

WEST FRESNO ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the West Fresno Elementary School District with the results of a systemic, comprehensive assessment in the following five areas of school district operations:

- Community Relations and Governance
- Pupil Achievement
- Personnel Management
- Financial Management
- Facilities Management

This report is the first of two six-month progress reports required by Assembly Bill 38 (Reyes, 2003) reviewing the efforts of the West Fresno Elementary School District advisory board, administrators and staff to address the recommendations for improvement made in the West Fresno Elementary School District Assessment and Improvement Plan. The plan was first presented to the district by the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) in July 2003.

This report provides data to the district, community and legislators to assist in facilitating more effective collaboration and in building capacity within the district to promote student learning. It assesses the progress made by the district over the last six months in implementing the recommendations of the improvement plan, and provides a process for the eventual return of the district to local governance.

Background

On March 6, 2003, Assembly Bill 38 (Reyes) was signed into law. The bill authorized the appointment of a State Administrator and provided an emergency state loan of \$2 million to the West Fresno Elementary School District. The legislation required the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) to conduct assessments of the West Fresno Elementary School District in five major operational areas. The bill further required the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) to file status reports for two six-month periods through June 2004 with various entities, including the Legislature, on the school district's progress in meeting the recommendations of the various improvement plans.

In March 2003 the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, appointed a State Administrator to the West Fresno Elementary School District to serve as his designee.

Also in March 2003, FCMAT organized a team of independent and external professional experts from both the private and public sectors to conduct an assessment of the district and to develop a plan of improvement in five school district operational areas: Community Relations and Governance, Pupil Achievement, Personnel Management, Financial Management, and Facilities Management. Fieldwork in the district was conducted in April and May, 2003.

In July 2003, FCMAT distributed the West Fresno Elementary School District Assessment and Improvement Plan to the district and various entities, including the California Department of Education and specific members of the Legislature. The July 2003 report assessed the district utilizing 357 professional and legal standards applicable to all California school districts. The use of a standards-based assessment process provided a baseline of information concerning district operations against which improvements made by the district can be measured over time.

In December 2003, the district accessed \$1.3 million of the \$2 million emergency apportionment made available by Assembly Bill 38. The funds were mainly required for three reasons. The district was required to repay the state \$430,000 for a 2001-02 audit finding relating to categorical program non-compliance issues. The district needed \$667,000 to offset its negative beginning balance for the 2003-04 fiscal year. The remaining amount is needed for lawsuits that are projected to be settled by the end of the fiscal year.

This progress report, January 2004, continues the use of legal and professional standards in the assessment process. However, the 357 legal and professional standards used in the development of the initial assessment and improvement plan in July 2003 have been reduced by FCMAT, in consultation with the California Department of Education, to a subset of 114 standards. These 114 standards provide the greatest probability for the district to successfully achieve the necessary improvement and return to local governance. They will remain the focus of the ongoing six-month progress reviews conducted in the district.

The findings presented in this report represent a snapshot of the district, and the recommendations are intended to assist the district with the improvement of student learning. In the time since the data-gathering fieldwork for this report, the district has continued to address certain areas of concern, making progress that may not be reflected in this report.

FCMAT would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the state-appointed administrator and the district's community and staff during the review process.

Returning the District to Local Governance

It is important to note the conditions that must be met for the district's eventual return to local governance. Assembly Bill 38, Reyes, Statutes of 2003, provides specifics regarding the return of the designated legal rights, duties and powers to the district's Governing Board. The authority of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and his administrator designee shall continue until certain conditions are met. The return of legal rights, duties and powers to the Governing Board occurs when the Superintendent of Public Instruction determines that the conditions of subdivision (e) have been satisfied.

AB 38 provides specific and direct responsibilities to FCMAT in assisting the SPI with the district's recovery. These duties include:

1. FCMAT shall complete the assessment and improvement plans for the district in five designated functional areas: Community Relations and Governance, Pupil Achievement, Personnel Management, Financial Management and Facilities Management.
2. Based upon its progress reports, FCMAT shall recommend to the Superintendent of Public Instruction those designated functional areas of school district operation that are appropriate for the Governing Board of the school district to assume.
3. FCMAT shall file written status reports that reflect the progress the district is making in meeting the recommendations of the improvement plans.
4. FCMAT, after consultation with the administrator, determines that for at least the immediately previous six months the district made substantial and sustained progress in the following functional areas:
 1. Community Relations and Governance
 2. Pupil Achievement
 3. Financial Management
 4. Personnel Procedures
 5. Facilities Management

As required by AB 38, FCMAT developed the West Fresno Elementary School District Assessment and Improvement Plan for the district in July 2003. In consultation with the California Department of Education, FCMAT has selected a subset of certain standards that will be targeted for ongoing progress reports. These standards have been selected as having the most probability to assist the district with the eventual return to local governance. The selected standards are listed at the end of Section One of this report and are also identified in the Table of Standards for each operational area in Section Two.

The results of this six-month progress report and the relative scaled scores applied to the standards assessed provide a current measure of the district's progress toward recovery. Within the five major functional areas, 114 standards were assessed in-depth. Each standard was measured for completeness and a relative scaled score from zero (not met) to a 10 (fully met) was applied. The average rating of all 357 assessment standards for all study areas for the West Fresno Elementary School District was 3.09 out of a possible score of 10.

The West Fresno Elementary School District is not required to reach a scaled score of 10 in every standard, but it is expected to make steady progress that can be sustained, as this is a requirement

of AB 38. It is reasonable to expect the district can reach an average range of at least six. As the average score of the subset of standards in a functional area reaches a level of six and it is considered to be sustainable, and no individual standard in the subset is below a four, FCMAT will recommend to the Superintendent of Public Instruction that this particular condition of AB 38 has been met and that the operational area could be returned to the Governing Board. Assembly Bill 38 suggests an incremental return of powers to the district. Subject to progress, recommendations every six months will address the functional areas of school district operation that could be returned to the Governing Board of the school district.

Additional conditions specified in AB 38 that need to occur for the return of all legal rights, duties and powers to the district's Governing Board include the following:

- The state administrator certifies that all necessary collective bargaining agreements have been negotiated and ratified, and that the agreements are consistent with the terms of the recovery and improvement plans.
- The district completes all reports required by the SPI and the state administrator.

The ultimate return of legal rights, duties and powers is based upon the Superintendent of Public Instruction's concurrence with the assessment of his administrator designee and FCMAT that the future compliance by the West Fresno Elementary School District with the improvement plans and the multiyear financial recovery plan is probable.

Study Guidelines

FCMAT's approach to implementing the statutory requirements of Assembly Bill 38 is based upon a commitment to a standards-based, independent and external review of the West Fresno Elementary 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 Fresno Elementary 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 of Professional and Legal Standards

FCMAT's 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.

Every standard is measured on a consistent rating format, and each standard is 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 employs an external and independent assessment process in the development of school district assessment and improvement plans. FCMAT assessment reports present findings and improvement plans based on the external and independent assessment from professional experts and agencies recruited to assist FCMAT in the assessment process. Collectively, these professional experts and 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 assessment and improvement plans are based on multiple measures. Testing, personal interviews, group meetings, public hearings, observations, review and analysis of data all provide added value to the assessment process. The providers are required to utilize multiple measurements as they assess the standards. This process allows for a variety of ways of determining whether the standards are met. All school district operations with an impact on student achievement, including governance, fiscal, personnel, and facilities are 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. The assessment reports include 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 providers is critical. As a result, a strong training component for board, staff and administration is called for consistently throughout FCMAT's assessment reports.

Of paramount importance is the community's role in local governance. The absence of parental involvement in education is a growing concern nationally. A key to success in any school district is the re-engagement of parents, teachers, and support staff. Parents generally care deeply about their children's future and most are willing to participate in improving their school district and enhancing student learning. The community relations section of FCMAT's assessment reports 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 a school district. This is emphasized by engaging state-recognized agencies 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 Fresno Elementary School District.

Study Team

The study team was composed of the following members:

For FCMAT:

Joel Montero
Roberta Mayor
Laura Haywood

For California School Boards Association – Community Relations and Governance:

Paul Richman	Felita Walker
Elizabeth Wells	Stephanie Farland
Samantha Dobbins	Martin Gonzalez
Davis Campbell	James Morante
Diane Greene	Ben Bartos

For Schromm and Associates – Personnel Management:

Charles Diggs
Michael J. Keebler

For MGT of America – Pupil Achievement:

Janelle Kubinec	Rachel Ehlers
Susan Van DeVeer	Fred Forrer

For School Services of California – Financial Management:

Jerry Twomey
Michele Huntoon
Curt Pollock

For School Services of California – Facilities Management:

Curt Pollock

Summary of Principal Findings and Recommendations

Except in the area of Pupil Achievement, the district has made little progress in the last six months in addressing the recommendations made in the initial West Fresno Elementary School Assessment and Improvement Plan, July 2003. Because the district is very small, with limited staff to implement the necessary improvements in the district, initial progress toward recovery in most district operational areas has been slow. In addition to the FCMAT review team, members of other oversight agencies, such as the State Controller's Office and the CDE Coordinated Compliance Review, have required the time and assistance of the district's limited office staff in completing their audit responsibilities.

However, some improvements in the district have been noted by the FCMAT review team. The State Administrator has provided a measure of stability for the staff and community and staff morale appears to have improved. Able employees have been assigned to perform key operational functions in the business and instructional areas. Improvement has been reported in instruction and staff development. The numerous lawsuits against the district have largely been resolved or settled. More notable progress should be observed in the next six months in addressing the recommendations in the improvement plan.

A summary of the findings and recommendations for this six-month progress review period are presented in the five operational areas of Community Relations and Governance, Pupil Achievement, Personnel Management, Financial Management, and Facilities Management. Section Two of this report provides further detail for each of the individual standards reviewed.

Community Relations and Governance

In the area of Community Relations and Governance, with the exception of a few important standards, the West Fresno Elementary School District has made meager to no progress in most priority standards identified for review.

Communications

In its *internal* communications, the district has shown some progress in instituting more systematic communications from the district administration to staff. Monthly meetings of all staff are now occurring. However, it could not be determined whether these staff meetings and/or other avenues offer sufficient opportunities for staff to provide input into school and district operations. Staff morale continues to improve, with the staff generally reporting that communications have improved under the state administrator. Nevertheless, strategies for strengthening two-way communications with staff at all levels should continue to be developed and implemented. Development of a comprehensive communications plan for the district would help establish internal and external communications goals, provide structure, clarify staff responsibilities for communications and provide a basis for accountability.

In *external* communications, the state administrator continues to be the primary spokesperson for the district, but the protocol is not written. District procedures such as these should be formalized, distributed and institutionalized through district policy/regulations and as part of a larger district communications plan.

Parent/Community Relations

The district has made advances in complying with the distribution of key information to parents, including the annual parental notice of rights and uniform complaint procedures. School accountability report cards have not yet been issued, although work is under way to develop and distribute these materials in the current school year.

Efforts to encourage input from parents and community have shown small gains, including monthly “meet and greets” with parents as well as the state administrator’s open-door policy with parents. However, additional strategies are needed to encourage input from traditionally disenfranchised parents and community members.

Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees, School Site Councils

Forming new collaborative efforts with community groups remains a key area in which the district must develop a strategy.

Although school site councils have not completed their Single Plans for Student Achievement, they are actively working toward this goal. Development of the district’s Local Educational Agency Plan, a requirement of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, has laid the groundwork for the Single Plan by providing a needs assessment, analysis of student achievement data and strategies to support student achievement. The councils are continuing to work with an outside consultant in this process and expect to have the plans available this school year. As the work is completed, the school site councils and the state administrator or designee should ensure that these site plans contain the elements required by law.

Policy

Maintenance and organization of the policy manual remain largely unchanged, although there is evidence of a few newly adopted policies. Many policies mandated by state or federal law do not appear in the district’s policy manual or do not reflect current law. As changes in law occur, the district’s mandated policies become more and more outdated. The district must develop a systematic plan to adopt policy, ensuring that its outdated policies are revised and updated and meet all the requirements of federal and state law.

No information was available to assess the extent to which the board in its advisory capacity has supported district policies. There is also no evidence that policies are used as a guiding force in the district. Updating of district policies to reflect current law and district practice will be needed before policies will be meaningful and useful to the board and staff.

Board Roles/Boardsmanship

The advisory board has begun meeting on a monthly basis, but attendance by all members has not been regular. All board members need to make every attempt to regularly attend advisory board meetings. Board members have received no recent continuing education to increase their understanding of school governance or critical education issues. However, several members indicated interest in participating in the California School Boards Association annual conference in December.

All members of the advisory board were invited to offer their input in this six-month progress review, but no members responded. The work and contributions of the advisory board have not been determined since meeting minutes have not been recorded.

Progress on some of the identified standards in the area of board roles can not yet be determined because the board, in its advisory capacity, lacks decision-making authority. Thus, the board has not yet been involved in conducting or using results of needs assessments or establishing a vision/mission for the district. Also, since neither staff nor members of the public attend advisory board meetings, the board's behavior and respect toward these groups in board meetings have not been observed.

Board Meetings

Little or no progress has been made on most of the priority standards pertaining to board meetings. The advisory board is now meeting monthly. The district indicates that agendas are being properly posted, but documentation confirming this assessment was unavailable. Public participation and comment should be an integral part of the meeting and minutes should be recorded, in accordance with district bylaws. Demonstrating progress on these standards is crucial because it is an area in which the district was deficient in the past.

Conclusion

The review of Community Relations and Governance included the assessment of 29 professional and legal standards during this first six-month progress review period. The average rating of all 60 assessment standards for this operational area has increased to **2.11**, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible. This rating was 1.76 in the July 2003 Assessment and Improvement Plan report.

A subset of 28 standards has been identified in the area of Community Relations and Governance. These 28 standards will be reviewed in subsequent six-month progress reviews. An average rating of 6.0 in this subset, with no standard rated lower than a 4, will indicate that the district has met the criteria for the return of this operational area to local governance. The average rating of the identified subset of Community Relations and Governance standards at this review period is **2.04**.

Pupil Achievement

In the past six months the West Fresno Elementary School District has made notable progress on the majority of the standards related to pupil achievement. District administrators and teachers spent a large portion of the summer break planning for the 2003-04 school year. At the close of the first trimester the prevailing attitude of the district's instructional staff is one of growing stability and confidence.

Using the Local Educational Agency (LEA) Plan as its guiding document, the district has implemented a comprehensive professional development schedule to train staff on how to better assess and teach to their students' individual needs. The district is also developing School Improvement Plans that will lay out more specific objectives for each of its two sites. The district has committed to promoting student literacy, and most curricular and scheduling decisions are driven by this strategic objective.

Teachers and administrators report feeling as though the district finally has a clear vision to guide decisions related to curriculum and instruction, and that goals and objectives have been well articulated. Teachers seem to have confidence in their administrators at the site and district levels and the majority seem "on board" with the direction the district is pursuing.

The district has spent the past six months planning and articulating goals and strategies, and as such, is in the early implementation stages in addressing the identified standards. The district has also begun to implement a number of promising action steps related to pupil achievement. These include:

- ***Identifying a Strategic Focus.*** The district has targeted improving students' literacy as a priority and has placed appropriate resources behind the pursuit of this goal.
- ***Developing a Vision and Plan for Professional Development.*** The district has used its LEA Plan to formalize professional development goals and activities. It has committed time and resources to ensure that professional development activities are well planned and effective.
- ***Using Assessment Data to Drive Decision Making.*** Appropriate assessment data has been collected and plans are in place to use it to guide instruction.
- ***Developing Strategies for English Language Learners.*** English Language Learners are grouped for a part of the instructional day to receive targeted English Language Development (ELD) instruction.

Areas in which the district has made improvements, but that require additional attention include:

- There are still classrooms that lack qualified teachers with appropriate credentials, particularly at the middle school campus and with regard to the instruction of English Learners (EL).
- District procedures and policies should be defined and communicated to parents more effectively, especially regarding student discipline and grade-level expectations and benchmarks.
- Additional intervention and enrichment strategies must be developed and implemented to address the needs of underachieving and academically advanced students. This may include reconsidering the use of after school and summer school programs, as well as classroom groupings.
- Financial management practices should be defined and implemented to ensure the appropriate use and allocation of resources to support instruction.

If the district continues to implement its plans and pursue the goals and objectives presented in the LEA Plan, it will continue to make progress toward sustainable implementation of the identified standards and improvement of pupil achievement.

Conclusion

The Pupil Achievement review included the assessment of 20 professional and legal standards during this first six-month progress review period. The average rating of all 55 assessment standards for this operational area has increased to **2.67**, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible. This rating was 2.18 in the July 2003 Assessment and Improvement Plan report.

A subset of 20 standards has been identified in the area of Pupil Achievement. These 20 standards will be reviewed in subsequent six-month progress reviews. An average rating of 6.0 in this subset, with no standard rated lower than a 4, will indicate that the district has met the criteria for the return of this operational area to local governance. The average rating of the identified subset of Pupil Achievement standards at this review period is **2.81**.

Personnel Management

Since the study team's report of July 2003, the district has reorganized its Personnel Office. The existing Executive Secretary has been reclassified to Administrative Assistant to the State Administrator, with expanded responsibilities as the district's receptionist/switchboard operator, substitute caller and point person for processing inter-district transfers.

The Personnel Office has been moved to an area just outside the State Administrator's office. The Administrative Assistant now works overtime to meet all the new job demands. This action has reduced the time available to work on addressing the personnel standards contained in the July 2003 report. Recently, a new Accounting Technician/Receptionist position was approved. When filled, this new position will relieve the Administrative Assistant of the receptionist/switchboard responsibilities and provide more time to address the personnel standards.

Although some improvements have been made in the district's personnel operations in organizing personnel files, establishing salary schedules, developing a classified handbook and addressing certificated evaluations, there are still areas for significant growth. There is a lack of current policies and written procedures, missing and non-existent job descriptions, classification and salary placement concerns, minimal compliance with state and federal employment requirements, lack of classified performance evaluations, and inaccuracies in the employee database.

Summary of Personnel Management Findings

The Personnel Office has developed employee handbooks for classified employees and substitute teachers. A draft classified hiring procedures document needs to be completed and implemented, as do board policies in the areas of recruitment, hiring, evaluation and dismissal of employees.

The Personnel Office has established certificated employment interview questions, rating sheets and a summary rating form. Teacher vacancies are being widely advertised in the Fresno area. Written procedures that describe the overall selection process need to be developed. Vacancies need to be advertised on Ed-Join, and administrators need training in the process. The Personnel Office has established effective procedures for the processing of new employees, including the use of a check-off sheet listing all required forms and documents.

Job descriptions are either missing or outdated for most job classifications. Current efforts to establish a job description for every classification need to remain focused and a time line developed for completion.

The district has been working with the Fresno County Office of Education to keep current on credential information. There is a need for the training of additional staff to act as backup to the Personnel Office staff for credentialing duties. The number of emergency permit teachers and teachers on waivers has been reduced from ten emergency permits to seven and from two waivers to zero.

District employees continue to receive valuable and legally required information at the time of employment on sexual harassment, communicable diseases and child abuse reporting. Ongoing, annual training of all employees in legally mandated areas still needs to be standardized and implemented on a consistent basis.

The district has drafted numerous job descriptions. All include a “physical abilities” section designed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). There is a continuing need to work on policies and regulations in this area and to address ADA requirements on the employment applications.

The Personnel Office has developed a Request for Personnel (RFP) form that is used to initiate all personnel transactions. Currently, the use of this form is voluntary. Making its use mandatory and requiring budget signoff on the form before it goes to Personnel will strengthen the position control process.

The Personnel Office has moved its employee database into a new county system. The data contains incorrect or missing information for job titles, work locations and credentials that needs to be corrected or updated as soon as possible.

The district has begun working on changes in the classified employee evaluation form. The form needs to be completed and implemented. There is still a need for a board policy and written procedures in the area of classified evaluation.

The Personnel Office and Business Office each have collected salary information on various individual work classifications. Expanded collection of data on salary schedules and fringe benefits from comparable districts is needed, as is the exploration of the formation of a district benefits committee. The study and establishment of a viable classification system remains critical for the district.

The district employed a new chief business officer who has started to develop procedures and forms that will provide the district with critical financial information during the collective bargaining process.

The district also needs to provide training to its administrators and supervisors on handling grievances and using problem-solving methods as employee problems arise.

Conclusion

The review of Personnel Management included the assessment of 20 professional and legal standards during this first six-month progress review period. The average rating of all 54 assessment standards for this operational area has increased to **3.41**, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible. This rating was 1.76 in the July 2003 Assessment and Improvement Plan report.

A subset of 21 standards has been identified in the area of Personnel Management. These 21 standards will be reviewed in subsequent six-month progress reviews. An average rating of 6.0 in this subset, with no standard rated lower than a 4, will indicate that the district has met the criteria for the return of this operational area to local governance. The average rating of the identified subset of Community Relations and Governance standards at this review period is **3.38**.

Financial Management

FCMAT's July 2003 report noted the general lack of formal policies and procedures for virtually every area and function encompassed by the Business Office. Business operations had been hampered by the lack of historical information and documentation, the relative inexperience of staff, and the need for a full-time Business Manager. At that point in time, the major challenges faced by the State Administrator to improve financial management included:

- Recruiting and retaining staff with the appropriate technical skills
- Dedicating resources to develop policies and procedures and training staff
- Instilling a culture of professionalism throughout the staff
- Implementing changes that will be continued in the future when the Governing Board regains its powers

In the six months since the July 2003 report, the district has not implemented a detailed and coordinated plan to address the recommendations made in that report. This is due to the relatively short period of time, limited staff and resources, and large demands placed on staff by the competing demands of various oversight entities. As a result, the district has not achieved most of the objectives. Significant issues remain in developing comprehensive policies and procedures, segregating duties, and establishing a formal process to providing comprehensive and ongoing training for staff.

The district has hired a full-time Business Manager, who appears to possess the technical skills and commitment to establish an effective Business Office. In addition, the district is in the process of hiring an additional accounting clerk to provide for better separation of duties and more efficient processing of transactions.

Also, the district has made improvements to its financial management systems with the conversion to a new student data and attendance accounting system, and the migration of most business functions to the county's financial and personnel system. These changes have helped to improve efficiency, provide greater control over the recording of transactions, and improve the accuracy of financial reporting.

Nevertheless, the district still has significant issues to address. The major items still to be addressed include:

Budget Development and Monitoring

- Utilizing a detailed budget calendar – the district is in the process of developing this calendar
- Utilizing budget development worksheets
- Establishing a budget advisory committee
- Correlating budgeted expenditures by site, program, and/or department to specific educational priorities and goals
- Implementing position control
- Projecting net ending balance on a monthly basis

Accounting Policies, Procedures, and Controls

- Establishing comprehensive accounting policies and procedures
- Segregating duties and implementing internal controls with regard to purchasing, receiving, and accounts payable
- Segregating duties and implementing internal controls with regard to revenue, cash receipts, and bank reconciliations
- Complying with program requirements for categorical programs
- Fully implementing all pertinent functions of the county's financial and personnel/position control systems
- Establishing a formal training plan and providing comprehensive training to all Business Office staff
- Establishing policies and procedures to provide adequate oversight and monitoring for charter schools

Ultimately, the greatest challenge for the district in achieving fundamental reform in financial management is having sufficient capacity to implement and sustain needed changes. The issue of sufficiency includes 1) having an adequate level of staff; 2) having staff with sufficient technical skill; 3) having documented policies and procedures; and 4) having adequate management information systems.

Conclusion

The review of Financial Management included the assessment of 24 professional and legal standards during this first six-month progress review period. The average rating of all 106 assessment standards for this operational area has increased to **1.80**, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible. This rating was 1.67 in the July 2003 Assessment and Improvement Plan report.

A subset of 24 standards has been identified in the area of Financial Management. These 24 standards will be reviewed in subsequent six-month progress reviews. An average rating of 6.0 in this subset, with no standard rated lower than a 4, will indicate that the district has met the criteria for the return of this operational area to local governance. The average rating of the identified subset of Financial Management standards at this review period is **1.54**.

Facilities Management

While the West Fresno School District had every intention of working on updating Governing Board policies and safety plans to provide the staff and students with better guidance, little has changed in the operational area of facilities management since the initial July 2003 report. The lack of change has been due to two primary factors.

The first factor is the impact of state audit work on the district staff. West Fresno School District is very small, with very few staff to answer the requests for information from the many oversight agencies in the district. This leaves less time for the district staff to perform day-to-day tasks. Frequently, the number of reviewers in the district outnumbers the district staff responsible for fiscal matters.

The second factor is the amount of litigation the district has had to address in the last year. The district is still dealing with the effects of the termination of various employees by previous superintendents and the Governing Board. Since the State Administrator arrived in the district, he has had to deal with 17 lawsuits relating to various personnel actions. The State Administrator's time has been taken away from instructional and administrative responsibilities to bring the litigation to closure.

Since these two factors are so time consuming, little time was available to develop board policies, administrative regulations, work on the categorical compliance issues, and supervise the instructional program. As a result this six-month follow-up review reports little progress.

However, because the district complex is small, and modernization of the facilities has taken place recently, the facilities generally are in good condition. The current facilities provide ample support for the district's instructional program.

Conclusion

The review of Facilities Management included the assessment of 21 professional and legal standards during this first six-month progress review period. The average rating of all 82 assessment standards for this operational area has increased to **5.48**, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 the highest score possible. This rating was 5.20 in the July 2003 Assessment and Improvement Plan report.

A subset of 21 standards has been identified in the area of Facilities Management. These 21 standards will be reviewed in subsequent six-month progress reviews. An average rating of 6.0 in this subset, with no standard rated lower than a 4, will indicate that the district has met the criteria for the return of this operational area to local governance. The average rating of the identified subset of Facilities Management standards at this review period is **3.81**.

Implementation Plan

In the West Fresno Elementary School District Assessment and Improvement Plan, July 2003, FCMAT assessed the district using 357 professional and legal standards in five operational areas of school district management. In this January 2004 report FCMAT assessed fewer standards to allow the district to focus its improvement efforts in specific areas.

FCMAT, in collaboration with the California Department of Education, has identified a subset of 114 standards that will be assessed in subsequent six-month reports. These include some of the standards assessed for this report, but other standards have been added and some deleted in each of the five operational areas. The 114 standards selected provide the most probability that the district, if it addresses the standards successfully, will be able to achieve the necessary improvement and return to local governance.

Although all 357 of the professional and legal standards utilized in the comprehensive assessment process are important to any district's success, focusing on the identified subset of 114 standards will enable the West Fresno Elementary School District to more quickly achieve a return to local governance.

The subset of 114 standards in the five operational areas include:

- 29 standards in Community Relations and Governance
- 20 standards in Pupil Achievement
- 20 standards in Personnel Management
- 24 standards in Financial Management
- 21 standards in Facilities Management

These standards are identified on the next few pages and in the Table of Standards following each of the five operational areas in Section Two of this report. The tables identify the standards designated for review for the July 2004 progress report.

As the average score of the subset of standards in an operational area reaches a level of six and it is considered to be sustainable, and no individual standard in the subset is below a four, FCMAT will recommend to the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) that this particular condition of AB 38 has been met and that this operational area could be returned to the Governing Board. Subject to progress, recommendations every six months will address the functional areas of school district operations that could be returned to the Governing Board of the school district on an incremental basis. The ultimate return of legal rights, duties and powers will be based upon the SPI's concurrence with the assessment of his administrator designee and FCMAT.

The average score in each operational area subset is indicated below. Average ratings for January 2003 in each operational area increased over the ratings in the initial FCMAT report in July 2003. Subsequent six-month reviews will report the district's progress over time with new ratings.

Average Rating in Each Subset, July 2003:

- Community Relations and Governance: average rating **1.36**, with **26** standards under a 4.
- Pupil Achievement: average rating **1.71**, with **20** standards under a 4.
- Personnel Management: average rating **2.52**, with **13** standards under a 4.
- Financial Management: average rating **0.83**, with **24** standards under a 4.
- Facilities Management: average rating **2.86**, with **13** standards under a 4.

Average Rating in Each Subset, January 2004:

Community Relations and Governance: average rating **2.04**, with **23** standards under a 4.

Pupil Achievement: average rating **2.81**, with **15** standards under a 4.

Personnel Management: average rating **3.38**, with **11** standards under a 4.

Financial Management: average rating **1.54**, with **24** standards under a 4.

Facilities Management: average rating **3.81**, with **12** standards under a 4.

FCMAT will conduct on-site fieldwork in the district in April and May, 2004. A second six-month progress report is expected to be published July 2004.

West Fresno Elementary School District

Standards to be addressed over the next six-month period

FCMAT, in collaboration with the California Department of Education, has identified a number of standards in each operational area that the district should address as most pressing. These standards will be reviewed during each six-month review period. A table of standards, with the specific standards targeted for focus during the six-month review period, can be found at the end of each of the sections of the report dealing with the five operational areas of Community Relations and Governance, Pupil Achievement, Personnel Management, Financial Management, and Facilities Management.

Community Relations and Governance

- 1.1 The district has developed a comprehensive plan for internal and external communications, including media relations.
- 1.2 Information is communicated to the staff at all levels in an effective and timely manner.
- 1.4 The district effectively implements strategies for communicating with parents, the community and the media.
- 2.1 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).
- 2.2 A school accountability report card is issued annually for each school site (EC 35256).
- 2.3 The district has developed and annually disseminates uniform complaint procedures (Title 5, Section 4621, 4622).
- 2.7 Parents and public input into school and district operations is encouraged.
- 2.10 Board members are actively involved in building community relations.
- 3.8 The school site council develops a Single Plan for Student Achievement at each school applying for categorical programs through the consolidated application (EC 64001).
- 3.9 School plans are comprehensive and have sufficient content to meet the statutory requirements (EC 64001).
- 4.1 Policies are written, organized and readily available to all members of the staff and to the public.
- 4.3 The board has adopted all policies mandated by state and federal law.

- 4.6 The board supports and follows district policies.
- 5.2 Board members participate in orientation sessions, workshops, conventions and special meetings sponsored by board associations.
- 5.3 Pertinent literature, statutes, legal counsel and recognized authorities are available to and utilized by the board to understand duties, functions, authority and responsibilities of members.
- 5.4 The board has identified the needs of the students, staff and educational community through a needs assessment process.
- 5.5 The board has established a district-wide vision/mission and uses that vision/mission as a framework for district action.
- 5.9 Functional working relations are maintained between the board and administrative team.
- 5.10 The board publicly demonstrates respect for and support for the district and school site staff.
- 5.11 The board demonstrates respect for public input at meetings and public hearings.
- 5.14 No individual board member attempts to exercise any administrative responsibility.
- 5.16 Members of the board act for the community and in the interests of all students in the district.
- 6.2 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).
- 6.3 Board members prepare for board meetings by becoming familiar with the agenda and support materials prior to the meeting.
- 6.5 Open and closed sessions are conducted according to the Ralph M. Brown Act (GC 54950 et seq.).
- 6.6 Meetings of the board proceed in a businesslike manner while allowing opportunity for full discussion.
- 6.8 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).
- 6.9 Board meetings focus on matters related to student achievement.

Pupil Achievement

- 1.1 A common vision of what all students should know and be able to do exists and is put into practice.
- 1.3 The district has long-term goals and plans to support student achievement improvements.
- 1.4 The district directs its resources fairly and consistently to accomplish its objectives.
- 1.6 The district's planning process focuses on supporting increased student performance.
- 2.1 The district through its adopted policy provides a clear operational framework for management of the curriculum.
- 2.2 Policies regarding curriculum and instruction are reviewed and approved by the school board.
- 2.3 The district has clear and valid objectives for students, including the core curriculum content.
- 3.2 Challenging learning goals and instructional plans and programs for all students are evident.
- 3.7 Each school has a school site council or leadership team, comprised of teachers, parents, principal, and students, that is actively engaged in school planning.
- 3.10 Clearly defined discipline practices have been established and communicated among the students, staff, board, and community.
- 3.14 The identification and placement of English Learners into appropriate courses are conducted in a timely and effective manner.
- 3.15 Curriculum and instruction for English Learners (EL) prepares EL students to transition to regular class settings and achieve at a high level in all subject matters.
- 3.16 The identification and placement of special education students into appropriate courses is conducted in a timely and effective manner.
- 3.17 Individual education plans (IEPs) are reviewed and updated on time.
- 3.18 Curriculum and instruction for special education students is rigorous and appropriate to meet special education students' learning needs.

- 4.2 Student achievement is measured and assessed through a variety of measurement tools (e.g. standardized tests, portfolios, projects, oral reports, etc.).
- 4.4 The administration and staff utilize assessment information to improve learning opportunities for all students.
- 5.1 Staff development demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose, written goals, and appropriate evaluations.
- 5.2 Staff development provides staff (for example, principals, teachers, and instructional aides) with the knowledge and skills to improve instruction and curriculum.
- 5.8 New teachers and principals are provided with training and support opportunities.

Personnel Management

- 1.1 The district has clearly defined and clarified policies and procedures relative to recruitment, hiring, evaluation and dismissal of employees.
- 3.1 Certificated employment procedures and practices are conducted in a manner that ensures equal employment opportunities. Written hiring procedures are provided.
- 3.2 The job application form requests information that is legal, useful, pertinent, and easily understood.
- 3.4 The district systematically initiates and follows up on reference checking on all certificated applicants being considered for employment. An appropriate reference checking form is completed and filed in the district office.
- 4.1 Classified employment procedures and practices are conducted in a manner that ensures equal employment opportunities. Written hiring procedures are provided.
- 4.3 The district systematically initiates and follows up on reference checking on all classified applicants being considered for employment. An appropriate reference checking form is completed and filed in the district office.
- 6.1 Personnel files are complete, well-organized and up-to-date.
- 6.4 The Personnel Office has a process in place to systematically review and update job descriptions. These job descriptions shall be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.
- 6.7 Wage and salary determination and ongoing implementation are handled without delays and conflicts (substitutes, temporary employees, stipends, shift differentials, etc.).

- 7.4 A clear implemented policy exists on the prohibition of discrimination.
- 7.5 The district has established policies, procedures and practices to ensure that all certificated employees hold valid certification to teach in each position in the district (EC 44006).
- 7.6 The district has established a process by which all required notices/in-services trainings have been performed and documented, such as child abuse reporting, blood-borne pathogens, sexual harassment, nondiscrimination, etc.
- 7.10 The district is in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in application procedures, hiring, advancement or discharge, compensation, job training and other terms, conditions and privileges of employment.
- 8.1 A systematic position control system is utilized and is integrated with payroll/ financial systems.
- 8.5 The Personnel Office has computerized its employee database systems including, but not limited to: credentials, seniority lists, evaluations, personnel by funding source, program, location and workers' compensation benefits.
- 9.1 The Personnel Office participates in the training of all management and supervisory staff responsible for employee evaluations and due process.
- 10.1 Clear policies and practices exist for the written evaluation and assessment of certificated employees.
- 10.2 Clear policies and practices exist for the written evaluation and assessment of classified employees.
- 10.3 The Personnel Office provides a process for the monitoring of employee evaluations and the accountability reporting of their completion.
- 12.1 The district has collected data that compare the salaries and benefits of its employees with districts of like size, geographic location and other comparable measures.
- 12.4 The district has a process that provides management and the Governing Board with information on the impact of bargaining proposals (e.g., fiscal, staffing, management flexibility, student outcomes).

Financial Management

- 2.2 The financial departments should communicate regularly with the Governing Board and community on the status of district finances and the financial impact of proposed expenditure decisions. The communication should be written whenever possible, particularly when it affects many community members, is an issue of high importance to the district and board, or reflects a change in policies.
- 2.5 The district should have formal policies and procedures that provide a mechanism for individuals to report illegal acts, establish to whom illegal acts should be reported, and provide a formal investigative process.
- 5.5 The district should have a clear process to analyze resources and allocations to ensure that they are aligned with strategic planning objectives and that the budget reflects the priorities of the district.
- 5.8 The district must have an ability to accurately reflect its net ending balance throughout the budget monitoring process. The first and second interim reports should provide valid updates of the district's net ending balance. The district should have tools and processes that ensure that there is an early warning of any discrepancies between the budget projections and actual revenues or expenditures.
- 6.2 An adopted budget calendar exists that meets legal and management requirements. At a minimum the calendar should identify statutory due dates and major budget development activities.
- 7.3 The district should have procedures that provide for the development and submission of a district budget and interim reports that adhere to criteria and standards and are approved by the County Office of Education.
- 7.9 The district should include in its audit report, but not later than March 15, a corrective action for all findings disclosed as required by Education Code Section 41020.
- 8.1 All purchase orders are properly encumbered against the budget until payment. The district should have a control system in place to ensure that adequate funds are available prior to incurring financial obligations.
- 8.2 There should be budget monitoring controls, such as periodic reports, to alert department and site managers of the potential for overexpenditure of budgeted amounts. Revenue and expenditures should be forecast and verified monthly.
- 8.5 The district uses an effective position control system, which tracks personnel allocations and expenditures. The position control system effectively establishes checks and balances between personnel decisions and budgeted appropriations.

- 11.1 An accurate record of daily enrollment and attendance is maintained at the sites and reconciled monthly.
- 11.2 Policies and regulations exist for independent study, home study, inter/intradistrict agreements and districts of choice, and should address fiscal impact.
- 11.7 School site personnel should receive periodic and timely training on the district's attendance procedures, system procedures and changes in laws and regulations.
- 12.2 The district should timely and accurately record all information regarding financial activity (unrestricted and restricted) for all programs. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) require that in order for financial reporting to serve the needs of the users, it must be reliable and timely. Therefore, the timely and accurate recording of the underlying transactions (revenue and expenditures) is an essential function of the district's financial management.
- 12.3 The district should forecast its revenue and expenditures and verify those projections on a monthly basis in order adequately to manage its cash. In addition, the district should reconcile its cash to bank statements and reports from the County Treasurer on a monthly basis. Standard accounting practice dictates that, in order to ensure that all cash receipts are deposited timely and recorded properly, cash be reconciled to bank statements on a monthly basis.
- 12.4 The district's payroll procedures should be in compliance with the requirements established by the County Office of Education. Standard accounting practice dictates that the district implement procedures to ensure the timely and accurate processing of payroll.
- 12.8 The district should comply with the bidding requirements of Public Contract Code Section 20111. Standard accounting practice dictates that the district have adequate purchasing and warehousing procedures to ensure that only properly authorized purchases are made, that authorized purchases are made consistent with district policies and management direction, that inventories are safeguarded, and that purchases and inventories are timely and accurately recorded.
- 12.9 The district has documented procedures for the receipt, expenditure, and monitoring of all construction-related activities. Included in the procedures are specific requirements for the approval and payment of all construction-related expenditures.
- 12.10 The accounting system should have an appropriate level of controls to prevent and detect errors and irregularities.
- 14.2 The district annually provides a multiyear revenue and expenditure projection for all funds of the district. Projected fund balance reserves should be disclosed. The assumptions for revenues and expenditures should be reasonable and supportable. [EC 42131]

- 15.3
 1. For long-term liabilities/debt service, the district should prepare debt service schedules and identify the dedicated funding sources to make those debt service payments.
 2. The district should project cash receipts from the dedicated revenue sources to ensure that it will have sufficient funds to make periodic debt payments.
 3. The cash flow projections should be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that any variances from projected cash flows are identified as early as possible, in order to allow the district sufficient time to take appropriate measures or identify alternative funding sources.

- 16.2 The State Administrator/Governing Board must ensure that any guideline the district develops for collective bargaining is fiscally aligned with the instructional and fiscal goals on a multiyear basis. The State Administrator/Governing Board must ensure that the district has a formal process where collective bargaining multiyear costs are identified and those expenditures changes are identified and implemented as necessary prior to any imposition of new collective bargaining obligations. The State Administrator/Governing Board must ensure that there is a validation of the costs and the projected district revenues and expenditures on a multiyear basis so that the fiscal resources are not strained further due to bargaining settlements. The public should be informed about budget reductions that will be required for a bargaining agreement prior to any contract acceptance by the Governing Board. The public should be given advance notice of the provisions of the final proposed bargaining settlement and be given an opportunity to comment.

- 18.8 Capital equipment and furniture should be tagged as district-owned property and inventoried at least annually.

- 20.1 In the process of reviewing and approving charter schools, the district should identify/establish minimal financial management and reporting standards that the charter school will follow. These standards/procedures will provide some level of assurance that finances will be managed appropriately, and allow the district to monitor the charter. The district should monitor the financial management and performance of the charter schools on an ongoing basis, in order to ensure that the resources are appropriately managed.

Facilities Management

- 1.1 All school administrators should be thoroughly familiar with the California Department of Education, Civil Defense and Disaster Planning Guide for School Officials, 1972. [EC 32000-32004, 32040, 35295-35297, 38132, 46390-46392, 49505, GC 3100, 8607, CCR Title 5 §550, 560, Title 19 §2400]

- 1.3 The district should be able to demonstrate that a plan of security has been developed, which includes adequate measures of safety and protection of people and property. [EC 32020, 32211, 35294-35294.9]

- 1.15 The Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) requires periodic inspections of facilities to identify conditions. [CCR Title 8 §3203]
- 1.18 A comprehensive school safety plan exists for the prevention of campus crime and violence. [EC 35294-35294.9]
- 1.19 Each public agency is required to have on file written plans describing procedures to be employed in case of emergency. [EC 32000-32004, 32040, 35295-35297, 38132, 46390-46392, 49505, GC 3100, 8607] [CCR Title 8, §3220]
- 1.26 The district conducts periodic safety training for employees. District employees should receive periodic training on the safety procedures of the district.
- 2.14 The district should collect statutory school fees. [EC 17620, GC 65995, 66000]
- 3.12 The district actively manages the deferred maintenance projects. The district should review the five-year deferred maintenance plan annually to remove any completed projects and include any newly eligible projects. The district should also verify that the projects performed during the year were included in the state-approved, five-year deferred maintenance plan.
- 4.2 Change orders are processed and receive prior approval from required parties before being implemented within respective construction projects.
- 4.4 Each Inspector of Record (IOR) assignment is properly approved.
- 5.1 The district complies with formal bidding procedures. (GC 54202, 54204, PCC 20111)
- 5.2 The district has a procedure for requests for quotes/proposals. (GC 54202, 54204, PCC 20111)
- 8.1 An Energy Conservation Policy should be approved by the Board of Education and implemented throughout the district
- 8.10 Toilet facilities are adequate and maintained. All buildings and grounds are maintained. [CCR Title 5 § 631]
- 9.1 The district has developed a plan for attractively landscaped facilities.
- 9.2 The goals and objectives of the technology plan should be clearly defined. The plan should include both the administrative and instructional technology systems. There should be a summary of the costs of each objective and a financing plan should be in place.
- 9.3 The Governing Board shall provide a warm, healthful place in which children who bring their own lunches to school may eat their lunch. [EC 17573, CCR Title 5 §14030]

- 9.4 The Governing Board of every school district shall provide clean and operable flush toilets for the use of pupils. [EC 17576, CCR Title 5 §14030]
- 10.1 The district should have a plan to promote community involvement in schools.
- 10.2 Education Code Section 38130 establishes terms and conditions of school facility use by community organizations, in the process requiring establishment of both “direct cost” and “fair market” rental rates, specifying what groups have which priorities and fee schedules.
- 10.3 Districts should maintain comprehensive records and controls on civic center implementation and cash management.