

## Plumas Unified School District County Administrator Listening Meeting Results – July 2025

On June 17, 25 and 27, 2025, representatives from the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) held a series of in-person and virtual listening meetings with partners of the Plumas Unified School District (Plumas / district). Representing FCMAT were Chief Analyst Tami Montero and Chief Executive Officer Michael Fine. The purpose of these meetings was to solicit public input on the qualities and characteristics the partners desired in the county administrator to be assigned to Plumas as part of its efforts to recover from state receivership. Those qualities and characteristics have been documented on the following pages and were used to 1) inform questions and topics that FCMAT will ask applicants to respond to in their required letter of interest to FCMAT to serve in the county administrator role (see below), 2) help develop the evaluation rubric used by FCMAT to vet the applicants, and 3) inform questions and topics that the county superintendent and other parties will use in the final selection process.

Approximately 40 partners participated in a series of one-on-one and small group conversations. These partners included board members (two of four participated), employee association leaders, parents, principals, executive team members, other managers, district staff, school site council members, and community members.

The input received during the listening meetings is listed on the following pages and is organized around seven themes. The seven questions applicants are asked to address in their letters of interest as part of the application process are derived from the themes and are listed below. An eighth, miscellaneous, category was created to capture all other input. The items in the miscellaneous category are important to consider; they were simply brought up with less frequency than other input that influenced the seven themes. Some themes are found in multiple questions.

### Questions for Applicants for County Administrator Position

The following questions that applicants for the county administrator position will be required to answer are derived from the notes from listening meetings reported in the next section.

1. The Education Code requires that the county administrator has expertise in management and finance, previous experience mitigating fiscal distress in school districts, and the ability to engage meaningfully with the community that the school district serves [EC 41326(c)].

The county administrator must have a proven track record in school finance. Please describe the transformation you led and the legacy you established in one or more recent positions relative to your school finance experience.

2. The role of the county administrator is to guide the district through receivership to a point when local governance authority is returned and the governing board and staff have sufficient capacity to carry out their fiduciary duties to students and the community.

As the county administrator, your role is to work yourself out of a job in the next three years by ensuring the return of local governance authority. How will you build the capacity of the staff to ensure a leadership succession plan at all levels?

3. A commitment to clear, consistent and accurate communication is required.

Describe how you will communicate to the staff, community and advisory board about your assessment of challenges and opportunities, recommendations and decisions, and daily activities of moving the district forward.

4. Collaborative, trusting relationships are an essential foundation to advancing students, staff and the district.

Describe how you will build relationships with district staff, parents and community partners.

5. One of the greatest challenges the Plumas Unified School District faces is a significantly imbalanced budget.

Explain how you will approach an estimated 20% annual deficit and restore fiscal stability over the next 36 months while ensuring advances in student achievement.

6. The four distinct Plumas communities are economically diverse, rural, and rich in history and culture. The county administrator must be able to demonstrate genuine care for and commitment to the communities and their unique challenges, opportunities and priorities.

Describe your experience leading in a small, rural, economically diverse environment and how you built on the strength of such diversity with students, families, staff, and the community. Also describe how you will honor and respect the district's traditions that value the environment and the community's ties to the land.

7. An assessment of the district's leadership in the time leading up to significant financial challenges in the fall of 2024 indicates that personal and organizational accountability was abandoned, leaders did not collaborate, empathy was lost, and decision-making was inconsistent and often short-term in nature. One of the many consequences is that distrust from within and outside the organization prevails.

Briefly describe your view and approach to each of the following: a) personal accountability, b) organizational accountability, c) empathy, d) collaborative leadership, e) decision-making, and f) overcoming internal and external distrust.

## Notes from Listening Meetings

In the notes from the meetings on the following pages, duplicate comments were retained to show frequency. These notes are a compilation from two note-takers; they have been edited only for clarity. The sections (except for the Miscellaneous section at the end) and the notes under each section are listed in alphabetical order.

## Accountability / Integrity

Accountability

Accountability on equal basis

Compassionate accountability

Compassionate accountability

High level of accountability

Hold people accountable for their actions

Integrity

Integrity

Integrity

Integrity

Integrity

Integrity

Integrity

Integrity

Needs to have integrity

Universal accountability

Universal accountability

## Communication and Transparency

Able to handle the negativity out in the public

Accept reality, be honest

Authenticity

Be honest and real

Be open and available

Be open and available; be willing to provide requested information

Clear and transparent

Clear communication is needed

Clear, consistent communication

Collaborative transparency

# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Communicate early and frequently with not only site admin but also the public - there is a lot of mistrust

Communicate frequently and well with public

Communicate status, what's happening, be honest

Communicate with the community, be transparent

Communicating with transparency

Communication

Communication

Communication

Communication skills

Communicator

Convey the truth

Early, frequent communication

Good communicator

Good communicator

Good communicator, transparent

Honesty

Honesty is crucial

Involve stakeholders

Know and share details when requested / needed

Listen, communicate

Listener

Listener

Listener

Listener

Listener

Listener

No sugar coating

Open communication

Open communicator

# FCMAT

FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT  
ASSISTANCE TEAM

Open, honest communicator

Overcome social media by filling the vacuum with complete, accurate and frequent information

Regular reporting ("Friday updates")

Straightforward with no sugar coating

Strong communicator

Timely information, prompt others for information

Transparency

Transparency

Transparency

Transparency

Transparency

Transparency, transparent with community

Transparent

Transparent

Transparent

Transparent and honest

Underpromise, overdeliver

## Experience

Business / fiscal experience

CBO experience, certified CBO, CBO done well

Commitment to financial reporting

Deep fiscal knowledge

Experienced / demonstrated skills to lead

Experienced leader

Experienced working in fiscal distress

Familiar with grants and nontraditional funding

Familiar with revenue-generating options

Fiscal knowledge

Fiscally sound

# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Has experience and is qualified for the job

If retired, less than two years (education has evolved)

Know common business practices

Knowledge of human resources and business

Knowledgeable

Knowledgeable about human resources processes

Knows how to budget, follow a budget

Knows the industry; preferably someone with favorable CBO experience

Knows their stuff

Modern thinker

Not someone who has been retired for years or has had a gap in service

Previous experience digging out of financial hole

Previous experience with fiscal insolvency or budget balancing

Professional instructional and business leader

Still in the game

Successful, including success after failure

Support a well-balanced program – arts, music, athletics. English language arts, math, instructional

Tech literate, please!

Technology literate

Understanding

Understanding capacity

Understands human resources rules and laws

### Leadership

“How do we get to yes?”

“Invest in us please; protect us”

“It’s okay if a person made mistakes, but how did they recover?”

A leader who “has a spine”

Ability to “get to yes”

Ability to compensate employees fairly

# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Ability to enforce collective bargaining agreement

Appreciate district's recent trauma

Attitude of service

Authentic

Avoid backdoor deals, going rouge

Avoid fostering a toxic environment

Avoid micromanagement

Bargain fairly

Bargain fairly with associations

Bargaining units want to be heard

Be present

Be present

Build network with state, other counties, peers

Build trust

Can handle conflict

Can't be scared to tell parents no

Collaboration

Collaboration, not just listening but shared decision making

Collaborative, inclusive

Collaborator

Collaborator with teachers, staff, parents and community

Communicate what to expect

Consensus builder

Consistent standards

Consistent treatment of personnel

District/school leaders need accurate information from leadership and budget office

Doesn't want to feel blindsided again

Don't cave to the negative

Don't talk behind people's backs

Efficient

# FCMAT

FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT  
ASSISTANCE TEAM

Empathic

Empathic

Empathic

Empathize with people and families

Empathy

Empathy and responsibility

Establish and follow written procedures

Establish clear expectations

Ethical leadership

Evaluations (of personnel) need to be done

Exceptional leadership skills

Existing onboarding process is nonexistent

Flexibility

Formulate, communicate and follow clear standard operating policies, procedures, management activities

Give site administration a voice

Good leadership

Good manager who goes to the sites and talks to the employees

Handle conflict “thick skin”

Hard decisions have impacts – be prepared for that

Hard decisions lead to results where you may cross paths with someone impacted in the future

Improve hiring practices – focus on qualified candidates

Inclusive actions

Inclusive when it comes to the site administrator and don't work in a silo

Invests in staff and protects staff

Know how to recover when they make a mistake

Knows how to convert weaknesses into strengths

Lead with humanity, but be aware of boundaries

Leadership

Leadership



# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Leadership skills, both organizationally and educationally

Leadership, transparency, trust

Leading with humanity

Mentor

Mentor

Models professionalism

More integrity is needed; some people have been given special treatment

Must visit sites on regular basis

Need backbone

No micromanaging, but support when needed

Not talking about others

Onboarding would be better if it included a visit to each department so a new person would know where to go to get help

Open eyes and mind toward all operations

Open minded

Open minded; straightforward

Outside-of-the-box thinker

Overdeliver but underpromise

Principals need a boss

Proactive, transformational leader, not status quo

Professionalism

Professionalism

Professionalism with no undermining

Promote learning among staff team

Promote thoughtful processes

Real leader – listener, communicator

Real leader, someone who can bring everyone together

Regular meetings with staff

Responsive

Solution-oriented

# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Someone that can lead us  
Someone to bring people together  
Stand up for district and staff  
Strong collaborator  
Strong teacher, mentor, guide, coach  
Support those impacted by decisions  
Supports shared decision making  
Teach  
Teach  
Thick skin  
Thick skin and not be afraid to take the actions needed  
Thick skinned  
Train, mentor, coach staff on their assignments, duties  
Understand impact of decisions and indecision  
Wants to collaborate, not just listen  
We need a proactive and progressive thinker - not status quo  
Who will not micromanage  
Willing to set boundaries with compassion and stick to them

### Plumas-Specific Considerations

Advocate for additional state and federal funding options and consider the unique characteristics of this community  
Advocate for Plumas USD  
Analysis / understanding of four communities  
Appreciate different communities  
Appreciate Plumas – community, environment, outdoor core  
Archaic systems, processes, procedures have adverse impact on students and safety – need to be addressed  
Do not want to hire a previous employee, period  
Equality focus re the distinct communities  
Frustrated about the conditions that vary from communities

# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Geographics of district require digital processes

Honor and respect Plumas traditions, integration of the environment with instruction

Impartial (no previous Plumas Service/connection)

Learn what works for Plumas

Needs to be fresh, no Plumas connection

New set of eyes, people who have been on the outside, not the Plumas way

No connections to local staff, no conflicts of interest, nobody who has worked here previously or works here now (look back 10 years)

No previous employees should be hired

No previous Plumas staff (they left for a reason)

No ties to Plumas – clean break

Not a former Plumas COE/Plumas USD employee

Older administrators should not be considered

Onboarding is lacking at Plumas USD

Protect Greenville schools/programs

Relocate to Plumas and integrate in the district and community

Rural community understanding

Single-district county experience

Solid understanding of rural community/life

The further the community is from Quincy, there is less connection and consistency

The person needs to listen and understand what draws families to our communities

Understand and appreciate differences in Plumas communities

Understand the nature of unique communities

Understand the uniqueness of Plumas

Understanding of rural communities

Understanding of rural nature of Plumas

Understanding of the demographics of Plumas

Understanding the “mountain families”

Understands the rural lifestyle

Understands why people enroll in Plumas USD and leave Plumas USD

We need someone fresh

## Relationships

Ability to get along with staff

Appropriate interactions with parents, especially when discipline is an issue

Cooperative

Feeling supported, being supportive

Get along with staff

Human approach

No conflicts of interest

No favoritism

Respect gains respect

Supportive

Trust

Trust but verify

Trust staff but verify and support

## Role of County Administrator

A problem solver who is ready to mentor

Ability to assess team, strengthen team, convert weaknesses to strengths

Ability to build a team in the district

Ability to monitor human resources functions (they are completely dysfunctional)

Ability to recruit team

Ability to recruit, promote the right people

Build culture around good governance

Clarity of roles

Culture must change

Desire to have board member training

Difficult decision maker

Establish board meeting protocols, policies and procedures

# FCMAT

## FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM

Evaluates options

Foundation builder, sets the stage for future

Get to know the district and its people

Get to know the district and its people

Get to know people and acknowledge them

Get to know the district and the staff

Good decisions for long-term results

Innovative problem solver

Job descriptions are unclear, and staff are unclear on their roles

Know their job and do it well

Know when to tell a parent "No"

Knows job and does it

Making good long-term decisions

Mentor board

Mentoring for the staff to ensure success after FCMAT and the administrator have left

Must break down the current siloed leadership in the district office

Needs to cut unnecessary jobs

New eyes

Not an entertainer

Organizational and relationship rebuilding skills

Overall dysfunction across all functional areas needs to be addressed

Overcome distrust

Overcome environment of mistrust

Own mistakes and navigate through recovery

Rebuilder

Standard operating procedures are needed at all levels

Take a hard look at where the cuts need to come from

Willing to investigate and correct dysfunction across all functions

Willing to take a hard look at real, meaningful reductions and positions

Work on board etiquette

## Miscellaneous

Don't just repair the broken plan, we need to build something new

Fresh perspective

Heart for kids

Huge facilities needs in district

Make it an ugly Christmas present instead of in March

Not be self-absorbed

Opposite of "Mr. Bill"

Personable

Positive

Service driven

Student achievement #1

Student achievement focus

Student centered

Student focus

Student focus

Student focused is the number one attribute needed in the candidate

Support the existing charter school through collaboration, communication, inclusiveness

The community is angry with the district office staff

We are looking for someone who wants to work with us

We feel trust now with the new leaders and want more of that kind of relationship

Willing to be involved in community

Willing to continue beyond the county administrator role and be the permanent superintendent

Works to counteract the habit that organizations plan until it breaks – don't fix, build new