

# **2001-2002 GRAND JURY REPORT**

## **The Palo Verde Unified School District**

### **Background**

The Palo Verde Unified School District (District) is located in Blythe, California. The name of the District comes from the fertile region known as the Palo Verde Valley. While the area's population is growing, it retains its agricultural roots. The geographic isolation from other districts and large cities has affected the hiring and retention of staff. That same isolation has negatively impacted the District in providing information to the community.

The District consists of three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative school. Total enrollment for K-12 is over 3,700 students. The District student enrollment is approximately 56% Hispanic, 26% Caucasian, 17% African American and 1% Other. The District receives approximately 10% federal dollars, 60% state, and 26% local dollars. The District budget for 2000-2001 was over \$26,660,000.

### **Findings**

1. The five member Palo Verde Unified School District Board of Education has three new members who were elected in 2001. One of the new members is a former superintendent of the District.
2. In September 2001, the superintendent resigned and an appointed superintendent served until April, 2002. Since that time there have been two additional interim superintendents.
3. The District office has an administrator who was originally hired for federal and state funded projects, but due to the resignation of the superintendent, had to assume additional responsibilities for instruction and pupil personnel.
4. The District signed a contract in March 2002, for the purchase of the Palo Verde Community College facilities, after the college moved to a new location. The purpose for the purchase was to provide for the temporary relocation of each elementary school while renovations were occurring.
5. The California Office of School Construction notified the District in June 2002, that the purchase contract lacked the required funding. The District is currently negotiating a rent/lease agreement with the college.
6. A concerned citizens group was formed due to the lack of communication that had created an atmosphere of mistrust between the District and the community. A major part of the mistrust was due to the following:

- requests from the District for resignations from the English Language Learner Program teacher, Palo Verde High School principal, a vice-principal, and another teacher
- a distributed notice to the journalism class that selling candy added points to each student's grade
- on-going yearbook debt problem has not been resolved to date
- questions regarding the administering of the elementary school SAT 9 Writing Section Test and the reporting of the test results
- Palo Verde High School gym air conditioning, shower rooms, water quality, and water availability for students
- Bid solicitation process and awarding of contracts

## **Recommendations**

### **Riverside County Office of Education Palo Verde Unified School District Board of Education**

1. The District Board of Education immediately request that the Riverside County Office of Education provide resource personnel to perform an in-depth audit of the District.
2. The Riverside County Office of Education respond favorably to the request from the District Board of Education for the resource personnel.
3. The Riverside County Office of Education provide assistance to the District for staff development with emphasis on interpersonal relationships, test administration, and test interpretation. The District provide support for community, parents, and Board of Education participation.
4. The District Board of Education take the training available for school board members provided by the California School Board Association.