

Eye On The Board

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Board Highlights February 14, 2006

Reported by Mariann Klinger

SHS choice causes flap, accusation Equity remains problematic

A flap over 110 openings at Salinas High led to an accusation of insubordination and concern for “flight” from the district high schools.

Pointing out that the requests for transfer to the downtown school remain low, Anton noted that school choice slots went to 57 students from the NSHS area, 12 from AHS and 11 EAHS last year.

“Why are students fleeing the other schools?” Trustee **Kathryn Ramirez** asked, “What are we doing at SHS that we are not doing at the others?”

Arguments stewed until trustees finally voted to allow the district to accept school choice applications.

The controversy surrounds school choice and how to ensure the district students equal opportunity to leave their high schools in favor of the downtown school.

For the second time, Superintendent **Roger Anton** presented trustees with a report on the board’s policy regarding school choice. But Ramirez said the report amounted to insubordination, since it reflects the same information from an earlier meeting where Anton attempted to begin the process of getting applications for school choice to SHS. The board policy, he said, aligns with the state education code and allows for a computerized random list drawn from all school choice applicants on a district- wide basis. He suggested that trustees could, however, change the policy.

At the time, Ramirez and Trustee **Phillip Tabera** called for an equal division of the student openings at each site. Tabera referred to a vote in 2005, setting aside equal numbers of openings for each site. “I don’t trust the lottery,” he said.

In addition, Ramirez expressed concern that parents who could not read might not be duly informed of their opportunity to send a student to SHS. At the last meeting, the board split 4-3 over the issue and voted against beginning the at-large lottery process, generally in place by February 1.

Tabera underlined that the vote from 2005 did away with the at-large lottery and Ramirez insisted that Anton failed to follow board direction.

For his part, Anton remained unflustered, explaining that the vote against the at-large lottery left the administration with no policy to follow.

Laurel Wood parents kept up a running dialogue on the issue from the audience. Parents complained they were not able to enroll siblings at SHS. The neighborhood parents have pursued admission for their students to SHS over the past 10 years, returning each year to lobby the Board.

Anton told trustees that Laurel Wood siblings would be admitted to Salinas High after they completed school choice applications. However, the applications were still unavailable, so trustees continued to argue for admission of siblings.

Laurel Wood students attend WMS, but come under the NSHS attendance area for high school. Parents argued for their admission to SHS with their children's classmates from WMS. Last year, these students accounted for most of the school choice slots at SHS.

"There must be some reason causing people to choose SHS," said Tabera.

Trustee **Margaret Serna-Bonetti** took issue with Ramirez' and Tabera's characterization of SHS as the top school choice. Serna-Bonetti said she disagreed that SHS represented the district's top school. "The other schools are also good schools."

Anton said students also request transfers to the other school sites. "People have a variety of reasons for transferring," he said, adding that the state's open enrollment code doesn't require a reason.

SHS parents attack CCS sports ban Board to seek injunction, Appeal of 'harsh' ruling

While the discussion of school choice fell after a press of parents left the meeting room, the topic may lay at the root of SHS troubles.

SHS teams were censured for fielding ineligible players – students not living in the SHS attendance area or attending on a school choice application. The Central Coast Section (CCS) banned all teams from competing in 2005 playoffs, but not from participating in games and practice. The ban extends to 2006 for the football team, where the infraction was discovered.

After listening to a long line of irate parents who argued amongst themselves and took potshots at Anton, trustees directed the superintendent to hire an attorney to seek a court injunction against the ban and to move on appeal.

In a report, Anton noted that "the school, in consultation with the district, determined that it would not be in its best interest to appeal the decision at this time, but to reserve the opportunity to appeal at a future date."

That statement set Ramirez to accusing the administrator of making a decision meant for trustees. "Why didn't we know about this?" she asked.

Trustees and parents seemed unanimous in their judgment of the ban as harsh and the letter from the CCS as inappropriate. The penalties are excessive and the ruling lacks respect, said parent Brett Scholl. "It's not an acceptable approach."

"The punishment is harsh," agreed Serna-Bonetti.

As parents paraded to the podium, each in their turn characterized SHS athletes as innocent team members being punished for the few. Trustees, too, expressed concern for the students and teams not cited by CCS. “Students deserve due process,” said Serna-Bonetti.

But the district had shied away from appealing for fear that CCS would call the school on other infractions of the rule.

“Any appeal could subject the school to further scrutiny on events that may have occurred since the panel’s hearing on January 19. Upon investigation, the school has indicated that additional incidences in boys’ basketball and soccer have occurred.”

For their part, trustees determined additional infractions should not come under scrutiny. “It should not be part of the decision,” said Serna-Bonetti.

Saying he would support appeal, Tabera added that he believed the incidents are part of a bigger issue related to school choice. “I see it as an institutional problem.”

He wasn’t the first to identify the issue as related to school choice, or the first to see it as institutionalized. At the earlier meeting, Serna-Bonetti joined the argument over school choice, saying that many parents circumvent the process, using fake addresses and failing to get permission to attend SHS.

Anton’s report noted that the discovery of other incidents points to a “need for change in the culture and attitude that may extend throughout its athletic program.”

Tabera called for the District “to revisit the honor policy” and the already-established Purple Ribbon Committee with an eye toward enforcement.

In its letter, CCS called for a campaign that would “drastically change the traditions and attitudes” at Salinas High.

Tech issues prompt letter of complaint

Teachers at EAHS tapped the tip of the technology iceberg with a letter to the district’s chief techie, calling for improved access to equipment.

In the letter, teachers complain that access to technology “is consistently diminished.”

A memo from Joe Rice warned EAHS teachers of a district plan to cut information storage space to 100 megabytes within a day. Teachers were advised to save documents, as all would be lost with the memory dump.

In an effort to underscore the problem, Jan Storey told trustees that one power point (a common format for a single lesson) can use up to 10 megabytes. “This,” she said, holding up a CD, “holds 700 megabytes.”

At least teachers need more time to store documents, said Storey, SVFT vice president and EAHS teacher.

“It’s the district’s right to say ‘hey, clean up your files,’” she added, but teachers object to the way the notice was given.

“Don’t wipe documents out. Give teachers some time to save the materials,” she said.

Storey said the issue is potentially much bigger than the incident of the memo. “If the district is serious about serving the needs of our students and supporting teachers . . . then this memory dump needs to be stopped until a reasonable solution that factors in education can be made.”

Storey said teachers and the union were willing to work on a solution to the technology issues across the district.

SVFT has formed a technology committee to advocate for meeting teachers’ technology needs, she added.

Since Storey spoke at the open forum part of the meeting, trustees did not comment.

Consent Agenda

By a vote of 6-0 (Trustee Art Gilbert was absent) the board approved the following:

- Approve a contract with AT&T to upgrade the wide area network to high-speed fiber optic connections at all sites.
- Award a bid for EAHS stadium concession building.
- Award a bid for EAHS enclosed dining area roof project.
- Award a bid for Mission Trail ROP patio project.

Teachers' Letter Forum

Teachers are invited to send letters-to-the-editor style comments or questions about newsletter topics or other concerns of general interest to the SVFT membership. Letters will be printed on a space available basis. Letter writers should include a name and phone number with any submission. All letter writers must be identified. Letters may be edited for space considerations. Letters can be sent by email to mklinger@salinas.k12.ca.us or to jdnolan@sbcglobal.net

Policies

(First reading)

- BP 6142.1 – Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Instruction
- BP 6145.6 – International Exchange
- BP 6146.3 – Reciprocity
- BP 6163.1 – Library/Media Centers
- BP 6173 – Education for Homeless Children/Students in Transition
- BP 6178.1 – Work Experience Education
- BP 6179 – Supplemental Instruction
- BP 4112.2 – Certification
- BP 4131 – Staff Development
- BP 4362 – Vacations for Confidential/Supervisory Personnel