

Friends and Supporters,

It has been some time since I sent out an update to all of you, and frankly it's been too long. However, as we approach the end of the school year and my first six months as a School Board member, it seemed like a good time to write down some reflections on my first half-year. I apologize up-front for this long summary, and I will attempt to communicate more often in the future, including on my newly inaugurated blog at [www.rosenblatt.org](http://www.rosenblatt.org).

Again I want to thank you all for the amazing support I received both during the campaign as well as since I've been elected. I appreciate all of your kind words and your confidence.

In general, it's been an amazing six months. I'm extremely glad I did this; I've learned a lot, and I think our team has made some good progress. Certainly there are some things that take getting used to – such as the pace at which a governmental body can move, as well as the sometimes highly charged and emotional nature of certain discussions. But in general, I have found both my colleagues on the Board, as well as the Superintendent and the District staff, to be extremely bright, caring people, and I have enjoyed working with them all. I've found that our agreements and philosophical alignments far exceed our differences.

From the outside in, it certainly appears that we work at a glacial pace. The inherent nature of this governing body – as well as the Brown Act (which, among other things, restricts private meetings among a majority of board members) – inherently limits the speed of decision making. As someone who is used to the private-sector where these limitations do not exist, I find myself needing to temper my natural instinct to “just get it done.” Don't take this to mean that it is bad process – there is much value in a deliberative, public forum for discussion and decision making.

Despite this metered pace, the District accomplished a lot in the last six months:

- We agreed upon, and published, our list of governance team priorities for the coming year
- The major construction projects were finished at all of the school sites
- We adjusted the policy to more easily allow children of current teachers and staff to attend our schools
- The District raised the substitute pay level
- We added more workshops on the board calendar to examine certain issues in greater depth
- We are near completion of a demographic study to understand trends related to future enrollment and school site boundary issues
- The District financial team has done an amazing job at vastly improving our financial reporting and control systems, with better information now available to Board members
- We finalized our policy and procedure around use of school facilities by outside parties

- The Superintendent instituted a reorganization of the district office, with new hires around curriculum and special education.
- We hired a polling firm to understand the possibilities around a future parcel tax ballot measure to increase funding for the schools
- We purchased the software “agenda online” which is amazing tool for electronic management and distribution for Board agendas, packets, and minutes. This will help the community stay better informed as to all of the happenings in the district.
- We completed a new middle school math textbook adoption

On a personal note, I was also able to:

- Visit all of the school sites, spend some time with each of the principals, visit classrooms, and spend some time with the teachers
- Attend a multitude of school events
- Attend a number of training sessions, including the CSBA annual conference as well a new board member workshops.
- Be a judge for the San Mateo County Kent Awards and visit a school site in Hillsborough to examine one of their student leadership programs.

Of course, we are not without our issues:

- Money – I’m sure you’re all aware of the State’s financial crisis, and of course this affects our school district. Even before the current state crisis, California was ranked near the bottom of all states in per pupil funding, and we are asked year after year to do more with less. This is larger issue than just San Carlos, so it is one that requires our continual commitment to advocate at the state and federal level on behalf of our children. However, at the local level, we need to continue to do our best to maximize programs and opportunities for children given these limited resources. One of the ways we can do this is through a new parcel tax.
- Communications – One of our biggest opportunity as a school district is to connect better with the community around us. When running for office, I learned how much I didn’t know despite the fact that I was a fairly involved parent. It is our responsibility as a school district to continually educate both parents and the broader community on district priorities, financial issues, goals and strategy, and how to best engage with the Board and the District. I will continue to work toward developing a powerful and effective model for communication and collaboration with the community.
- Enrollment and Boundaries – There has been anecdotal evidence of a brewing problem that we are running out of space in the school district. In addition, there is “asymmetry” in the capacity utilization among our elementary schools. Based on the preliminary demographic report recently received, there is some good news and some bad news. The good news is that we may be able to avoid overall spikes in enrollment that were feared. The bad news is that the Middle Schools are flirting with the edge of their capacity, and that the current elementary school boundaries don’t accurately reflect where the kids are coming from (neither of these would be a surprise to most parents in the

district). The Board will need to spend some time over the next number of months understanding these issues, and will perhaps have to make some difficult and/or unpopular decisions.

- Technology – although we have made some progress in this area, I think you will see a greater focus on how best to leverage technology in the classroom. I'm not talking about just having PCs for kids, but rather tools for teachers to augment their classroom experience and better engage students.

You also may have heard about some “high profile” issues, such working with the city on possible artificial turf at Heather field (which ultimately did not happen) as well as negotiations between the District and the teacher’s union on salaries. Although it would probably be inappropriate (and lengthy) to go into a detailed analysis of these situations, I had some common observations about these issues:

- Emotions can run really high, making “feelings” become “facts” – in that context, it is difficult to have a rational debate.
- For reasons unbeknownst to me, some people make it personal. In both of these situations, Board members were accused of being not caring, deceptive, manipulative, and lacking morals.

The first lesson here is that one quickly learns to grow a thicker skin. And although I certainly can “take a punch”, I find this approach disappointing. I certainly appreciate the some people may have strong opinions on certain topics, but I find it disheartening that people often forget that the Board is just a group of volunteers who devote a ton of their time to do the best they can to support our children’s education. We may differ in opinion and perspective, but it’s never personal. Particularly in a school district, we’re really all on the same team.

To end on a positive note, I continue to be excited about the opportunities that lie ahead, and I encourage each of you to get involved as much as you can. Hopefully you will be hearing more from us in general, and then specifically on certain topics of focus, including our parcel tax effort, enrollment and boundaries, and the long-term goals and strategy for the district. Last but certainly not least, in about one year’s time, the window opens for new candidates who want to run for school board for election in November 2009. We are always looking for great people to get involved, so if you ever want to talk more in detail about the commitment or anything else, please let me know.

If you’ve read this far, I appreciate your indulgence. Again, I’m grateful for the support and the privilege to do what I’m doing. Have a terrific summer!

Regards,

Seth