

Upland Unified School District Board of Education

League of Women Voters of Mt. Baldy Area

Observer Report by Molly Godfrey

May 2019 to May 12, 2020

Role and Purpose of Upland Unified School District Board of Education

According to the Upland Unified School District website, the board is comprised of elected community members "...who work together to ensure that all students within our district receive an education of excellence. The Board makes major decisions for the district regarding educational goals, staffing, and school policy and ensures that the district is financially accountable to the public. The district staff, headed by the Superintendent of Schools, carries out the policies and actions of the Board."

Members of the Upland Unified School District Board of Education & District Administration

Current board members as of May 2020: *

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| President: | Linda Angona |
| Vice President: | Wes Fifield |
| Clerk: | Mary Locke |
| Member: | Jack Young |
| Member: | Robert Bennett |

*Annual organizational election of the Board of Trustees, including election of President, Vice-President, Clerk, representative and alternate for County Committee, representative and alternate for City/School Committee, representatives for Legislative Network and Traffic Safety Advisory committees takes place in December.

Superintendent Dr. Nancy Kelly has been serving Upland since 2013. In November 2019, Dr. Kelly announced plans to retire at the end of the academic year and a new Superintendent, Lynn Carmen Day, was approved in March 2020. This year saw the retirement of Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, Dr. Scott Sypkens in May 2019, and the following administrative appointments were made throughout the year: Sergio Canal as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Pamela Salgado as the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, and Arik Avanesyans as the new Assistant Superintendent of Business Services.

Structure of the Board Meetings

Regular school board meetings are generally held the second and/or fourth Tuesday of every month at 6:00pm, however special meetings are often scheduled, usually to approve service and/or employment contracts, and are generally brief. I started in April and attended 14 out of

16 of the regular board meetings and 1 of the 12 special meetings. Meeting agendas are available online and at the meetings, and public comment is encouraged. Employee representatives from the Upland Teachers Association (UTA), Upland Management Association (UMA), and the California School Employees Association (CSEA) are invited to address the board at every meeting. Meetings prior to the school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic alternated between the Community Room at the UUSD Building and schools throughout the district, with the host school being given an opportunity to present school accomplishments or projects to the board. Meetings open with the pledge of allegiance (usually led by students from one of the schools) followed by Superintendent's comments, Board comments and correspondence, administrative reports, audience participation, comments from employee representatives, the consent calendar, action items and closed session.

Highlights and General Impressions

1. Board and Administrative Participation and Response to Public Comments & Attendees

All board members are usually present at meetings. Based on my observations, board members treat each other, the public who are addressing the board, and visiting students with respect. They welcome comments and directly address high school senior attendees, all of which must attend a meeting as a social studies requirement. All board members regularly attend school events at all levels across the district, including presentations, fundraisers, club fairs and sporting events and routinely discuss these items during board comment and correspondence.

2. Teacher Projects, Community Partnerships and Staff Reports

In May 2019, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education, Shinay Bowman, provided an update to the UUSD English Learner Language Program. Approximately 10% of all students within UUSD are English Learners. The goal for English Learners is to have them reclassified, which means they have to meet state testing requirements and successfully achieve in classrooms and society fully in English. Over the course of 5 years, reclassification rates went from 2% to 30%, which is higher than county and state averages for English Learners overall. They discussed successes in the English Language Program and the next steps being taken to address continued engagement, success and parent participation.

In July 2019 the board approved a proposal to upgrade the current telephone system to a Mitel solution Voice-Over IP (VoIP) telephone system through the district. The new telephone system will provide better routing capabilities and overall communications.

Administrative and staff presentations repeatedly show an interest in the impact of Social-Emotional Learning. The district has seen success with a Wellness Center at Cabrillo Elementary and a second Wellness Center was opened at Upland High School in December 2019. Wellness Centers, which are the targeted aspect of a Multi-Tiered Support System, are a quiet place where kids who are struggling can reset. The project was green lit by Dr. Kelly and is preventative and intervention based.

3. Pertinent Issues Facing the Board

In June 2019, Caroline Larson, a CPA/Partner with Vavrinek, Trine, Day & Co., LLP presented the UUSD 2019-2020 Annual Budget. She proposed \$600,000 in cuts over each of the next 3 academic years to prevent cutting \$1.7 million in one year in order to curb a shortage of the required 3% reserve. She also stressed the challenges they face over turnover at the UUSD Business Office and said the ability to respond to the audit will affect financials. Turnover at the business office has been addressed multiple times in administrative presentations, by teachers and union representatives and seems to be a persistent issue for the district.

There have been multiple speakers during public comment who address the board regarding difficulties with the West End Special Education Local Plan Area (WESELPA) and ongoing and pending litigation by the law firm used by UUSD- Fagen Friedman and Fulfroft LLP. Many speakers during the 19-20 academic year implored the Board to address issues caused by WESELPA, mostly cases involving denial of services. They often comment on money spent on litigators instead of students, and the alleged use of intimidation and frivolous lawsuits by FFF LLP. This is an ongoing issue that the board faces.

4. Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

UUSD initially closed all schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic for 4 weeks on March 16, 2020. On April 1, 2020, "in coordination with public health agencies and the Governor's office and schools across the region and state", UUSD announced that campuses would remain closed through the end of the academic year, but that distance learning would continue.

During the closure of campuses the district distributed approximately 3,700 Chromebooks to students in a drive-up process to aid in distance learning. They also continued breakfast and lunch service as a "grab and go" program that was free and open to all students under 18, not just to those who qualified and participated in the free or reduced price meal program. Initially this meal program was a weekday distribution at all school sites but has since changed to every Monday at 4 sites throughout the district. On one Monday in May, Nutritional Services handed out approximately 15,000 meals for the week and served more than 3,000 students.

Some board members assist with food distribution on a weekly basis. All continue to be active in participating in virtual activities for students and their families and other meetings in general. Board of Education Meetings began taking place via Zoom on March 24th, 2020, with regular attendance from board members, members of the public, union representatives, and high school seniors.

In closing, it is my observation that UUSD Board of Education welcomes public input, practices civility during meetings, and members appear well prepared and sincerely invested in the issues facing the district and the success of the students. I look forward to continuing observing the board and how they will face the challenges of the upcoming academic year.