

**West Contra Costa Unified School District  
Minutes of the Board of Education  
Special Joint Meeting of  
City Councils of El Cerrito, Hercules, Pinole, Richmond,  
San Pablo, County Supervisors John Gioia and Gayle Uilkema  
Lovonya DeJean Middle School  
3400 McDonald Avenue  
Richmond, CA 94805**

**January 10, 2009**

**A. Welcome and Introductions**

President Miles called the meeting to order at 10:15 AM.

President Miles offered welcome and provided instructions regarding the format of the meeting.

**Board Present:** Madeline Kronenberg, Antonio Medrano, Audrey Miles, Charles Ramsey, Tony Thurmond

**Council Members Present:**

Latressa Alford for Congressman George Miller  
Brock Arner, City Manager, El Cerrito  
Ed Balico, City Manger, San Pablo  
Genoveva Calloway, City Council, San Pablo  
Ann Cheng, City Council, El Cerrito  
Belinda Espinoza, City Manger, Pinole  
Virginia Fujita, Mayor Pro Tem, Pinole  
John Gioia, County Supervisor  
Mary Horton, Mayor, Pinole  
Bill Jones, City Council, El Cerrito  
Donald Kuehne, City Council, Hercules  
Bill Lindsay, City Manager, Richmond  
Debbie Long, City Council, Pinole  
Ludmyrna Lopez, City Council, Richmond  
Greg Lyman, City Council, El Cerrito  
Joe Eddy McDonald, Mayor, Hercules  
Gayle McLaughlin, Mayor, Richmond  
Leonard McNeil, Mayor, San Pablo  
Paul Morris, City Council, San Pablo  
Peter Murray, City Council, Pinole  
Nelson Oliva, City Manager, Hercules  
Karen Pinkos, Asst. City Manger, El Cerrito  
Sandia Potter, Mayor, El Cerrito  
Jeff Ritterman, City Council, Richmond  
Jim Rogers, City Council, Richmond  
Pedro Rosado for State Senator Loni Hancock  
Roy Swearingen, City Council, Pinole  
Gayle Uilkema, County Supervisor  
Cecilia Valdez, City Council, San Pablo  
Kris Valstald, Vice Mayor, Hercules  
Maria Viramontes, City Council, Richmond  
Joanne Ward, City Council, Hercules

**B. Overview Presentation: WCCUSD Financial Situation and School Closures**

Superintendent Harter provided a presentation regarding financial solvency in the district including information about the general fund budget, remaining debt, average school size and enrollment, bond fund renovations, consolidation committee meetings, comparison of scenarios, and possible short term debt relief.

**C. Exchange of Ideas and Strategies among the Cities, County and School District**

President Miles asked that individuals at the table take a few minutes to speak about the issues of concern.

Mr. Thurmond thanked all the elected officials for their presence and demonstration of commitment to schools. He said this is an opportunity to identify where government can work together to minimize the financial impact to the district.

John Gioia spoke about similar social service cuts at the Contra Costa County level due to the state reduction in funding and tough decisions to be made by the school district regarding cutting expenses and raising additional revenue to avert potential bankruptcy.

Jim Rogers said he suggested focus on a plan to keep schools open with gap financing in this time of crisis, and reported that the Richmond City Council voted to locate funds to cover costs for keeping Richmond schools open as a temporary measure.

Ed Balico said that while Hercules supports the district, he hopes that emotions can be put aside to solve this problem for the future. He urged further study to consolidate schools to run efficiently.

Charles Ramsey spoke about the recent passage of the parcel tax renewal which underscored the commitment of the community to the financial need in the district. He said he supports the idea of an initiative to collectively support the finances of the district similar to the way other communities support the academic education of their children.

Mary Horton said she was here to listen to the district and community and will confer with her city council colleagues at an upcoming study session.

Latreesa Alford said that Congressman Miller appreciated the many parents who have contacted his office. She spoke about jurisdictional issues, as the Congressman has no influence regarding school closures. She concluded by saying that the appropriation funds process could provide funds to various programs.

Bill Jones said he appreciated the difficulty of the school district in being unable to maintain levels of service. He said he would like to suggest that strategies be developed where cities can work on a long term basis to help schools.

Jeff Ritterman said he supported formulating a plan for short term and long term funding and was hopeful now that Richmond has offered to look for bridge funding. He continued by saying that he supported any effort to seek loan forgiveness and asking other local entities to look for additional bridge funding.

Genoveva Calloway said that San Pablo is committed to supporting neighborhood schools for all of West County and advocates working toward local funding, as well as organizing for state and federal public education reform.

Don Kuehne said he supported public education and looking for creative ways to fund other sources of revenue and cutting services where necessary.

Joe Eddy McDonald said he wanted to listen and obtain information particularly regarding efforts to seek forgiveness of debts as he continues to support the district.

Ann Cheng said she wanted to encourage high quality local schools and a long term view of bolstering the school district.

Roy Swearingen reported that Pinole would need to know specific costs necessary to save a school from closure so that they could seek to offset that cost with some sort of community program. He said he also favored a long-term plan to avoid the same issues in the future.

Gayle Uilkema said she observed the cooperation of the local community governments bringing political forces to accomplish the goals of the district at today's meeting.

Greg Lyman said he supported long term solutions including taking additional funding to the public as an initiative and spoke about a planned acquisition of the Fairmont campus for city use in El Cerrito.

Madeline Kronenberg said that the district faces bankruptcy and decisions about local school management. She said her hope is that the district can preserve schools with the collaboration of the community governments finding additional funding.

Ludmyrna Lopez said she felt that student achievement is better in small schools and she is willing to ask every city to provide what support they can. She would like a clear picture of what ongoing costs would be to keep neighborhood schools open for the future.

Virginia Fujita said that while Pinole is looking for funding to keep their city solvent, she would like to see long-term, creative solutions. She urged faith and trust in the established school closure committee for a best solution as they are representative of the community.

Peter Murray said he agreed that the solution for the district lies at the state legislative level. He said he appreciated that the Board is tasked with tough decisions to maintain high standards of quality education.

Kris Valstad said that he felt the priorities of the state and federal government should be education, health care, and national defense and that our leaders need to get priorities in order to move forward.

Cecilia Valdez said she recalls that the downward financial spiral began with Proposition 13. She supported the local community to do the best possible for the schools.

Leonard McNeil spoke about an open commitment that the City of San Pablo would do its part to support the school district. He continued by saying that this meeting underscored the need for a coalition of cities to advocate for district solvency.

Antonio Medrano said he would like to see more collaboration between the cities and school district. The threat of State takeover requires school consolidation and closure implementation. The debt repayment is resulting in less per capita funding, depriving students of an education equal to peers in other districts.

Debbie Long spoke about Pinole's historical support of the schools in their community saying that she advocates debt forgiveness. She suggested a review of surplus properties as city redevelopment agencies may be able to purchase properties to offer short term solutions.

Paul Morris said that San Pablo has worked with the district over the years and he does not support school closures. He said he would like to see the State set priorities that include students as its most important commodity.

Gayle McLaughlin said she agreed with those at the table who advocate for a push back to the state legislature. The focus needs to remain on providing healthy learning environments as the City of Richmond explores ways to financially support the district.

Joanne Ward suggested that this be the first of many forums as an opportunity for city officials to help the district. She concluded by discussing a revenue stream by renting buildings not in use for schools.

Maria Viramontes spoke about passing a proclamation saying that bankruptcy is not an option. She also addressed the employee organizations regarding support of the district in this financial effort to avoid bankruptcy and saving neighborhood schools.

Sandia Potter spoke about some of the issues relating to El Cerrito and the partnership with the school district, saying they are fully committed to helping with the impacts if school closure should happen to their community as they continue to examine sources of revenue.

Ms. Miles deferred her comments to Mr. Thurmond.

Mr. Thurmond thanked the elected officials and the public for the discussion of saving schools. He asked that all city council members go back and formally discuss what their city might do to support the school district. He further asked that Dr. Harter meet with the city managers to look at all the financial options raised today. He concluded by asking those in attendance to consider the political suggestions about working with Sacramento toward debt relief and school funding.

Pedro Rosado, representing State Senator Loni Hancock, reported that the State is in crisis similar to the school district. The Senator does not believe in cutting services, but does believe in increasing revenues in ways that are rational. He said he will take the concerns back to Ms. Hancock.

**D. Public Comment**

Mike Peritz spoke about the need for action items to move forward.

Nicholas Zoffel said that he believed the data is inconclusive regarding a benefit in the consolidation of small schools.

Greg Chang spoke about short and long term solutions, gap funding achievability, and structural reforms.

Brent Fetter offered a solution for Coronado and asked that the closure criteria be reexamined.

Jennifer Zoffel said that the discussion addressed short term needs, ignoring the long-term impacts of costs that impact cities and communities.

Paul Wilson said that every school is important and spoke in support of Coronado.

Rachel McLachlan said it is important to listen to the ideas that came from the table and to continue working on behalf of students.

Roosevelt McKindley said the issue of school closure started long ago and that people need to consider restructuring in order to return to the important task of educating the children.

Gigi Guizado de Nathan spoke about rejecting the idea that the odds are insurmountable and continue the fight.

Christina Slamon asked that current programs of sports and music be maintained.

Jill Wolkenfeld said she hoped that the cities can work together in service to all students of the district to keep schools open.

Jeremy McCauley asked the Board to delay kindergarten registration until all closure issues are solved and commended the committee for looking for funds to save schools and maintain a viable school district.

Anna Edgerton spoke about Kennedy student worries regarding safety if they transfer to go to other schools.

Charles Rachlis spoke about civil rights action and political activism.

Ann Palmer asked the Board and city officials for time to explore other options in order to make better decisions.

Diane Brown thanked the Richmond City Council for coming up with possible solutions.

Mine Ternar Kal said that times of economic distress are not times of despair when tested. She urged the Board to consider Castro's award winning programs.

Mark Moran spoke in support of maintaining Kennedy High School.

C. McIntire spoke in support of maintaining Kennedy to avoid sectional violence should students transfer to schools outside the Kennedy attendance area.

Greg Whaling said that school closure is permanent and that he would like to hear short term solutions right away.

Laurie Ward urged lobbying against the debt with the State and IBM, and exploring ways to find revenue to keep schools open.

Lori Tannyhill spoke in support of Valley View and not closing any schools.

Darcy Long spoke on behalf of Coronado.

Linda Lozito said she hopes that all options will be considered to fight for schools.

**E. Adjournment**

President Miles said that the meeting was successful as an exchange of ideas and strategies between the city and county representatives. Ms. Miles adjourned the meeting at 1:15 P.M.