

CF GRAND JURY
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Trustee supports grand jury report

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A scathing Santa Cruz County grand jury report on the Pajaro Valley school district's administration and its board of trustees has simply confirmed what many have suspected all along — the district is in deep trouble.

Trustee Kristen Cozad, a steadfast critic of her fellow board members and district administrators, said "the report," which was released Friday, is "accurate." She hopes it can be used as learning

tool by the community to help straighten out what's wrong with the district.

And according to the report, there's plenty wrong. The grand jury report makes the following assertions:

✓ Some trustees have become personally involved in hiring new teachers and principals, thus using their positions to influence these decisions. The district has a hiring policy which adheres to affirmative action guidelines and does not allow for such inappropriate con-

duct on the part of the trustees.

✓ Many decisions and duties regarding the budget, which are the responsibility of the trustees, are instead relegated to the administration and the unions.

✓ Historically, the trustees have been politically divided and failed to resolve their legitimate differences.

✓ Over the years, the trustees have adopted a budget that omitted crucial information, such as the amount of money actually spent at a school site or district

office.

✓ In years past, the district has had a cash-flow problem in June, requiring it to make short-term bank loans to meet its payroll. These loans have cost the district tens of thousands of dollars in interest.

✓ The 1991-92 audit of the district published in January made several recommendations to resolve some of these cash-flow problems, but the board has yet to

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adopt the audit and the recommendations have not been implemented.

✓ Funds set aside for a specific purpose were used for other purposes. Not only do these transfers make it difficult to track money, they also raise public questions about whether the funds are being appropriately spent for educational purposes.

✓ Due to the large population of migrant and low-income students, the district receives extra state and federal funding. The grand jury discovered some questionable expenditures of these funds, but was unable to determine if any violations had occurred.

✓ The administration hasn't followed district policy when hiring, firing and transferring personnel, resulting in numerous complaints to the grand jury about due process and favoritism. Witnesses repeatedly expressed fear of retribu-

tion from administrators if their anonymity was compromised.

✓ The grand jury struggled to get accurate information from certain administrators, and in some cases, the administrators failed to comply with requests for information and even gave misleading information. (The report did not name these administrators.)

✓ Interviewees told the grand jury that Superintendent Grant is "impatient and cavalier" about following policy. They said he is sometimes "abusive."

The board, Cozad said, can take one of several courses of action. It can deny there is anything wrong; accept responsibility and take steps to fix things; or it can hire someone to "clean up this mess."

"Certainly, we haven't been doing our job effectively," she said. Cozad, who has described the board as "dysfunctional," said she believes a good working relationship among board members can be accomplished but added, "sometimes I have my doubts."

But for her part, "I am not willing to go along just to get along," she said.

Board President Jeff Hancock agrees that the board sometimes places personalities above policy making. Often the board becomes a stage on which trustees can grind their axes, he said.

"The board shouldn't be a platform for attacking or defending individuals," Hancock said. He added that certain trustees' votes are swayed not by the content of a proposal but by whose proposal it is.

The prognosis of a healthier board, Hancock said, is uncertain.

"As far as personalities, that's up to the individuals," he said. He added, "If you are looking for complete agreement you are not going to get it."

Superintendent Grant said this morning he and his staff are preparing a detailed response to the grand jury report and deferred comment until the response is ready. The report should be ready in about two days, he said.