

Live Oak District Looks At Itself

By DALE POLLOCK

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Trustees, administrators and staff members of the Live Oak School District took a long walk around themselves Tuesday night, as they examined their roles, responsibilities, and changes that might improve their effectiveness.

The training session was led by Gary Bergthold, consultant to county schools on organizational development, and president of the Soquel Union School District board of trustees.

Bergthold started off by asking those in attendance to break into small groups, and to "draw" their conceptions of the school district. The idea was to present in non-verbal fashion the failings and virtues of the district, as perceived by those who run and staff it.

The results, to say the least, were interesting, ranging from one figure "pouring its guts out" with a shotgun, representing the board of trustees, at the figure's head. A second drawing resembled an acupuncture victim, with stimuli for action impeded, and a rather dull personality projected.

The third drawing featured a machine with three bodies, for each of the Live Oak schools, although they "are

not really coordinated together very well," as one staff member observed. Another added, "The hands and feet seem to be grabbing in all directions."

With cartoons out of the way, Bergthold summarized that according to the drawings, the board's role seemed confused, being represented as "external and harsh."

That judgment was confirmed by the second exercise Bergthold took the group through, assessing what the board is doing now that is helpful, and what they could be doing. The same question concerning staff members was asked of the trustees.

While staff complimented board members on their making hard decisions, their consistent support of staff, and their willingness to listen and serve the community, they felt trustees should become more directly involved in the schools, and talk to teachers and students on a one-to-one basis.

They also asked for clearer definitions of the roles of superintendent and assistant superintendent, along with that of the negotiator between staff and the board. They also strongly protested criticism of individual staff members by trustees, and asked the board to "respect the professionalism of the entire staff." Said Marianne Thomas, one of the teacher representatives,

"Sometimes they think they've hired a bunch of nincompoops."

Board Chairman Pauline Poen agreed with several of the requests, and said many of the changes will be instituted by the following meeting. But ill feelings were aroused when board trustees came out with their gripes, and apparently found little, if anything, good to say about the staff.

"There's not much of a relationship between the staff and board," noted Poen, adding that did not include administrators. Trustees complained they received staff reports only after they had been filtered through administrators, and that they felt "sheltered" from what goes on in the district.

Claiming that she had not understood Bergthold's request, Poen said, "We didn't look for the good side. We thought we were supposed to be critical." Bergthold pointed out that attitude in itself may be an indication of how the board approaches its relationship with the teaching and classified staff, a sentiment echoed by administrator Rosemary Faitos, who said, "I feel stabbed."

It was generally agreed by those present to make the give-and-take sessions a regular feature, especially when new trustees come onto the board.