

Governing Board

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Committed to Excellence

August 20, 2018

The Honorable Stephanie E. Hulsey
Judge of the Superior Court
County of Monterey
240 Church Street
Salinas, CA 93901

Dear Judge Hulsey:

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05(f), please consider this letter as the formal response from the Gonzales Unified School District Board of Education ("Board" or "School Board") to the 2018 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report entitled "*School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards*" ("Final Report"), published on May 29, 2018.

A portion of the Final Report addresses issues related to 24 school districts in Monterey County. With respect to the Gonzales Unified School District (the "District"), the Final Report includes eight Findings and six Recommendations that require a response from the Board. Each of the Findings and Recommendations directed to the Board is addressed below in the order presented in the Grand Jury's Final Report.

This Response was approved by the Board on August 13, 2018.

FINDINGS

Finding No. 1: "*Student achievement suffers when school districts are unproductive or dysfunctional. It can be very costly and take years to address problems if the Monterey County Office of Education and/or California Department of Education have to step in to support or save a school district.*"

Response:

- Agree***
- Partially Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): N/A

Finding No. 2: “There are proactive steps that can be taken by the Monterey County Office of Education in collaboration with school boards to prevent many pitfalls of poor governance.”

Response:

- Agree**
- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board agrees with this Finding, noting, however, that while collaboration may be useful in helping districts to avoid certain “pitfalls of poor governance,” the Monterey County Office of Education does not have jurisdiction over the District’s Board.

Finding No. 3: “The Monterey County Office of Education and local school boards can do more to promote effective local governance that is accountable to the community and produces better district outcomes.”

Response:

- Agree**
- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board generally agrees with this Finding, noting that local school boards and the MCOE can always do more, by way of mutual collaboration, to ensure effective local governance that is accountable to the community and improves district outcomes.

Finding No. 4: “Promoting effective local governance requires better public information, communication, and a strong commitment to board development.”

Response:

- Agree**
- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board agrees with this Finding and is continually working to improve its efforts to communicate and provide information to the public. To that end, the Board is strongly committed to Board development and participation in workshops and conferences relevant to effective Board governance.

Finding No. 5: “Although each school district has individual priorities, school boards can each make a commitment to adhering to best practices, training, and ongoing professional development when it comes to school board governance.”

Response:

- Agree**

- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board generally agrees with this Finding, with the understanding that many School Board members also have fulltime jobs and family commitments that may limit the time available for ongoing professional development. Nonetheless, the Board reiterates its commitment to adhering to best practices as identified in its Governance Handbook and Board Bylaws, and encourages each Board member to participate in ongoing professional development, as time and other commitments allow.

Finding No. 6: “While the Monterey County Office of Education cannot dictate how school boards govern, they can provide stronger leadership in promoting a culture of effective school board governance.”

Response:

- Agree**
- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board generally agrees with the Grand Jury, but believes that the focus of this Finding should be on intentional collaboration between MCOE and local boards rather than on simply promoting a culture of effective school board governance.

Finding No. 7: “Information posted on Monterey County Office of Education and school district websites is insufficient and not user-friendly. It does not provide the public with adequate information about what school boards do, how to evaluate school board performance, or how to assess school district outcomes.”

Response:

- Agree**
- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board agrees that MCOE and school districts can always provide more information on their websites about what school boards do; however, the Board disagrees with this Finding to the extent that it believes that information posted on the MCOE website and the District website is sufficient and easy to navigate for both the general public and staff. In particular, the District website, which is in the process of being updated, currently includes: contact information for Board members; the Board meeting schedule, agendas, and minutes; and links to Board Policies and Bylaws and Board’s Governance Handbook, which describes the role and responsibilities of School Board members. The website also includes links to School Board/Districtwide Goals; the District’s Local Control and Accountability Plan (“LCAP”), describing District outcomes; and additional accountability information from the California Department of Education (“CDE”). The Board does not agree that it is the role of MCOE or the District Board to educate the public as to how to evaluate school board

performance, as the public ultimately evaluates board member performance through the election process.

Finding No. 8: “School boards can do better in fulfilling their responsibility to communicate with school district stakeholders.”

Response:

- Agree**
- Partially Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

Explanation (if applicable): The Board agrees that organizations can always improve communication with stakeholders, and towards that end, the District and Board have adopted the following School Board/Districtwide Goal: “All communication is structured to engender credibility and confidence by being based on the premise that we are all partners in the education of all children.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 1: “School Boards should adopt a policy to commit to all National School Board Association best practices.”

Response:

- (1) **Has been implemented** – include summary of implemented action
- (2) **Will be implemented in future** – include explanation and timeframe
- (3) **Requires further analysis** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)
- (4) **Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable** – include explanation

Explanation: (4) Adoption of a policy committing to all National School Board Association (“NSBA”) best practices is not warranted as the Board has already adopted Board Bylaws (“BB”), including BB 9000 (Role of the Board) and BB 9005 (Governance Standards), based on best practices recommended by the National School Boards Association (“NSBA”) as well as the California School Boards Association (“CSBA”). Following its participation in a CSBA *Effective Governance* workshop, the Board also adopted a comprehensive Governance Handbook that includes, among other things, a description of the role and responsibilities of School Board members and Governance Team norms and protocols. The Governance Handbook is reviewed annually and updated, as necessary. Copies of the Governance Handbook and Board Bylaws are available on the District website.

Recommendation No. 2: “School Boards should adopt a bylaw to make initial training and ongoing workshops mandatory.”

Response:

- (1) **Has been implemented** – include summary of implemented action

- (2) *Will be implemented in future – include explanation and timeframe*
- (3) *Requires further analysis – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)*
- (4) *Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable – include explanation*

Explanation: (4) The Board does not believe that adoption of a new bylaw making initial training and ongoing workshops mandatory is warranted, as many School Board members also have fulltime jobs and family commitments that may limit the time available for ongoing professional development. Further, the Board has adopted Board Bylaw 9230 (Orientation), requiring orientation sessions for new Board members as early as possible following election or appointment, and encouraging new Board members to attend CSBA’s *Orientation for New Trustees, Institute for New and First Term Board Members*, and other relevant workshops and conferences. The Board has also adopted Bylaw 9240 (Board Training) permitting all Board members to participate in workshops and conferences for the purpose of Board development and authorizing the expenditure of District funds for this purpose. As discussed above at Recommendation No. 1, the Board has adopted a comprehensive Governance Handbook (available on the District website) based on best practices identified by CSBA. Among other things, the Governance Manual includes specific discussion of the role and responsibilities of School Board members as well as Board operating norms and governance standards. The Governance Handbook is reviewed by the Board annually, and is updated, as necessary.

Recommendation No. 3: *“School Boards, along with their superintendent and teacher union representatives, should make annual public presentations on school district goals and student achievement.”*

Response:

- (1) *Has been implemented – include summary of implemented action*
- (2) *Will be implemented in future – include explanation and timeframe*
- (3) *Requires further analysis – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)*
- (4) *Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable – include explanation*

Explanation: The Board does not believe that it is appropriate for “School Boards, along with their superintendent and teacher union representatives to make public presentations on school district goals and student achievement.” The Superintendent, in consultation with District administrators, teachers, and staff, currently presents to the Board and the general public regarding District goals and student achievement at regular meetings of the Board. The Superintendent will also be presenting a State of the District address during a regularly scheduled Board meeting during the 2018-2019 school year. Union representatives regularly attend Board meetings and have the opportunity to voice their opinions on all agenda items. The Superintendent meets monthly with union representatives to discuss, among other things, Districtwide goals and outcomes. Union representatives also meet monthly with the EERC (Employee/Employer Relations Committee) for the purpose of improving communication, discussing potential issues and collectively working towards solutions. Union representatives are also part of the District’s LCAP and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (“WASC”) accreditation committees. As an additional avenue for public communication, the District schedules joint meetings with the City Council to review District goals and achievement

and to collaborate on addressing concerns, such as safety, that impact the District and the community as a whole. For example, community members and District representatives recently met to establish Safe Graduation guidelines, including guidelines for ensuring that youth do not have access to alcohol during graduation celebrations.

Recommendation No. 4: *“School Boards should provide clear, concise, and easy-to-find communications on their district’s goals and outcomes on their district website.”*

Response:

- (1) *Has been implemented – include summary of implemented action*
- (2) *Will be implemented in future – include explanation and timeframe*
- (3) *Requires further analysis – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)*
- (4) *Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable – include explanation*

Explanation: (1) The District transitioned to a new, more robust website on July 1, 2018, which now allows for greater ease and access to other information at the school and District level. The website provides access to the District’s LCAP describing District goals and outcomes, as well as the District’s WASC accreditation process. Additionally, the new District website is fully ADA-compliant, allowing disabled users to easily navigate and locate information on the website.

Recommendation No. 5: *“School Boards should provide information on their district’s website about the role and responsibilities of school board members to educate parents, the public and potential school board candidates.”*

Response:

- (1) *Has been implemented – include summary of implemented action*
- (2) *Will be implemented in future – include explanation and timeframe*
- (3) *Requires further analysis – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)*
- (4) *Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable – include explanation*

Explanation: (2) The District transitioned to a new, more robust website as of July 1, 2018. The Board is committed to increasing its web presence on the District website and will include additional information on its webpage, including links to its Governance Handbook and Board Bylaws, by October 1, 2018.

Recommendation No. 6: *“School Boards should provide access to informational sessions to educate potential school board candidates on the duties and commitment associated with serving on a local school board.”*

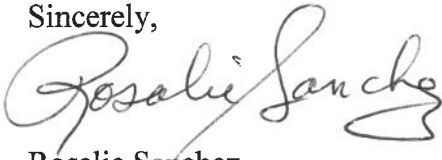
Response:

- (1) *Has been implemented – include summary of implemented action*
- (2) *Will be implemented in future – include explanation and timeframe*

- (3) Requires further analysis** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)
- (4) Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable** – include explanation

Explanation: The District’s practice is to provide informational sessions for potential School Board candidates before each election. The Interim Superintendent will be presenting informational sessions for potential Board candidates prior to the November 2018 election. The dates and times for these sessions will be posted on the District’s website once the filing period for candidates opens.

Sincerely,



Rosalie Sanchez
Board of Education, President

Sincerely,



Yvette Irving
Interim Superintendent