



Orange
County
School
Boards
Association

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January 2002 Edition

President's Message
Don Sedgwick

Leadership During Budget Cuts—SOMEBODY'S Got To Do It

The Board meeting was about to start. Every seat was taken. The halls were so crowded I could barely find a way to the front and hundreds more were outside trying to get in. Upon hearing frustrated voices searching for a seat, I said, "I will gladly give you my seat tonight!" Some began to laugh but I could see from their expressions that they needed someone to lead. They needed someone to stand confidently before them and put them at peace. They needed to feel comfort from, and confidence in, the people at the top. This was not something that could or should be delegated. Hundreds of people came out in the cold night air, anxious that the school district they once had held in such high esteem was now on very shaky ground. Despite my weaknesses, I realized that my fellow Board Members and I were all they had! It is during times like these where we really earn our salaries.

Many of us in Orange County are now struggling through budget challenges. Governor Davis has slashed our revenues, including the energy reimbursement equalization, and many other sources of funding. Given the lethargic state economy, 42 percent (the Proposition 98 guarantee for education) out of expectedly small state revenues will not go very far this year. We will likely see a tight budget through next year. School districts will need to make tough decisions in order to balance their books. Schools will close; programs will be lost; employees will be laid off and services will decline. All the while, youngsters will be educated by caring teachers (who will be given little, if any wage increase) and life will go on.

What can we do as Board Members to prevent distrust in our school districts? We must be visibly leading through these hard times. Although tempting, now is not the time to curl up and stay home. Boards ought to create a schedule of attending all of the PTA council meetings, and communicate regularly with the community at large. Solicit by asking your PTA council, employee organizations and other community groups to conduct surveys of budget priorities and other ideas. Request that your superintendent and staff leadership present budget workshops for important community groups. Share ownership of this problem and the weight will not feel as great. You might promote your website, and update it with a periodic message from your Board. You might send out a mailing to parents and teachers in order to help educate them on why this is happening.

At the same time, communicate your need for their help and support to get out of this predicament. Share with them that this problem is not a district problem, but a challenge for the whole community to overcome. Though it is important to sympathize and express your own disappointment with the conditions we are in, you must also come to transition from "problem-lamenter" to "problem-solver." They must feel that you truly are trying your hardest to protect the education of the children. Lead a letter-writing campaign to local officials with details as to how to write and to whom, and offer tips. They must know, though, that this is no your only strategy. We have little control over Sacramento and have a big task at home right now! Anyone who comes forward to address your Board must be compassionately heard. Pay attention, smile and be genuinely interested. We cannot afford to be too protective of our staff. Be respectful, even promote their professionalism and character, but ask the tough questions in public (with prior warning to staff, when possible). In the end, the community must feel confident that they have people in charge who are sharp, who love all the children in the district, and who are honestly working hard on their behalf. They won't care what you know until they know that you care.

I didn't get home from that meeting until 3:00 a.m. Public comments went on until 1:00 a.m. I made a couple of mistakes in my comments (especially in the later hours!), but I was proud of my Board because I think most folks left that meeting with a new appreciation for the District's leadership. They probably won't remember 90 percent of what was said. But as the District prepares for some disastrous cuts, they will at least feel that someone at the top cares and will strive within reason to save the most precious parts of the educational product for their children—a very important need. I'm glad I didn't give away my seat.

LYNN DAUCHER

Assemblymember Seventy-second District

Too Many State Mandates on Education

When it comes to providing our children with top-notch education, how many state regulations are too many? Amazingly, more than 86,000 regulations currently govern education in California. Yet, every legislative session the Legislature piles still more mandates upon local schools already struggling with mandates from previous legislative sessions. Adding insult to injury, state agencies routinely apply these mandates indiscriminately without recognizing that every school district is unique.

Rather, state government's usual approach to education is to rely on the tired "one-size-fits-all" model. School districts from as diverse parts of the state as rural northern California and urban Orange County are told by politicians and bureaucrats how and when to spend their dollars, what they can purchase with these dollars, and the type of curriculum teachers must teach our children. With each passing legislative session, locally elected school boards suffer further erosion of their authority.

One culprit behind this erosion is that state lawmakers habitually attempt to use schools to address societal problems. For example, every year the Legislature sees measures intended to have schools teach their students good parenting skills or recognizing domestic violence. Another routinely introduced bill would force schools to collect "racial profiling" data pursuant to student suspensions. This year, legislators debated a bill intended to create "anti-bullying" curriculum to combat alleged increases in schoolyard violence. Yet another bill would create state-sanctioned nutritional requirements for foods sold at elementary and secondary schools. Is there nothing else more in need of the Legislature's attention than whether or not canned sodas should be sold at schools?

Even if one concedes there are good intentions behind all of these bills, the fact remains that Sacramento spends too much of its time meddling in the affairs of locally elected school boards. This constant and unwanted attention further detracts from the primary responsibility of school boards to ensure that their young charges are taught the basic core educational curriculum necessary for them to develop into productive members of the community.

It is time for the Legislature to take a hard look at its penchant to busy itself in every aspect of our local schools. Perhaps local schools need to back a Home Rule Initiative to constitutionally restrict state legislative meddling in local affairs. In any case, local school boards deserve the freedom to define priorities for their schools. Schools also need the flexibility to fund their priorities. Judging from what we read in the daily newspapers or see on evening news, the Governor and the Legislature have enough pressing issues with which to devote their time next session. Continuing to micromanage the affairs of local schools should not be one of them.

Lynn Daucher is the Vice-Chair of Aging and Long Term Care Committee and a Member of the following committees: Appropriations, Budget, Elections, Reapportionment and Constitutional Amendments, and Local Government.

Governor Discontinues 1996-97 ADA Audits

At the California School Boards Association (CSBA) annual conference on December 1, CSBA Executive Director, Scott Plotkin, announced that Governor Davis has decided to end the audits of 1996-97 attendance accounting data. Plotkin's announcement was reportedly met with "thunderous" applause by educators and board members in attendance at the conference.

The announcement reflects the work of education organizations over the past two years. These groups have protested both the purpose and the procedures reflected in the audits. These audits were funded at a rate of \$3 million per year. With each passing year, the data became more difficult to provide to auditors and more disruptive of local educational activities. In a prepared statement Plotkin said, "The Governor's action is a prudent budgetary decision. It will save the state millions of dollars and allow school districts to again focus on what we would all agree is our true priority – increase student achievement."

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POLITICAL ACTION GROUP EFFORTS

Mary Fuhrman, Chairperson

PAGE MEETING

**Wednesday, January 23, 2002 – 5:30 p.m.
at the Irvine Marriott Hotel**

**Ron Wenkart
General Counsel
Orange County Department of Education**

Topic: E-mail and the Brown Act

Ron Wenkart will discuss issues regarding the use of the e-mail as a form of communication between board members and how it relates to the Brown Act. The PAGE meeting will be 5:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., just before the January 23, 2002 Orange County School Boards Association (OCSBA) dinner meeting at the Irvine Marriott. **All trustees, superintendents, and PAGE representatives are welcome to attend.**

POINTS FROM PAGE MEETING

October 17, 2001

**Redevelopment Fees
By David Doomey
Assistant Superintendent
Capistrano Unified School District**

- Cities often make mistakes (usually to their benefit).
- Districts should consider hiring a good fiscal consultant and lawyer to see if they are receiving what is due them.
- New redevelopment agencies since AB1290 are not negotiated. Districts are assured a specific amount.
- Most agencies have a lifespan of 45 years with most money coming in the later years.
- Funds must be used for land acquisition and facilities, not for General Fund.
- If you have an existing agency and need a change, don't "amend it," use "implementation" language.
- Workers on projects funded by redevelopment agencies must be paid prevailing wage.

SAVE THE DATE

Next year's California School Boards Association Annual Conference will be held
December 5-7, 2002 in San Francisco
The Delegate Assembly will be December 4-5, 2002

OCSBA CALENDAR

General Dinner Meetings

Location: Irvine Marriott, 18000 Von Karman Ave., Irvine 92612
Evening Schedule, 5:30 p.m. PAGE Meeting, 6:00 p.m. Social, 6:30 p.m. Dinner
*Joint ACSA Dinner Meeting

January 23, 2002*
March 20, 2002*
April 24, 2002

Officers and Directors Meetings

Location: Orange County Department of Education, Board Room
200 Kalmus Drive, Costa Mesa, 92628
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

January 9, 2002
March 13, 2002
April 10, 2002

Dinner Meeting Guest Speakers

Kristina Lindgren, Senior Editor
Los Angeles Times Orange County Edition
Karin Klein, Education Supervisor
Los Angeles Times Orange County Edition
Educational Issues and the Orange County Edition of the

2001-2002


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Newsletter Editor.....Bob Fidler, FSD



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