

# WEST FRESNO ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

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## Introduction

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 requires 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.

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 district operation:

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

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 Fresno Elementary 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 Fresno Elementary 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 Fresno and a priority listing of those needs that are most pressing through its comprehensive audit.

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 audit, 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 state-appointed administrator, and the district's community and staff during the audit process.

### ***Study Guidelines***

FCMAT's approach to implementing the statutory requirements of AB 39 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.

In order to participate in the process of the West Fresno Elementary School District review, providers responded to a Scope of Study that identified these standards as the basis of assessment and improvement. The providers demonstrated how the FCMAT-identified standards would be incorporated into their work. It is these standards on which the improvement plans for the West Fresno district were based. The standards, while identified specifically for the West Fresno Elementary 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 through 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 West Fresno 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
- 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 Fresno Elementary School District is the re-engagement of parents, teachers, and support staff. West Fresno 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 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	Mindy Querry
Holly Jacobson	Stephanie Farland
Samantha Dobbins	Martin Gonzalez
Davis Campbell	Mina Fasulo
James Morante	Jo Ann Yee
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### **For Schromm and Associates – Personnel Management:**

Richard A. Schromm  
Charles Diggs  
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### **For MGT of America – Pupil Achievement:**

Janelle Kubinec  
Rachel Ehlers  
Susan VanDeVeer  
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### **For School Services of California – Financial Management:**

Jerry Twomey  
Michele Huntoon  
Curt Pollock

### **For School Services of California – Facilities Management:**

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# Executive Summary

FCMAT's assessment of the West Fresno Elementary School District indicates that the district is having difficulty meeting many basic legal and professional standards. This report lists numerous findings and recommendations in five school district operational areas. The prioritization and redirecting of resources to address these recommendations must be the first order of business for the district.

## ***Principal Findings***

The full report includes a complete list of the various findings and recommendations for district improvement. Each finding and recommendation addresses the professional and legal standards previously identified in the assessment process. The following is a summary of the general findings and recommendations that are presented in greater detail by study area in Section Two of this report.

The assessment represents data collection and analysis at a specific point in time. The assessment team began work in April 2003 and concluded in May 2003. The formal report is scheduled for presentation to the district in July 2003. The district has been addressing some preliminary findings reported during the course of the assessment and is benefiting by ongoing feedback from the assessment team.

## **Community Relations**

### **Communications and Parent/Community Relations**

The district will need an aggressive communications and media relations effort to rebuild the district's credibility in the public's perception and improve student and staff morale. Currently the district does not have a comprehensive communications plan addressing external and/or internal communications. The development of a communications plan must be accomplished with broad input from the community, the administrators and other staff. Internal communications in the district seem to have improved under the state administrator. Senior staff members meet on a regular basis. The state administrator expresses a desire to have an "open door" policy for all staff.

Since the West Fresno ESD is a small district, mainstream media typically provide little or no general coverage of the district. However, West Fresno ESD's fiscal difficulties, dealings with the Fresno County Office of Education, and the state takeover legislation did receive considerable media attention. The district, schools and individual staff members recently have made more direct communications to parents and community members. The small size of the district allows home visits by teachers and phone calls to play a meaningful role in communications. In addition, the district has made efforts to reach out to parents whose first language is not English. The efforts of the parent advisors/liaisons appear to be making inroads in the community. Because the advisors are bilingual or multilingual, their translation services have provided a link to non-English-speaking parents for the district and for individual teachers.

Although there were opportunities for the public to address the board at each board meeting, the consensus of interviewees was that the board did not value the input from all segments of the community, and board meetings were an unwelcome place for the public. The board also appears to have had limited involvement in initiating and facilitating community partnerships.

#### Community Collaboratives, District Advisory Committees and School Site Councils

The district has few formal collaboratives with outside community agencies to jointly address the needs of children and families. There are some cooperative programs with the city police department and the county department of social services, and occasional assistance from other organizations, but no coordinated effort to develop such partnerships. There also are not any significant partnerships with private businesses. The few collaborative efforts that do exist are generally credited to staff. The board reportedly has not been actively involved in developing or supporting community collaboratives, although it is a goal of at least one board member.

The district has advisory councils for the Migrant Education and English Language Learner programs. Representatives from the Migrant Advisory Council and English Language Advisory Council jointly form a Parent Advisory Committee. There is also a combined School Site Council this year, after a year without any functioning site councils. A “leadership team” consisting of parents, staff and administrators is working on the district plan required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. These groups generally receive adequate training and information to perform their duties and appear to be representative of the diversity of the community. The School Site Council has specific legal responsibilities for developing and annually reviewing a Single Plan for Student Achievement.

#### **Policy**

This district has written policies placed into binders in a single, centralized location that is reasonably accessible to district staff and both school sites. However, some policies appear to be missing or numbered incorrectly, and the lack of a current index makes it difficult to locate policies. When board members or staff need to refer to district policy, they tend to make inquiries of the board president, Superintendent or legal counsel rather than using the manual.

The majority of policies are out of date. Most were adopted on or before 1990, and only 11 have been adopted since 1994. A substantial number of policies have no adoption date, and CSBA sample policies are interspersed with district-adopted policies in the policy manual with no indication as to whether these were reviewed or adopted by the board. Only a third of policies mandated by state or federal law appear in the policy manual. The district should begin a systematic review of its policies, setting a priority on updating the mandated policies and/or other policies that may have the greatest impact on student learning. The state administrator, who has the authority to adopt policies, should lead this effort.

#### **Board Roles/Boardsmanship**

Based on an assessment of their performance and conduct prior to the state takeover in March 2003, it is apparent that board members in this district lack a fundamental understanding of the governing board’s roles, responsibilities and legitimate authority.

Most striking was the board’s inability to foster any degree of stability in the district by hiring and supporting a permanent Superintendent. Without this leadership at the top, the board appears to have routinely engaged in operational matters more appropriate to the administration. For



example, some board members appear to have been involved in establishing positions and job descriptions, determining qualifications of candidates, interviewing and hiring candidates, setting salary levels, informally “evaluating” staff, and initiating or attempting to initiate terminations.

It also appears that board members did not always avail themselves of advice and information about the appropriate role and duties of boards, as well as budget information, offered by recognized authorities such as legal counsel and financial consultants. In fact, there is evidence that the board ignored the advice or opinions of its legal counsel and advisors on several occasions.

Staff and parents generally felt their input was not solicited or welcomed by the board. There is little evidence of staff recognition at board meetings. There is a considerable amount of resentment by site-level staff who feel they were not included in significant policy or program decisions such as an overhaul to the elementary school curriculum.

Before resuming governance of the district, all board members must actively participate in comprehensive and ongoing training to ensure that they fully understand the scope of their role and authority, as well as the principles of effective governance in all major areas of board oversight. Board members must also avail themselves of an array of pertinent literature and resources related to governance, school finance and other related topics to enhance their knowledge and ability to make sound decisions in the interests of students.

### **Board Meetings**

District compliance with legal requirements regarding the publishing of an adopted board meeting calendar and distribution of the board agenda could not be confirmed. Board bylaws reflect these legal requirements, but evidence of their implementation could not be found. Special meetings were frequent: for example, from January through June 2002, the board held five regular meetings and 12 special meetings.

To assist the board in conducting meaningful discussions, the district will need to prepare and distribute agenda packets that include relevant background information, analyses, references to law and district policies, budget implications, staff input and/or other appropriate information. Board members also will need to take seriously their responsibility for reviewing agenda materials prior to meetings.

To conduct meetings in a professional manner, the board must adhere to its own adopted bylaws, as well as legal requirements (the Brown Act) pertaining to open and closed sessions. The board has adopted bylaws pertaining to meeting conduct, but there were a number of reports that the board did not consistently follow legal requirements of the Brown Act. Beyond compliance with the legal requirements, a well-run, efficient meeting depends on the leadership of the board president and the conduct of each individual board member. Past board meetings in this district were described by interviewees as being characterized by frequent shouting, arguments, disorder, and the board retreating into long closed sessions while staff and the public waited.

Even in its current advisory role, the board can begin to establish a focus on student achievement by facilitating discussions and developing recommendations to the state administrator regarding policies that would have a positive impact on student learning.

The review of Community Relations included the assessment of 60 professional and legal standards. Of the 60 standards:

None were fully implemented-sustained  
None were fully implemented-substantial  
41 were partially implemented  
13 were not implemented  
6 were not applicable.

The average rating of the assessment standards for this operational area was 1.76 on a scale of 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

### **Pupil Achievement**

The challenges that the district faces in the area of pupil achievement are significant, but the State Administrator and his team are well equipped for the work that lies ahead. The past three years have seen both increases and decreases in the district's academic performance, but generally show signs of upward progress. Nonetheless, the district's two schools remain in the bottom decile of schools in the state.

Factors that may have some influence on the performance of students include, but are not limited to the following:

- The students in the district are generally low income (over 90 percent qualify for free or reduced priced meals).
- Approximately 50 percent of the students attending school in the district are classified as English Language Learners.
- The demographics of the community are rapidly changing from predominately African American to a combination of African American, Hispanic, and Asian students.
- There is a relatively high mobility rate attributable to families that rely on agricultural work for income.
- The district has encountered difficulties in hiring qualified staff. Approximately 15 of the district's 50 teachers do not hold the proper credentials.
- The district has experienced financial difficulties due to poor management by past board members and superintendents.

In addition to the elementary and middle school sites, the district also serves as the administrative agent to several charter schools. Data about the charter schools was not available to include in this report. Furthermore, the findings and recommendations presented in this report do not address the charter schools, as the district is not directly involved in the delivery of instruction at these schools.

The assessment of pupil achievement covered the following functional areas:

1. Planning Processes
2. Curriculum
3. Instructional Strategies
4. Assessment and Accountability
5. Professional Development

## **Planning Processes**

The district has contracted with The Literacy Connection (LitConn), a Fresno-based education consulting and planning firm, to support the development of its Local Education Agency (LEA) Plan and to also support professional development and implementation of plan components. The district has worked with LitConn in the past, so there is a shared understanding of the district's past challenges and motivation to overcome them. The LEA Plan provides a good starting point for school improvement planning, but the goals and objectives identified in the district's LEA Plan are too general to guide implementation and plan accountability. The district should consider developing an area of focus with input from administrators, teachers, parents, and students, to guide instructional improvement. The area of focus and LEA Plan should be used to develop site-specific school improvement plans that will guide the day-to-day activities to support improvements in pupil achievement.

## **Curriculum**

The district has done a good job ensuring that instructional materials are available for students. It is slightly behind the state's schedule for adopting standards-based curriculum, but it is in the process of selecting curriculum for science, reading/language arts, and English Language Development. The district should work on developing a curriculum management plan to guide its adoption and implementation of new curriculum. It will be critical to include input from teachers in this process.

## **Instructional Strategies**

The district does not currently group or track students. Teachers are expected to address the learning needs of all students through differentiated instruction. Outside of the regular instructional day, the district offers after school enrichment and summer programs. Low-performing students are encouraged or required to participate in these programs to make necessary academic gains. The district needs to improve how it identifies and supports students with special learning needs such as English Language Learners, special education, and GATE students. The district needs to develop a consistent process for screening, placing, and serving students with special needs.

## **Accountability and Assessment**

In addition to state level assessments, the district also supports numerous local assessments. Teachers regularly assess students and share results with their grade-level teams and site administrator. As the district implements its LEA Plan and develops its school improvement plans, it should create benchmarks for student performance in each subject area that are grade-specific. The benchmarks should be correlated with assessments. While teachers are familiar with assessments and the data generated by assessments, they would benefit from additional professional development and support to truly use assessment data to make decisions related to the most effective instructional approach for each student.

## **Professional Development**

Professional development has been a casualty of the absence of leadership. However, the district does recognize the importance of professional development. From March to May 2003 all teachers were required to attend "Teacher Basics" training to help improve classroom management skills. While this training could have been even more valuable at the beginning of the school year, it is a positive sign that training did occur at some point in the year. The district's

LEA Plan specifies several areas in need of professional development, including the support of teachers receiving their CLAD certification. In the future, professional development should be directly tied to the district's strategic goals and plans.

### **Conclusion**

Addressing improvements in pupil achievement will be a multi-year effort. The first priority for the district should be developing an area of focus and meaningful school improvement plans for each school site. The district's LEA Plan provides a strong foundation for such planning. During the 2003-04 school year the district should concentrate its efforts on developing plans and introducing processes that value the input of teachers and parents. In the 2004-05 and following school years the district should continue to refine its plans, but should be making significant progress on implementing improvements.

The FCMAT standards for Pupil Achievement are organized and presented under the following functional areas: Planning processes, Curriculum, Instructional Strategies, Assessment and Accountability, and Professional Development. The review of Pupil Achievement included the assessment of 57 professional and legal standards. Of the 57 standards:

- 1 was fully implemented-sustained
- None were fully implemented-substantial
- 46 were partially implemented
- 10 were not implemented.

The average rating of the assessment standards for this operational area was 2.18 on a scale of 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

### **Personnel Management**

The Personnel Services of the district traditionally has been managed by the Superintendent and his secretary. Currently, the district has a confidential position of Executive Secretary directing most of the personnel functions of the district. The district is lacking in numerous areas of sound personnel practices. Written procedures need to be developed to ensure the consistent, fair and equitable provision of services to all employees. State and federal compliance issues need to be addressed to comply with various laws.

Evaluation of district personnel needs to be established as a priority. Evaluation and due process training must be furnished to managers and supervisors so they can provide proper direction and assistance to their staff.

### **Certificated Recruitment and Selection**

The district affirmative action policies need to be reexamined to determine if the continued use of ethnic hiring goals is legally permissible. Written procedures and rating forms need to be developed that implement the board policy on recruitment and selection and further ensure consistent, fair and equitable application of the recruitment process. The application form needs to be revised to require the applicant to list all employment in positions other than teaching and to state if he/she has ever been terminated from a position. The ethnic tear-off questionnaire needs to be revised to indicate that its completion is voluntary.

The district's certificated recruitment activities need to be strengthened by creating some attractive recruitment materials that publicize the benefits of employment in West Fresno and provide some general information about the schools and community. Advertising vacancies on Ed-Join will help increase the size of the applicant pool. A process should be implemented to ensure that all applicants who are being considered for employment have their references checked and documented prior to employment. The staff should be trained in how to properly conduct and document such checks.

While the district has systems in place to record and monitor teacher credentials, the number of teachers working under emergency permits and waivers is significant for a district of this size. A greater effort to recruit and retain fully credentialed teachers must be made.

### **Classified Recruitment and Selection**

The process and procedures for the recruitment and selection of classified personnel need to incorporate wide advertising of vacancies, screening of applications for appropriate training, and skills and testing to ensure that only the best qualified are considered for employment. The Personnel Office needs to review its current instructional aide test to ensure that it is at a high enough level to meet both the Education Code requirements and the new requirements contained in "No Child Left Behind Act" legislation. The employment application should be revised to require the applicant to disclose and explain any cases where he/she was fired, terminated or asked to resign. The interview process needs to be documented on rating forms, and references must be checked prior to employment.

The district needs to implement the procedures required in Education Code Section 45103 regarding the hiring of short-term (temporary) employees.

### **Employment Induction and Orientation**

Prior to the 2002-2003 school year, the district had provided new certificated employees with an additional day of service for training and providing information about the district. Although this program was not offered this year because of staff changes, the program needs to be continued in future years. Also, a program or handbook that contains information about the district and its work rules should be developed for new classified employees. The Personnel Office currently has a procedure for efficiently processing a new employee and providing him/her with legally required material and information.

### **Operational Procedures**

The Personnel Office has recently organized all personnel files into a prescribed order and created a written checklist of materials that may be placed in the files. Removing all medical information from the files and storing such information in a separate, secure file can further enhance this process. A procedure needs to be established that specifies the steps that should be taken prior to placing derogatory material in a personnel file. Developing a desk manual for the Personnel Office that includes the necessary steps to perform the most critical tasks would help to ensure continuity of service whenever the incumbent is absent.

The administration of district wages and salaries should be better documented. There should be individual salary schedules for management and supervisors, confidential, classified and teaching

employees. Each salary schedule needs to include the date of the last board adoption and the size of any salary increase granted. Procedures should be established that set initial salary placement and future step increases.

### **State and Federal Compliance**

The Personnel Office has organized most of those tasks over which it has control, such as fingerprinting, tuberculosis testing, notification to new employees of their legal responsibilities and their rights to Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) of 1986 benefits. However, where state and/or federal law goes beyond the normal scope of the Personnel Office, there is significant failure to comply with various laws.

The district should develop a comprehensive board policy related to nondiscrimination. A system must be developed to ensure that employees receive notice of and access to in-service programs on legally mandated topics, such as sexual harassment. The district must also develop procedures that will assure its compliance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The identification of a Title IX Coordinator and postings of all current employment-related laws at all work locations also must be addressed.

### **Use of Technology**

The district has taken the initial steps to implement a position control system. However, some additional work is required. The new personnel requisition form needs to be utilized for all personnel changes. The personnel data in the district's business/personnel software package, Quintessential School System (QSS), needs to reflect actual job classification and work locations. Once the data is accurate, a staffing list should be run by location to validate staffing with budget adoptions.

The district relies on a manual substitute teacher calling system. The Personnel Office does not have an applicant tracking system but rather maintains two separate application procedures and filing systems. The district can enhance its current practices by establishing a list of applicants and some basic data in Microsoft Word, Excel or Access to facilitate tracking and written communication with applicants.

### **Evaluation/Due Process Assistance**

The evaluation of employees is a critical issue for the district. It appears that, until recent intervention by the State Administrator, employee evaluations were sporadic. For 2002-03, the district made a concerted effort to evaluate one-half of the certificated staff by April 15. The plan calls for evaluating the remainder of the certificated staff during 2003-04. This is an important start to establishing an ongoing system of evaluation for both certificated and classified employees.

The district and the certificated bargaining unit have discussed the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. While no written document was produced, the district indicated the program is scheduled to be implemented in 2003-04.

### **Employee/Employer Relations**

Employees are being paid on 2000-01 salary schedules. However, the classified employees do not have a true salary schedule or a well-defined classification system upon which salary payment can even be accomplished. The district must address the classification system together

with the revisions to, and establishment of, job descriptions. District-adopted salary schedules must also be reflected in individual salaries paid to employees.

The changes in administration have affected the collective bargaining process. As the administrative assignments stabilize, district administrators and supervisors should become an integral part of the district's bargaining teams.

The review of Personnel Management included the assessment of 56 professional and legal standards. Of the 56 standards:

2 were fully implemented-sustained

1 was fully implemented-substantial

43 were partially implemented

10 were not implemented.

The average rating of the assessment standards for this operational area was 2.93 on a scale of 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

### **Financial Management**

The conflict and controversy surrounding the board and the administration of the district during the past two years has left West Fresno essentially in the position to have to reestablish virtually all financial management policies, procedures, systems, and controls.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that staff is either relatively new or does not possess extensive technical knowledge. The Business Manager, with the support of the Fresno County Office of Education, is attempting to establish procedures for many of the basic financial management functions. However, given the limitations of the staff and the day-to-day needs of operating the district, the Business Manager does not have the time or resources to develop and implement comprehensive policies and procedures or train the staff. Further, it appears that the Business Manager is filling the position on an interim basis and, therefore, a successor must be hired to effect and sustain significant and lasting change in how the district manages its finances. The State Administrator will need to find an individual who has extensive technical knowledge and can be hands-on in performing the work.

Areas affected by the lack of appropriate policies and procedures include:

- Budget development and monitoring
- Purchasing and accounts payable
- Accounts receivable and cash controls
- Categorical programs

The major challenges faced by the State Administrator in improving financial management include:

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

### **Budget Development and Monitoring**

The district essentially has no formal policies and procedures regarding budget development. Basically, the budget was a roll-over document prepared by the Business Manager with no process or procedures for other managers, the board, or the community to have input. As such, the district does not:

- Utilize a detailed budget calendar
- Have a formal technical process to identify/project enrollment, ADA, revenues, and expenditures
- Utilize budget development worksheets
- Have a community budget advisory committee
- Have board study sessions regarding the budget
- Correlate expenditures by site, program, or department to the educational goals

Therefore, the budget development process does not lend itself to community input, effective communication, or technical consistency and soundness.

Given the district's deficit spending and the large variances between the P-2 projected year-end revenues and expenditures and actual revenues and expenditures, the prior budget monitoring was non-existent or ineffective at best. The district does not use position control or have formal budget transfer forms and only recently has begun to produce monthly budget reports and utilize encumbrance accounting. It still does not encumber payroll. Therefore, the current district procedures are not sufficient to ensure the accurate projection of revenues or sufficiently control expenditures. Without the implementation of comprehensive procedures to monitor revenues and expenditures throughout the year, the district is in jeopardy of inadvertently overrunning its budget.

### **Accounting Policies, Procedures, and Controls**

The key to monitoring and controlling the budget is the ability to produce accurate and timely financial information. Accounting policies, procedures, and controls are the tools used by districts to ensure that transactions are processed timely and accurately, financial information is reported appropriately and free from misstatement, and assets protected from theft or misappropriation. Due to the board conflict and turnover in staff, the district effectively has no formal accounting policies and procedures or internal controls. Further, staff has limited experience and/or limited technical expertise. As a result, the district has made numerous errors in processing and recording its financial transactions and has not been timely in filing its required reports. Further, this situation makes the district susceptible to errors or omissions in financial management and reporting.

### **Purchasing and Accounts Payable**

Consistent with the district's general lack of policies and procedures, the purchasing and accounts payable functions are not governed by a formal process. Specifically, the district does not have:

- Formal purchasing procedures or a purchasing manual
- A purchasing manager
- An approved vendor list
- A receiving warehouse
- A receiving document/report
- Specific controls over putting vendors on the accounting system



While district size is a limiting factor for items such as having a purchasing manager and warehouse, overall the district has not implemented procedures to provide adequate control over these functions. In fact, the district pays invoices without having a receiving report that verifies the goods were actually received. Further, the district does not mark invoices as paid, and duplicate payments have occurred in the past. Therefore, the district needs to implement comprehensive procedures to provide adequate control over purchases and payments.

### **Cash and Accounts Receivable**

Another area with significant procedural and control deficiencies is cash and accounts receivable. This area is of particular concern, as control and proper accounting for accounts receivable is crucial for budgeting and monitoring revenues. Further, cash is the asset most susceptible to theft/misappropriation. Weaknesses noted include:

- No formal policies or procedures for cash and accounts receivable
- Mail is distributed unopened to the Accounting Technician
- Checks are not logged by the receptionist
- Checks are not restrictively endorsed on the back
- Checks/cash are not recorded in a cash receipts journal
- Deposits are typically made only once a month by the Accounting Technician, who receives cash/checks and posts receipts to the general ledger
- No independent review/reconciliation of the bank statements is performed

It is imperative that the district implement procedures and controls in this area to ensure the accurate recording of revenue/receipts and to prevent theft/misappropriation of cash.

### **Categorical Programs**

Given its demographics, the district has a high level of eligibility for categorical funds. These funds are crucial to providing the educational programs and support that the students need. Therefore, it is important that the district comply with all requirements related to program operations, expenditure restrictions, and reporting obligations.

Currently, all categorical management and oversight functions are done by one staff member. The great responsibility and large workload associated with managing all categorical functions, particularly without clear procedures, specific compliance guidelines, or a formal calendar of mandatory activities, puts the district at risk of not meeting all requirements of the categorical programs. In fact, the district has had a significant number of findings related to state and federal programs in its audit reports. These instances of non-compliance put the district at risk of losing categorical funding and potentially being liable to repay categorical funds previously received. Accordingly, this is a significant area that the district needs to address.

### **Technology and Management Information Systems**

Given its small size and limited resources, both the district's need and ability to make major changes to its management information systems is minimal. The district currently utilizes the Fresno County Office of Education's system for its basic accounting and administrative management functions. This system is more than adequate to meet the district's needs and addresses those needs in a cost effective manner. However, the district does not fully utilize all system modules or capabilities. As a result, many functions and processes that could be automated through the county system are done manually. Such manual processes typically

lack strong internal controls and reduce the district's efficiency and accuracy in processing its financial transactions. Therefore, the district should work with the county to completely implement the current system. The district should also request that the county provide ongoing training and support.

The review of financial management included the assessment of 104 professional and legal standards. Of the 104 standards:

None were fully implemented-sustained  
4 were fully implemented-substantial  
45 were partially implemented  
53 were not implemented  
2 were not applicable.

The average rating of the assessment standards for this operational area was 1.67 on a scale of 10, with 10 the highest score possible.

## **Facilities Management**

### **District Economics**

The operating budget of the district has been and continues to be severely impacted by the near-bankruptcy of the district and ongoing debt service costs. The appointment of the State Administrator has provided the district with a renewed attitude of doing whatever it takes to turn the district around for the betterment of the students. This is seen most vividly in improvements to the facilities in the past couple of years.

While the district was able to pass a \$6 million General Obligation Bond, the use of these funds did not follow normal fiscal procedures, with the end result being the construction of a gymnasium that is underutilized.

As a result of these factors and others detailed within the report, the team found that the educational environment provided by the district's facilities has been improved but there are still needs that must be met. Millions of dollars from e-rate funding was spent to upgrade the technology of the classrooms, but now the program is clouded with an FBI investigation of how the funds were spent. This cloud could result in a repayment to the federal government of an undetermined dollar amount.

### **Community Support**

While the community is generally supportive of both individual schools and the district as a whole, it is important to recognize that both district standards and de-facto community standards affect the condition of schools. The recommendations for continued efforts to maintain and increase community involvement in schools are intended to help align these two potentially different standards.

### **School Safety**

No evidence of a school safety plan was found, though the current administrator and staff are developing a plan for compliance with the Federal No Child Left Behind program. The development of a comprehensive safety plan is well under way, but has not been completed and

implemented. Recommendations made regarding the use of visitor's badges and site safety plans are designed to deal with the most visible safety issues.

### **Facility Planning**

Planning for future facilities needs of the district is minimal since the district is experiencing declining student enrollment, primarily due to the recent fiscal emergency and the uncertainty of the improvement in the district's financial condition.

### **Maintenance and Custodial Service**

The maintenance and custodial staff need to be evaluated regularly. Employees not meeting the standards of the district should be evaluated more often with training provided, or should be terminated to provide the opportunity for new staff to bring in modern cleaning and maintenance skills.

### **Facilities Financial Management**

Normally, a small district has few facilities dollars of its own to spend for construction or renovation of existing facilities. However, the District has a combination of the \$6 million local bond money and more than \$3 million in state facilities funds to modernize the two schools. The final step is to close out the state projects and to determine if there are any funds left to spend on other waiting projects.

### **Staffing and Morale**

The morale of employees is recovering from the previous administrations. Employees are seeing support from the State Administrator. They see the administrator as someone to help boost morale rather than run the district.

### **Conclusion**

While FCMAT has established a comprehensive list of standards on which all school districts are measured, many standards do not apply to the West Fresno Elementary School District because of the size of the district. Approximately 30 standards have been determined to be not applicable to the district.

The review of facilities management included the assessment of 82 professional and legal standards. Of the 82 standards:

- 9 were fully implemented-sustained
- 9 were fully implemented-substantial
- 55 were partially implemented
- 7 were not implemented
- 2 were not applicable.

The average rating of the assessment standards for this operational area was 5.2 on a scale of 10, with 10 the highest score possible.



# **West Fresno Elementary School District**

## *Standards to be addressed over the next six-month period*

FCMAT has identified a number of standards in each operational area that the district should address as most pressing. Most of these standards will be reviewed during the first six-month review period. A chart of standards, with the specific standards targeted for focus during the first 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 Governance and Community Relations, Pupil Achievement, Personnel Management, Financial Management, and Facilities Management.

### **Governance/Community Relations**

- 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 board 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.
- 3.1 The board and Superintendent support partnerships and collaborations with community groups, local agencies and businesses.
- 3.8 Community collaboratives and district and school advisory councils effectively fulfill their responsibilities (e.g. researching issues, developing recommendations).
- 3.9 School plans for the School-Based Coordinated Program exist at each school participating in the program (EC 52850).
- 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 its own policies once they are adopted.
- 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 The board acts 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.
- 6.4 Board meetings are conducted according to a set of bylaws adopted by the board.
- 6.5 Open and closed sessions are conducted according to the Ralph M. Brown Act (GC 54950 et seq.).
- 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 Employment procedures and practices are conducted in a manner that ensures equal employment opportunities. Written hiring procedures are provided.
- 5.2 The Personnel Office has developed an employment checklist to be used for all new employees that include district forms and state and federal mandated information. The checklist is signed by the employee and kept on file.
- 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.
- 7.8 The district is in compliance with the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 (COBRA).
- 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.



- 10.2 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.
- 11.2 The district has various referral agencies available to its employees to assist employees in need.
- 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).
- 12.5 The Personnel Office provides clearly defined forms and procedures in the handling of grievances for its managers and supervisors.

## **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.

- 7.9 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.
- 12.3 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.
- 12.9 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.

- 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.
  
- 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 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]
  
- 1.25 The district maintains a comprehensive employee safety program. Employees should be aware of the district safety program and the district provide in-service training to employees on the requirements of the safety program.

- 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.