
LEGGETT SCHOOL DISTRICT 2013

May 1, 2013

SUMMARY

Funding small school districts is expensive. The overhead costs are the same for a school district enrollment of 120 or 300. Most California school districts basic income is based on average daily attendance. Less students = less funding! The Leggett School District, with two isolated locations, is trying to maintain quality education with insufficient numbers of students to generate funding to cover basic costs. The school district receives additional funds for being a small school district. The Grand Jury (GJ) found caring, concerned leadership, dedicated teachers and volunteers during this visit to the school. There was a complete change of administrative staff since the last GJ visit resulting in a lack of knowledge of the computer software and a need for a new policy and procedures manual. The GJ is recommending that the Mendocino County Office of Education provide technical support and resources.

A teacher suggested at the board meeting, reducing current salaries across the board would avoid layoffs. It was stated the school is spending \$100,000 more this year than they will receive in revenue. Adding to their costs is supplying bottled water due to non-potable well water, paying mileage to attract credentialed substitute teachers and reallocating money for Program Improvement (year three). The Superintendent has been told the school will receive flat funding for the next 7 years. At this rate, continuing as a functioning district is questionable unless they reduce costs or increase enrollment. The public needs to be aware of the financial challenges and that there will be five school board vacancies in November 2013.

GLOSSARY**Title 1: Federal Funding Formula Grants Education for the Disadvantaged:**

Provides additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects. For example, funds support extra instruction in reading and mathematics, as well as special preschool, after-school, and summer programs to extend and reinforce the regular school curriculum.

Program Improvement, Year Three (PI): To inform parents and public of corrective action and allow comments and may provide direct technical assistance to school site councils in developing school plans. Identifies school for **corrective action** and does at least one of the following:

- Replace school staff
- Implement new curriculum
- Decrease management authority at school level

- Appoint outside expert
- Extend school year or day
- Restructure internal organization

BACKGROUND

In 2006 the GJ visited several small rural school districts. Among the best was the Leggett District. Two years later the GJ received a series of complaints from teachers and parents in the Leggett School District. The GJ found what had been an excellent district was suffering from scandal and poor leadership. Leggett had become a community divided. Parents and teachers were unhappy, student behaviors were unacceptable and there were no accepted defined policies for students and teachers. The GJ returned to Leggett in 2013 to assess the current situation and learned that administration had changed for the second time since 2008-2009.

APPROACH

The GJ toured the school, talked to administration, attended a school board meeting and reviewed the following documents:

- Teacher's contracts
- Emergency procedures
- Discipline reports
- New procedures manual

DISCUSSION

The new Superintendent /Principal was hired in August 2012, three days before school started. There also has been a 100% turnover in administration and office staff since the end of the 2012 school year. No one was left to train the new staff on how to use the record keeping software to generate reports. The previous administration kept insufficient records which has made filling out California required forms difficult if not impossible. School administration needs to request technical assistance and resources from the Mendocino County Office of Education.

The current administration has spent \$10,000 to review and codify school policies. The new Superintendent has expressed a zero tolerance for drugs and disruptive behavior. The Leggett campus is attractive, clean and well maintained by one maintenance person. The school water well produces non-potable water. School water fountains cannot be used. This requires the purchase of bottled water at a cost of \$200-\$300 per month. Grant funding to purify the water in the well is required. Digging a new well resulted in the same contaminated water.

Currently there are 70 students at the school in Leggett and 45 at Whale Gulch. It is an hour and a half drive between the schools. Both campuses educate children from pre-K to 12th grade. There has been a significant drop in enrollment since the GJ visit in 2009 to the present. In 2009 there were 100 students at Leggett and 40 at Whale Gulch. The rural district is paying mileage to attract credentialed substitute teachers.

The State funding stream budget rules for Leggett provide for three teachers for the elementary grades and three teachers for Jr. high/high school. The school currently has four teachers in the elementary school plus three aides paid out of Title 1 funds. The third year of PI has necessitated the reallocation of funds putting the three aide positions in jeopardy. The fourth teacher (unfunded position) in the elementary grades has been cut for the next school year. Seventeen children require special education. There is one specialist providing these services for the two schools.

There are not enough students to offer extramural sports. There is a co-ed basketball team. The GJ was told that student athletes have left the district to attend larger schools in South Humboldt County or Laytonville. There is only one graduating senior this year.

The 8th grade is working on producing a yearbook for the entire school. This is part of the enrichment program which includes cooking classes, media, ceramics, music jam and video. Parent volunteers are providing an arts program and baseball training for all grades. There is no teacher available for foreign language or for the computer lab.

The public at large was told that the school district should expect flat funding from all sources for the next seven years, (\$13,400 per student) as the State changes financial formulas for small school districts. The loss of more than 30 students in the last three years has resulted in a \$200,000 revenue loss requiring expenditures from reserves that is unsustainable. They must radically cut spending or will have insufficient reserves in two years.

The GJ observed dedicated teachers, providing after school programs for elementary students to accommodate the one bus per afternoon schedule. Teachers and aides suggested to the school board to cut salaries across the board to maintain threatened cuts in positions.

In addition to cutting one elementary teacher, the Board was presented with possible reductions to the transportation hours, or route reduction, and possible cuts to maintenance services. Other suggestions were also made for reducing costs.

All five seats on the board of directors are up for election in November 2013.

FINDINGS

- F1. Leadership and policies have significantly improved since 2009.
- F2. The cost of maintaining a small school district is expensive.

- F3. The Leggett school district needs technical training for the school computer records management.
- F4. All Board seats (5) will become vacant in November 2013.
- F5. The Board and community fear they will not be able to maintain an independent district in the future.
- F6. The community is having difficulty understanding the depth of the financial crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. Request technical support specialist from Mendocino County Office of Education to help with computer programs. (F3)
- R2. Recruit qualified Board members. (F4)
- R3. Keep community informed of State funding changes and continuing financial condition of the school. (F5-F6)

REQUESTED FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal code section 933.05, the following responses are *required*:

- Leggett School District Board (all findings; all recommendations) within 90 days.
- Paul Tichinin, Superintendent, Mendocino County Office of Education (F3, R1) within 60 days

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

The Grand Jury *requests* the following individuals to respond:

- Tom Puskarich, Superintendent of Leggett School District (all findings; all recommendations) within 60 days

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.
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