

# Eye On The Board

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## Board Highlights January 24, 2006

Reported by Mariann Klinger

### Pressure is on for students to pass test

The final date for CAHSEE success looms near as district seniors work their way toward completion of graduation requirements.

About 410 seniors still need to pass all or part of the state exit exam required of graduates in 2006 for the first time.

State law requires all California students to pass the test in order to earn a diploma.

Approximately 72 percent of seniors who did not pass the test still need to make the grade, said **Robert Martinez**, district director of research.

About 26 percent of them are within 10 points of passing, he added.

Students take the CAHSEE for the first time as tenth graders. If they don't pass it on the first try, they take it again as juniors. In fact 71 percent of the Class of 2007, today's juniors, has already met the requirement. The class of 2008 will take the test for the first time in March.

Juniors who did not pass the test after their second attempt were directed into a class designed to focus on practice for the CAHSEE. Director of Curriculum **John Favaro** described the intense training process students follow as they approach their senior year. Classes began in the summer and non-CAHSEE passing seniors take the course and the test until they succeed. March will be the last time current seniors can pass the test in time for June graduation.

Trustee **Phillip Tabera** wanted a breakdown of the students who have not passed. "I want to know who is represented in the group," he said.

At the meeting, Martinez' report listed the numbers and rates of students passing the test at each school. At SHS 90 percent of the students met the requirement, at NSHS 82 percent passed the test, at EAHS 80 percent passed, at AHS 78 percent passed, and Mount Toro had a pass rate of 50 percent.

For the class of 2007, pass rates follow a similar pattern ranging from 39 percent at MTHS to 80 percent at SHS. For the district it translates to a 71 percent first-time pass rate for 2007 graduates.

# School choice sticking point

While SHS athletes, ineligible because of faked addresses, created a stir in the community and a problem for the school's teams, trustees prepared to handle a district-wide rush to attend the beleaguered school.

A recommendation to use random lottery for school choice transfers to SHS failed to pass, as trustees argued over access to the district's downtown high school.

Calling for balance, Trustee **Kathryn Ramirez** said she wants equal numbers from each of the other sites and a campaign informing parents of NSHS, EAHS and AHS of the openings at Salinas High.

Administrators, who estimated about 110 student openings at SHS, sought approval on the district's random lottery policy for filling school-choice openings. The application process began in February.

In an effort to reassure Ramirez of the fairness of the policy, Superintendent **Roger Anton** said all parents receive letters regarding the opening of school choice. "If you want to change the policy, you can do so," he said, adding letters had already been sent.

Ramirez said the letters in Spanish and English were not enough. "Many parents can not read."

In addition, Trustee **Margaret Serna-Bonetti**, clerk to the board, insisted many parents do not know about the system. "They just choose not to go through the lottery process."

"I don't trust the lottery," said Tabera, calling for assigning slots to the other district schools.

The trio was joined by new Trustee **Lila Cann** to defeat the superintendent's school choice recommendation 4-3.

Last year, with 45 SHS slots, AHS and EAHS parents submitted no request to transfer to the downtown school. Most of the transfer requests came from the NSHS area, many of them from the Laurel West neighborhood.

At the moment, SHS sports teams are banned from championship competition, because an athlete was attending the school out of area without benefit of a school-choice transfer.

## Finance process Ok'd; tighter control needed

Independent auditors eased through the district's financial activities, citing an ongoing issue with student monies and internal controls.

**Matthew Nethaway** of Perry-Smith Accountants praised administrators' cooperation and adherence to state and federal codes.

The report noted, however, that ASB funds could be misappropriated and some internal controls have not been implemented or enforced.

In the previous audit, handling of student monies was identified as a problem. **James Earhart**, the district's chief business officer, said it remains mainly a training issue to "tighten it up." He noted that new activity directors had been named this year.

Auditors called for a standardized process to handle the \$2.9 million funneled through student activities.

Internal control issues revolved around information technology – obsolete passwords, unprotected equipment, understaffed maintenance and back up and recovery procedures lacking.