

## What's Going On In The School District?

A few years ago, a book called *Good to Great* appeared on the shelves and instantly became a bestselling handbook for organizational development. The author, Jim Collins, and his research team had identified and compared pairs of elite companies---one of which went on to become a “great” company, while the other either lost or merely maintained status. The researchers learned that there are hallmarks of “great” companies that can be identified and developed.

The first paragraph of the book consists of one sentence: “Good is the enemy of great.” Collins explains that as organizations become quite good they fail to make the additional focused effort to “defy gravity” and become truly great.

Scotts Valley Unified School District is a very good school district. Our standardized test scores, in keeping with our demographics, are high compared to statewide averages. We work hard to meet the needs of all of our students. We have done this in spite of a number of challenges that have affected the district in recent years---the difficulties surrounding the high school, the failed bond election, severe financial difficulties, our second year of declining enrollment (and therefore declining funding) and internal discontinuities and staff turnovers that negatively affected student learning.

We are committed, however, to make that leap to greatness, and have made significant progress in the last year. In concert with over a hundred staff, students, parents and community members, we developed a strategic plan that addresses the greatest needs of our district and helps us to keep the necessary focus. In the past year, we have made progress toward our goals.

- **Student Achievement:** API scores increased at all sites, with a 29 point gain at the high school and an increase from 62% to 100% participation. We have begun ongoing professional development and teacher collaboration at the middle and high schools, in addition to the elementaries, and are piloting subject-specific support for teachers through a mentor and coach.
- **Fiscal Stability:** Following two years of serious fiscal problems, need for “Dollar a Day” contributions from the community, and ongoing declining enrollment, we are now able to cover critical positions and programs (assistant principals, counselors, library staff, and smaller class size) in the district budget. We are fiscally stable.
- **Facilities:** We have resolved the lawsuit for construction defects at the high school and begun the much-needed repairs. We installed a new roof and upgraded four bathrooms at the middle school. We are addressing long-neglected facility problems throughout the district.
- **Human Resources:** In spite of declining enrollment, we have been able to increase employee compensation beyond the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) funds we received from the state. We are staffing our schools with “highly qualified” teachers, have established stipended teacher-leader positions at the middle and high schools, and are supporting staff with professional development.

- **Communication:** We have increased efforts to communicate with our community through newsletters, meetings at school sites, informational reports at Board meetings, newspaper articles, outreach efforts, upgraded phone systems and technology infrastructure.

**We have more to do, and are again asking the community for help.** As an outgrowth of our strategic plan, we are establishing a **Fiscal Advisory Committee**---composed of staff and community members interested in understanding school finance and providing perspective to the Board as we continue to make difficult fiscal decisions in our district. We are also convening a **Facilities Committee** eager to explore the many and varied facilities issues we need to resolve, and provide recommendations to the Board. If you are interested in participating, and have expertise you can provide in either of these areas, please call my office: 438-1820. We would value your participation!