

**Subject:** Public Comment for March 1 Board Meeting: SMCBOE - District 7 vacancy

**Date:** Tuesday, February 28, 2023 at 12:29:59 PM Pacific Standard Time

**From:** Bob Bauer <rbauer@gmail.com>

**To:** Jennifer Perna <jperna@smcoe.org>

Dear San Mateo County Trustees,

As a current Trustee of the Portola Valley School District in my 10th year, I seriously considered applying for the District 7 vacancy. In the process of evaluating whether the opportunity to 'make a difference' would be greater as a member of the County vs. local school Board, I spoke with current and former Superintendents of multiple local School Districts as well as retiring trustee Ross. I reviewed the minutes from your Board meetings during the past 6 months including the Strategic Planning session last Fall. With this as background, Superintendent Magee was generous in meeting face-to-face so I might gain a 'sense' of the possibility of partnering on vital education issues facing our County schools. The purpose of this note is to share with you my observations, and urge you to improve the execution of your duties so you may take more meaningful actions on behalf of the students of San Mateo County.

I did not apply for the District 7 vacancy for one fundamental reason: I concluded that while the County Superintendent is required to engage and support the San Mateo Board on some matters (e.g., appeals, budget adoption), there is no avenue for this Superintendent to work with the County Board on their interests or initiatives because of being separately elected to lead an LEA. Indeed the very notion of setting aside 'discretionary funds' for Board member priorities during the budget approval process was not a possibility in the Superintendent's articulation of the workings of SMCOE & the Board. However, according to information I obtained about the Education Code (e.g., Sections 1042 and 1621), the County Board can do much more than simply approve requests and priorities set by the Superintendent for the SMCOE,

I considered applying to join y'all in order to set priorities that are important to the voters among whom we live. Some of the issues that are critical to me, and I believe District 7 voters, include the following:

1. During my first term as a PVSD trustee, I voted to approve the Tinsley settlement; now that I have returned to the Board (first as an appointee replacing resigning Trustees during COVID), I was ecstatic to learn that over 10% of our District students come from the Ravenswood District. These students and their families enrich the education and lives of local students while our District offers extraordinary opportunities to the children of East Palo Alto. How can we learn from this success? (I dare anyone to identify VTP students from others in PVSD based on performance.) How can the Board lead in the understanding and implementation of opportunities for increased diversity through programs and voluntary interdistrict transfers across the County?

2. I would have liked to see evidence that Trustees require reports on any number of academic performance metrics in order to affect improvement, As a couple of examples where greater focus could be beneficial:

(a) CAASPP results show that massive gender-based disparities occur between 5th and 8th grade in Science. This is but one example of student performance data that the County Board could examine and use to initiate meaningful programs at the County level that local Districts would never be able to conduct.

(b) The impact of CoVID on ELA and Math proficiency (as measured by test scores) varied widely among San Mateo County Districts. What can be learned from the best practices of Districts that did not experience significant learning loss in our County? What resources are needed to achieve meaningful remediation by implementing the learnings from these Districts? Will the Board act to prioritize such County expenditures for the 2023-24 School year?

3. There is outstanding work by [CSforCA](#) including suggested curricula that address gender equity and access to computer science understanding starting in kindergarten when STEM curiosity is often at its peak. What can San Mateo County do to evaluate, advocate and support such work in its LEAs?

Besides such specific issues, there are vital SMCOE activities (e.g., LCAP approvals and MTSS support) for which the Board should provide more cogent oversight and leadership.

Let me be clear: I/We (PVSD) am/are extremely grateful for the excellent multi-faceted support Superintendent Magee's leadership has provided for our students and staff in areas ranging from School Safety and Library resourcing

to IT security and services. Her handling of CoVID challenges was heroic and absolutely world class. However, as an elected head of a LEA, the Superintendent's responsibilities/obligations/interests result in the Board being a very minor aspect of her work and essentially ignored in the efforts of the SMCOE. After reviewing the work of the Board and Superintendent and insights of outstanding educators, I believe that oversight of SMC-level education efforts are not optimal without stronger substantive efforts by the San Mateo County School Board.

Today all substantive matters of interest to the Board are handled by the Superintendent as informational/educational matters focussed on enabling Board members to advocate themselves within the County and at the State level. Board passions are treated as efforts that require individual Trustees to seek partnership with political leaders or non-profit entities; not only do Board initiatives not leverage the SMCOE, but also any academic performance results or curriculum strategies requested by the Board would only be treated as background for such advocacy rather than be considered for meaningful work to be undertaken by the SMCOE. Needless to say, this was very sobering, and I decided that an effort to transform the County Board to be more activist was not one that I could undertake at this time. While I prefer to remain on the Portola Valley Board where I can advocate for issues beyond our LEA through CSBA and lobbying with the State government, I humbly urge each of you to consider the authority vested in your position and to use 'the power of the purse' to explore & execute Board-led initiatives of your choosing.

I very much appreciate Superintendent Magee and others who generously shared their time, experience, and candid insights. We all want the same thing: The best educational outcomes for the youth of San Mateo County. I am at your service to achieve this goal.

Sincerest regards,  
Bob

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Robert S. Bauer, Ph.D.  
Portola Valley School District Trustee  
[rbauer@pvsd.net](mailto:rbauer@pvsd.net)  
650.722.2430  
[rbauer@gmail.com](mailto:rbauer@gmail.com)