

Eye On The Board

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Board Highlights – October 11, 2005

Reported by Mariann Klinger

Balance is tough act at schools

The balancing act that puts teachers and students together in the right numbers, calls for equal attention on the purse strings, according to Superintendent **Roger Anton**.

Anton described the district as a good fiscal steward during the process of staffing classrooms. “The goal is to have the right number of students in the right place,” he said.

“One ‘minor’ error (one FTE/5 teaching periods) at a school can have a negative financial impact,” he told the board in a staffing report. To avoid having one too many teachers, Anton said the district maintains a “tight staffing” posture for the start of school.

The solution, he said, comes with attrition and an adjustment after school has begun. At that time, schedulers will look to balance classes with low enrollment (less than 25 per class) and large enrollment (more than 35 per class).

The policy plays out at school sites where the pinch is felt. Teachers shuffle desks, and when they run out, chairs. Some classes operate on a standing room only basis. And when the solution comes, often five or six weeks into the semester, the reshuffle can become a reschedule for entire classes of students, a reorientation of the workday and a change in courses for some teachers.

In the aftermath, teachers and students try to recoup the losses of class time and five weeks of study. But when the dust settles many teachers still work with 38 and 40-student classes.

Teachers from all sites tell war stories about overloaded classes, running out of desks, chairs, and books. In the first days of school, several classes at Alisal offered seats on a first-come, first-serve basis, teachers said. Some math, music, social studies and physical education classes and others counted 40 or more students in a class. Five weeks later, when the switch was made, many teachers were still left with 38 to 42 students per class.

At North Salinas many content core classes still average 35 students, according to teacher **David Doris**.

And almost as disruptive is the time for the change, he said. In mid-October a new health class was added, students reassigned and schedules changed. “Waiting this late...” Doris said, his voice trailing off.

“I’m beyond upset. I’m disillusioned,” said **Manuel Lopez**, Everett Alvarez teacher. Lopez said he wasn’t the only one disturbed about the process and timing for change. At EAHS, he said, the switch often affects at-risk students. “The lower end students are the most impacted . . . talk about equity,” he said. “Lower-end students get the shaft.”

Lopez said overcrowding and a shift that occurs five or six weeks into the semester is routine. “It doesn’t surprise me, because it happens every year.”

Like Lopez, Phil Moore of SHS said, “It’s an endemic problem. It happens every year.” Moore, along with other Salinas High teachers and even a parent, brought concerns of overcrowding to the board at an earlier meeting.

Anton’s report focused on the budget, and getting the numbers right. And teachers, union officials and parents complained of the overcrowding at an earlier meeting, but it was left to Trustee **Rich Foster** to note the overall effect on students and teacher as the process unfolds. “It’s disruptive,” he said.

“Maybe we need to be a little less conservative,” he added, suggesting that a focus on budget first may not provide the best results.

Along with questioning the attention to the dollar amounts, Foster questioned the skills of schedulers. “Where does the master scheduler get training?”

Anton admitted that there may be a “learning gap” when it comes to the scheduler.

Vice principals at each site juggle the board, where teachers and their classes become tabs in a slot. Administrators step into the job of master scheduler with some training, but may lack experience, according to Anton.

While teachers lay complaints on the doorstep of schedulers, administrators and the district, AHS teacher **Kim O’Hagan** said the union comes in for a share of the responsibility. The language of the contract, he said, allows district officials to estimate class size. “The district “can see you have 38 students (in a class), but say ‘Gee, we tried,’” he said.

The contract language only suggests an average class size according to SVFT President **John Nolan**. “They (administrators) feel they have a lot of wiggle room,” he said.

Calling the process chaotic, Nolan said the situation is unlikely to change unless contract language is strengthened. The problem, he added, “is not on their radar. We can’t even file a grievance.”

Reporters Note: Most teachers were interviewed at a later time.

Two named to open seats

Trustees appointed **Phillip Tabera** and **Lila Cann** to seats on the board, marking the first time a working member of the CSEA took an open seat. Neither was opposed in the election set for November.

Tabera currently serves as the board president and represents Trustee Area 3.

Cann, who will fill Foster’s seat and represent Trustee Area 7, works for the regional office of the classified union. Prior to the union post, Cann worked for the district at NSHS.

Both new trustees were sworn in at the meeting and Cann will take her seat in December.

Foster decided not to seek re-election and will end his first four-year term in December.

“After eight years, I want to spend more time with my family,” he said.

Foster served a four-year term in the Spreckles school district prior to joining the SUHSD board.

Students spend summer catching up on credits

Students line up for summer school classes in record numbers. More than 4,400 students enrolled in programs at one of the eight district school sites.

The numbers include an increase of 46 students from the previous year, according to **John Favero**, curriculum director.

In a report, Favero said most of the programs focused on remediation, but about 937 students took classes for enrichment. About 53 students completed credits for graduation. For the latter,

diplomas were distributed at a joint graduation ceremony.

In addition to summer school programs, the district offered the YES program at Mount Toro. The program offers job training and relies on a strong partnership with law enforcement and other agencies. About 113 students attended.

The Migrant Program offered classes, including CAHSEE preparation for 210 students at the AHS campus and SHS hosted Mission Trails ROP for 587 students.

Most of the summer school staff – about 75 percent – were part of the regular teaching staff, said Favero.

Sunrise offers on-site services

Board members renewed an agreement for services with Sunrise House after its executive director presented a profile of services.

The agreement maintains a 35-year relationship with the drug counseling resource center.

Sunrise counselors serve as resource agents at the school sites. While they offer counseling to students, they also train teachers, coaches and classified employees, offer classroom presentations and community and parent education seminars, said **Jim Rear**.

In describing a typical day, Rear said counselors might see 206 students complete the insight program, 167 in drug programs, 125 attend alternative to youth violence classes.

Trustees voted to renew the district's \$160,000 contract for the services.

Work at school sites continues

If first impressions count, then AHS is “more aesthetically pleasing” than ever, said Maintenance Manager **Jerry Stratton**.

Stratton said his crews removed fencing, put in lights at the front of the 40-year-old school and landscaped six atriums. “The first impression of the school improved at Alisal,” he said.

Stratton and Facilities Manager **Karen Luna** gave trustees a rundown on construction and overhaul projects at various district sites.

Stratton talked about trash bins at ROP and SHS, a Viking ship for NSHS, ball fields and benches at SHS, new heat ducts, heating equipment and refurbished maple floors at WMS and ESMS. Furthermore, he said, much of the work was done in house, saving the district thousands of dollars at each site.

Since Luna's job is to plan and oversee the spending of bond monies in construction and repair, her list was longer and projects were larger.

EAHS – the pool project is underway, staff parking lot expanded and sidewalks put in. The latter from funding sources other than bonds.

NSHS – the weight room is under construction.

SHS – Tennis court project has begun and air conditioning is going into the Performing Arts Center.

AHS – The center plaza was enlarged and newly landscaped.

HMS – The school's new entrance is complete and the multi-purpose room is operational.

LPMS – Multi-purpose room, including a stage, is taking shape.

WMS – New lockers and hallways greeted students at the start of school.

ESMS – Restrooms are in the process of being expanded and should be complete by mid-November.

Student behavior increases numbers of expulsions

Along with increased student population, administrators noted an increase in expulsions from the previous year.

The number of students expelled continues to grow with many of the offenses centered on behavior motivated by anger, according to Associate Superintendent **Tim Vanoli**.

Last year, 123 students were expelled – 80 of them for disrupting school and/or defying authority, he said. The number of defiant and disruptive students doubled from the year before. About 66 students were expelled for causing or threatening physical injury and that number was also double from the year before, according to Vanoli's report.

The district conducted 110 readmission hearings last year, denying 54 requests for readmission because students failed to complete rehabilitation plans or did not attend the hearing.

Policies

(Adopted)

BP 4113 – Assignment

BP 4131 – Staff Development (certificated)

BP 4131.1 – Beginning Teacher

Support/induction (New)

BP 4143.1 – 4243.1 – Public Notices-Personnel Negotiations

BP 4231 – Staff Development (classified)

(First Reading)

BP 0420 – School Plans/Site Councils

BP 0420.1 – School-Based Program

Coordination

BP 1220 – Citizen Advisory Committees

BP 1431 – Waivers

BP 2110 – Superintendent Responsibilities

BP 9200 – Limits of Board Members' Authority

Comment from SVFT

Nolan told trustees that the shortage of substitutes has reached the crisis stage. "There's a chaotic scramble to cover classes." The union is working with administrators to reach a solution that would call for the maintenance of an adequate pool of substitutes.