

Report Supports Romero

LAUSD board urged to give superintendent more clout

By Erik N. Nelson
Staff Writer

Board members micromanage the Los Angeles Unified School District and need to step aside and allow the superintendent to govern the \$9 billion-a-year enterprise, according to a report to be released today by a leading city education reform group.

The Committee on Effective School Governance recommends that the seven-member board curtail its own power by allowing the superintendent to approve contracts up to \$1 million, limit its time-consuming requests to staff, and meet once a month instead of twice.

But some feared that the recommendations would lead to less interaction between the public and board and even harm an already overburdened public school system.

"The school board isn't a corporate board. It is a body that serves the public," said Stephanie Carter, co-chairwoman of Finally Restoring Excellence in Education, a local group that wants to split from LAUSD and form two separate San Fernando Valley school districts. "If it's too complicated and too difficult, they ought to break up the district."

The school governance committee, whose members include many influential civic and business leaders in Los Angeles, is urging the board to set five-year goals for student achievement and other concerns and adopt the plan by January to serve as a road map for its superintendent.

"If for whatever reason the board can't change in the way that we're talking about, then we're going to have to find other ways to run the district," said committee chairman

Harold Williams, president emeritus of the J. Paul Getty Trust. "We're just beginning to embark on a study looking at other ways of governing if in fact this doesn't work."

Superintendent Roy Romero, reached en route from Washington, D.C., on Thursday,

said he had not seen the report and wanted to discuss it with the board before commenting.

"It sounds like a very good report and a very appropriate report," Romero said. "It'll be helpful."

Board member Caprice Young, who has been pushing to establish a \$1 million threshold for board contract decisions, said she agreed with the report's findings.

"A lot of these things are things that I've been pushing for very hard," she said, citing the threshold for board contract decisions. "If we have some level of certainty and he's focused on the priorities we've set then there's no reason why we shouldn't give him tremendous authority."

The committee's findings were also praised by Julie Korenstein and Valerie Fields, board members running for reelection, and their opponents, Tom Riley and Matthew Rodman.

"Most of the things that they say, I have been doing," said Fields, whose district includes the west San Fernando Valley. "I participated in appointing a capable person as superintendent and I have stayed out of his way and let him manage."

Rodman, a commercial developer trying to unseat Fields, praised the "group of extremely smart and well-respected leaders" for taking a corporate CEO approach to managing the district.

"This is an organization with a \$9 billion-a-year budget and it's about time that we treat it as such," Rodman said.

But other board members, while generally supportive of empowering the superintendent, expressed doubts about the plan's ambitious timetable and curtailed board activity.

Retooling the district's governance will require "long, deep, substantive work," said board President Genethia Hayes.

"Whatever good schools and good government happens, that is going to be valueless if we don't have seats for children," she said.

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