustained. This is a major accomplishment for any board, much less one in a complex urban district.
- The district has made significant progress in improving Personnel Services functions. Goals and objectives have been developed for staff members, including personal professional development plans. Employee desk manuals have been developed and cross training of staff has been accomplished so that work will not slow down during employee absences. A monthly activities planning calendar and an operational procedures manual have been developed for the personnel office. An employee orientation video was created for new employees. Improved reference checking procedures have been implemented.

Areas of Remaining Concern

Several areas identified by the assessment team in the initial assessment of the district, and noted in subsequent six-month progress reports, continue to concern the team. As FCMAT's involvement in the district will cease with this fourth six-month progress report, the team wishes to remind the district that it must work to remedy these areas to maintain its future fiscal solvency. These areas have remained largely unresolved during the two-and-a-half years that FCMAT has been monitoring the district's progress in implementing the improvement plan.

- The district's use of its administrative data systems still needs to be improved. There is no director for Management Information Systems. The district may need to establish a director of technology or a chief information systems position to provide direction for the district's technology programs, and to be accountable for appropriate technology use and support of the administrative systems in the district. The current system has not met all of the needs of the Personnel Services Division. The automated position control system, linking staff positions to approved budgets for those positions, is not being fully utilized. A number of personnel and payroll functions are still being handled manually, e.g., monthly time cards and the reconciliation of records. The district still remains unable to accurately monitor the many substitutes and temporary employees hired by the various district divisions.
- The district continues the practice of regularly using short-term employees in the district. These are employees who are released before working 185 days or 75 percent of the school year. While the occasional use of short-term employees may not, in itself, be a problem, the fact that these employees often are rehired as temporary employees for the following year in the same positions is a concern. The assessment team continues to believe that the district may be at risk in continuing this practice. In addition, when an employee is not released before 185 days and exceeds the provisions of the Education Code, this creates a permanent employee position that has bypassed the hiring practices and procedures as outlined in board policy and contract agreements. Also, the district's practice of hiring substitutes and temporary employees to provide extra help, often in unauthorized positions for which no budget is available, is pervasive throughout the district and needs to be closely monitored. There continues to be insufficient control over the hiring and utilization of substitute and temporary employees across the district.
- The team's six-month progress reports have continued to note that the provision of lifetime medical benefits for retirees and dependents continues to pose an increasing unfunded liability for the district. The amount required to fund these benefits remains far beyond the scope and fiscal capability of the district. The district's unfunded liability in this area has grown to \$275 million. The rising costs of employee benefits for both regular employees and retirees increases the district's annual cost for the program, which is anticipated to be \$8.5 million in 2002-03 and \$9.7 million in 2003-04. There is no long-term plan to fund these increasing costs. The district needs to address the fiscal impact to the district of lifetime benefits for their employees. This can be accomplished by developing and implementing a plan to fund the benefits or negotiating a more cost-savings arrangement to fund the plan.

A benefits committee has been established to address this issue and has met several times. However, unless the district and/or the committee takes definitive action to control spiraling benefits costs, the district's long-term liability will continue to grow and continue to raise questions about the district's future ability to fund the liability and to remain fiscally solvent.

- The district's effort to implement some of the recommendations in the improvement plan continues to be hampered by existing contract language. As reported in the third six-month progress report, the district completed negotiations with the employee organizations for the 2002-03 year and was not able to significantly affect contract language or the status quo. For example, the district negotiated a three-year collective bargaining contract with Local One. There was no change in the Local One contract dealing with seniority and its significance in the selection process for classified employees. Only mutually agreed upon issues can be reopened through 2003-04. For 2004-05, salary plus two articles per party may be negotiated. This will probably be the next opportunity for the district to be able to negotiate the seniority-related issues. At issue is the district's need to hire the most qualified individual for new positions, rather than the most senior on the substitute list. The district's ability to affect contract language in negotiations remains a crucial component of making long-term improvement in the district's operational efficiencies.
- The district administration needs to understand the multi-year cumulative effects of any bargaining agreements. The district must not utilize one-time resources for ongoing costs of salaries or programs. The district has negotiated seemingly modest salary increases in each year of the three-year contract just negotiated (2% in January 2002, 2% in January 2003, and 2% in July 2003), but cumulative compounding of these increases amounts to more than a 9% total salary increase in year three which may exacerbate the district's ability to balance its budget in succeeding years. In addition to preparing multi-year financial projections relative to the negotiated agreements, the district needs to develop a multi-year plan for cost containment and future budget reductions to fund long-term commitments.

The district is working with the employee unions to forego the 2% increase for the 2003-04 year because of the current cuts in education funding.

- Long-term debt continues to impact the district. The district still owes approximately \$18.4 million of the \$28 million state loan made in 1991. The loan is scheduled to be fully paid in the year 2018. In addition, the district agreed in 1993 to repay IBM \$5 million over a period of four years, August 2008 to August 2011, at \$1.25 million per year, to resolve disputed technology contracts. According to the district, the technology equipment provided by IBM at that time has since lost any current or future usefulness to the district. The district should explore the possibility of working with IBM to rescind or waive this agreement.

The district has been working to resolve many of these concerns. Some of these concerns cannot be remedied in a short period of time, and many of them require collaboration with employee groups. However, the district must continue to pursue resolution of these issues, and if need be, to make some of these issues the district's central proposals in each contract negotiation in the future.

SUMMARY OF THE FIVE OPERATIONAL AREAS

A summary of the findings in each of the five operational areas assessed during the past six-month period is presented here. Additional detail of the progress made on the individual standards identified for review during this last six-month period follows in the body of this report.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Communications

The district's communications has greatly improved since first observing its operations, procedures and protocols. The district is, at this time, fully implementing the FCMAT standards relative to media relations, internal and external communications, and the maintenance of a proactive communications plan.

The recent example was a proactive letter to parents, community members and the media regarding the district's attention to both the dire state budget situation and the tension created by the potential Iraq conflict. The information was brief, direct and simply reassured the community that the district was taking appropriate precautionary measures to deal with the situations. The letter was also translated into Spanish.

The district instituted "listening team visits," which consist of the Superintendent and Cabinet members discussing day-to-day issues – emphasizing literacy and student achievement – with school site employees during lunch periods. There are 20 visits currently scheduled. The district has also held several district staff focus groups, and provides a "Suggestion Box," located in the district office and on the district's Web site.

The district has been very aggressive and active in working with local community groups and businesses. Several campaigns and programs have been instituted and sustained, including "West County Reads," "Marketing Groups" (consisting of the local Chamber of Commerce, business community, parent and district representatives), and "Leading for Literacy." Also, the district rotates its board meetings to various neighborhoods within the district.

The district has successfully integrated the common message of "improving academic achievement for all students" into various aspects of its communications operations – providing focus and direction for the district. Communication devices, such as press releases (Apple Bites), weekly e-mail updates (Friday FYI) and other information have been distributed on a very consistent basis. The information is pertinent to district business and many times refers back to the core message of student achievement and literacy.

Parent/Community Relations

The district has made significant gains in the area of Parent/Community Relations. In addition to increased professional development for administrators, teachers and classified staff on effective communications with parents, the district has hired an administrator to coordinate a comprehensive parent and community involvement effort. That administrator was newly hired in November and developed a comprehensive work plan to guide the district's efforts in this area. The work plan focuses on a variety of venues for expanding parent involvement, and seeks to strengthen district support for schools in enhancing parent involvement.

Most recently, the district has begun the process of convening community forums, or “Community Conversations” to provide an opportunity for “citizens to ask questions, give input, and share their concerns regarding public education issues.” These forums will be held regularly through November and at a different time and location than school board meetings, making it more accessible to individuals who find the time and/or location of school board meetings to be inconvenient for meaningful participation.

The district has established a goal to “Engage families and community in supporting the instructional focus,” which is a regular reminder to the community, district and school sites of the value placed on parent involvement.

Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Significant strategies have been put into place to strengthen the role of school site/district councils, particularly in assisting council members in understanding their roles and responsibilities, and by ensuring that councils have full representation from parents and teachers alike. The district has provided sites with detailed responsibilities of ELAC members and has enhanced the ELAC tool kit to ensure more effective participation by members. Comprehensive handbooks are provided to all school site councils.

The district has also instituted a review process of site and district council minutes to determine that meaningful participation is occurring and that the councils are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities. Councils must also report to the board on how they will monitor the effectiveness of site plans and received training on how to monitor plans to make the monitoring process more meaningful and relevant. Rosters of councils also are reviewed to ensure the composition meets all statutory requirements.

Policy

The district has made keeping policies up-to-date a priority. Good efforts have been made to keep the policy manual compliant with law and reflective of district practices and philosophy. District staff are involved in regular review of policy. The district has also decided to subscribe to the GAMUT Online system in order that all site, staff, board members, and the community will have easy access to the district board policies on the Internet.

Board Roles/Boardsmanship

From the beginning of the FCMAT review, it was clear that the Superintendent and board had made improving governance a major priority. As of this report, the Board Roles and Relationship Standards have been fully met and appear to be sustained.

The board does, however, face serious challenges to the progress achieved in governance to date. The district must cut over \$14 million from its budget for 2003-2004. There is nothing more difficult for community elected board members than facing the organized pressure from constituent groups that elected them to “save” programs that need to be saved. These kinds of choices create an untenable environment for everyone. That the money must be cut is a fact; while the margins can sometimes be manipulated, the major cuts are a reality. Board members must often choose between rational, good government leadership as a board team making the tough decisions that will keep the district viable and functioning and behavior that wins favor with constituent groups.

The wrong decision will haunt the board for years to come. If the board chooses not to continue its solid leadership as a board team, the entire governance structure can begin to unravel.

A major function of any board is the establishment and adoption of the vision, mission and goals for the district. One of the first tasks of the new Superintendent when she began her tenure in the district was the formulation of a comprehensive strategic plan. The board and all major stakeholders in the district were involved in creation of the plan. The plan became the basis for the instructional direction for the district and has been fully embraced by the board. Last year, the vision, mission and goals were reviewed and the board was fully represented in those discussions.

A characteristic of effective boards is how they treat the public and the staff at board meetings. The current board gets high marks for its attempt to make the board a welcome place for public and staff. The board is very respectful of the public and, notwithstanding controversial issues, the board attempts to operate with civility and decorum. The board continues to conduct formal recognition of staff and accomplishments of the district at the opening part of every board meeting.

The board standard on confidentiality raised a number concerns early on in the review process. The initial review identified a number of cases where confidential personnel information was “leaked” to the staff in recent years. Over the past two years, however, the board has clearly internalized the importance of confidentiality. The current board has also done a good job refraining from inappropriate involvement (micromanagement) in the district. Board bylaws are quite extensive in clearly outlining the board’s areas of responsibility and limitations on administrative intrusion.

The board has done an excellent job in meeting the standards related to the conduct of board meetings. Board meetings are well-managed and effective. Board members are clearly committed, do their homework and participate in meetings.

The review of the Community Relations area during the fourth six-month progress review period, included an overview of the 60 professional and legal Community Relations standards in the areas of communications, parent/community relations, policy, boardsmanship and board meetings. The average rating of all assessment standards for this operational area has increased as seen below, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

July 2, 2001	6.27
January 2, 2002	6.92
July 2, 2002	7.38
January 2, 2003	7.62
July 2, 2003	7.75

PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

The West Contra Costa Unified School District has shown significant growth relative to all FC-MAT Pupil Achievement standards. The district's success is directly attributable to the vision for student success that has been created and followed over the past two and a half years. The district quickly identified areas of weakness and formulated plans that support success. More important than the district's growth on implementing FCMAT's standards has been the district's growth on the STAR. As shown in the table below, the district has shown significant growth in mathematics for all sub-groups and growth in reading.

	Percent of Students Scoring at or Above 50th Percentile	
	2000	2002
Mathematics		
All Students	37%	42%
Title I	24%	30%
Limited English Proficient	22%	25%
Special Education	13%	24%
Reading		
All Students	32%	34%
Title I	18%	20%
Limited English Proficient	9%	10%
Special Education	10%	19%

Source: California Department of Education

While the district has not yet fully achieved its goals for pupil achievement and still lags behind the county and state averages, it has shown positive growth. It is expected that with the district's strong planning, increased leadership capacity and focus, further growth may be evidenced over time.

The district has demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and cooperation throughout the review process. The documentation provided by the district has consistently exceeded expectations and the district has generally been quick to respond to requests. As this is the last six-month monitoring report, the standards that are included in this report are intended to provide a broad overview of how the district has performed overall in the area of pupil achievement.

Areas of Strength

The district has created a strong instructional foundation through careful and deliberate planning. The focus that the district has developed for improving student achievement is pervasive and has translated into goals and action steps that are meaningful and being implemented.

1. Strategic priorities are clear and well understood. The district's planning is centered about seven strategic priorities that collectively support the goal of improved student achievement. The process that the district has used to share and disseminate information about the priorities has brought the priorities to life in the district. The priorities are infused in all aspects of planning, in-

cluding the district's school improvement planning process and local education agency plan. The consistency among the plans has created an environment that is supportive of holistic planning and implementation.

2. The district is engaged in data-driven decision-making. The district has oriented principals, teachers, and district staff to the importance and value of using assessment data to inform instruction. This has been accomplished through professional development and structures that require staff to consider data when making decisions.

3. Principals operate as instructional leaders. At the beginning of the FCMAT review process principals felt burdened and overwhelmed by the challenges that lay ahead. While principals continue to feel challenged, there is generally a sense of purpose and direction that was not evidenced at the onset of the review. Over the past two years principals have been provided with necessary training and support to operate as instructional leaders.

Continuing Challenges

The district estimates that it faces a \$14 million deficit during the 2003-04 school year if changes to programs and staffing are not made. As a result, the district has had to make some difficult choices this year, including laying off approximately 300 teachers and 11 administrators. The staff reductions will directly affect educational programs. For the 2003-04 school year the district plans to eliminate class size reduction in kindergarten to grade three, counselors at middle and high schools, and non-required electives at secondary schools. The district has indicated that such reductions should not harm the quality of education, as it will continue to maintain its focus on its goal to improve student achievement.

The current budget situation will be an added challenge for the district as it works to build on its successes to date. There are several areas that were identified during the review that the district should continue to work on in upcoming years.

1. Support college readiness of students. Counselors provided an important source of support to students as they prepared for college. Counselors helped ensure that students were in appropriate courses and that they were familiar with their college opportunities. With many counselors likely to be eliminated, the district will need to find a way to replace this resource for students. It may want to consider building on its current partnerships with local colleges and universities to provide counseling to students to ensure awareness and readiness for college.

2. Provide principals and teachers with support and strategies to deal with program cuts. The elimination of class size reduction and counselors will directly impact the workload of principals and teachers. In addition, such reductions may also directly impact the attitude and morale at school sites. The district should offer concrete strategies to sites to cope with reductions in staff to ensure that school and district improvement goals are met.

3. Increase learning opportunities for low-performing students. The district's local education agency plan identifies strategies to provide extended day and summer school learning opportunities for low-performing students. Such opportunities will be critical if the district is to successfully close the achievement gap for its lowest performing students.

4. Evaluate intervention strategies. The district should use data to evaluate intervention choices and instructional strategies to determine the most cost-effective methods for meeting its goals. This is incorporated as part of the school improvement plans, but the district should be pursuing district-wide evaluation of interventions and strategies.

The district has laid a strong foundation for improvements in student achievement. The district faces a significant challenge in the coming school year with significant budget cuts, but a consistent focus on student achievement will hopefully sustain growth in achievement. The district has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short amount of time and there is no reason to expect that such growth will not continue into the future.

The review of the Pupil Achievement area during the fourth six-month progress review period, included the assessment of 12 targeted standards of the 63 professional and legal Pupil Achievement standards. The average rating of all assessment standards for this operational area has increased as seen below, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

July 2, 2001	2.76
January 2, 2002	3.45
July 2, 2002	4.24
January 2, 2003	5.03
July 2, 2003	5.68

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

The district has made significant overall progress during the two-year assessment and improvement process in the following areas:

- Division goals and objectives for individual staff members, including a personal professional development plan, have been developed.
- A monthly activities planning calendar has been developed.
- Cross training of staff has been accomplished.
- Improved reference checking procedures are in place.
- Development of individual employee desk manuals has occurred.
- An operational procedures manual for the personnel office has been developed.
- Communication and goal setting among the staffs of Management Information Systems, Fiscal, and Personnel has been improved.
- An employee orientation video has been developed.

Areas of concern that the district needs to continue to address in the future include:

- Addressing major issues on contract language affecting the district's ability to select and promote the best-qualified candidates.
- Promoting technology use in gathering and reporting the data needed for many Personnel Services functions.
- Updating job descriptions.
- Relocating certificated personnel leadership within the personnel office complex.

Operations

The Personnel Services Division has continued to improve the reference checking process in the selection of personnel. Written direction to administrators has been provided to clarify the responsibilities for completing the essential processes in the selection of personnel.

The Personnel Services and Fiscal Services divisions have yet to audit payrolls to identify employees who may be inappropriately assigned. The Personnel Services Division needs to establish procedures to ensure that substitute and short-term employees are appropriately utilized and in compliance with Education Code requirements.

The district has developed a video of the district's activities and expectations for orientation of new certificated and classified employees. A written orientation plan needs to be developed that includes the video presentation.

The district has developed revised job descriptions for all classifications; however, the bargaining units and the Governing Board have not approved the changes. The Personnel Services Division is in the process of reviewing all of its personnel files to remove any inappropriate materials. The district still needs to work with the bargaining units to modify contract language to delete references to the removal of derogatory material from personnel files.

The Personnel Services Division relies upon contract language and salary schedules for making salary determinations. Written procedures need to be developed to cover those situations where the contract is not clear or specific.

The district has developed appropriate processes and policies for meeting the requirements for tuberculosis monitoring. The district plans to develop a standard nondiscrimination statement to be used as required and posted appropriately.

Technology

The Personnel Services Division leadership is working with Management Information Services to develop a technology plan for Personnel Services. Some technology training for staff was provided when the new system was implemented. Additional training is needed. Cross training is continuing in the operation of the substitute calling system.

The Personnel Services Division leadership and the Management Information Systems staff are continuing to meet to develop an improved database system to meet the needs of the personnel office. Applicant tracking, credential information and seniority lists have been implemented into the new technology system. An applicant tracking system and a credential database have been developed and implemented for certificated employees. The Bi-Tech system provides some needed reports; however, it does not meet the needs of the Classified Services Department.

An online position control payroll system has been instituted. Credential data and personnel information continues to be a work in progress. The automated substitute calling system currently in place does not have the appropriate software needed to merge the Bi-Tech and substitute finding systems.

Employee/Employer Relations

The district has negotiated the creation of a Benefits Committee to examine the retiree health benefit costs and possible alternatives. The district's negotiations strategy now includes soliciting input from site administrators, sharing the input with the board and involving site and district office administrators in negotiations.

The district has successfully established a full-time Labor Relations Office with responsibility for all negotiations and labor relations. The Labor Relations Office and Personnel Services Division must meet regularly with leaders of the bargaining units.

The review of the Personnel Management area during the fourth six-month progress review period, included the assessment of 22 targeted standards of the 96 professional and legal Personnel Management standards. The average rating of all assessment standards for this operational area has increased as seen below, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

July 2, 2001	5.30
January 2, 2002	5.83
July 2, 2002	6.48
January 2, 2003	6.84
July 2, 2003	7.07

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The district has made significant improvements in the area of financial management in the two years of this review. The Assistant Superintendent of Fiscal Services has reorganized the Business Division and has filled key positions with capable staff. Both the first and second interim reports were positive certifications.

Significant progress has also been achieved in the following areas:

1. The board policy regarding fraud prevention and detection has been developed.
2. The new Internal Auditor has developed and distributed audit guidelines to appropriate administrators within the district.
3. Budget adoption, reporting, and filing of the first and second positive certification reports have all been completed on time, with commendations from the Contra Costa County Office of Education.
4. Budget monitoring has increased significantly, including the provision of workshops on monitoring budgets.
5. The development of the routine restricted maintenance account, along with appropriate budget monitoring, has been achieved.
6. The district has made significant progress regarding systems training of site personnel on attendance accounting, particularly in the area of the SASI attendance implementation.
7. The district has achieved success in the use and development of several systems that provide multiple-year financial projections.
8. Guidelines for the development of collective bargaining parameters have been achieved. Trust and reliability of information have been enhanced. Communication to the Governing Board, the public, and labor unions has been expanded.

The following areas are in need of additional attention:

1. While the Management Information Systems Department has made progress, additional attention, staff, and resources will need to be made available to achieve the desired level of support service. It was noted that the MIS Department is lacking a director with the appropriate secretarial staff. This position needs to be filled to enable the department to proceed with consistent and focused direction.
2. With the exception of the plans developed for the Finance Division, a high percentage of the district's classified staff continues to be exempted from classified service because the district has determined that these staff members are "short-term employees" in accordance with Education Code Section 45103.

This issue was discussed extensively in the November 21, 2002 report. Some sites, departments, and divisions will allow an employee to exceed the provisions of the Education Code, thus creating a permanent employee position and bypassing the hiring practices and procedures as outlined in board policy and collective bargaining agreements. This practice needs to be reviewed closely.

3. The lifetime health benefits continues to be a major issue for the district to resolve. There is an approximate \$275 million unfunded liability for lifetime health benefits provided to employees of the district. This practice is costing the district dearly, with an anticipated increase of approximately \$8.5 million in annual premiums for health insurance, scheduled to grow to \$9.7 million in the 2003-2004 budget. The district is attempting to address this issue on a collaborative basis with all employee groups. For the district to remain fiscally sound, and for current employees to have an opportunity to receive any additional compensation in the future, this issue must be resolved.
4. The district has expressed concerns about the time lines and costs of the annual audit conducted by the State Controller's Office. At the time of the team's review, the district had not received the audit for the 2001-02 year.

The West Contra Costa Unified School District has, in large measure, achieved the level of success proposed in the initial assessment report. The district is to be commended for the time and effort put forth in complying with the recommendations made in the improvement plan.

The review of the Financial Management area during the fourth six-month progress review period, included the assessment of 14 targeted standards of the 107 professional and legal Financial Management standards. The average rating of all assessment standards for this operational area has increased as seen below, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

July 2, 2001	4.38
January 2, 2002	4.68
July 2, 2002	5.16
January 2, 2003	5.88
July 2, 2003	6.50

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

The progress that the West Contra Costa Unified District has achieved in the two years of this monitoring has been remarkable. As important as was the passage of two local bonds, Measure M, a \$150 million General Obligation Bond passed in November 2000, and Measure D, a \$300 million General Obligation Bond passed in March 2001, the district's proper administration and utilization of funds and facilities priorities is the real reason for the vast improvement in the district's facilities.

An example of what the district has been able to achieve is the opening of the Lovonya DeJean Middle School in the heart of Richmond. While the school was only opened a few months ago, the district has not had a single graffiti abatement request. By having the school named for a member of the community and including some of Ms. DeJean's artwork, the community sees the school as its own and takes great pride in the facility.

If the necessary facilities funding continues to grow, the district should be able to modernize all of its facilities and establish a sound maintenance program for the ongoing upkeep of the schools. The current structure of the Facilities Department would be a great model for other districts to follow.

The review of the Facilities Management area during the fourth six-month progress review period, included the assessment of 19 targeted standards of the 111 professional and legal Facilities Management standards. The average rating of all assessment standards for this operational area has increased as seen below, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

July 2, 2001	5.26
January 2, 2002	5.53
July 2, 2002	5.98
January 2, 2003	6.43
July 2, 2003	6.98