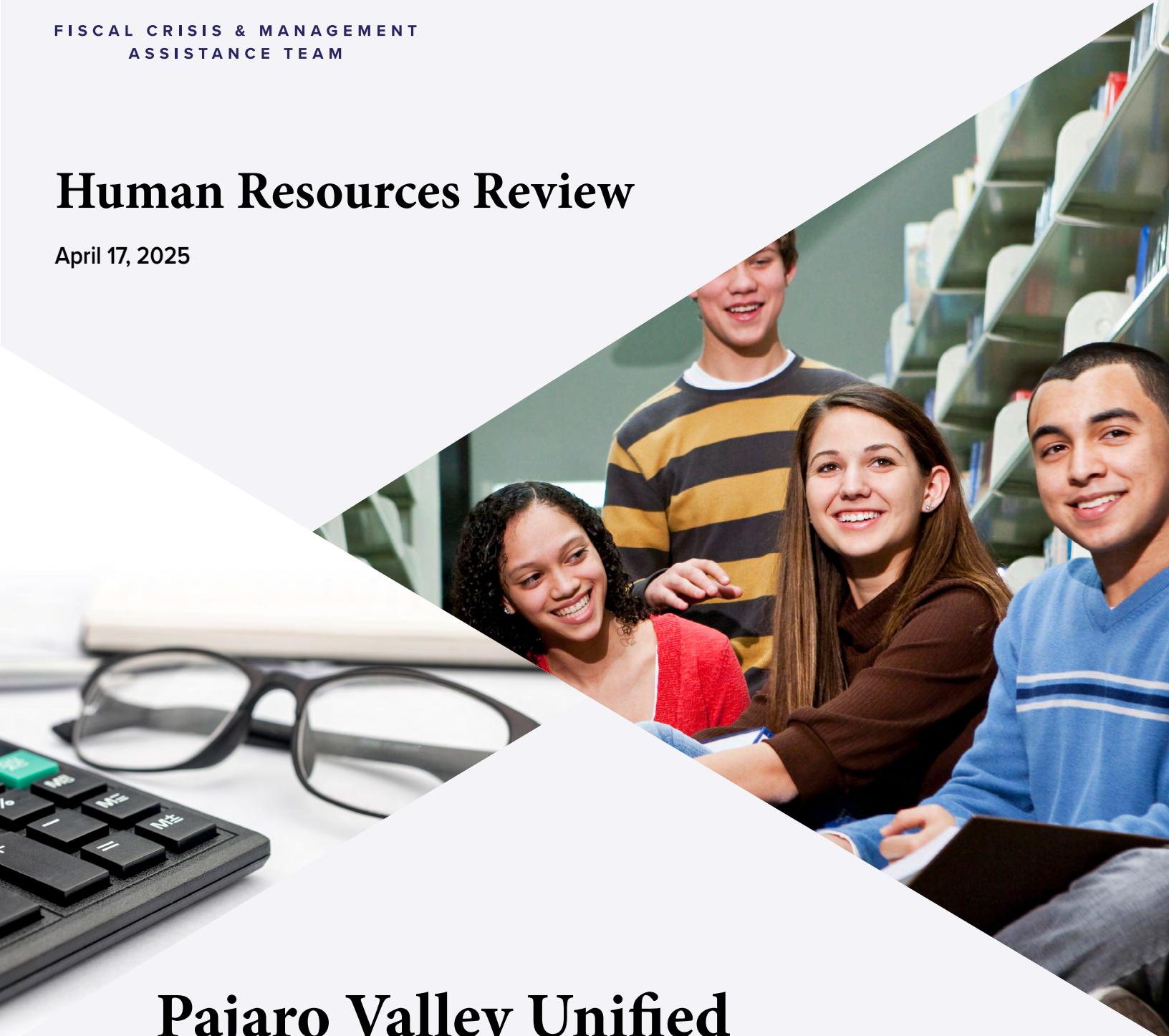


# FCMAT

FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT  
ASSISTANCE TEAM

## Human Resources Review

April 17, 2025



## Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Michael H. Fine  
Chief Executive Officer

April 17, 2025

Heather Contreras, Superintendent  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District  
294 Green Valley Road  
Watsonville, CA 95076

Dear Superintendent Contreras:

In September 2023, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) entered into an agreement for FCMAT to conduct a review of the district's Human Resources Department. The agreement stated that FCMAT would perform the following:

1. Review operation processes and procedures in the Human Resources Department and make recommendations for improved efficiencies, if any.
2. Evaluate the current workflow and distribution of functions in the above department and make recommendations for improved efficiencies, if any.
3. Conduct an organizational and staffing review of the department and make recommendations for staffing improvements and organizational restructuring, if any.

This final report contains the study team's findings and recommendations.

FCMAT appreciates the opportunity to serve the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and extends thanks to all the staff for their assistance during fieldwork.

Sincerely,



Michael H. Fine  
Chief Executive Officer

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# About FCMAT

## Purpose and Services

FCMAT was created by the California Legislature to help California's transitional kindergarten through grade 14 (TK-14) local educational agencies (LEAs) avoid fiscal insolvency. Today, FCMAT helps LEAs identify, prevent and resolve financial, management, program, data, and oversight challenges; provides professional learning; produces and provides software, checklists, manuals and other tools; and offers other related school business and data services.

FCMAT may be asked to provide fiscal crisis or management assistance by a school district, charter school, community college, county superintendent of schools, the state superintendent of public instruction, or the Legislature.

When FCMAT is asked for help with management assistance or a fiscal crisis, FCMAT management and staff work closely with the requesting LEA to meet their needs. Often this means conducting a formal study using a FCMAT study team that coordinates with the LEA for on-site fieldwork to evaluate specified operational areas and subsequently produces a written report with findings and recommendations for improvement.

For more immediate needs in a specific area, FCMAT offers short-term technical assistance from a FCMAT staff member with the required expertise.

To help meet the need for qualified chief business officials (CBOs) in LEAs, FCMAT offers four different CBO training and mentoring programs that consist of 11 or 12 diverse two-day training sessions over the course of a full year.

For agencies with professional learning needs, FCMAT offers workshops on specific topics. Popular topics include associated student body operations, use of FCMAT's Projection-Pro online financial forecasting software, use of FCMAT's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Calculator, and data reporting for the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). FCMAT staff and management also frequently make presentations at various professional conferences.

The California School Information Services (CSIS) service of FCMAT helps the California Department of Education (CDE) operate CALPADS; helps LEAs learn about CALPADS, resolve data issues and meet reporting requirements; and provides LEAs with training and leadership in data management. CSIS also developed and continues to host and improve the Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) web-based financial reporting system for all California LEAs, and provides ed-data.org, which gives educators, policy-makers, the Legislature, parents and the public quick access to timely and comprehensive data about TK-12 education in California.

Since it was formed, FCMAT has provided LEAs with the types of help described above on more than 2,000 occasions.

FCMAT's administrative agent is the Kern County Superintendent of Schools. FCMAT is led by Michael H. Fine, Chief Executive Officer, and is funded by appropriations in the state budget and modest fees to requesting agencies.

Workshop schedules, manuals, presentation slide decks, Projection-Pro software, LCFF calculators, past reports, an online help desk, and many other resources are available for download or use at no charge on FCMAT's website.

## History

FCMAT was created by Assembly Bill 1200 (Chapter 1213, Statutes of 1991) and Education Code 42127.8. Assembly Bill 107 (Chapter 282, Statutes of 1997) added Education Code 49080, which charged FCMAT with responsibility for CSIS and its statewide data management work, and Assembly Bill 1115 (Chapter 78, Statutes of 1999) codified CSIS' mission.

Assembly Bill 1200 created a statewide plan for county offices of education and school districts to work together locally to improve fiscal procedures and accountability standards. Assembly Bill 2756 (Chapter 52, Statutes of 2004) gave FCMAT specific responsibilities for districts that have received emergency state loans.

In January 2006, Senate Bill 430 (Chapter 357, Statutes of 2005) amended Education Code 42127.8, and Assembly Bill 1366 (Chapter 360, Statutes of 2005) amended Education Codes 42127.8 and 84041. These new laws expanded FCMAT's services to include charter schools and community colleges, respectively.

Assembly Bill 1840 (Chapter 426, Statutes of 2018) changed how fiscally insolvent districts are administered once an emergency appropriation has been made, shifting oversight responsibilities from the state to the local county superintendent to be more consistent with the principles of local control, and giving FCMAT new responsibilities associated with the process.

# Introduction

## Background

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District is located in the city of Watsonville, CA. The district provides educational programs and services to approximately 17,520 students in grades transitional kindergarten through grade 12 (TK-12) and is governed by a seven-member board of education.

As reported at [Ed-Data.org](https://Ed-Data.org), since fiscal year 2019-20, the district's enrollment has been decreasing by approximately 548 students each year. In addition, the district's 2023-24 unduplicated pupil percentage<sup>1</sup> was reported to be 81.04%.

The district's Human Resources Department is made up of 13 staff members who serve approximately 1,100 certificated, 1,014 classified, and 155 confidential and management employees.

## Study and Report Guidelines

In September 2024, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) entered into an agreement for FCMAT to conduct a review of the district's Human Resources Department.

FCMAT visited the district on October 21-23, 2024, to conduct interviews with district and school staff, collect data, and review documents. Following fieldwork, FCMAT continued to review and analyze documents. This report is the result of those activities.

FCMAT's reports focus on systems and processes that may need improvement; it does not generally comment on those that may be functioning well. In writing its reports, FCMAT uses the Associated Press Stylebook and its own short, internal style guide, which emphasize plain language, capitalize relatively few terms, and strive for conciseness, clarity and simplicity.

## Study Team

The study team was composed of the following members:

Marcus Wirowek, CFE  
FCMAT Intervention Specialist

Jeffery Potter, CFE  
FCMAT Intervention Specialist

John Lotze  
FCMAT Technical Writer

Each team member reviewed the draft report to confirm accuracy and achieve consensus on the final recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the percentage of a district's students who are foster youth, English learners, or qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Each student is counted only once even if they qualify in more than one category.

# Executive Summary

Interviews with district employees highlighted significant deficiencies in leadership at the district, particularly in the Human Resources (HR) Department. Frequent turnover in key positions, inconsistent direction, and lack of communication have led to operational inefficiencies and low staff morale. The new interim assistant superintendent has started to address these issues, but several challenges remain.

Accurate and updated job descriptions are essential for clarity, recruitment, training, and compliance. FCMAT found that many of the district's job descriptions are outdated, vague, or lack specific criteria, leading to confusion and inefficiency.

The district's position control system is inaccurate, causing budget discrepancies and payroll errors. The lack of use of staffing ratios to guide staffing has led to imbalances among schools. An accurate position control system and board-approved staffing ratios are essential to enable effective budgeting and staffing decisions.

The HR Department lacks a comprehensive staff handbook, leading to inconsistent practices and confusion among employees. Employee evaluations are not conducted regularly or consistently, causing concerns about fairness and equity in job tasks and responsibilities.

The relationship between HR and Payroll departments is dysfunctional, leading to operational inefficiencies and errors. There is a lack of communication and collaboration between the two departments; these are essential to ensure accurate and timely payroll processing and ultimately customer service but are not occurring.

The HR Department is not effectively managing employee leave, leading to compliance issues and employee frustration. There is a significant lack of training and a lack of collaboration with the Payroll and Benefits departments.

Human Resources staff receive minimal training, leading to inefficiencies and errors. The district should implement comprehensive training and cross-training to increase staff competence and operational efficiency.

The HR Department's customer service is hindered by poor communication and inconsistent practices. Improving customer service involves better communication, timely updates on collective bargaining agreements, and ensuring access to HR services.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Operational Process and Procedures

### Absence of Leadership

In any organization, and especially local educational agencies (LEA), leadership is paramount to ensure the organization is running as effectively and efficiently as possible. When leadership is lacking, whether at the board, superintendent, department head, or supervisor level, it creates an environment where even well-functioning and established processes and procedures will eventually erode. If processes and procedures were not set up properly to begin with, a lack of leadership will further deteriorate a department's overall effectiveness and efficiency.

In the Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team's (FCMAT's) Fiscal Health Risk Analysis (FHRA), Leadership and Stability is one of the 20 vital areas evaluated, and failures in this area are common in LEAs that have experienced fiscal distress. Leadership and Stability is also one of the key sections in FCMAT's Indicators of Risk or Potential Insolvency, because weakness in this area increases an LEA's risk of insolvency. Some of the common indicators in that section are as follows:

- Frequent turnover in the CBO and/or superintendent positions (incumbents have been with the LEA less than two years).
- Lack of regular communication among the superintendent and all administrative cabinet members.
- Failure to follow, adopt, update, implement and/or communicate board policies and administrative regulations.

The indicators above were evident at Pajaro Valley Unified School District.

The district's superintendent and interim assistant superintendent of human resources had started their positions three months before FCMAT's review, and the problems described in this report predated their employment with the district. Interviewees indicated that before these two individuals began in their respective positions, the Human Resources (HR) Department was low-functioning and staff indicated that morale was very low.

There are two HR directors in the department, and staff reported that the direction given by the two HR directors is not consistent, and process and procedures differ depending on whom one asks. Some staff members also feel unsupported by the district office or cabinet members. The dysfunction apparently spreads further than the HR Department because staff reported that previous HR management had public disagreements with another department director in the organization.

Staff also reported that the HR Department does not follow district policies or the terms of applicable collective bargaining agreements regarding employee attendance. Interviewees indicated that staff do not necessarily report their time when they come to work late, leave early, or take the day off. Staff reported that no one knows when staff members will be absent on vacation or a planned leave of absence. This practice may cause staff members' leave records to show an inaccurate amounts, including showing accrued vacation that has already been used.

Interviewees indicate that work sometimes stops completely when staff are absent. Also, the staff member who will be absent contacts their coworkers to ask if they can complete their duties while they are gone, rather than this being managed by a supervisor. The department lacks processes and procedures for employees to fill in to ensure continuity of work when another employee is absent. In addition, as discussed more fully later in this report, the workload is not balanced, and HR staff are not adequately cross-trained.

According to interviewees, a lack of communication further contributes to the dysfunction. For example, staff reported that when the governing board tentatively agrees to or approves new collective bargaining agreements, this updated information is not communicated to relevant departments. Staff reported instances when HR and payroll would input the prior bargaining agreement's salary schedule because they did not know that the salary schedule had just been updated with a new increase. With a new interim assistant superintendent of human resources, the department is starting to have regular meetings. However, this was not the case under previous management.

There is a lack of direction among HR Department staff and management. Although each staff member has a job description, there is uncertainty about what assignments they are responsible for according to their classification. In addition, some assignments or tasks are divided among multiple staff because employees complained their workload was too high or that they were overworked. FCMAT asked each employee about their overtime. Most stated that they do not work much overtime, but some employees continued to reiterate that they are overworked. FCMAT also requested a copy of the district's overtime report but had not received it at the time of this report. It appears that staff are untrained in several aspects of their positions, which leads FCMAT to believe that they may be inefficient in their positions; this is discussed further later in this report.

During interviews, staff were asked about the cause of the various issues in the department. Most employees stated that they were due to high turnover in the assistant superintendent of human resources position. However, staff also report that there have been positive changes since the arrival of the new interim assistant superintendent of human resources.

## Job Descriptions

Accurate and updated job descriptions are crucial for any local educational agency (LEA) because they do the following:

- Provide clarity to employees and potential candidates about roles and responsibilities.
- Help with recruitment and candidate screening.
- Guide training and development initiatives.
- Facilitate workforce planning and legal compliance.
- Support career progression.
- Foster clear communication districtwide.

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District is a merit district with a personnel commission, which is an independent body that provides oversight of an LEA's merit system. Personnel commissions are responsible for certain personnel matters affecting classified school employees, including classified job descriptions. The personnel commission has three members, who are appointed for staggered three-year terms by the LEA, the local classified association, and a neutral party appointed by the other two commission members.

The California Education Code provides guidelines for optional merit systems in transitional kindergarten through grade 12 (TK-12) LEAs. These systems include provisions for employee selection, retention, promotion and training; they are intended to improve workforce efficiency and promote the public good. According to the California School Personnel Commissioners Association, this system is based on “merit, fitness, and the principle of ‘like pay for like work.’”

The district’s personnel commission is part of the HR Department. Specifically, the director of human resources, classified is responsible for updating and maintaining all classified job descriptions. Similarly, the director of human resources, certificated is responsible for all certificated job descriptions. As stated previously, job descriptions are vital to the organization to ensure staff and managers know what is expected of them in each role.

It is important for each job description to be revised or updated when new or similar tasks or functions need to be added or if tasks or functions need to be removed because of changes in the industry. Failing to periodically update job descriptions can lead to confusion among managers and staff.

Table 1 below shows the district’s certificated and classified positions and the last time the job disruption for each was updated.

**Table 1: Job Titles and Dates of Last Job Description Update**

| Job Descriptions                          | Date of Approval, Review, or Revise |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Certificated</b>                       |                                     |
| Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources | No Date Listed                      |
| Director of Human Resources, Certificated | No Date Listed                      |
| Teacher                                   | 3/15/1978                           |
| Principal                                 | No Date Listed                      |
| TOSA                                      | 3/23/2011                           |
| CTE Counselor                             | No Date Listed                      |
| <b>Classified</b>                         |                                     |
| Director of Human Resources, Classified   |                                     |
| Human Resources Analyst                   | 7/17/2013                           |
| Human Resources Specialist                | 10/27/2010                          |
| Human Resources Technician                | 7/17/2013                           |
| Accounting Specialist                     | 7/17/2013                           |
| Administrative Secretary I                | 7/17/2013                           |
| Custodian                                 | 5/5/2016                            |
| Food and Nutrition Services Cook-Baker II | 5/5/2016                            |
| Information Systems Technician I          | 5/5/2016                            |
| Lead Custodian                            | 5/5/2016                            |
| Office Assistant I                        | 5/5/2016                            |
| Student Services Specialist               | 8/20/2015                           |

It would benefit the HR Department to develop a three-year cycle to review, revise, or revisit all classified and certificated job descriptions. This would help ensure that job descriptions are constantly reviewed and revised in accordance with any changes in the district and industry standards. The last updates to the district's classified job descriptions appear to have been done more than nine years ago. FCMAT found that the certificated job descriptions have not been updated in well over 10 years. The HR Department is ultimately responsible for both certificated and classified job descriptions.

Job descriptions also need to be detailed enough to ensure staff know specifically what they are to do. Vague job descriptions are just as detrimental to an organization as having no job description. The district's job descriptions for the human resources analyst, human resources specialist, and human resources technician positions are confusing, vague, or lack specifics about criteria or the knowledge the employees need to perform their jobs.

An employee's promotion to a higher classification should be contingent on experience and on appropriate and specific training and education. These elements should be present in a job description for the higher classification to ensure staff are trained and have the relevant experience for the classification. The district's requirement for an HR technician to promote to a HR specialist is only one additional year of experience. Most of the HR job descriptions do not address any technical knowledge needed for the higher level of classification. HR functions frequently include highly technical knowledge and tasks. If staff are not trained properly, they can easily make a decision that may violate a collective bargaining agreement, board policy, or relevant federal or state law.

It is vital that there be a training plan for each position in HR that outlines specifically what an employee must know to be successful. It would be detrimental to the organization if an employee were promoted to higher classifications without the appropriate training or knowledge for their specific job title. Training is discussed later in this report.

In interviews, HR staff indicated that job duties are assigned to staff members in response to complaints, not necessarily by job classification. Interviewees indicated that some employees are doing lower level work, and some less experienced employees are doing a higher level of work. In addition, FCMAT found that several employees in the HR analyst positions did not perform all of the duties in the analyst classification.

## Position Control and Staffing

Accurately projecting employee salary and benefit costs is essential to budgeting for school district expenditures. These costs are usually the largest part of a school district's budget, making up from 80% to 90% of a typical district's unrestricted general fund expenditures. Accurately tracking and projecting these costs requires what is commonly referred to as position control, which is a system for tracking salary and benefit information based on positions rather than by specific employees. Position control creates a record of positions for all jobs in a district regardless of whether they are filled. Regardless of the position control system used, it is imperative that it be accurately maintained at all times. Districts in fiscal distress often find that a lack of an accurate position control is one of the major contributing factors.

A fully functioning position control system can help a district maintain accurate budget projections, and information on salaries, benefits and employee demographics. An effective system establishes positions by site or department and prevents overstaffing by ensuring that staffing levels conform to district formulas and standards. Ideally, it will integrate with the payroll and budget modules in a district's financial system; this facilitates the hiring and monitoring of all employees and helps ensure that the budget is updated and accurate at each reporting period. When the Business Services and HR departments use a common

system, staff time and duplication of effort is reduced, and information can be produced on time and accurately.

Position control functions require proper internal controls to ensure that only board-authorized positions are entered into the system, that the HR Department hires employees to fill positions that have been authorized by the board, and that payroll staff pay only employees hired for authorized positions. The district uses a position control system that functions within the Escape financial software and integrates the district’s budget with payroll and human resources.

During interviews, staff indicated that the district’s position control system lacks accuracy, resulting in discrepancies in records of positions between schools and other sites and the central district office. Efforts to reconcile the discrepancies have helped resolve some of the errors; however, the work to effectively record and realign positions with the district’s budget remained incomplete at the time of FCMAT’s fieldwork, contributing to inaccuracies in the district’s overall budget for salaries and benefits. Once the district completes reconciliation of position control, the district should strive to reconcile again it at least at interim reporting periods. By doing so, the district will avoid inaccuracies in its position control system.

Section 19, of FCMAT’s FHRA, titled “Position Control,” could help the district monitor whether it is using the best practices for position control. Following is the question regarding leaves in this section of the FHRA:

- 19.1 Does the district account for all positions and costs?
- 19.2 Does the district analyze and adjust staffing based on staffing ratios and enrollment?
- 19.3 Does the district reconcile budget, payroll and position control regularly, at least at budget adoption and interim reporting periods?
- 19.6 Do managers and staff responsible for the district’s human resources, payroll and budget functions meet regularly to discuss issues and improve processes?

In addition, the table below shows various departments’ responsibilities for position control.

**Table 2: Position Control Tasks and Responsible Department**

| Task  | Responsibility                         |
|---|--|
| Approve or authorize position   | Governing Board                        |
| Enter approved position into position control with estimated salary and budget.<br>Each position is given a unique number.<br>Eliminate positions.  | Business Department                    |
| Enter demographic data into the main demographic screen, including:<br>Employee name.<br>Employee address.<br>Social Security number.<br>Credential (if applicable).<br>Classification.<br>Salary schedule placement.<br>Annual review of employee assignments. | Human Resources Department             |
| Update employee benefits<br>Review and update employee work calendars   | Business (Payroll) and Human Resources |
| Annually review and update salary schedules. This may need to be completed more frequently, such as in the case of collective bargaining settlements.   | Business (Payroll) and Human Resources |

| Task                  | Responsibility      |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Account codes         |                     |
| Budget development    |                     |
| Budget projections    | Business Department |
| Multiyear projections |                     |
| Salary projections    |                     |

Staff also indicated that payroll errors are common because payroll may be unaware of an employee's change in status. For example, staff indicated that in 2023-24, a terminated employee was overpaid approximately \$60,000 because of inaccuracies in the position control system and a breakdown in communication between payroll and HR. In addition, payroll is occasionally notified of an employee who has not been properly paid after being hired, mainly because the new hire process was not properly followed. It is imperative that the district establish weekly meetings between payroll and HR to review personnel changes in the organization.

In conjunction with an accurate position control system, using staffing ratios helps districts prevent overstaffing, guide hiring decisions, and allocate existing staff effectively throughout the district. Districts typically establish staffing ratios using standard and commonly used staffing models that help balance staffing with changes in student enrollment at each school, any evolving or changing needs, and other factors. Without staffing ratios, imbalanced staffing can occur throughout a district, with overstaffing at some locations and understaffing at others.

Interviewees indicated that the district has not developed and does not use staffing ratios or standards to manage positions at the district office and schools. This has led to imbalances in staffing among the schools, and it prevents district leaders from making consistent and informed decisions about staffing needs.

## Staff Handbook and Other Written Processes and Procedures

Staff handbooks play a key part in communicating various processes and procedures within a department. Staff handbooks should be specific to the department that developed them, and they should be updated constantly to ensure that the most relevant practices and procedures are followed. Staff handbooks typically include policies and procedures, are designed to communicate these as well as expectations, and are usually provided to employees when they begin employment. They typically include the following items:

- The district's mission or vision statement.
- The department mission or vision statement.
- Contact information, information about employee resources, employee responsibilities, and information for when employees are absent or on a leave.
- Commonly used HR-related terms and definitions.
- Rules regarding attendance, leaves and tardiness.
- Board policies and administrative regulations pertinent to the employees being addressed.
- Salary schedules.
- Employee calendars, which include vacation schedules of the department.

- Employee union information.
- A disclaimer that the handbook does not address every possible situation or create a contract for employment.

Although not required, having staff handbooks is a best practice. Well written handbooks provide important information and support consistency and practices within a department. A staff handbook may provide more information than necessary for an employee currently in the position, but because of this can be especially helpful for anyone outside the department or individuals who are promoted within the department.

Interviewees indicated that the district's HR Department has no staff handbook or written process and procedures. Many employees expressed confusion about who is responsible for certain tasks when the individual who normally performs one or more of those tasks is absent. Most employees contact their coworkers to see if they can cover for them and perform some of their workload in case they are absent. Most employees also stated that they received little to no training from the individual who preceded them in the position and was promoted out of it. FCMAT was told that the training typically was limited to less than two hours. In addition, how work or a task is completed or when work is completed varies. Employees' responses about how certain tasks were to be completed varied and indicated uncertainty. Most of the responses FCMAT received when asking about specific tasks began with, "I assume" or "I guess." Training and cross-training are discussed later in this report.

Because there is no consistency in the HR Department's processes for tasks to be completed, each employee does things differently. FCMAT was told that the recruitment processes for certificated and classified employees differ depending on whom one speaks with, and the same is true of processes for leaves and credentials. In addition, some managers indicated that they received no help with employee discipline issues; managers outside of the human resources department indicated that this has caused frustration because the process differs depending on whom they speak with. As a result, the department's internal and external customer service suffers, and there is ineffectiveness in the recruitment process. In addition, this can cause severe frustration and in some cases loss of qualified candidates.

To have relevant and accurate procedures, manuals and employee handbooks, employees need to be adequately trained in their respective roles. If not, the development of the handbook would be based of their current practices, which may not in accordance to board policy, law or best practices. Training and cross-training are discussed later in this report.

## Employee Evaluations

Employee evaluations are an essential tool for assessing individual performance and maximizing organizational effectiveness. They provide an opportunity for both the employee and employer to review the employee's job performance, noting areas of superior achievement and identifying any areas in which growth and improvement are needed. The evaluation process offers employees an opportunity to communicate any needs they may have to do their jobs effectively, such as additional training, and gives the employer an opportunity to provide feedback and accountability through a standard process that occurs regularly. This process fosters employee development, helps align individual goals with organizational objectives, and motivates employees because it recognizes and acknowledges their accomplishments and job performance. It also aids in organizational decision-making about future staffing needs, helps ensure ongoing communication between staff and supervisors, and can enhance an employee's job satisfaction.

Interviewees indicated that evaluations of certificated employees are done according to policy and contract. However, evaluations of classified HR employees are not conducted at regular intervals. It is standard

practice for HR to maintain an annual schedule of evaluations and to support managers in performing evaluations. Some classified staff stated that they had been evaluated annually, while others said they have either not been evaluated at all or have not been evaluated regularly. Some staff members indicated that this may be causing concerns about the fairness and equity of employee evaluations. Inconsistencies were apparent in both the intervals at which evaluations were being performed and which individual staff members were evaluated .

In addition to this situation in the HR Department, interviews indicated that evaluations of classified employees have not been performed consistently throughout the district. Staff stated that certain HR staff members provide supervisors districtwide with evaluation forms and reminders when evaluations are due; however, it is common for the supervisors to either not perform the evaluations as requested or to neglect to return any evaluation documents to HR.

## Recommendations

*The district should:*

1. Improve communication within the department on issues that have a significant impact on staff members' job functions.
2. Ensure that direction from the HR directors is consistent so that primary tasks can be accomplished effectively.
3. Hold staff accountable for absences in accordance with the applicable board policy and collective bargaining agreement.
4. Establish written processes and procedures specifying which positions are responsible for tasks when staff are on a leave or vacation.
5. Develop and follow a three-year plan and calendar that identifies which job descriptions will be updated during which month.
6. Ensure that the personnel commission staff adhere to the plan and calendar of job description updates.
7. Review HR staff members' major responsibilities to ensure the workload is shared equally.
8. Complete the work of reconciling its position control system with its budget and payroll system.
9. Establish a regular process to ensure that a reconciliation of the position control system is completed at least at each interim financial reporting period. Ensure that the process identifies the staff responsible for this function.
10. Schedule weekly meetings between HR and payroll to review all personnel changes, including new hires, terminations, and any other changes in employee positions and/or status.
11. Establish, adopt, follow and monitor staffing ratios throughout the district to ensure adequate and appropriate staffing at all schools and other sites and for all district functions.
12. Create an HR Department handbook that includes the bulleted items above.
13. Develop a process and schedule for who is the backup when an employee is absent or on a leave.

14. Ensure that the HR Department works as a department to review recruitment, credentials, leaves, and discipline processes with HR staff to ensure all staff are providing accurate and consistent advice to district managers.
15. Create and follow an annual schedule to ensure that classified employee evaluations are conducted for all HR Department staff, ensuring both regular and equitable evaluations. Communicate the schedule to all department staff members.
16. With support from district leaders, establish a districtwide initiative to communicate the need for and importance of classified employee evaluations.
17. Develop HR Department procedures to ensure that all supervisors districtwide conduct evaluations and that documents supporting each evaluation are returned to HR and maintained in each employee's personnel file. Continually monitor the evaluation process districtwide.

# Workflow and Distribution of Functions

## Human Resources and Payroll

In a well-functioning organization, the Human Resources and Payroll departments operate in close coordination, collaborating regularly and effectively to ensure that any changes in an employee's compensation are made accurately and on time in employee payments. Communication between the departments is vital to ensure appropriate workflow between the two departments. Regular and wide-ranging communication should occur constantly between the two departments, and both district and department leaders should recognize the need to maintain a high level of functionality and operations to support employees.

Having these elements in place ensures compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, reduces redundancies and potential errors, ensures efficient and accurate operations, supports informed decision-making for the organization, and improves employees' experiences with both departments. In no instance should the two departments operate in isolation from each other, avoid or discourage communication with the other department, or establish and maintain obstacles that prevent department staff from performing their respective functions because they cannot get help from or communicate with the other department.

During FCMAT's fieldwork, staff in both the Human Resources and Payroll departments indicated repeatedly that the relationship between the two departments is highly dysfunctional. This has led to operational inefficiencies, poor communication, and isolation of each department from the other. Multiple staff members indicated that the root cause of the acrimonious relationship may be a job reclassification approximately 10 years ago that resulted in a disparity between the analyst classification in the two departments. Before the classification change, the analysts in both departments had the same placement on the salary schedule. However, following the change, the analysts in HR were reclassified to a higher step on the salary schedule, resulting in resentment and division that continues to be a factor contributing to the interdepartment problems.

The two departments are both located close to one another near the main entrance to the district office. The interior entrances to the departments are across the hall from each other, separated only by the building's main receptionist. During fieldwork, FCMAT observed that both departments keep their doors closed and locked at all times. This prevents both departments' staff, as well as any other employees, from easily accessing either department. Interior hallway windows have been fully covered and prevent any view into the Payroll Department. Below are images of the Payroll and Human Resources departments' entrances.

**Figure 1: Payroll Department Entrance**



Figure 1: A photo of the locked door to the Payroll Department, with a keypad lock mechanism.

**Figure 2: Human Resources Department Entrance**



Figure 2: A photo of the locked door to the HR Department from the interior of the district building, with a keypad lock mechanism and two signs stating, "Authorized Access Only," and a third sign directing people to use the main entrance to HR.

Interviewees indicated that the security code to each department's doors is known only to that department's administrators. Staff members from both departments cannot and do not access the other department because they lack the access codes. Some staff said that they have been instructed not to visit the other department, although FCMAT could not verify whether such a directive was given.

Regular meetings of HR and Payroll departments with one another are essential to fostering effective, timely and efficient organizational and department operations. Interviewees indicated that the two departments do meet regularly, though some said weekly and some said monthly. Regardless of frequency, interviews indicated the meetings are not very productive or informative, in part due to the ongoing animosity between the two departments. Some employees also indicated that they have met with members of the other department in less formal and private settings to avoid admonishment from department leaders.

1. Managers in both departments must encourage communication and relationship building. Managers need to both model this and set it as an expectation for everyone in both departments. Constant communication between HR and business/payroll is absolutely necessary to ensure the fiscal health of the organization. According to FCMAT's Indicators of Risk or Potential Insolvency, the following weaknesses, which are greatly exacerbated by a lack of communication between HR and business/payroll, increase an organization's risk.

6. Mismanaged Collective Bargaining Agreements

15. Ineffective Internal Controls and Fraud Prevention

16. Weaknesses in Leadership and Stability

19. Lack of Position Control

The division and separation of HR and business/payroll has adversely affected both departments as well as the entire organization, causing problems, errors, and confusion that could be avoided. It would benefit the departments to establish basic standards when meeting together, including establishing which department is responsible for which task where there is crossover. This can be similar to the Position Control Tasks and Responsibilities chart provided in the Position Control section of this report. In addition, and as identified in later sections, written procedures need to be shared between departments so staff are aware of the established expectations. The procedures also need to have timelines so employees know when to reach out if there are delays.

## Leave Management

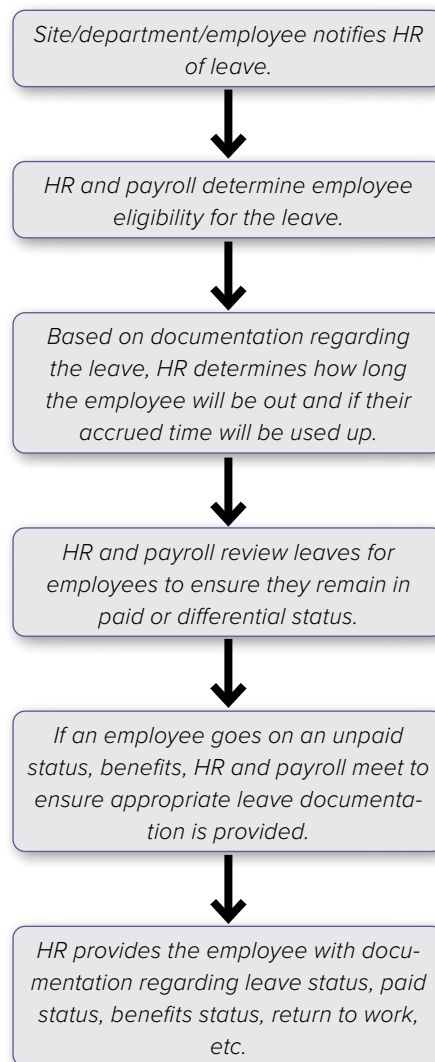
Leave management is the process of managing various types of leave requests, including holidays, sick leave, vacation, emergency, personal and family leave. This process involves following district-established rules such as board policies and administrative regulations, relevant state and federal laws, and collective bargaining agreements.

Compliance with state and federal laws and with the terms of collective bargaining agreements regarding leaves is complex, and errors can have significant consequences for both a district and its employees. Therefore, the best practice is for leave management to be assigned to positions that can oversee the process from start to finish. From a customer service standpoint, this is beneficial for the employee who is requesting a leave, because they may be going through a difficult time and this gives them a well-trained single point of contact in the HR Department for answers to their questions. This is far better than putting an employee who may be at a difficult time in their life in the frustrating position of having to go to different employees for different reasons pertaining to a leave.

The HR Department plays a crucial role in ensuring compliance with legal regulations and managing employee leaves. To apply leave policies consistently, fairly and accurately, HR staff need to be highly trained and knowledgeable in the intricacies of leave management. Interviewees indicated that not all employees are properly trained, understand leaves, or are familiar with relevant board policy. Further, although the district contracts with the California School Boards Association (CSBA) for their board policies, the board has not adopted a policy on leaves. Typically, these are board policies 4161, 4261, and 4361. These policies outline basic parameters for leave and leave management. It would benefit the district and its governing board to work with the CSBA to develop and adopt board policies regarding leaves. In the absence of any board policy, employees will need to refer to and rely solely on the terms of the district’s collective bargaining agreements for guidance on leave management.

Managing long- and short-term employee leaves is a collaborative process. HR should meet with payroll, benefits and risk management if the leave is related to a workers’ compensation claim. As a simple example, a sample flow chart is provided below to show what should occur and which department should be involved during the leave process. This sample chart does not include all of the nuances of every type of leave; it is an example of the communication that should occur between the various departments that are involved in the process.

**Figure 3: Sample Leave Process Flow Chart**



All of these departments are vital and must work together to ensure each employee's leave is processed in accordance with district regulation and policy, collective bargaining agreements, and federal and state law. Depending on the size of the organization, this process should not take longer than two to three weeks to complete. Smaller LEAs should be able to complete this even faster. Interviewees indicated that there are no formal meetings between these departments. Some HR employees stated that they process leaves without any input from payroll or benefits. They simply tell employees to contact the Payroll or Benefits departments with any questions. This is not the best practice and is poor customer service.

Section 9, of FCMAT's FHRA, titled "Employee Benefits," could help the district monitor whether it is using the best practices for all benefits, including leave management. Following is the question regarding leaves in this section of the FHRA:

9.5 Does the district track, reconcile and report employees' compensated leave balances?

If a district cannot answer "Yes" to this question, it is at risk of failing Section 9, thereby increasing its overall risk of insolvency. Failure to manage this process effectively could lead to increased costs to the district, and in some cases could create a gift of public funds by providing additional leave that an employee is not entitled to.

## Training and Cross-Training

Local educational agencies must ensure that HR Department staff receive comprehensive training in their assigned areas of responsibility, complemented by clear direction and consistent oversight from management. Staff must have the knowledge and skills to perform HR functions effectively and stay informed about the latest legal requirements and board policies. Proper training not only improves employee competence but is also essential for efficient and effective operations.

Providing training for new employees builds the foundation for success. It is the best practice for all HR employees to attend regular training sessions that cover best practices, new laws, and the latest regulations and requirements for personnel functions, including the department's own policies and procedures. Training as soon as HR staff are hired or promoted helps ensure that the department can continue to provide technical support to the district and helps fill gaps in knowledge. This enables staff to perform their duties effectively and in alignment with district standards. Neither the district's new employees nor existing staff receive relevant training regarding K-12 public school HR issues.

In addition to providing training during onboarding, it is the best practice for an HR Department to select annual trainings for staff and include them in a written staff development plan. This ensures that staff receive the knowledge they need to better support the district and fully understand their many job requirements. The district does not have a training plan for HR staff. Employees feel appreciated and valued when their employer invests in them by providing quality training that is tailored to their individual needs. Ongoing training can help increase employee retention, boost morale, and increase an LEA's capacity and effectiveness.

Interviewees indicated that staff have received little to no training in their respective roles. Most of the training is done by coworkers who have been promoted out of their respective positions. Even when this training is provided, it is minimal. This has caused the department to become dysfunctional and inefficient. Staff also reported being frustrated with one another because at times they do not receive the support they need from each other. Even within the HR Department, staff have become isolated in their roles. This occurs when only one employee is responsible for and able to perform a particular function. This is not the best practice, because the department loses all of that knowledge and capacity if that employee is absent.

To increase workflow, some districts have transitioned to electronic document tracking systems. In most cases, this increases efficiency. However, if staff are not trained correctly or if the current process is broken, inefficiencies can increase when a new system is implemented. For example, the district is introducing a digital workflow called *Informed K12*, which the vendor's website describes as follows:

*Informed K12* is an easy-to-use workflow automation and digital forms solution that helps school district administrators to:

1. Manage all forms and paperwork electronically
2. Automate critical school business processes
3. Track approval workflows across departments

If new systems such as *Informed K12* are not set up correctly, the department's efficiency will further decline. Poor processes or data result in poor outcomes. In interviews, staff indicated that they have had no training on *Informed K12* other than being given an instruction manual.

Interviewees also indicated that staff are not adequately trained on the district's financial system, which also contains the district's HR information. Aside from basic financial training, the HR Department has received no training on the HR modules in the district's financial system. Interviewees also stated that employees have been yelled at by management for not completing processes correctly, even though they have never been trained adequately. County offices of education offer training on financial system modules, and it would be ideal for the HR team to receive this training.

It would benefit the district to develop training schedules for each employee classification in the HR Department. This would give managers and staff opportunities for growth and advancement, as well as increase the department's efficiency and knowledge. Each year, staff need to be trained on the various tasks they are responsible for. Interviewees indicated that staff were told by previous managers that training was no longer available, so staff have now stopped asking for any training, including for new or newly promoted employees in the department.

## **Cross-Training**

Cross-training involves training employees to perform tasks other than those in their job descriptions. This practice offers numerous advantages that can improve a school district's overall performance. For example, it ensures continuity of operations by enabling a second individual to step in and perform another employee's duties when the first employee is unavailable. This also helps during employee transitions, because cross-trained employees can readily assume additional responsibilities as needed. This bolsters operational efficiency and mitigates the impact of turnover by empowering employees to adapt to changing demands and challenges. Having multiple employees trained for the same tasks also provides a built-in system of checks and balances, because it enables detection and correction of errors or irregularities.

Cross-training promotes a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities in a school district, thus fostering collaboration and improving communication among employees.

Although the district provided an organizational chart with staff responsibilities, staff were unsure about some of the duties assigned to them. The duties were not distributed equally, and staff indicated that when employees complained about a specific duty assigned to them, it was reassigned to other employees. Some employees are assigned only to classified staff, some are assigned only to certificated staff, and a few are assigned both certificated and classified staff.

During interviews, one management employee stated that cross-training is not effective. Cross-training is a best practice and increases efficiency in a department when properly implemented. This manager's opposition to cross-training could be the reason department staff are isolated from one another in their duties.

Without cross-training, the department risks significant disruption of essential operations when an employee is absent. Cross-training also plays a vital role in reducing turnover by providing opportunities for skilled development and growth, thereby increasing employee retention over the long term. Cross-training is not designed to make employees interchangeable or to replace the need for specific knowledge, skills and abilities; rather, it enables school districts to sustain operations during crises and short-term employee absences. To successfully implement effective cross-training, each employee needs to develop and document standard operating procedures for their major tasks and responsibilities. Managers need to be completely supportive of cross-training, because without such support the department will not improve.

## Customer Service and Communication

In California public education, HR departments exist to serve both internal and external partners by providing employee support, creating and communicating personnel and policy guidelines, recruiting both internally and externally, providing professional development, monitoring compliance, managing employee compensation and benefits, participating in collective bargaining negotiations, and performing many other functions that support the organization's goals. When operating effectively and efficiently, an HR department becomes a cornerstone of the organization, and it often serves as the initial point of contact for new employees and as the final point of contact for employees departing the organization. However, when it does not operate as effectively or smoothly as needed to meet an organization's changing needs, it can become an obstacle and impediment to an organization's success.

To serve most effectively, HR managers need to ensure the department communicates regularly with district leaders and employees so it can proactively identify potential organizational challenges and emerging needs.

During fieldwork and interviews with staff, FCMAT identified several areas of HR in which procedural improvements or adjustments could be made to better serve the district. These are discussed below.

## Personnel Files

Personnel files contain sensitive and confidential information about each employee that must always be kept secure. Interviewees indicated that some district departments maintain personnel files of their own for their employees, duplicating the personnel files in HR. The departments that maintain duplicate files claim that this is necessary in case of various state and federal audits, and that allowing HR to exclusively maintain the personnel files would hinder their ability to demonstrate compliance during these audits.

FCMAT did not observe these duplicate files; however, retaining duplicate employee files raises considerable concerns about the security of each employee's information. Personnel files contain Social Security numbers, home addresses, medical information, and other confidential and sensitive information, all of which could be compromised if not properly secured. Retaining duplicate files places the district in a vulnerable position and incurs unnecessary liability.

Interviewees also indicated that the personnel files the HR Department maintains are often kept at an employee's work station for an extended period of time rather than in the HR storage room. This is done to facilitate use of the files; however, an employee's desk lacks the security needed to properly store personnel files. This lack of security significantly increases the risk of information being compromised or stolen.

The district's Board Policy 4312.6 – Personnel Files states, in part, the following requirement, which is not currently being followed:

The Superintendent or designee shall maintain personnel files for all current employees. All personnel files are confidential and shall be available only to the employee, persons authorized by the employee and those authorized by the Superintendent or designee. Official employee files shall be maintained at the district's central office. The Superintendent or designee shall determine the types of information to be included and shall process all material to be placed in a personnel file.

The contents of all personnel files shall be kept in strict confidence by any authorized reviewer.

Personnel files shall be reviewed and replaced within the shortest time possible. In no case shall a personnel file be left unattended or left unfiled overnight.

The district's current practice is in direct conflict with this board policy.

## **Employee and Management Input**

An important function of an HR department is to ensure that the needs of both employees and managers are heard and addressed, especially related to the collective bargaining process. An effective and common method for determining what services and assistance may be needed is to survey employees and management. Interviewees indicated that a survey of employees has not been conducted in many years.

In addition, the district indicated that it does not seek help or input from district management related to procedures or process that are outlined in the collective bargaining agreements. This prevents HR from understanding and addressing any needed adjustments to collective bargaining agreements.

## **Timeliness of Classified Recruitment**

The district often takes more than three months to recruit and hire a classified employee. Because the district is subject to the merit system, this process can be more complex than at other school districts, because the district's personnel commission must oversee all classified recruitment. For recruitments to be conducted efficiently and effectively, close coordination and collaboration is needed among HR, the personnel commission and the hiring department. It is not uncommon in districts operating under the merit system and its additional complexity to experience delays in the recruitment process. Staff suggested that, for some positions, one of the main causes of the delays may be the language proficiency testing requirements, because many candidates for certain positions do not pass the exam.

## **Understanding of Personnel Commission Role**

In districts that operate under the merit system both district staff and leaders often lack a complete understanding of the distinct but associated roles and responsibilities of the personnel commission and the HR Department. Information from interviews indicated that an improved understanding of the personnel commission's responsibilities is needed and would be beneficial districtwide, including for the HR Department and the personnel commission.

## **CALPADS Reporting**

The California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) is California's main K–12 education data system and includes information on student demographics, program participation, course enrollment

and completion, statewide assessments, and other elements of education. To meet the requirements of California Education Code (EC) 60900, school districts must retain and report certain staffing records to CALPADS. This includes timely notifications about newly hired certificated staff, including certain required details about a new staff member, such as a teacher's job classification and course assignments. Interviewees indicated that staff responsible for the district's CALPADS reporting functions do not always receive timely or complete information from HR to facilitate reporting to CALPADS.

## **Communication About Tentative Collective Bargaining Agreements**

Information from interviews indicated a need for improved communication between the district and its employee bargaining units about new tentative collective bargaining agreements, and better distribution of this information. When a tentative agreement includes changes in compensation, such as adjustments to the salary schedules, various working groups, such as budgeting and payroll, may need considerable time to update district and employee records. The district has not established a reliable process to ensure that all affected parties receive the information needed about a proposed collective bargaining agreement. This results in delays and inaccuracies when making the required adjustments.

## **Recommendations**

*The district should:*

1. Unlock the doors to both the HR and Payroll departments to give all employees access. If there are security concerns because of the location of the departments at the building's entrance, consider providing all staff in both departments with the access codes to both departments' doors, or consider moving payroll back to fiscal services and away from the building entrance.
2. Ensure that department leaders encourage closer collaboration and communication between the two departments.
3. Create standard, documented onboarding and termination procedures to prevent errors in employee compensation. Involve both departments in developing these procedures. Sample onboarding and termination checklists are provided in the appendix.
4. Develop and support ongoing training for HR staff on managing leaves of absence.
5. Establish board policies regarding leaves, regularly review and revise these policies in accordance with any recent changes in law, and keep staff informed of the policies and any updates to them.
6. Schedule regular joint meetings of its HR and payroll staff to ensure that leaves are reconciled according to the standards outlined in FCMAT's FHRA.
7. Ensure that the HR Department develops an annual written training plan.
8. Ensure that HR Department staff regularly attend training on relevant K -12 California public school issues.
9. Seek training opportunities through the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, particularly for the HR modules in the financial system.
10. Immediately develop and implement a cross-training plan for HR staff. Ensure that the plan includes employees responsible for both certificated and classified staff.

11. Eliminate duplicate personnel files. Maintain one set of personnel files for all employees in HR, and ensure the files are secured at all times.
12. Conduct a districtwide survey of all employees to determine whether there are needs that are not being addressed by HR.
13. Before collective bargaining negotiations, survey all district managers to determine whether existing agreements may need any adjustments.
14. With help from the personnel commission, review the entire recruitment process for classified employees to determine which processes, if any, can be streamlined to expedite recruitment. Determine whether language proficiency testing is needed for all positions for which it is currently required.
15. Educate all classified employees about the purpose of the personnel commission and about the roles and responsibilities of both the personnel commission and HR. Provide all new classified employees with the resources they need to ensure an ongoing, thorough, districtwide understanding of the merit system and personnel commission.
16. Establish a process to communicate thoroughly and in a timely manner to all affected parties, including payroll staff, the details of any tentative collective bargaining agreements

# Organization and Staffing

## Span of Control

Span of control refers to the number of subordinates who report directly to a supervisor. Although there is no agreed-upon ideal number of subordinates for span of control, the span can be larger at lower levels of an organization than at higher levels because subordinates at lower levels typically perform routine duties that are easier to supervise.

## Chain of Command

Chain of command refers to the flow of authority in an organization and is characterized by two significant principles: unity of command, in which a subordinate is accountable to only one supervisor, thus eliminating the potential for conflicting direction from multiple supervisors; and the scalar principle, in which authority and responsibility flow in a direct vertical line from top management to the lower levels. The result is a hierarchical division of labor.

## Line and Staff Authority

A school district's organizational structure has both line and staff authority. Line authority is the relationship between supervisors and subordinates and refers to the direct line in the chain of command<sup>2</sup>. For example, in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, the superintendent has direct line authority over the assistant superintendent, human resources, and the two directors have direct line authority over the HR staff.

In contrast, staff authority is advisory. Staff personnel do not have the authority to make and implement decisions, but act in support of supervisors who have line authority. Management positions are responsible for supervising employees and the work of their respective departments. They must ensure that staff members understand all district policies and procedures and perform duties in a timely and accurate manner. Directors also serve as liaisons between their department and other departments to identify and resolve problems and design and modify processes and procedures as needed. Management positions are typically not responsible for routine daily functions; these are best assigned to department staff.

## Organizational Charts

Organizational charts are useful graphic representations of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships between positions in an organization. They can depict the structure of an organization as a whole or broken down by departments or units. Organizational charts typically show an organization's chain of command, which benefits an organization by increasing efficiency, supporting all employees, simplifying delegation, creating and clarifying accountability, and standardizing communication.

## Staffing Comparison

FCMAT compared the district's HR Department staffing to that of several districts of similar size and structure. Although comparative information is useful, it should not be the only measure of appropriate staffing levels. School districts are complex and vary widely in demographics and resources. Careful evaluation is recommended because generalizations can be misleading if unique circumstances are not taken into consideration. When choosing comparison districts, FCMAT considered district type, student enrollment,

2 Daft, R. L. (2001). *Organization Theory and Design*. South-Western College Publishing

and unduplicated pupil percentage.<sup>3</sup> Data for the following comparison was taken from the Education Data Partnership (Ed-Data) website, and department staffing was obtained directly from the comparison districts' websites.

## Department Structure and Staffing

At the time of fieldwork, the district's HR Department staffing was as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Pajaro Valley USD HR Department Staffing**

| Position  | FTE       |
|---|-----------|
| Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources (Interim) | 1.0       |
| Executive Assistant                                 | 1.0       |
| Director, Certificated                              | 1.0       |
| Director, Classified                                | 1.0       |
| Human Resources Specialist                          | 1.0       |
| Human Resources Specialist, Special Education       | 1.0       |
| Human Resources Technician / Substitute Desk        | 1.0       |
| Human Resources Technician, Classified              | 1.0       |
| Human Resources Analyst (2)                         | 2.0       |
| Human Resources Analyst, Certificated (2)           | 2.0       |
| Human Resources Analyst, Classified                 | 1.0       |
| District Receptionist                               | 1.0       |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>14</b> |

The total full-time equivalent (FTE) for the HR Department (which includes the personnel commission staff) was approximately 13.0 FTE. According to the district's organizational chart, the HR Department has 14.00 FTE. The district receptionist position on the district's organizational chart is not an HR position. This employee is located near the HR department but does not support HR; rather, they serve as receptionist for the entire district office.

Interviews and documents indicated that the department's current organizational structure is as shown in the organizational chart below:

<sup>3</sup> This is the percentage of students who are English learners and/or foster youth and/or who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. No student is counted twice, even if they meet more than one of these criteria.

**Figure 4: Human Resources Department Organization**

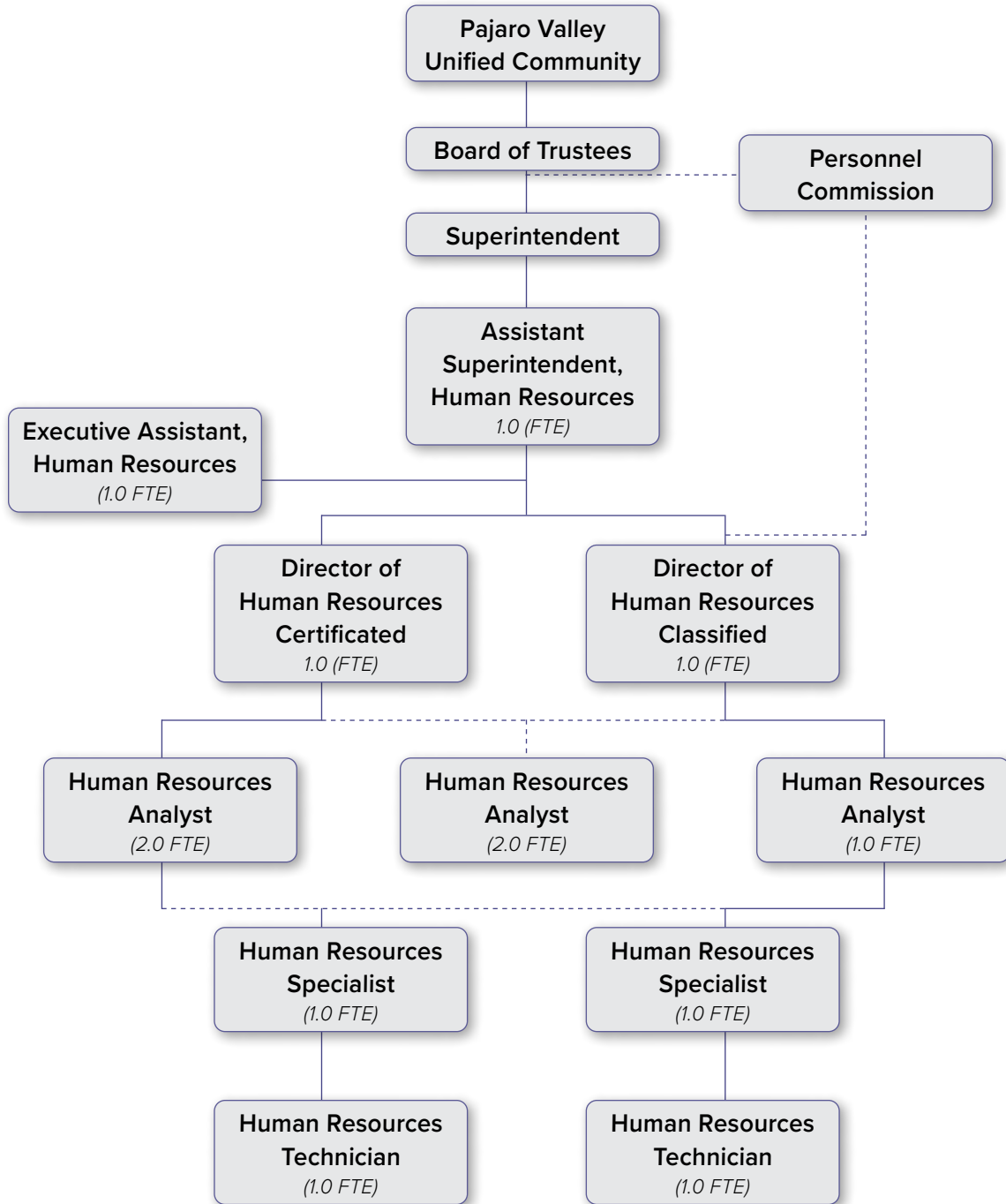


Figure 4: An organizational chart of the district’s current HR Department, showing positions, FTE and hierarchy.

As stated previously, staff lack clarity about the HR Department’s organizational structure. The lines in the organizational chart above indicate the flow of line authority. However, HR staff were often unsure which director they report to, and in some cases if the response they received from one director about an issue was not to their satisfaction, they sought input from a different director. The dotted lines in the organizational chart above indicate these alternate paths of line authority.

This is not a normal flow of authority and creates confusion in the department and in the district. Even customers outside of the HR department were unsure whom they should go to for certain issues or con-

cerns. They assumed that for all issues and concerns about certificated staff they would go to the director of human resources, certificated, and that for issues and concerns about classified staff they should go to the director of human resources, classified. However, staff members' tasks and responsibilities varied and changed depending on which director they were assigned to.

In FCMAT's review of the comparison merit districts, it was common to find two HR directors, one with responsibilities for certificated staff and one for classified staff. However, this arrangement can create a division within an HR department. For efficiency and effectiveness, the best practice is to ensure that all staff are trained and understand their roles and responsibilities for both classified and certificated staff. This helps with efficiency, and it informs the internal customers whom they can go to when they have questions, concerns or issues.

In addition, regardless of the exact division of responsibilities, the best practice is to make the reporting structure and areas of responsibility clear to all staff, but this is not occurring at the district.

FCMAT conducted a comparison of districts with similar enrollments and unduplicated pupil percentages<sup>4</sup> to that of Pajaro Valley Unified. The comparison included some nonmerit districts, because they also must recruit classified staff. Pajaro Valley Unified School District was included in the comparison. Data for the comparison was obtained from Ed-Data, district websites, or directly from district staff. When using data from district websites, FCMAT assumed the positions in the HR department were full time (1.0 FTE). FCMAT's staffing totals include positions in the HR department and personnel commission staff.

The comparison unified school districts' student enrollment ranged from 15,677 to 19,456. Seven of the 18 districts are merit districts. The average total HR and personnel commission staffing was approximately 15.0 FTE, and the average enrollment was approximately 17,260. The data indicates that Pajaro Valley Unified is understaffed by approximately 3.0 FTE. The comparison data is shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Comparison District Data**

| District Name              | Merit District | FTE   | County       | District Type           | Census Day Enrollment | FRPM/EL/Foster Unduplicated % |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Simi Valley Unified        | Yes            | 13.00 | Ventura      | Unified School District | 15,677                | 48.01                         |
| Hacienda la Puente Unified | Yes            | 25.00 | Los Angeles  | Unified School District | 15,767                | 78.84                         |
| Central Unified            | No             | 11.00 | Fresno       | Unified School District | 15,956                | 82.03                         |
| Conejo Valley Unified      | Yes            | 11.00 | Ventura      | Unified School District | 15,999                | 27.86                         |
| Antioch Unified            | Yes            | 15.00 | Contra Costa | Unified School District | 16,045                | 78.28                         |
| Coachella Valley Unified   | No             | 18.00 | Riverside    | Unified School District | 16,276                | 94.37                         |
| Napa Valley Unified        | No             | 16.00 | Napa         | Unified School District | 16,393                | 66.31                         |
| Alvord Unified             | No             | 12.00 | Riverside    | Unified School District | 16,663                | 86.55                         |
| Natomas Unified            | No             | 12.00 | Sacramento   | Unified School District | 16,813                | 60.61                         |
| Pajaro Valley Unified      | Yes            | 13.00 | Santa Cruz   | Unified School District | 17,520                | 81.04                         |
| Newport-Mesa Unified       | Yes            | 25.00 | Orange       | Unified School District | 17,768                | 54.12                         |
| Oceanside Unified          | Yes            | 11.00 | San Diego    | Unified School District | 17,839                | 68.69                         |

<sup>4</sup> This is the percentage of students who are English learners, foster youth, or qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Each student is counted only once, even if they meet two or more of these criteria.

| District Name        | Merit District | FTE   | County         | District Type           | Census Day Enrollment | FRPM/EL/Foster Unduplicated % |
|----------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Jurupa Unified       | No             | 14.00 | Riverside      | Unified School District | 18,015                | 82.77                         |
| ABC Unified          | No             | 12.00 | Los Angeles    | Unified School District | 18,081                | 62.18                         |
| Beaumont Unified     | No             | 13.00 | Riverside      | Unified School District | 18,137                | 61.39                         |
| Colton Joint Unified | No             | 17.00 | San Bernardino | Unified School District | 18,912                | 87.09                         |
| Val Verde Unified    | No             | 19.00 | Riverside      | Unified School District | 19,361                | 88.24                         |
| San Marcos Unified   | No             | 12.00 | San Diego      | Unified School District | 19,456                | 40.94                         |
| AVERAGE              |                | 14.94 |                |                         | 17,260                | 69.41                         |

Table 5 below includes information about the merit districts in the comparison. As stated previously, both merit and nonmerit districts must recruit new staff. The comparison districts with a personnel commission had student enrollment ranging from 15,677 to 17,839, their average HR and personnel commission total staffing was approximately 16.14 FTE, and their average enrollment was approximately 16,659. Like the data above, this data indicates that Pajaro Valley Unified is understaffed.

**Table 5: Comparison Data for Merit Districts**

| District Name              | Merit District | FTE   | County       | District Type           | Census Day Enrollment | FRPM/EL/Foster Undupl. % |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Simi Valley Unified        | Yes            | 13.00 | Ventura      | Unified School District | 15,677                | 48.01                    |
| Hacienda la Puente Unified | Yes            | 25.00 | Los Angeles  | Unified School District | 15,767                | 78.84                    |
| Conejo Valley Unified      | Yes            | 11.00 | Ventura      | Unified School District | 15,999                | 27.86                    |
| Antioch Unified            | Yes            | 15.00 | Contra Costa | Unified School District | 16,045                | 78.28                    |
| Pajaro Valley Unified      | Yes            | 13.00 | Santa Cruz   | Unified School District | 17,520                | 81.04                    |
| Newport-Mesa Unified       | Yes            | 25.00 | Orange       | Unified School District | 17,768                | 54.12                    |
| Oceanside Unified          | Yes            | 11.00 | San Diego    | Unified School District | 17,839                | 68.69                    |
| AVERAGE                    |                | 16.14 |              |                         | 16,659                | 62.41                    |

Given this information, it would benefit the district to change its HR Department’s organizational structure and add positions.

Ideally, this would include reclassifying one of the director of human resources positions to an executive director of human resources, which should help clarify reporting and line of authority for staff. It would also include maintaining the director of human resources position’s current reporting structure, in which this position reports to both the personnel commission and the board of trustees.

Additional full-time HR positions that would benefit the district include one additional HR specialist, one additional HR technician, and an HR Department secretary. The secretary position could be responsible for welcoming internal and external customers to both the HR Department and the district. For this to be meaningful, the department needs to be accessible to customers and the public, including having unlocked

doors. An HR department by nature works with the public to recruit and retain staff to serve a district’s students.

The organizational chart below shows FCMAT’s recommended structure and staffing for the district’s HR Department. This chart is based on the assumption that staff are trained in both certificated and classified HR functions and that employees and their duties are not isolated from others or strictly divided between classified and certificated.

**Figure 5: FCMAT Recommended HR Department Organizational Structure**

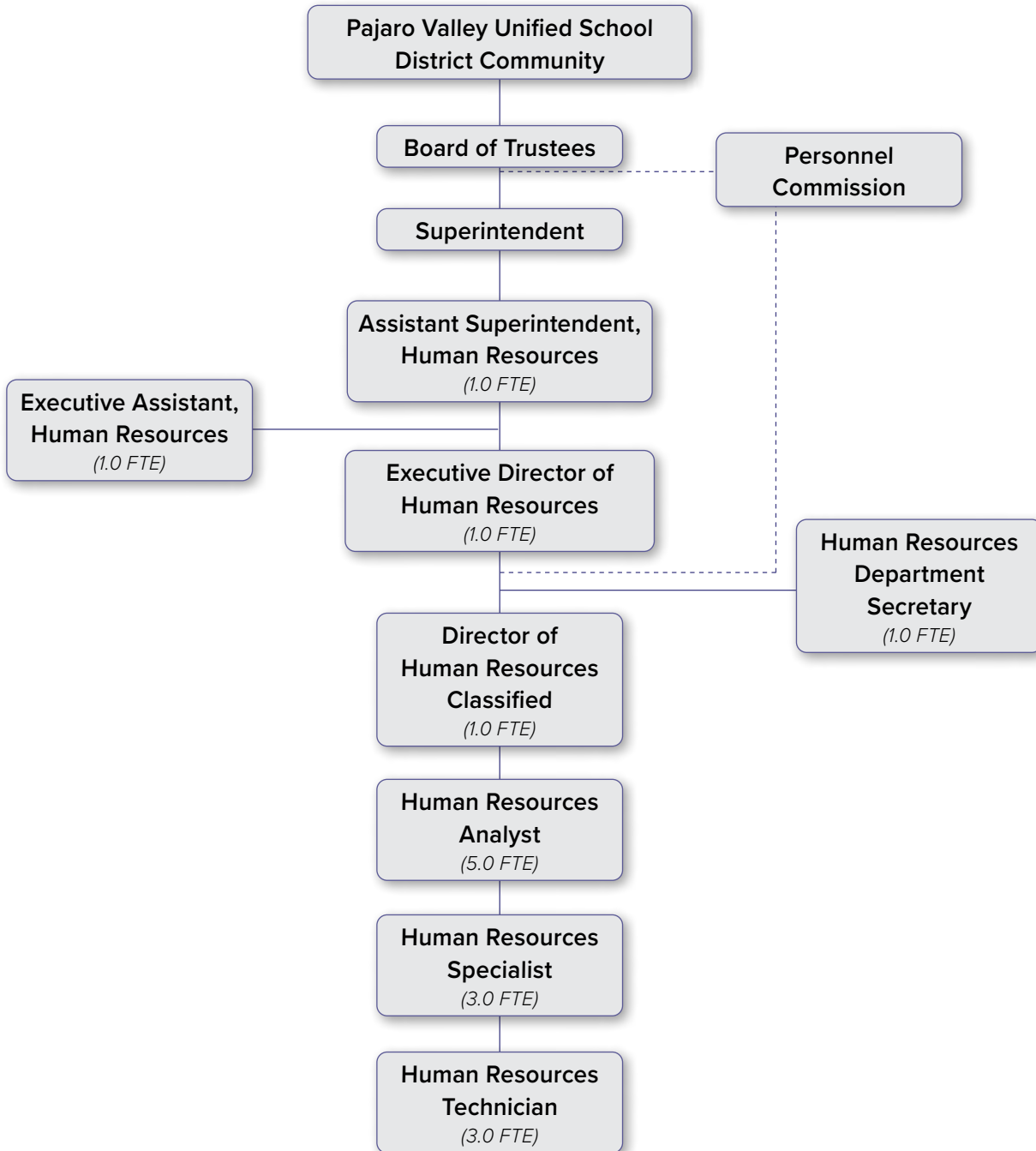


Figure 5: An organizational chart showing FCMAT’s recommended organization for the district’s HR Department, showing positions, FTE and hierarchy.

## Recommendations

*The district should:*

1. Implement the organization and staffing shown in the above organizational chart.
2. Reclassify one director of human resources position to an executive director of human resources position.
3. Add 1.0 FTE human resources technician position.
4. Add 1.0 FTE human resources specialist position.
5. Add 1.0 FTE human resources department secretary position.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

### **New Hire Checklist and New Employee Data Sheets**

*Click on a title below to download a Microsoft Word version of the document.*

[New Classified Employee Data Sheet](#)

[New Certificated Employee Data Sheet](#)

[New Hire Paperwork Checklist for Certificated Hires](#)

# **Appendix B**

## **Study Agreement**



**FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM  
STUDY AGREEMENT  
FOR MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE**

This study agreement, hereinafter referred to as Agreement, is made and entered into by and between the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team, hereinafter referred to as the Team or FCMAT, and the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, hereinafter referred to as the Client; collectively, FCMAT and Client are hereinafter referred to as the Parties. This Agreement shall become effective from the date of execution hereof by FCMAT.

**1. BASIS OF AGREEMENT**

FCMAT provides a variety of services to local education agencies (LEAs) as authorized by Education Code (EC) 42127.8(d). The Client has requested that the FCMAT assign professionals to study specific aspects of the Client's operations. The professionals will include FCMAT staff and may include professionals from county offices of education, school districts, charter schools, community colleges, other public agencies or private contractors. All professionals assigned shall work under the direction of FCMAT. All work shall be performed in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement.

FCMAT will notify the Client's county superintendent of schools of this Agreement.

**2. SCOPE OF THE WORK**

**A. Scope and Objectives of the Study**

1. Review operational processes and procedures in the Human Resources Department and make recommendations for improved efficiency, if any.
2. Evaluate the current workflow and distribution of functions in the above department and make recommendations for improved efficiencies, if any.
3. Conduct an organizational and staffing review of the above department and make recommendations for staffing improvements and organizational restructuring, if any.

**B. Services and Products to be Provided**

1. Orientation Meeting  
The Team will conduct an orientation session at the Client's location to brief the Client's management and supervisory personnel on the Team's procedures and the purpose and schedule of the study. This orientation meeting is normally held at the beginning of fieldwork for the study.
2. Fieldwork  
The Team will conduct fieldwork at the Client's office and/or school site(s), or other locations as needed. Limited fieldwork may also be conducted remotely via telephone

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or videoconferencing services, in addition to the Public Safety Considerations outlined in Section 13 below.

3. **Exit Meeting**  
The Team will hold an exit meeting at the conclusion of the fieldwork to inform the Client of the status of the study. The exit meeting will include a review of the scope of work; outstanding items, including documents, data and interviews not yet received or held; and the estimated timeline for a draft report. The meeting will not memorialize details regarding findings because the Team's conclusions may change after a complete analysis is finished. Exceptions to this will be findings of immediate health and safety concerns for students or staff, and other time-sensitive items that include the potential for risk or exposure to loss.
4. **Exit Letter**  
Approximately 10 business days after the exit meeting, the Team will issue an exit letter briefly memorializing the topics discussed in the exit meeting.
5. **Draft Report**  
An electronic copy of a preliminary draft report will be delivered to the Client's point of contact identified below for review and comment.
6. **Final Report**  
An electronic copy of the final report will be delivered to the Client's point of contact and to the Client's county superintendent of schools following completion of the study. FCMAT's work products are public and all final reports are published on the FCMAT website.
7. **Board Presentation**  
Presentations to the Client's board are optional and are made at the request of the Client. If a board presentation is requested, it will be noted in the scope and objectives of the study or can be added as a change in scope at a later date.
8. **Follow-Up Review**  
If requested by the Client within six to 12 months after completion of the study, FCMAT, at no additional cost, will assess the Client's progress in implementing the recommendations included in the report. This follow-up support is primarily a document review-based study. Progress in implementing the recommendations will be documented to the Client in a FCMAT management letter. FCMAT will work with the Client on a mutually convenient time to return for follow-up support that is no sooner than eight months and no later than 18 months after the date of the final report.

### **3. PROJECT PERSONNEL**

The personnel assigned to the study will be led by a FCMAT staff person (job lead) and will include at least one other professional. FCMAT will notify the Client of the assigned personnel when the fully executed copy of this Agreement is returned to the Client.

FCMAT will communicate to the Client any changes in assigned project personnel.

#### **4. PROJECT COSTS**

The cost for studies requested pursuant to EC 42127.8(d)(1) and 84041 shall be as follows:

- A. \$1,100 per day for each FCMAT staff member while on site conducting fieldwork. The cost of independent FCMAT consultants will be billed at their daily rate for all work performed. On-site is defined as either 1) physically at the Client's office or school site(s), or 2) in a scheduled virtual meeting with the Client's personnel, representatives or others associated with the scope of work pursuant to Section 13 below.
- B. All out-of-pocket expenses, including travel and its associated costs, and miscellaneous items necessary to complete the scope and objectives of the study.
- C. The applicable indirect rate at the time work is performed on the study will be added to all costs billed.
- D. The Client will be invoiced for 50% of the not-to-exceed cost shown below following completion of fieldwork (progress payment) and the remaining amount shall be due upon the issuance of the final report or presentation to the Client's board, whichever is later (final payment). The Parties agree that changes documented in a revised study agreement may change the original not-to-exceed amount shown below. If changes are made before or during fieldwork, the new not-to-exceed amount documented in such a revised study agreement will constitute the basis for the progress payment. If changes are made after fieldwork, 100% of the total changed value documented in a revised study agreement, less progress payments made, will constitute the final payment due. All payments shall be due immediately based on the terms of the invoice.

**Based on the scope and objectives of the study, the total not-to-exceed cost of the study will be \$20,300.**

- E. Any change to the scope of work will affect the total cost. Changes may include, but are not limited to, delays, revisions to the scope of services, and substitution or addition of personnel. The need for changes shall be communicated by FCMAT to the Client in advance in the form of a revised study agreement.

Payments for FCMAT's services are payable to Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Administrative Agent, 1300 17th Street, City Centre, Bakersfield, CA 93301.

#### **5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLIENT**

- A. Return current organizational chart(s) that show the Client's management and staffing structure with the signed copy of this Agreement. Organizational charts should be relevant to the scope of this Agreement.
- B. Provide private office or conference room space for the Team's use during fieldwork.
- C. Provide for a Client employee to upload all requested documents and data to FCMAT's online SharePoint repository per FCMAT's instructions. Provide FCMAT with the name and email of the person who will be responsible for collecting and uploading documents

requested by FCMAT with the signed copy of this Agreement.

- D. Provide documents and data requested on the Team’s initial and supplementary document request list(s) by the date requested.

All documents and data provided shall be responsive to FCMAT’s request, in quality condition, readable and in a usable form. With few exceptions, documents and data requested are public records and records maintained by LEAs in the routine course of doing business. Some data requested may require exporting LEA financial system reports to Microsoft Excel or another usable format agreed to by FCMAT.

All documents shall be provided to FCMAT in electronic format, labeled as instructed by FCMAT. Upon approval of this Agreement, access will be provided to FCMAT’s online SharePoint repository, to which the Client will upload all requested documents and data.

- E. Ensure appropriate senior-level staff are available for the orientation and exit meetings.
- F. Facilitate access to requested board members, officers and staff for interviews.
- G. Facilitate access to requested information and facilities to include, but not be limited to, files, sites, classrooms and operational areas for observation.
- H. Review a draft of the report and return it to FCMAT by the date FCMAT requests with any comments regarding the accuracy of the report’s data or the practicability of its recommendations. The Team will review this feedback in a timely manner and make any adjustments it deems necessary before issuing the final report.
- I. Return the requested evaluation survey to FCMAT as described below.

**6. PROJECT SCHEDULE**

Time is of the essence. The Parties acknowledge that the goal of the scope and objectives of the study under this Agreement is to produce a timely and thorough report that adds value for the Client. To accomplish this goal, the Parties agree to communicate and mutually agree to honor established time commitments. These commitments include the Client providing requested documents, setting and keeping interview appointments and returning comments on the draft report consistent with the established project schedule.

The following project schedule milestones will be established by FCMAT upon receipt of a signed Agreement from the Client:

| ACTION   | TIMELINE  |
|--|---|
| FCMAT provides the Client with a draft Agreement.  | Draft Agreements are usually provided within 20 business days of the Client’s initial request for services. |
| Client returns partially executed Agreement to FCMAT along with the applicable organizational chart and the name and email of the of person who will be responsible for collecting and | Draft Agreements are valid for 30 business days.  |

| ACTION   | TIMELINE  |
|--|---|
| uploading documents requested by FCMAT.  |   |
| FCMAT returns a fully executed Agreement to the Client and identifies the project schedule and the lead and other personnel assigned to the job. | Within five business days of the Client's return of the signed Agreement.   |
| Client uploads initial requested documents and data to FCMAT's online SharePoint repository.   | Within 10 business days of the Client's receipt of the FCMAT document and data request list.                                  |
| Fieldwork  | Mutually agreed upon; usually, to commence within 10 business days of FCMAT's receipt of requested documents and data.        |
| Orientation meeting  | First day of fieldwork.   |
| Exit meeting   | Last day of fieldwork.  |
| Follow up fieldwork, if needed (e.g., rescheduled interview, additional interviews).   | Mutually agreed upon; usually, within five business days of FCMAT's request.  |
| Client uploads supplemental documents and data to FCMAT's online SharePoint repository.  | Within two business days of the Client's receipt of FCMAT's supplemental document and data request(s).                        |
| Draft report submitted to the Client.  | To be determined, usually, within eight weeks of the conclusion of fieldwork and receipt of all documents and data requested. |
| Client comments on draft report  | Within 10 business days of FCMAT providing a draft report to the Client.  |

The Client acknowledges that project schedule deadlines build upon and are contingent on each previous deadline. Missed deadline dates will affect future deadline dates and ultimately the timing of the final report. For example, if the Client does not provide requested documents and data by the specified date, the fieldwork may not be able to proceed as originally planned.

FCMAT acknowledges that the Client has an educational program to administer, is balancing many priorities, and in some cases may have records management difficulties, staffing capacity issues, staff on various types of leave, or other circumstances, all of which will affect the project schedule.

The Parties commit to regular communication and updates about the study schedule and work progress. FCMAT may modify the usual timelines as needed.

## **7. COMMENCEMENT, TERMINATION AND COMPLETION OF WORK**

FCMAT will commence work as soon as it has assembled an available and appropriate study team, taking into consideration other jobs FCMAT has previously undertaken, assignments from the state, and higher priority assignments due to fiscal distress. The Team will work expeditiously to complete its work and deliver its report, subject to the cooperation of the Client and any other related parties from which, in the Team's judgment, it must obtain information. Once the Team has completed its fieldwork, it will proceed to prepare a report. In the absence of extraordinary circumstances, FCMAT will not withhold preparation, publication and distribution of a final report once fieldwork has been completed.

Prior to completion of fieldwork and upon written notice to FCMAT, the Client may terminate its request for service and will be responsible for all costs incurred by FCMAT to the date of termination under Section 4 (Project Costs). If the Client does not provide written notice of termination prior to completion of fieldwork, the Team will complete its work and deliver its final report and the Client will be responsible for the full costs.

FCMAT may terminate this Agreement at any time if the Client fails to cooperate with the requested project schedule, provide requested documents and data and/or make staff available for interviews as requested by FCMAT.

## **8. INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR**

FCMAT is an independent contractor and is not an employee or engaged in any manner with the Client. The manner in which FCMAT's services are rendered shall be within its sole control and discretion. FCMAT representatives are not authorized to speak for, represent, or obligate the Client in any manner without prior express written authorization from an officer of the Client.

## **9. RECORDS**

The Client understands and agrees that FCMAT is a state agency and all FCMAT reports are public records and are published on the [FCMAT website](#). Supporting documents and data in FCMAT's possession may also be public records and will be made available in accordance with the provisions of the California Public Records Act.

FCMAT has a records retention policy and practice, and every effort will be made to maintain records related to this Agreement in accordance with this policy.

## **10. CONTACT WITH PUPILS**

Pursuant to EC 45125.1, representatives of FCMAT will have limited contact with pupils. The Client shall take appropriate steps to comply with EC 45125.1.

## **11. INSURANCE**

During the term of this Agreement, FCMAT shall maintain liability insurance of not less than \$1 million unless otherwise agreed upon in writing by the Client, automobile liability insurance in the amount required by California state law, and workers' compensation as required by California state law. Upon the request of the Client and receipt of the signed Agreement, FCMAT shall provide certificates of insurance, with the Client named as

additional insured, indicating applicable insurance coverages.

## **12. HOLD HARMLESS**

FCMAT shall hold the Client, its board, officers, agents, and employees harmless from all suits, claims and liabilities resulting from negligent acts or omissions of FCMAT's board, officers, agents and employees undertaken under this Agreement. Conversely, the Client shall hold FCMAT, its board, officers, agents, and employees harmless from all suits, claims and liabilities resulting from negligent acts or omissions of the Client's board, officers, agents and employees undertaken under this Agreement.

## **13. PUBLIC SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

Whether due to public health considerations, extreme weather conditions, road closures, other travel restrictions or interruptions, shelter-at-home orders, LEA closures or other related considerations, at FCMAT's sole discretion, the Scope of Work, Project Costs, Responsibilities of the Client, and Project Schedule (Sections 2, 4, 5 and 6 herein) and other provisions herein may be revised. Examples of such revisions may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- A. Orientation and exit meetings, interviews and other information-gathering activities may be conducted remotely via telephone, videoconferencing, or other means. References to fieldwork shall be interpreted appropriately given the circumstances.
- B. Activities performed remotely that are normally performed in the field shall be billed hourly as if performed in the field (excluding out-of-pocket costs that can otherwise be avoided).
- C. The Client may be relieved of its duty to provide conference and other work area facilities for the Team.

## **14. FORCE MAJEURE**

Neither party will be liable for any failure or delay in the performance of this Agreement due to causes beyond the reasonable control of the party, except for payment obligations by the Client.

## **15. EVALUATION**

In the interest of continuous improvement, FCMAT will provide the Client with an evaluation survey at the conclusion of the services. FCMAT appreciates the Client's honest assessment of the Team's services and process. The Client shall return the evaluation survey within 10 business days of receipt.

## **16. CLIENT CONTACT PERSON**

The Client's contact person designated below shall be the primary contact person for FCMAT to use in communicating with the Client on matters related to this Agreement. At any time when this Agreement or FCMAT's process requires that FCMAT send information, document request lists, draft report or final report, or when FCMAT makes other requests for

the Client to act upon, this is the person whom FCMAT will contact. The Client may change the contact person upon written notice to FCMAT's job lead assigned to the study.

Name: Jenny Im, Chief Business Officer

Telephone: (201) 527-5860

Email: [jenny\\_im@pvusd.net](mailto:jenny_im@pvusd.net)

**17. SIGNATURES**

Each individual executing this Agreement on behalf of a party hereto represents and warrants that he or she is duly authorized by all necessary and appropriate action to execute this Agreement on behalf of such party and does so with full legal authority.

For Client:

  
\_\_\_\_\_ 9-18-24  
Date  
Dr. Heather Contreras, Superintendent  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

For FCMAT:

  
\_\_\_\_\_ 9-26-24  
Date  
Shayleen Harte, Deputy Executive Officer  
Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team