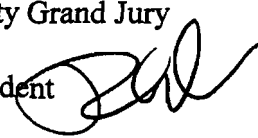


FILE

**PALO VERDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
295 NORTH FIRST STREET
BLYTHE, CALIFORNIA 92225**

MEMORANDUM.....
Office of the District Superintendent

September 26, 2002

To: Gale Soursais, Riverside County Grand Jury
From: Kate Wren, District Superintendent 
Subject: Response from Palo Verde Unified School District

Attached, please find the response from three (3) Members of the Board of Trustees of the Palo Verde Unified School District to the 2001-2002 Grand Jury Report.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

2001-2002 GRAND JURY REPORT
The Palo Verde Unified School District

Background:

The Palo Verde Unified School District (District) is located in Blythe, California. The name of the District comes from the fertile region known as the Palo Verde Valley. While the area's population is growing, it retains its agricultural roots. The geographical isolation from other districts and large cities has affected the hiring and retention of staff. That same isolation has negatively impacted the District in providing information to the community.

The District consists of three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative school. Total enrollment for K-12 is over 3,700 students. The District student enrollment is approximately 56% Hispanic, 26% Caucasian, 17% African American and 1% Other. The District receives approximately 10% federal dollars, 60% state, and 26% local dollars. The District budget for 2000-2001 was over \$26,660,000.00.

Findings:

1. The five member Palo Verde Unified School District Board of Education has three new members who were elected in 2002. One of the new members is a former superintendent of the District.

Guith: Agree

Morris: Agree

Manly: Agree

2. In September 2001, the superintendent resigned and an appointed superintendent served until April, 2002. Since that time there have been two additional interim superintendents.

Guith: Agree

Morris: Agree

Manly: Agree

3. The District Office has an administrator who was originally hired for federal and state funded projects, but due to the resignation of the superintendent, had to assume additional responsibilities for instruction and pupil personnel.

Guith: Disagree

Joyce Pacheco was hired by the Board as Assistant Superintendent.

Morris: Joyce went through the interview process. She was the best candidate we had. Dr. Fischer agreed that with the proper training, she could do a good job. That has not happened with the people leaving.

Manly: Agree

4. The District signed a contract in March 2002, for the purchase of the Palo Verde Community College facilities, after the college moved to a new location. The purpose for the purchase was to provide for the temporary relocation of each elementary school while renovations were occurring.

Guith: Disagree

The District continued with negotiations with Palo Verde Community College for the lease/purchase of the college. Never consummated. District signed lease papers in August 2002.

Morris: Agree

Manly: The previous Board of Trustees (Richard Dean Babb, Cindy Morris, Dariel Perez, and J.R. Conley) voted to purchase the old Palo Verde College Campus in November, 2001. The campus purchase passed with a 3-1 vote, with Perez voting against. This action was taken at the last Board meeting before the newly elected Board of Trustees was sworn into office. The former Board of Trustees voted to approve the purchase despite the request of the three newly elected Board members to put the purchase off until the next meeting, when they were sworn into office.

The true intent of the purchase was never disclosed to the public or to the members of the Board of Trustees. The buildings are being used to house an elementary school while the Appleby site is being studied by the State because of a gas line that runs through the property. To my knowledge there are no specific site plans for the buildings. The mention of moving the administration building there was discussed, but no mention of a specific plan for use of the entire 30,000 square feet of space was defined. The previous Interim Superintendent mentioned the possibility of moving the transportation department there, but again, I saw no specific site plans, time schedules or budgetary considerations for this. No discussion with the public regarding the use of the buildings after the renovation projects were complete was done.

5. The California Office of School construction notified the District in June 2002, that the purchase contract lacked the required funding. The District is currently negotiating a rent/lease agreement with the college.

Guith: Agree

Morris: I am not aware of any notification for lack of funding on any project or budget. We are/were negotiating a rent/lease with the college due to the uncertainty of Appleby.

Manly: To my knowledge the board members were not notified of, nor received any information regarding any conversation or notification from the Department of Education Office of Public School Construction that indicated that Palo Verde Unified School District could not afford to purchase the Palo Verde college campus.

If notification was sent, the Board was never informed about it.

The Board of Trustees backed out of the lease agreement in June, 2002. This was done, in part, because the appraisal that was provided by Palo Verde College questioned the true value of the property and the possibility of asbestos on the property since no environmental study had been done prior to the purchase of the property. A new appraisal was performed by an MAI certified appraiser hired by Palo Verde Unified and it was found that the appraisal provided by Palo Verde Community College misstated the value of the campus by over \$250,000.00.

The original appraisal, paid for by Palo Verde College and performed by Paul Wagner of Mackenzie, Wagner and Associates of Palm Desert stated the value of the campus was \$1.7 million. Property owned by Palo Verde Unified School District was incorrectly listed in the Mackenzie, Wagner and Associates appraisal as being owned by Palo Verde College and the age of the buildings was misrepresented by nearly 10 years or more.

The second appraisal performed by Casey Merrill of Merrill Appraisal found the campus value to be \$1.45 million.

The campus is currently being leased by PVUSD

6. A concerned citizens group was formed due to the lack of communication that had created an atmosphere of mistrust between the District and the Community. A major part of the mistrust was due to the following:

Guith: Disagree – Wholeheartedly

A small group of parents was discontented with the requested resignations of the high school principal, vice-principal and two teachers in lieu of non-reelection. The vast majority of the Community supported the action as did a majority of the high school staff. The other issues listed are routine issues that were answered or handled administratively as routine items.

Manly: Disagree - The community has a great mistrust in the Board of Trustees that has carried over from the previous Board actions.

- requests from the District for resignations from the English Language Learner Program teacher, Palo Verde High School principal, a vice-principal, and another teacher

Guith: Personnel Issues

Morris: The teacher in question went through the proper evaluation process. The ELL program teacher was not an ELL teacher. He was a Civics teacher. He had no credential to teach in California.

The vice principal was never on site and misused time off.

The principal did not perform her job duties. She did not prepare the school for the accreditation review and postponed it without district approval.

Manly: the staff members that resigned were not requested to resign, they chose to after they were informed of their non-reelect status.

- a distributed notice to the journalism class that selling candy added points to each student's grade

Guith: Corrected administratively

Manly: The issue regarding selling candy for grades in the journalism class was resolved.

- on-going yearbook debt problem has not been resolved to date

Guith: Resolved administratively

Morris: The year book problem was looked into and only a few hundred dollars was outstanding and paid as soon as it was discovered. The main debt was from the current year.

Manly: The issue of the year book debt is being resolved.

- questions regarding the administering of the elementary school SAT 9 Writing Section Test and the reporting of the test results

Guith: Answered appropriately

Morris: That was researched and found untrue.

Manly: The issue of allowing students to see SAT 9 test scores was resolved and staff made aware that this is a violation of California Education Code and is unacceptable.

- Palo Verde High School gym air conditioning, shower rooms, water quality, and water availability for students

Guith: Gym coolers and insulation installed.

Morris: They are allowed water between classes, but not in the room. The parent (Larry Williams) wanted them to be allowed to drink anything, anytime. The gym, we are working on. Showers? Water quality was at the old Palo Verde College site – not enough drinking fountains for the elementary students. That was taken care of by Sonny.

Manly: There has been no resolve on all the issues of the gymnasium. There has been discussion of air conditioning the gymnasium but this issue has not moved forward due to the expense. However, insulation was added to the ceiling and swamp-coolers were repaired and replaced over the summer. This has improved conditions in the Gym.

- Bid solicitation process and awarding of contracts

Guith: Done according to the Education Code.

Morris: Bid solicitations and awarding of contracts. Once again, Larry Williams felt that we should hire only Blythe contractors. Larry Williams is a local contractor. Bovis explained that we cannot use Blythe contractors for some of the work, because of the scope of work and they did not have the proper licenses/credentials. Those that did meet the license/credential requirements were awarded bids.

Manly: The process of awarding bids has not been discussed as of yet.

Recommendations:

Riverside County Office of Education
Palo Verde Unified School District Board of Education

1. The District Board of Education immediately request that the Riverside County Office of Education provide resource personnel to perform an in-depth audit of the District

Guith: (Will not be implemented.) The District has not had any major audit exceptions in their yearly audits

Manly: Agree to recommendation number one in part.

A forensic accountant needs to be hired, instead of the County Office of Education. The forensic auditor needs to investigate the past seven-years of district finances with a focus on all expenditures and specifically program fund spending. At the end of 2001-2002 year over \$750,000 in funds were rolled over to the general fund. In March 2002, over \$450,000.00 of program fund money remained unspent at Palo Verde High School. These funds included SB1X, SIP, SB65, LEP and title I. Questions have been raised about the amount of direct and indirect costs and if money is spent in the proper manner.

2. The Riverside County Office of Education respond favorably to the request from the District Board of Education for the resource personnel.

Guith: (Will not be implemented.) The District has not had any major audit exceptions in their yearly audits.

3. The Riverside county Office of Education provide assistance to the District for staff development with emphasis on interpersonal relationships, test administration, and test interpretation. The District provide support for community, parents, and Board of Education participation.

Guith: (Will not be implemented.) Staff moral, has improved with the new superintendent, high school principal and vice-principal. Test administration and interpretation is being conducted as per Education Code and standard operating procedures.

Manly: Agree. The Board of Trustees will cooperate with the County Office of Education and develop a plan that will address the issues noted in the report of findings. The Board of Trustees should coordinate with the Grant Jury and the presiding judge for the Riverside County Superior Court to ensure that the specific individuals the Grand Jury found to be lacking in interpersonal relationship skills receive additional training. The Board of Trustees will also issue a public notice on a regular basis to encourage community input and support of the schools in the Palo Verde Unified School District. The Board of Trustees

will revise and update its mission statements to reflect the importance of the community in the schools.

4. The District Board of Education take the training available for school board members provided by the California School Board Association.

Guith: Board members are attending training provided by The California School Board's Association.

Manly: Agree in part. Board members will be encouraged to participate in training available from the California School Boards Association (CSBA) which is a private corporation. However, training to be a school board member cannot be made mandatory because it would violate the United States Constitution.