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SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

BACKGROUND

There are 43 Elementary School districts and 10 High School districts within Tulare County. Seven of these districts are unified creating 46 Elementary and High School districts with a total of 176 schools. Besides these 46 districts, there are other schools in Tulare County. These are as follows: one Vocational Education program, two Community Colleges, six Court and Community Schools, four Charter Schools, four Special Education Schools, one University Preparatory High School located at the College of Sequoias and 22 private schools with six or more students. This totals 214 schools in the County. Besides Tulare County School Districts, Fresno, Kern and Kings County have High School districts, which serve some of Tulare County's elementary schools bordering those respective counties.

Each School District has a Board of Directors/Trustees (School Board) which customarily adopts the annual budget and approves all expenditures; establishes district policy; authorizes employment of personnel; approves curriculum textbooks and courses of study; and makes decisions on all contracts. School Boards meet at least once a month and all meetings are public meetings as required by law. School Boards must follow all regulations required by the Ralph M. Brown Act as well as those established by themselves.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

While attending some School Board meetings the 2009 - 2010 Tulare County Grand Jury observed some irregularities and inconsistencies in the conduct of these public meetings.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

1. Attended 48 different School Board meetings
2. Used an evaluation checklist, which included agendas; timeliness; Board Member preparedness, demeanor and knowledge; and the meeting room amenities
3. Reviewed relevant information

FINDINGS

1. Of the 48 District meetings visited:
 - a. Thirty-seven started on time.

- b. The public was unable to hear at six meetings for some of the following reasons:
 - i. Public Address (PA) system was not used.
 - ii. Board Members spoke too softly.
 - iii. Translators speaking over the speaker.
- c. Forty-three sites posted the agenda in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act.
- d. Two districts did not have agenda's available for the public at meeting time.
- e. Six Boards did not follow their posted/distributed agenda.
- f. Public comment time was not on the agenda nor asked for at three meetings.
- g. Demeanor of Board Members was not always professional.
- h. Not all Board Members were prepared for their meeting.

- i. Thirty-one districts provide benefits for their Board Members and fourteen pay their Board Members.
 - j. The length of meetings varied between ten minutes and four hours.
 - k. In five districts Board Members were late to the meeting.
 - l. Meeting rooms were a problem for five districts, they did not have a room for the meeting or the room was too small.
 - m. Two districts moved the meeting to another room without notification or leaving a notice at the original site where the meeting had relocated.
 - n. On at least two occasions, Board Members appeared to fall asleep.
2. Eight of the 48 districts have complied with Senate Bill 343 Chapter 298 (Government Code section 54957.5). This Senate Bill, which is an amendment to the Ralph M. Brown Act, became effective July 1, 2008 and requires that Board meeting agendas include a notice, that any agenda packet provided to Board Members is available for public inspection at the district office and/or the district's web site.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of Tulare County School Board meetings are well run by organized, knowledgeable and supportive people. However, there are issues that need addressing in the preparation and execution of the School Board meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. All School Board Members in all Districts attend Government 101. (A training initiated by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors facilitated by County

Counsel and other local attorneys for all governing board members.)

- 2. School Districts:
 - a. Add to the agenda Senate Bill 343 Chapter 298 language and a place for public comment.
 - b. Post meeting agendas 72 hours before the Board meeting in a location where it is available for the public to review per the Ralph M. Brown Act.
 - c. When the agenda is full of business save extra presentations for another meeting.
- 3. School Board Members:
 - a. Read agenda packets before meetings.
 - b. Be on time.
 - c. Be professional and business-like, do not veer off the agenda or fall asleep.
 - d. Keep meetings under 2 hours in order to increase meeting participation.
 - e. Ensure all speakers can be heard by each and every person in attendance.
- 4. If a large group of parents, teachers, and visitors are expected to attend a meeting, find a room large enough to accommodate them before the meeting time.
- 5. If the scheduled meeting room is moved to another site, post a notice of the new location at the original site.

RESPONSES REQUIRED

- Allensworth Elementary School District
- Alpaugh Unified School District
- Alta Vista Elementary School District
- Buena Vista Elementary School District
- Burton Elementary School District

Citrus South Tule Elementary School District
Columbine Elementary School District
College of the Sequoias
Cutler-Orosi Unified School District
Dinuba Unified School District
Ducor Elementary School District
Earlimart Elementary School District
Exeter Elementary School District
Exeter Union High School
Farmersville Unified School District
Hope Elementary School District
Hot Springs Elementary School District
Kings River Union Elementary School District
Liberty Elementary School District
Lindsay Unified School District
Monson-Sutlana Joint Union Elementary School District
Oak Valley Union Elementary School District
Outside Creek Elementary School District
Palo Verde Union Elementary School District
Pixley Elementary School District
Pleasant View Elementary School District
Porterville Unified School District
Richgrove Elementary School District
Rockford Elementary School District
Saucelito Elementary School District
Sequoia Union Elementary School District
Springville Union Elementary School District
Stone Corral Elementary School District
Strathmore Union Elementary School District
Sundale Union Elementary School District
Sunnyside Union Elementary School District
Terra Bella Union Elementary School District
Three Rivers Union Elementary School District
Tipton Elementary School District
Traver Joint Elementary School District
Tulare City School District
Tulare Joint Union High School District
Visalia Unified School District
Waukena Joint Union Elementary School District
Woodlake Union High School
Woodlake Union Elementary School District
Woodville Union Elementary School District
Tulare County Organization for Vocational Education (TCOVE)
Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE)