



SALINAS VALLEY
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Eye on the Board

Board Highlights

May 11, 2004

WMS faces review of progress

Trustees and administrators hope an independent audit will help ward off further sanctions against Washington Middle School for its failure to meet all state-required improvements. The board voted 7-0 to call for an external review of the school, its teachers and its students.

In its second year as a program improvement school, WMS English language learners and economically disadvantaged students did not meet state improvement expectations. The school met state criteria in all other areas.

Sanctions for the failure to advance in measurable ways puts the school on line for a review and possible revision of the school plan, help in identifying student needs and technical assistance.

Should the school fail to meet expectations in the third year, it could

face more severe sanctions. "We need to get our schools out of school

Reported by Mariann Klinger

improvement status quickly," said Trustee **Art Gilbert**.

All of the district's other schools, except La Paz Middle School, have already undergone a similar review, according to Associate Superintendent **Roger Anton**. Curriculum Management Systems, Inc. and Phi Delta Kappa are to conduct the external audit. The review process includes a three-day visit to the school, a review of curriculum, teacher interviews and classroom observations. In addition, the auditors are to form a team with school personnel to develop a plan for change, Anton said.

SVFT president **Phil Moore** praised the board and district administrators for the attention to the situation, saying the middle school staff was grateful for the "huge investment of time." Moore said he hoped that any team formed would be "truly inclusive" and use the available expertise to develop an improvement plan.

Students show improvement on

district tests

While students demonstrate a lack of achievement in some areas, most show improvement in math, English and social studies over the year, according to **Robert Martinez**, director of research. Martinez attributed the improvement and the district's ability to chart it to the benchmark tests – a tool used in district classrooms to prepare for state tests. Currently, students take these district standardized tests several times a year in math, and English. Social studies were tested for the first time this year. Science is to be included by 2007.

The idea behind the tests focuses on student accomplishment and learning, rather than teaching, said Anton. "It represents a major shift" in emphasis, he added.

"It (test focus on learning) represents a major shift."

Roger Anton
Associate Superintendent

The statistics show a varying picture of student achievement with first tests of the year sometimes falling below basic levels. By the time students take the third benchmark most demonstrate improvement at least to the basic level. Benchmarks are graded as far below basic, below basic, basic, and advanced. For instance, ninth graders earn between 33 and 59 percent on tests and account for a below basic to basic reading. Tests are graded on a 100 percent scale. When most students achieve 80 percent, the test is deemed too easy.

The tests are designed to assess students on subjects guided by state standards for curriculum. Students performing low on

tests require reteaching. The tests allow teachers to see where students need reteaching.

Bond funds into second spending phase

Trustees 7-0 vote on bond funds means students and construction workers are likely to share campus space at most of the district's high schools again this summer. Modernization at Alisal, stadium restrooms at Everett Alvarez and Salinas high schools, a multi-purpose room at North Salinas – all are projects on the multi-million dollar list of things to do in the district. The projects are in varying stages of progress – all given the okay now that trustees have approved spending the second issuance of bond money.

The first round of bond money saw \$32.7 million committed to projects. The most recent vote throws in another \$14.9 million toward completion of the project list.

As renovation and building projects reach completion and others get underway, controversy dogs the trustees. Alisal officials and families struggle to keep in East Salinas what they believe is the school's share of the funds. The cost of an Olympic size pool worries trustees and cost overruns on the SHS theater could diminish the overall plans for the project.

Between meetings, the AHS community members called trustees and district officials with pleas to keep the promised funding amount on the East Salinas campus. The controversy began when district officials saw a savings in the

Alisal modernization of \$1.9 million and made a plan to shift the funds to other sites.

Trustees and administrators argued that the money shift does not shortchange AHS. Alisal got everything it was promised, Gilbert reiterated at the most recent meeting.

But **Pat Egan**, who served on the AHS site council and the bond-spending committee, said AHS voters turned out to support the bond based on the belief a specific amount of the funds would be used at Alisal. He also said AHS was pressed to shorten the list of needs, causing the school to trade stadium restrooms for turf on the field.

The arguments were not lost on trustees. “Keep in mind AHS is older . . . we need to get as much as we can get that is new,” said Trustee **Sandra Villarreal-Ocampo**, acknowledging that “we passed the bond with promises.”

“Nothing was taken away from Alisal High,” said Facilities Manager **Karen Luna**. Luna presented the lists of site projects and expected costs with a stadium restroom building included at AHS.

“I’m happy to see the restrooms back in,” said Trustee **Kathryn Ramirez**, adding that she still had concerns over the money shifted away from AHS. Saying he, too, had received calls, Trustee **Phillip Tabera** said he wanted to be sure the money goes to completing Alisal projects. Tabera said the callers wanted AHS modernization savings kept at Alisal.

In addition to the Alisal modernization money, trustees discussed the planned Olympic-sized pool at EAHS and the SHS theater renovation. Both projects are expected to cost more that trustees hoped. As the bond money dwindles, the

conversation around these projects increases.

Luna told the board that the larger pool would not only cost more to build, but significantly more to maintain. Tabera, however, reminded trustees that the pool would be expected to serve a large community beyond the student population. New houses in the area mean a growing population. “We need to look ahead to the city’s future,” he said.

Tabera serves as a representative from the board to city planners.

As far as the theater, Luna told the board “it’s not going to be the Taj Mahal.”

Plans for the theater allow for the bare necessities to put the facility to use, she said. Currently, the plans are running \$1.3 million over budget, according to Luna.

Initially the SHS community formed a committee to collect money that would expand the project, but Luna said the group has disbanded without generating any funds.

Bond spending plans allow \$10.5 million for the purchase of land for a new high school-middle school complex and.

Accounting for the land and the completion of all currently identified projects, Luna said the district expects to have \$3.2 million left.

SVFT offers hiring plan

In the face of rising costs and increasing standards, SVFT President **Phil Moore** called on the board to establish a tenure review board to protect its investment in teachers.

“You can’t trust the judgement of one person” in the hiring process, he said. Moore complained that at some school sites credentialed teachers were being let

go on the say so of the principal. “I don’t agree with trips to Spain to fill the need for teachers, when we have good teachers right here,” he said.

As an example, Moore cited the case of **Mario Aguilar**, a bilingual science teacher at El Sausal Middle School. Aguilar, Moore said, taught at the middle school on an emergency credential for five years. In the first year after Aguilar earned a credential, he received a good evaluation, but in the second credential year he was said to have deficits. Moore said no plan of assistance was offered and Aguilar received notice.

“He is a great teacher. I hope we have room in the district for him,” said Moore.

Tabera spoke in favor of the tenure review board idea.

State standards for teachers mean continued training and education often at district expense. And as housing prices soar, many school districts are struggling to find and keep credentialed teachers. In the San Jose area some districts already offer housing subsidies for teachers.

Campus Round up

ArtSong volunteer wins board’s praise

Patricia Sullivan, director of Artistas United, was recognized for her work with students in ArtSong 2004 – a youth mentoring program. The 2004 exhibit at the Hartnell College Gallery was praised as the best since the program began in 1996.

New administrators named to positions

Several new administrators are to take their posts next fall, including Dan

Burns, alternative education teacher at North Salinas High School, Blanca Baltazar, counselor at EAHS, Darin Hershberger, activities director at Salinas High School and Tim Vinoli, director for the Regional Occupation Program. Burns, Baltazar and Hershberger were all named to serve as assistant principal – Burns at El Sausal, Baltazar at EAHS and Hershberger at SHS. Vinoli was named associate superintendent for instructional services. In addition to the promotions, the district expects to fill student activities director positions at EAHS and SHS and assistant principal positions at WMS and AHS.

Currently considered open, the deadline for applicants is June 16 for the activities directors and WMS assistant principal. The deadline for applying to the AHS assistant principal post is July 2. The interview process is to begin in mid-June.

Policy Revisions

Trustees voted 7-0 to act on the following policies

(Adopt)

BP 3100 – Budget

BP 3531 – Student Insurance

BP 3540 – Transportation

BP 7160 – Construction Projects by Community or Staff

(Rescind)

BP/AR 3334 – Extra-Curricular Testing

BP 3514.2 – Environmental Safety and Workers’ Compensation

BP 3535 – Employee Bonds

BP 3541.31 – Transportation

BP 7160 – Buildings/Capital Outlay

