

VENURA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Declining Enrollment Committee
March 29, 2022
Minutes

Call to Order

Ventura Unified School District held a teleconference meeting of the Declining Enrollment Committee on March 29, 2022. The meeting was called to order by Committee Chairperson James Forsythe.

Roll Call

Committee Members Present: Velma Lomax, James Forsythe, Mike Johnson, Laura Nicholls, Todd Tyner, Heather Lacayo, Claudia Caudill, Carol Peek, Dan Nelson, Lori Campbell, Mike Owens, Mike Lazarus, Danielle Reyes, Dr. Jerry Dannenberg

Absent: Allison McKay, Steve Strong, Mayra Vega-Manriquez, Carol Peek, Cary Glenn, Dr. Jesus Vega, Matt Almaraz, Carolyn Grimm, Maria Melo, Rosie Wilcox, Stephanie Ortiz, Martha Payne, Rebekah Acker, Cassie Lawhead, Kassi Harris

VUSD Support Staff Present: Dr. Roger Rice, Dr. Rebecca Chandler, Marieanne Quiroz, Gina Wolowicz, Anna Campbell, Andrea Crouch, Maria Elizarras, Anthony Ramos, Dr. Rene Rickard

Dr. Rice began the meeting after asking VUSD support staff and committee members to identify themselves. With many committee members absent, Chairperson Forsythe asked if there was a quorum for this evening's meeting. Dr. Chandler checked the numbers and to confirm that there was a quorum for the meeting, with 14 of the 25 committee members present.

Review of Data

Dr. Rice reviewed some of the data shared at the previous meeting: enrollment broken down by a number of factors, where students were landing after they left VUSD, District budget spending, parochial/private school enrollment, housing affordability, and marketing efforts for VUSD schools.

Membership Discussion

Chairperson Forsythe began the discussion of committee members who have not attended previous meetings. Dr. Rice emphasized the importance of having an active and engaged committee so the credibility of the recommendations to the Board be representative of a wide swath of the community. Dr. Rice commented that it was at the discretion of the committee to decide to remove committee members who haven't participated and vote to seat the alternates that are present. Trustee Lomax asked if the committee members who have not attended had been contacted, Dr. Chandler confirmed that they had been. Ms. Nicholls opined that having meetings with consistent frequency may help with committee member attendance. Dr. Chandler shared a roll sheet, showing which members have asked to be removed from the committee, as well as those that have not attended previous meetings and did not respond to the email sent regarding their participation on the committee. Ms. Nicholls spoke up, clarifying that Ms. Acker, the alternate from the Midtown area, is interested in participating but was out

of town and not able to attend tonight's meeting. Ms. Peek stated that she feels it's important to have Education Support Professionals (ESPs) on the committee. Mr. Nelson stated that he believes he can assist with helping bring in replacement members, specifically from Special Education and Electives. Ms. Trustee Lomax stated that any new committee members should be asked to watch recordings of the previous meetings.

Co-Chairperson Johnson made a motion to remove community representative committee members who have alternates available in their areas. Todd Tyner seconded the motion. Ms. Lacayo asked to confirm that East End area alternate Ms. Ortiz was interested in participating, this was confirmed. There was no further discussion.

Chairperson Forsythe asked to put the motion to a vote, Dr. Chandler performed a roll call vote. The vote passed with all voting members present voting yes, and zero voting no.

Co-Chairperson Johnson made a point of order, stating that roll call should be performed again, as there were new committee members voted in. A second roll call was completed by Dr. Chandler.

Presentation of New Data

Dr. Rice presented information about an exit interview given to students/families who are leaving VUSD, which could be provided to all schools, upon the recommendation of the committee. Dr. Rice explained that the survey is fairly straightforward, asking families where they plan to enroll the student after exiting them from VUSD, and then asking the main reason for exiting their student from VUSD. There was some feedback from committee members on the answers and wording of the survey. Options in the delivery method of the survey (electronic, paper, etc.) were mentioned as well, Dr. Rice offering that in his experiences on-site at schools, an in-person, paper option would be extremely helpful in capturing more data from exiting students. Ms. Quiroz commented that VUSD is looking into a new online survey platform to use in the future. Committee members also offered feedback on additional answers in the existing questions, as well as additional questions seeking further information as to what could bring exiting students back to the district.

Next, the draft of the survey to current VUSD parents was shown, which had been suggested at a previous meeting. Ms. Caudill commented that adding in the grade of the student could be good additional information. Ms. Lacayo asked if the surveys would be confidential, Dr. Rice indicated that a place to enter the student's name would likely be included. Mr. Lazarus commented that names should not be recorded on the survey, and that anonymity could lead to more honest responses.

Dr. Chandler commented that in regards to the membership discussion, there were still some committee members who had asked to be removed that had not been yet. Ms. Lacayo made a motion to remove those members who had requested to be removed who had not yet been removed. The motion was seconded. Dr. Chandler did a roll call vote, and the motion passed.

Ms. Peek made a motion to name three Education Support Professionals (ESPs) and replace the two teachers who had asked to be removed. The motion was seconded by Todd Tyner. Mr. Nelson commented that he would like to see the two teachers removed, with one spot reserved for another teacher, and two ESPs to be named to be included in the committee. Ms. Lacayo asked for clarification, as her previous motion was to remove any committee member who had asked to be removed. One of the teachers who is a committee member had not requested to be removed, but has not participated in any of the previous committee meetings. Dr. Chandler confirmed this information. Chairperson Forsythe

asked Dr. Rice for clarification if the motion would be invalid, and have to be amended to correct the wording, Ms. Peek commented that she would be willing to do so. The motion was restated by Ms. Peek, to remove the teacher with an ESP. The motion was seconded by Mr. Nelson, and there was no further discussion before a roll call vote by Dr. Chandler. The motion was passed. Ms. Peek will follow up with the names of an ESP and an alternate. Dr. Rice clarified that Mr. Nelson would bring the name of a teacher who could replace the one who had not asked to be removed, but has not participated in meetings thus far.

Public Comments

Ms. Quiroz announced that public comment had begun, and explained how one would request to make a public comment via Zoom. There were no public comments.

Committee Comments/Requests

Chairperson Forsythe asked committee members for any comments or requests for any future meetings. Co-Chairperson Johnson commented that everyone be mindful in data requests, as it can be overwhelming. Mr. Nelson spoke to the fact that he has heard that the Declining Enrollment Committee's goal is to close schools, he wanted to make a point of clarifying that this is not the case and is not what the committee is set up to do. The role of the committee making recommendations to the School Board was discussed by various members.

Ms. Lori Campbell asked how requests for school of choice are handled for families that submit those requests after the deadline. Ms. Elizarras, Dr. Rice, and Mr. Tyner all contributed information to answer the question.

Adjournment

Mr. Nelson made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Peek seconded. The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson Forsythe.

From: [Johnston, Michelle](#)
To: [Public Comment](#)
Subject: Declining Enrollment
Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2022 3:55:42 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Dear Committee,

I am writing as a former student, 27 year veteran teacher, and parent of three students (k through 12th and now graduated) in Ventura Unified. I listened in on the very first meeting. I did not know there was additional meetings until I just happened to see the notice on the website. Obviously declining enrollment is a serious issue due to the domino effect it causes.

First of all, I think our district is making some positive changes. Having unique programs available for many kinds of students is important. I do think adding k-8th schools is a wise decision. I think it is important to offer the FLEX programming as well as growing the El Camino programs and the homeschooling options. I think the FIRE and BARK type programs are important for students as they begin high school. Increasing support for enrichment and extracurricular activities is what keeps many kids going to school. Keep up the great work.

Next, I think that the statistics being shared are interesting and informative, but the WHY is the most important aspect of the data. The 2020-2021 data showed 145 students leaving for private schools, 96 to Vista Real, and 35 for homeschool. We can't control those moving out of state, but we can address some of the issues. I will note that the data for 2021-2022 is not based on the full year so that data of 43 Vista Real, 16 homeschool, and 22 private is based on August to February and is missing the end of the school year months.

We can't do anything about the cost of housing. We can't do change if people move out of the area. However, we can ask parents and students what they need and want. Why are people leaving? What is the reason? I have been talking lately to people I encounter and when I find out they have children in private schools instead of Ventura Unified I ask why! Many of them cite the Covid related restrictions and the online learning in the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year as the reason they left and took their child to private school. One parent of a prior student of mine said her child will be back someday, that the cost of private tuition was a huge issue, but the restrictions related to Covid was the initial reason. We need to be asking for parent input and we need to include our "customers" which are the kids! Yes, we will find that many may give silly answers, but many will share ideas that just might work. We will get some data that may give us direction. Happy kids means happy parents.

Also, it is a concern of many parents that there are topics in some grades that they do not want their child to be exposed to. I recall just a few years ago hearing stories from my own children and their friends about things happening in their classrooms at the high school. I was very concerned and shocked to find out things adults were saying in the classroom. I wanted to confront administration and the teachers, but I was concerned and so was my own child about the repercussions of speaking up. Students and parents need safe ways to communicate concerns. Administration in some of the schools need to be more visible in the classroom. Parents are concerned about sexual education,

CRT, bullying, and more. Hearing terrible news about incidents in other states just adds to the concern parents have. I think there is a way to educate and grow learners that can think for themselves. Parents are concerned about “indoctrination” with certain topics. We need transparency and parents need to have right to know what their child/ren are learning.

Finally, it is imperative that the mandates for the vaccine are not forced on school age children. Many parents are absolutely against this and they will pull their child(ren) out of public education. Has the district voiced their concerns to lawmakers as to the damage this could have on enrollment and all the effects thereafter? In a recent poll of private school parents in one Ventura school, 50% of the parents voiced that they would remove their child/ren if the vaccine is mandated at the school. One statistic I heard is 30% of public education parents would pull their child out of school if the Covid-19 “vaccine” is mandated. We cannot afford to have this impact on enrollment.

In closing, I think it is important to respect the time and honor those making public comment. I noticed 30 community members spoke at the first meeting. The public comment was early on the agenda, but it didn’t start for one hour and 50 minutes. I think that shows a lack of courtesy. I have noticed that the Board Meetings have a specific time for public input which I think is respectful and honoring. I am wondering why the committee meeting time for the March 2nd meeting and agenda wasn’t sent to all stakeholders? I only knew there had been a meeting because I just happened to come upon it on the website. The fact that no public comment was made on the early March meeting makes me think that the lack of communication was intentional. This meeting today was not communicated in writing either. I think it is important to keep all stakeholders informed and being respectful of time is important. We are not a business, but when we put our customers first (parents and students), we will experience more success!

Thank you for working together for the success of our district and community.

Sincerely,

Michelle Johnston, Kindergarten Teacher

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