

GLENDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE VISIT  
Academic Senate for California Community Colleges  
Community College League of California  
January 30, 2009

This report is in response to a request for technical assistance by President/Superintendent Audre Levy and Academic Senate President John Queen. The technical assistance visit was conducted on January 30, 2009, by Scott Lay, President and CEO of the Community College League of California, and Mark Wade Lieu, President of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. The purpose of the visit was to assist the board, administration, faculty and staff in improving communication and developing a common understanding of participating effectively in district and college governance in order to improve the campus climate and more effectively serve students.

The team's observations and recommendations were made following a governance presentation for the entire college community and separate meetings with Classified Staff and Faculty, Administrators, the District Board of Trustees and the College Superintendent/President. The recommendations should not be viewed as a set of prescriptive solutions, but rather as catalysts for further discussion and improvements in governance at the college.

**Observations**

The broad participation of faculty, staff, administrators, and the board in the technical assistance visit clearly demonstrated recognition of the problems facing the college with regard to participatory governance and a shared desire by all to resolve these problems for the benefit of the district and its board, employees and students. Throughout the meetings with the three groups, several issues were raised numerous times and by more than one group. These issues, we believe, have a great impact on the current climate and affect the ability of all constituencies to work together.

Overall, the Technical Assistance Team found that constituency members have a general understanding of the principles of participatory governance and the need for broad participation in institutional decisions and processes. However, there is clearly a disconnect between the understanding of faculty, staff, and middle-level administration -- many of whom are long-time employees of the district -- and that of members of the board, the president, and senior staff (vice-presidents and assistant vice-presidents), almost all of whom have been with the district three years or fewer.

Under the tenure of the previous college president, who served for twenty-three years, the college established strong practices and policies related to participatory governance. However, these practices and policies, which date from 1983, were not updated with the passage of AB1725. As a result, constituency groups are receiving different information about the structure of participatory governance, some based on the district policies established prior to 1989 and some based on the regulatory language put into place by AB1725.

Through observation of many types of organizations, whether educational, business, or religious, it can be generally stated that there are inherent difficulties in the transition from long-standing leadership to new leadership. Under the previous college president, customs and practices were established over many years. It is not surprising, therefore, to find tension in the college community with the arrival of a new college president who brings with her a change in leadership style and the necessity to bring the college into compliance with AB1725.

In hindsight, the board might well have employed the useful practice of hiring an interim president, one who could have set new processes in motion and provided a transition between college presidents and who could absorb the tensions of such a transition knowing full well that his/her tenure at the college was temporary. However, the fact remains that the board moved immediately into the hiring of a new college president upon the retirement of the former.

From conversations with the faculty, staff, and middle-level administrators, it appears that the transition was a particularly jarring one. The new president entered her position with a clear list of issues that needed to be resolved, and when faculty and staff expressed resistance to her ideas, the president turned from a more participatory style of decision-making to one where she depended largely on the input of senior staff. There is the perception that the president felt little value in the college's history and traditions, which has been translated into the president finding little value in the contributions of long-time employees of the district as well. The president's first year was also colored by some difficult negotiations with both faculty and staff unions.

Communication is the number one issue cited by all constituencies, including the board, albeit from different perspectives. On the part of the faculty and staff, there is the perception that the president has built a wall around herself, communicating to faculty and staff only through senior staff. There is a strong sense of a hierarchy now in place, a marked change from the open-door policy and decentralized leadership style of the previous president. There is also the perception of an increasingly rigid control of college processes on the part of the president. Two examples were cited repeatedly. Faculty and staff both expressed frustration with the process of negotiations. The district negotiator was seen to be unprepared and to have no power to negotiate; rather all proposals had to return to the president for approval. Meetings with the negotiator were seen as meaningless and a waste of time. The second issue concerned communication in particular between the faculty and the board. Faculty perceived the president as erecting a barrier between the faculty and the board. Any concerns had to go through the president, and over time, faculty lost confidence that the president was either faithfully or accurately conveying their concerns to the board.

These problems with communication have engendered strong responses, particularly on the part of faculty. Over the last two years, the faculty senate has conducted surveys related to college-wide perceptions of governance and the president's communication. The faculty senate presented the results of the survey to the board and the president in a closed session to what the senate perceived as a strongly negative and nonproductive reaction. Faculty and staff have also showed up in large numbers to express dissatisfaction with the president at recent board meetings. The faculty senate has also done an analysis of the length of board meetings and how they have changed over ten years. The senate cites the increase in length in meetings from less than an hour to over two hours to "micromanaging" on the part of the board.

While hindsight suggests that a different approach to this transition between presidents might have made a lot of difference, the fact is that at the current time, relations between the faculty, staff and middle-level administrators and the president and the board are marked by distrust. As a result, actions on the part of the president and the board which might be readily accepted in a different climate are generally viewed with suspicion and tainted with the label of ‘micromanaging.’

In general, the consensus among faculty, staff, middle-level administration, and the board is that successful implementation of participatory governance is highly reliant on the personal commitment of the president, and extraordinary work will be required to overcome the mistrust that has developed in the transition from the long-standing president to the current leadership.

### **Recommendations**

1) The district needs to exercise strong leadership to improve the current climate and morale among various constituency groups so they can work effectively together once again. It is recommended that an external facilitator(s) be brought in to provide team building and communications training. The board, administration, faculty and classified staff should work together to design activities and structured discussions aimed at building trust, mutual respect and a sense of community among the leaders of the district. Events and activities that build teamwork and community should be made a top priority. Opportunities should be provided to recognize publicly the good work being done by people in the district and to build upon the successful history of the district.

2) It is recommended that all members of the district community need to develop and practice a culture that treats other members, groups and viewpoints with respect. There must be a sincere desire to obtain and use these varied viewpoints in decision-making, and the fact that previous attempts have been unsuccessful should not prompt a retrenchment from such efforts. All involved in the participatory governance process should participate with the intent of seeking positive resolutions to issues and reaching consensus whenever possible. Participants should respect the opinions of all, conducting discussions in a professional manner, and focus on the student and learning environment. In addition, everyone in the district needs to declare their desire to do their part to change the current environment and move forward.

3) Everyone’s role needs to be better understood and respected. This is partly a result of the clash between governance policies established before the passage of AB1725 and the requirements for participatory governance that now exist in regulation. In order to foster this understanding and respect, the district needs to set as a high priority the development of board policies regarding the roles and responsibilities for faculty, staff, and students per current regulation. It is recommended that an audit be conducting of existing practices and procedures, compliance with regulations be evaluated, and that roles be defined consistently and written down so that all parties have the same understanding of their respective roles. All parties should focus publicly and privately on treating each organization and position with the respect owed the position, listening to all views, treating each other as they would like to be treated, and focusing together on issues that need to be addressed to better serve students.

4) The board sets the tone for the entire district and as such must serve as the models for participatory governance. In the meeting with members of the board, there was clearly a desire to improve communications with district employees and with faculty in particular. After establishing new policies related to participatory governance, the board should participate in annual development activities that review the roles and responsibilities of the board within the legal structure of participatory governance. The district has supported new board members by sending them to professional development activities related to good “boardsmanship,” and this should continue. Such activities may also address the perception that board meetings are now overly lengthy and concern issues normally considered outside the purview of boards.

### **Conclusion**

The Technical Assistance Team appreciates the full and thorough involvement of everyone who participated in the visit and who candidly shared their concerns and solutions about the participatory governance process in the Glendale Community College District. We sincerely hope the recommendations will be helpful. While the number of recommendations is few in number, their scope is broad and they speak to the foundation of participatory governance necessary to function well as a district. In light of the college’s upcoming accreditation visit, it cannot be overstated that the district must move address these recommendations if it hopes to have its accreditation reaffirmed. We will be available for further explanation of the recommendations if necessary.

During the technical assistance visit, faculty, staff, administration, and board members expressed a sincere desire to improve the functioning of the district to benefit students. The evident level of passion and emotion among all involved reveals a strong connection to the district. Their commitment to the college and district they represent and their desire to move forward bode well in their effort to establish clear policies on participatory governance that will allow the district to function in an atmosphere of collegiality and clarity.

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