

**SAUSALITO MARIN CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
August 31, 2016**

**ATTENDANCE**

Board Members Present: Caroline Van Alst, William Ziegler, Thomas Newmeyer, Joshua Barrow, Ida Green

Superintendent: Will McCoy

The meeting was called to order at 4:02 p.m.

**Presentation by Dr. Carl Cohn, Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)**

Dr. Cohn said he was delighted to be at the Sausalito Marin City school district. He continued: Governor Brown signed a historic piece of school funding legislation on July 1, 2013. A little known part of the legislation was the creation of the independent agency CCEE, which works to get the right kind of assistance to districts, charters and county offices of education. This task has been complicated by the fact that in the last 15 years, schools have not been getting the right kind of help. We want to pivot away from the "test, punish and shame" methods of the last 15 years and work with people at the local level to get the help to rescue our kids.

California has become the test kitchen for what the rest the country will be adopting in the future. Punish and shame did not close the achievement gap. Now we have an opportunity to get it right. I have tremendous respect for people at the local level; we are asking them to make an unprecedented number of changes in the way they run schools. Some of the changes underway in California include a new approach to school finance and governance. However, not enough attention is being paid to governance. We want to engage stakeholders in ensuring the educational success of our children. Until now, we have not paid enough attention to the problem of getting stakeholders to support change. My mother raised six children by herself. We were poor and she was a victim of domestic violence. But she insisted on her children being educated and I am the beneficiary of her philosophy as a parent.

Another thing we want to ask people to do is to consider alternative approaches to school discipline and serving kids with disabilities. We have argued that the majority of kids with disabilities should be educated in the regular classroom. We are asking a tremendous amount of people at the local level. One of my favorite quotes is from Abraham Lincoln: "A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities, and corporations. All your books are going to be judged, praised or condemned by him. The fate of humanity is in his hands."

I also take inspiration from this school's namesake, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

The CCEE supports LEAs in implementing a cycle of continuous improvement. The most important thing is for people at the local level to own the improvement process. Governor Brown believes in this concept: that state capitols and Washington do not necessarily have the answers. We have a fundamental belief that those at local level must make the changes, while we serve as strategic thought partners.

At the Palo Verde school district, the president of the school board said: In the past people told us what to do, so we could always blame them. This new way is scary because we are involved in the decision making process. Parents and communities are important stakeholders. Closing the achievement gap takes time. I am uneasy when I hear people snapping their fingers and asking why it's not done yet. The big gains in Long Beach kicked in from about years five to ten. The district believed that our efforts would pay off in the long run, and this was critical to the success there. There were points along the way, when they could have said change is not happening fast enough and we need a new team. At CCEE, we want collaborative partners who are focused in a positive way on this kind of work.

Dr. Cohn then asked board members what they see as positive elements in the district or community – attributes which ought to be retained. Trustee Van Alst said that bringing in Will McCoy after a long search for someone with experience and a strong fiscal background has been encouraging.

Trustee Green said we have a community with passionate stakeholders; we have lots of people who are ready to step in and help in any way. Trustee Barrow said we are seeing a greater participation by parents and community members in our public schools. Trustee Ziegler said we have had more community involvement over the past two years. He asked Dr. Cohn about the optimal role for community stakeholders. Dr. Cohn replied that they help the children by reinforcing what is going on in the classroom. Something as simple as meeting in a community facility or offering food during meetings can make a big difference in community participation in school events, he said.

Trustee Green said one of the issues for our district is trust. In the past, parents felt they were not being heard. Trustee Barrow said it is important to recognize the progress we have made with LCAP over the last year. We must credit the community and organizations within the community such as Saving a Generation chaired by Bettie Hodges and the county office of education. Trustee Newmeyer said that diversity has been an overwhelmingly positive attribute of the district.

Trustee Ziegler said that in his opinion, what is needed is basic education. There is continued lack of improvement in the fundamentals – reading, writing and math. Dr. Cohn said that he learned to read in the first grade from a Sister Martin who read the class Winnie the Pooh. The other thing she had down was discipline, he explained. We were looking forward to a Valentine's Day party. But we misbehaved,

so the party was cancelled and Sister Martin offered it to the next class. I was so traumatized that I am still telling the story, he said.

Trustee Van Alst said that she believes improving school culture, intervention and restorative justice are important. Dr. Cohn agreed and said that the pipeline to prison is a huge issue. Speaking of the Palo Verde school district, he said that there are two state prisons in Blythe. The warden there informed him that it costs more than \$50K a year to house a prisoner. The difference between what we are willing to spend at the front end vs. the back end is amazing, he said. He encouraged the audience to search for a TED talk online in which young, articulate inmates talk about their lives at Ironwood State Prison. Their lives are wasted. There is a sense of urgency around these issues and how the State will spend its resources, he said.

In answer to trustee Ziegler's question about California's ranking among states in education, Dr. Cohn said that the LCFF/LCAP legislation is a start on the road to change. But there are no quick, dramatic turnarounds. We must work alongside teachers to see how these compensatory investments will eventually payoff.

Trustee Green said: I am excited that we have an African American principal at our local high school. And we have one here in our school. We need to check our biases about how our children learn. A nun taught you how to read without looking at your color. Our kids often come to school with many challenges, so we have to check our biases to understand why we have seventh and eighth graders who are challenged in English and Math.

Trustee Van Alst asked how districts integrate art and music into the curriculum where students are underperforming in core subjects. Dr. Cohn said there is lots of evidence that arts and music are crucial in helping to teach the basics. I am a firm believer that a well- educated youngster needs art and music as part of the curriculum. He continued: We must have a laser like focus on getting help to the school. We should put all the noise aside and focus on the kids. If they don't get the best education possible right now, they are being hurt.

The measure of us is what happens when those youngsters that we educate now go off into the future.

Trustee Barrow said that he looks at the entirety of the community, despite the fact that we have our population in two spots. Dr. Cohn said that he was trained as a counselor and believes that listening is a neglected skill. The only way to get to the right place is when people listen to each other. "Every child, every day" must be the guiding philosophy. Sometimes, getting school boards to focus on student performance is difficult. Success for us will be if people at the local level say CCEE brought us the help we needed.

Trustee Newmeyer asked if this district should also anticipate a 10-year arc before seeing big improvements. Dr. Cohn said that the community should expect to see changes within three to five years. Trustee Barrow asked: how do we balance the local desire to move fast with your philosophy? Dr.

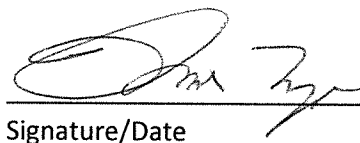
Cohn said that he had just finished a five- year evaluation of DC public schools. There was a big testing scandal at some point. In one middle school, proficiency levels were in the single digits and went up to 75% in on year. When the progress of students has been neglected for some time, to think you can have a quick turnaround is a mistake. There is no magic wand, no substitute for slow and steady progress.

Trustee Barrow asked about the cost of the CCEE program. Dr. Cohn said that there are no costs to the district. However much you want to involve us, we are available to that extent, he said.

Trustee Newmeyer said we are enthusiastic about Will McCoy being on board. Trustee Van Alst thanked Dr. Cohn for his real and refreshing words and said that she looks forward to working with him. Trustee Ziegler thanked Dr. Cohn for sharing his wisdom with the Board and the community. Mr. McCoy said that a resolution regarding an agreement with CCEE would be brought to the September 13 board meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Newmeyer/Barrow/All to adjourn at 5:15 p.m.**

 9/13/16  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Date

Clerk  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Title