

REPORT ON DELPHIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

SUMMARY

After review of the complaint, the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury has determined that the Delphic School Board is acting, for the most part, in accordance with state law. However, there are a few areas of concern that need to be addressed.

BACKGROUND

The Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury received a citizen's complaint outlining the following: that the Delphic School Board members are all related to each other; they list the school phone number as their own personal phone number; they oversee an elementary school that has very few children living within the district boundaries; the board members do not always act upon complaints about school employees that are brought to them by staff and parents; the school board members are also on the same election cycle; and concerns over the Board's handling of personnel issues.

METHODOLOGY

The information in this report was gathered through interviews with various individuals and research from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

DISCUSSION

Delphic School District has had its ups and downs over the years. For 27 of the last 30 years, they have had the same administrator, which helps keep the continuity consistent for the staff as well as the students. Last year the school board chose to hire a new principal/superintendent for the current school year and beyond even though the current principal was doing her job in a competent manner, and the parents and students were happy with the school.

With the change of administration this school year it was difficult to find any information about the school, including when school board meetings were scheduled. These issues have been worked out, and the district currently has an operating website with up-to-date information. According to the California Teacher's Credentialing website, all teachers and the administrator have the proper credentials for their current job assignments.

School Board meetings occur once a month and meeting announcements/agendas appear to follow the Brown Act. Community members and parents of students attending Delphic were present at board meetings where the intent to hire a new Principal/Superintendent was announced. At these meetings, parents and community members were informed, by the School Board, that they do not live in the school district, so they have no vote or say in how the School Board operates.

The boundaries for the school district are seven square miles, less than 60 people live within the boundaries, and most do not have school aged children. At the time of this report, 58 of the 60 students enrolled in Delphic School live outside the District boundaries.

The Delphic School Board is made up of three community members who are required to reside within the district. All the current members are related to each other and live on the same property in two different houses. This causes concern about School Board business being discussed outside of regular board meetings and in closed session. According to the Brown Act only board members, school administrators, and individuals directly involved in the discussion are allowed into closed session. Several people stated that an individual not involved with the school was sitting in on multiple closed sessions. Interviews revealed that this individual is no longer attending closed sessions. The Board is aware that there are restrictions involving closed sessions.

Currently all three School Board seats are up for election on the same election cycle. Staggered terms are standard in most school districts and boards.

All the school board members have the same telephone contact information, which happens to be the Delphic School phone number. Board members have their own individual e-mail addresses through the Siskiyou County Office of Education. Contact information was not posted on the website at the time of the Grand Jury investigation, making it difficult to contact board members.

The School Board has been previously informed by parents and staff about employees who were not fulfilling their job requirements and additionally may have been engaged in some legally questionable activities. When the school board made the decision to change the administration for the current school year they took charge of the hiring and firing of all school employees. When concerns were brought to them about employees not following procedures that were in place, it appears they failed to address these issues. For example, it is alleged that an incident occurred between a staff member and students that may have required contacting Child Protection Services or the police. It is alleged that the School Board failed to address this incident.

FINDINGS

- F 1: All board members are related to each other and live on the same property.
- F 2: Boundaries of Delphic School District are very small (about seven square miles). 58 of the 60 enrolled students live outside of the district boundaries.
- F 3: School Board members are all on the same election cycle.
- F 4: It appears that the School Board did not act upon information shared by parents and staff concerning allegations of employees behaving in an inappropriate manner towards students and/or adults.
- F5: School Board members list the school phone number in lieu of individual contact information. The school takes messages and passes them on to the correct board member.
- F6: The School Board knowingly violated the Brown Act in regard to closed session.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1: While it is not illegal for board members to be related, voters within the Delphic School District boundaries who find this objectionable should strive to elect new board members.

R2: Parents and the School Board should explore ways to increase boundaries or negotiate with another district to possibly merge districts.

R3: The District and the Siskiyou County Clerk's office need to work together to address the staggering of elections for board seats.

R4: The School Board needs to act immediately upon any and all concerns brought to their attention concerning student and/or staff safety and well-being. In accordance with the Brown Act regarding confidentiality in closed session, the Board should find a way to inform concerned parties that their complaints have been addressed.

R5: School Board members, at a minimum, should have individual voice mailboxes set up through the school. Board members should continue to maintain their individual e-mail addresses.

R6: All School Board members must attend the next scheduled Small School District Board training session re: The Brown Act.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES:

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Siskiyou County Civil Grand Jury requests responses from Delphic Elementary School Board to all of the above recommendations and the Siskiyou County Clerk is requested to respond to F3 and R3.

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 Grand Jury.