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members have expressed a willingness to do so. Their roles have been limited to reviewing spending only after it has occurred.

BOC members reported initial training and understanding of their authority has been limited, with members initially unclear about the scope of work and extent of their responsibilities. As noted in recommendation R5, the Civil Grand Jury concludes that the BOCs would benefit from thorough, independent training, both upon the formation of the committees and when any new members are added. Organizations such as the California Association of Bond Oversight Committees can provide appropriate training.

Allocation of Bond Funds

The Civil Grand Jury has found that all but a small percentage of bond funds expended since the passage of Measure H have been used for capital expenses, which is consistent with the measures' ballot language. Nearly all of the Measure H funds have been expended, and approximately one half of the Measure A2 bonds have been sold to generate funds, with many projects underway. Measure B bonds are scheduled to be sold in the spring of 2025, and the district has begun recruitment for a Measure B Bond Oversight Committee.⁵⁴

The ballot language for Bond Measure H (passed in 2016) included the following provision consistent with Proposition 39 (ALL CAPS as in original text):

“NO ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES: PROCEEDS FROM THE SALE OF THE BONDS AUTHORIZED BY THIS PROPOSITION SHALL BE USED ONLY FOR THE ACQUISITION, CONSTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION, OR REPLACEMENT OF SCHOOL FACILITIES, INCLUDING THE FURNISHING AND EQUIPPING OF SCHOOL FACILITIES, AND NOT FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE, INCLUDING TEACHER AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES AND OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES.”

Similar ballot language was included in Bond Measure A2 (passed in 2022) and Bond Measure B (passed in 2024). Although this language would appear to prohibit expenditure for NVUSD employee salaries, the district relied on Attorney General Opinion 04-110 creating an exception for salaries for work related to bond-funded projects.

⁵⁴ NVUSD Board of Trustees Resolution 25-17, January 16, 2025, found at <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=36030213&AID=990540&MID=34993>

Proponents of NVUSD bond measures - including district officials - have campaigned on the basis that bond funds are used exclusively for capital projects, not administrative salaries. In the Measure B campaign, the Registrar of Voters published the proponents' "Rebuttal to Argument Against Measure B" that stated: "Yes on B stays local. Accountability measures keep Measure B funds locally controlled, for Napa schools only. No money for administration. Funds are for voter-approved projects, with independent oversight and annual audits."⁵⁵ Despite these statements, the Civil Grand Jury found that a small percentage of bond funds have been used by NVUSD for salaries. Measure H BOC annual reports and audits are available to the public⁵⁶ and were reviewed in detail by the Civil Grand Jury. As outlined in Table 3 below, each year the district allocated from .08% to 1.15% of bond proceeds to salaries and benefits.

⁵⁵ "Rebuttal to Arguments Against Measure B", found at Napa County Elections website <https://www.countyofnapa.org/DocumentCenter/View/33464/November-5-2024---Measure-B---Rebuttal-to-the-Argument-Against---Napa-Valley-Unified-PDF> (emphasis added).

⁵⁶ The Measure H audits are found via the NVUSD Measure H Bond Oversight Committee site at <https://www.nvUSD.org/bond-oversight-committee-measure-h> and directly online at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16yZgrWfo8Nj704CKk6d8pO9T78rmPZu0>.

**TABLE 3:
NVUSD SALARIES AND BENEFITS AS PERCENTAGE OF
TOTAL MEASURE H EXPENDITURES**

Category	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Classified Salaries	\$203,043	\$339,179	\$376,281	\$86,548	\$4,129
Classified Benefits	\$67,334	\$115,501	\$119,135	\$35,003	\$396
Total Expenditures	\$79,154,27	\$65,490,430	\$43,111,051	\$24,304,585	\$6,024,184
% Expenditures for Salaries & Wages	0.34%	0.69%	1.15%	0.50%	0.08%

As of the writing of this report, the 2023-24 fiscal year audit was not yet published, and the district reported that no salaries had been charged to Measure H bond funds during that or the current fiscal year.

The Measure H Bond Oversight Committee inquired about the practice of using some bond funds for salaries related to bond projects and was informed by district staff that bond counsel and auditors have approved such expenditures as consistent with the Attorney General’s opinion.⁵⁷

Charging employee salaries against the funding source may be appropriate practice in project management in the private sector. However, the Civil Grand Jury concluded that while minimal and possibly permissible in limited circumstances, charging NVUSD employee salaries against bond funds may reduce public trust by contradicting public pledges and bond ballot language that states, “no funds for administrators.” In its current practice, NVUSD has stopped charging any salaries to bond funds, and the Civil Grand Jury recommends that it continue to avoid charging any salaries to bond funds.

⁵⁷ Measure H Bond Oversight Committee Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2022-2023.
<https://www.nvusd.org/bond-oversight-committee-measure-h>

Public Outreach

Tight bond election results in recent years suggest that NVUSD can and should do more to inform citizens about district fiscal needs in general and bond financing in particular. Detailed information regarding bond spending is available online, but it can be difficult to find on the district's complex website and requires reviewing lengthy documents.

NVUSD should proactively distribute information and updates to inform the general public on how bond funds are being allocated and used. The Civil Grand Jury notes that the district recently engaged a communications consulting firm to assist with this work.⁵⁸ The district could publish periodic reports, send information to parents through district communication channels, use social media for information directed to the general public, and post signage at project sites where bond-funded work is in progress. NVUSD should maintain an ongoing campaign using multiple media outlets and distribution tools to inform stakeholders and the general public on the details and progress of the projects associated with bond fund allocations. The Measure A2 Bond Oversight Committee page reports expenditures by school, updated approximately every two months⁵⁹. Such regular updates, by school and by project, are appropriate and beneficial to all interested parties. The district is also encouraged to publish such regular reports for the recently passed Measure B.

Public Participation in Capital Projects Facility Master Plan Development

The Civil Grand Jury found that public participation in facilities planning is limited, with the process being primarily driven by NVUSD staff and approved by the district Board of Trustees. The district developed a 10-year Capital Projects Facilities Master Plan in 2016, which has been described as a living document updated during that period based on Measure H implementation plans. A new Facilities Master Plan will be required to update the 2016 plan and to comply with state requirements. NVUSD Policy 7110: Facilities Master Plan provides relevant language that directs this effort:

“The district's facilities master plan shall be based on an assessment of the condition and adequacy of existing facilities, a projection of future enrollments, and alignment of facilities with the district's vision for the instructional program.

To solicit broad input into the planning process, the Superintendent or designee may establish a facilities advisory committee consisting of staff, parents/guardians, and

⁵⁸ Item 2.4, Agreement with Q Communications, NVUSD Board of Trustees meeting packet, January 16, 2025.

https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/SB_Meetings/ViewMeeting.aspx?S=36030213&MID=34993&Tab=Agenda&enIID=gjJx9jDUJbWMCRT0zEIOjA%3D%3D

⁵⁹ <https://www.nvusd.org/about/contact/school-planning/measure-a2>

business, local government, and other community representatives. The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that the public is informed of the need for construction and modernization of facilities and of the district's plans for facilities.”⁶⁰

The district does not have a Facilities Advisory Committee as contemplated by the policy, but with a new or updated Facilities Master Plan being required for eligibility for state matching funds⁶¹, this is an opportunity to expand public participation by creating such a committee. The Civil Grand Jury heard testimony that BOC members and others are ready, willing and able to participate in the planning process. As noted in our recommendation R6, the Civil Grand Jury recommends full implementation of the Facilities policy by creating a Facilities Advisory Committee before a new Facilities Master Plan is developed.

FINDINGS

The Civil Grand Jury finds:

F1: Bond financing is the primary source of funding for addressing the capital needs of the Napa Valley Unified School District.

F2: The NVUSD website is complex to navigate making it difficult to find bond financial data and reports.

F3: Charging NVUSD employee salaries against bond funds, while permissible in limited circumstances, may reduce public trust by contradicting public pledges and bond ballot language that states, “no funds for administrators”.

F4: NVUSD does not adequately inform the general public that the Citizen Bond Oversight Committees play critical roles in satisfying California’s Proposition 39 (2000), which requires school boards to establish independent oversight committees and conduct annual financial and performance audits until all bond funds have been spent.

F5: NVUSD’s Citizen Bond Oversight Committees lack thorough and independent training on the roles, scope of work, relationship with school district personnel, and authority of its members.

F6: The creation and execution of NVUSD’s 2016-2025 Facilities Master Plan had only limited public participation.

⁶⁰ NVUSD Policy 7110: Facilities Master Plan is found at the NVUSD Policies website, <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Policy/PolicyListing.aspx?S=36030213>.

⁶¹ Education Code § 17070.54.

COMMENDATION

The 2024-25 Napa County Civil Grand Jury commends the volunteer members of the NVUSD Bond Oversight Committees for their monitoring spending of Measure H and Measure A2 bond funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Civil Grand Jury recommends:

R1: NVUSD should maintain an ongoing campaign using multiple media outlets and distribution tools to inform stakeholders and the general public on the details and progress of the projects associated with bond fund allocations, and do so by September 30, 2025.

R2: Narrow bond measure election results strongly suggest that NVUSD should build community trust by proactively distributing information and updates to inform the general public on how bond funds are being allocated and used, and do so by September 30, 2025.

R3: NVUSD should continue its current practice to refrain from using bond funds for any district salaries, operating expenses or other administrative activities.

R4: NVUSD should inform the general public about the role of bond oversight committees and actively encourage stakeholder groups, especially community members and parents of students, to participate on such committees, effective no later than 90 days after the publication of this 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury report.

R5: NVUSD should arrange for independent training of Citizen Bond Oversight Committees, starting with the new Measure B committee, and do so by September 30, 2025.

R6: NVUSD should implement fully its existing facilities planning policy by establishing a Facilities Advisory Committee consisting of staff, parents/guardians, and business, local government, and other community representatives, and do so before a new Facilities Master Plan is created and no later than June 30, 2026.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Napa Valley Unified School District Board of Trustees is *required* to respond to F1-F6 and R1-R6 within 90 days of receipt of this report.

INVITED RESPONSES

The Civil Grand Jury invites, but does not require, the Napa County Superintendent of Schools to respond to F1-F6 and R1-R6 within 60 days of receipt of this report and invites, but does not require, the Measure H Bond Oversight Committee and the Measure A2 Bond Oversight Committee to respond to F1-F6 and R1-R6 within 90 days of receipt of this report.



A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service

NAPA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY 2024-2025

April 23, 2025

FINAL REPORT

Pope Valley Union Elementary School District Overcoming a Troubled Past

SUMMARY

Located in northeastern Napa County, the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District (PVUESD) is a small, rural public school offering Transitional Kindergarten (TK) through eighth grades. With an enrollment of approximately 50 students, PVUESD faces unique challenges. Its remote location, small student population, staffing challenges, and a history of leadership struggles underscore the pressing need for transformative, sustainable solutions to secure the school district's future.

Last year, the community was impacted by the trial and conviction of a former school employee for sexual abuse, involving both current and former students. The abuse, which spanned over a decade, created significant rifts within school personnel and among student families. After receiving and evaluating a citizen complaint alleging discrimination and unequal treatment by the school administration against Hispanic or Spanish-speaking families, the 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury conducted an 8-month investigation into the allegations which uncovered widespread issues with district leadership and school operations.

The Civil Grand Jury made several key findings and recommendations about PVUESD, related to systemic issues involving governance, management of school operations, and community engagement.

- PVUESD failed to provide a safe learning environment and requisite education for its students.
- The PVUESD Board of Trustees (School Board) failed to deliver the necessary oversight and direction for PVUESD operations and academic performance. At this time, the School Board appears to be focused on addressing past deficiencies and committed to providing the necessary oversight and direction to improve PVUESD operations and academic performance. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the School Board develop and implement a long-term strategy for the school district, prioritizing operational effectiveness and significant improvements in academic outcomes.
- Prior school superintendents/principals failed to ensure student safety, address academic instruction and student performance gaps, or manage the school and staff effectively. The Civil Grand Jury recommends the School Board ensure that school leadership possesses the necessary qualifications and experience to effectively prioritize student safety and educational excellence.
- The Superintendent/Principal, who held the position during this Civil Grand Jury investigation, implemented policies and procedures to stabilize and build sustainable long-term operations, enforce student safety protocols, and improve academic instruction and student performance. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Superintendent/Principal continue to monitor and refine these policies and procedures regularly to ensure their effectiveness.

- While the Civil Grand Jury investigation found no evidence of discrimination or unequal treatment by the school administration against Hispanic or Spanish-speaking families, the past lack of bilingual support revealed communication gaps, leaving Spanish-speaking parents and English Second Language learners feeling isolated and disconnected. The Civil Grand Jury strongly recommends continued school administration efforts to foster greater inclusivity within the community.
- Inadequate communication by district and school management following the trial and conviction of a former school employee for student sexual abuse left parents feeling disconnected and frustrated. The Civil Grand Jury recommends regular and consistent updates to inform the public, rebuild trust, promote inclusivity, and improve transparency in decision-making to strengthen the relationship between the school and the community.
- School bus transportation service was found to be inadequate to serve the district, with persistent equipment problems undermining reliability. The Civil Grand Jury recommends the School Board and Superintendent/Principal develop and execute a permanent solution to provide safe and reliable transportation for students.
- The school community is divided, with one group of parents and teachers supporting changes in the school and another favoring a return to prior practices and personnel. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the School Board and Superintendent/Principal take deliberate steps to promote open and constructive dialogue among all stakeholders.

Pope Valley Union Elementary School has faced many challenges over the past decade, and district and school leadership have implemented changes to improve school operations and student outcomes. Increased involvement by parents and the community will increase School Board and Superintendent/Principal accountability regarding academic performance, measurable student development, and on-campus safety. The Civil Grand Jury believes this commitment, along with continuity and consistency in school operations, will promote long-term success for both the students and the community of Pope Valley.

BACKGROUND

Napa County has five public school districts: Napa Valley Unified, St. Helena Unified, Calistoga Joint Unified, Howell Mountain Elementary, and Pope Valley Union Elementary. Among these, Howell Mountain and Pope Valley have the lowest enrollments, each with fewer than 100 students.

Pope Valley is a small, rural, unincorporated community in northeastern Napa County with a residential population of approximately 673 people.⁶² The demographics are diverse, with approximately 49.8% of the population identifying as Hispanic and 43.4% as White. Many residents work in agriculture, particularly in vineyards and wineries.

The average annual household income is \$102,242 with a median household income of \$71,250. Several families have deep, generational roots in the area.

According to the Napa County Historical Society, the first Pope Valley School was founded in 1859⁶³. In the 1940's, five one-room schoolhouses were combined into the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District (PVUESD). PVUESD is now one campus, Pope Valley Elementary, serving TK through eighth grade.

The Pope Valley Union Elementary School District has received significant media attention in recent years due to the trial and conviction of a former employee for sexual abuse involving current and former students. This case has led to ongoing feelings of distrust towards school leadership and staff among some residents.

The Civil Grand Jury received a citizen complaint alleging instances of misconduct by teachers and staff at the school, unrelated to the resolved criminal abuse case. The complaint also alleged mistreatment of Spanish-speaking parents and students. In response, the Civil Grand Jury initiated a comprehensive investigation of the complaint and the school's overall operations. Although the criminal case is outside the scope of the Civil Grand Jury, the Civil Grand Jury noted the profound impacts of the conviction on the school staff and local community.

⁶² Point2Homes: www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/CA/Pope-Valley-Demographics.html

⁶³ Napa Historical Society: <https://napahistory.org/pope-valley-schools-a-primer/>

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on comprehensive Civil Grand Jury interviews and reviews of school, state, federal, and local materials.

Civil Grand Jury interviews included management and staff from Pope Valley Union Elementary School District and Napa County Office of Education, management from Howell Mountain Elementary and St. Helena Unified school districts, and parents of students in Pope Valley Union Elementary School.

Documents from the following sources were reviewed:

- Pope Valley Unified Elementary School District
 - Website (www.pvk8.org)
 - Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)
 - Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)
 - School Accountability Report Card (SARC)
 - Audit reports
 - School Board meeting minutes
 - 2024 Revitalize and Rebuild Plan
- California Department of Education
 - California Education Code
 - California School Dashboard
 - District Profile
- US Department of Education
- Napa County Office of Education (NCOE)
- California School Board Association (CSBA)
- Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT)
- Press coverage
- Court transcripts

DISCUSSION

School District

Pope Valley Union Elementary School, located at 6200 Pope Valley Road, features three main buildings. The older building, constructed in 1969, includes the main school office for the Superintendent/Principal, and two rooms for small group work, a first aid room, and staff room. The newer building, completed in 1982, houses four classrooms: a Learning Center, TK-2 classroom, 3-5 classroom, and a 6-8 classroom. Additionally, there is a new Multipurpose Room (MPR) building, and a portable classroom used as the school library on the west side of the school. The MPR serves as a multi-purpose room for art, music, indoor physical education, and rainy-day lunches.

The California Department of Education School Dashboard provides historical information about the Pope Valley school demographics and performance. School enrollment has fluctuated over the years but generally has been about 50 students. About 70% of the students are of Hispanic heritage.

Pope Valley Elementary School Enrollment by School Year⁶⁴

	<u>2019-20</u>	<u>2020-21</u>	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>	<u>2023-24</u>	<u>2024-25</u>
Students	50	46	50	57	55	48

Students are taught in small, mixed-grade classrooms with a student-to-teacher ratio of about 12:1. This high-touch learning environment allows for individualized attention and support.

³ California School Dashboard, <https://www.caschooldashboard.org>. Enrollment and financial data are from School Accountability Report Cards found at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sa/index.asp>.

**2024-25 Pope Valley Elementary School
Student Enrollment by Grade Level**

GRADE LEVEL	NO. OF STUDENTS
Kindergarten	4
Grade 1	5
Grade 2	6
Grade 3	4
Grade 4	4
Grade 5	5
Grade 6	6
Grade 7	5
Grade 8	9
Total Enrollment	48

Pope Valley’s school district appears to have more funding than most California school districts. It is a basic aid district, meaning it retains revenue from local property taxes that exceed the state’s funding formula requirements. Additionally, it receives constitutionally guaranteed state basic aid funding. Property tax revenue accounts for approximately 80% of the district’s revenues. Per-pupil funding is \$33,092, compared to Napa Valley Unified School District per-pupil funding of \$10,328.⁶⁵

At the start of the 2024-2025 school year, there were four full-time credentialed classroom teachers and a part-time Special Education teacher on the school payroll. Prior to the completion of this report, adjustments were made in the teaching staff,

⁶⁵ NVUSD Financial Hub, <https://nvusdk12caus-25-us-west1-01.preview.finalsitecdn.com/about/departments/business-services/financial-hub>.

including shifts in grade assignments and the non-renewal of several teachers' contracts for the 2025-26 school year due to performance issues.

Positions at the school historically have been difficult to fill primarily due to its rural location. As a result, teacher and staff salaries are comparatively higher than other schools in California. A limited number of job applicants resulted in a small pool of candidates which contributed to the hiring of staff who were related by family. A number of past and present school employees are from two local families, which has raised concerns about conflicts of interest.

Student academic achievement data is evidence of poor performance in the Pope Valley district. Pope Valley student academic scores in math and reading are consistently below grade-level standards. PVUESD has an average math proficiency score of 25% (versus the California public elementary school average of 35%) and reading proficiency score of 15% (versus the 45% statewide average).

The school has a high percentage of socially disadvantaged students (95.8%) and English learners (39.6%), factors which have been shown to influence academic success. Overall, school class performance has been well below state standards and often rated as “red,” the lowest rating on the California School Dashboard. Records reinforcing low performance levels existed prior to and since impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Academic Performance by Year
(point scores compared to standard)⁶⁶**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
English	-31.4	No data	Very Low	-103.3	-77.8	-81.5
Math	-36.4	No data	Low	-81.3	-62.1	-67.6

The school has faced challenges serving special needs students due to a lack of an appropriately credentialed teacher, resulting in difficulties executing statutory requirements such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In California, special needs students are those with disabilities that negatively impact their education and require special education services. An IEP is a written annual statement outlining a child's current performance levels, learning goals, school placement, and services.

⁶⁶ The California School Dashboard reports that state law suspended reporting of data for 2020-21, and allowed reporting of data using one of five status levels (ranging from Very High, High, Medium, Low, and Very Low) for 2021-22 due to COVID.

Additionally, students often face difficulties securing reliable transportation due to the considerable distance between their homes and the school, as well as the work commitments of their parents and caregivers. To address this challenge, the school provides bus transportation for its students.

School Board

The PVUESD Board of Trustees (School Board) consists of five elected officials, with one member newly elected in 2024. Many Board members have served multiple terms, with one trustee having served over 25 years. The current President, a former student of the school, has served for approximately two years, first as Secretary and then as President.

None of the trustees have prior experience in public education. They are generally long-term community members, some of whom have children or grandchildren who attend or have attended the school. Filling School Board positions has been challenging, as few community members have applied, and candidates often run unopposed.

The School Board appoints and evaluates the district Superintendent/Principal. It oversees the establishment of the district's budget, curriculum, policies, and academic achievement standards.

The School Board plays a critical role in student and district performance. The California School Board Association (CSBA) states that for a school board to operate effectively they must “maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress” while involving the community, including parents, students and staff. CSBA⁶⁷ outlines the main functions of a School Board as follows:

- Setting Direction by establishing a long-term vision for the school district
- Establishing Structure with an effective and efficient organizational framework
- Providing Support for the superintendent and staff in demonstrating professional behavior, making informed decisions, and effectively allocating resources
- Ensuring Accountability to the public by monitoring and evaluating the district's performance
- Providing Community Leadership by advocating for children, the school district, and serving as leaders within the community

⁶⁷ CSBA, “Roles and Responsibilities”, <https://www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources/EffectiveGovernance/RoleandResponsibilitiesofSBMs.aspx>

Based on interviews with the school staff and parents, the Civil Grand Jury concluded that before 2023, the Pope Valley School Board was inadequately performing these functions. The Board did not have a well-defined vision to guide the school's future direction. The Board had taken a hands-off approach to academic performance, failing to monitor or improve student outcomes. As a result, students graduating from Pope Valley were underprepared for high school and often required special attention to succeed in high school. The previous Superintendent/Principal was not held accountable by the School Board for the poor academic instruction and performance of the students and operated with almost complete autonomy from the Board. Although Board members stated that they raised concerns about academic performance with the previous Superintendent/Principal, no follow-up action appears to have been taken when improvements did not occur.

The Board stated that they were unaware of the ongoing abuse at the school until it became public knowledge with the indictment of an employee for child abuse including past and current PVUESD students. While it is understandable that legal confidentiality was necessary during the criminal investigation, parents reported that the overall communication from the Board was poorly managed. This has resulted in community distrust and division.

In 2023, the School Board hired a new Superintendent/Principal. She is a PhD candidate with a background in education and change management. The new Superintendent/Principal is receiving Board support for key initiatives to implement changes to the curriculum and school management. In interviews with the Civil Grand Jury, School Board members expressed a determination to improve academic performance and rebuild community trust.

Several critical areas are still to be addressed by the School Board. There is no district strategic plan to guide the long-term improvement of the school and ensure this progress is sustained. Additionally, the Board has yet to communicate a plan to rebuild community trust in the school following the abuse case and to enhance parent engagement moving forward.

The Civil Grand Jury learned from Board members that there are no training standards for Board members, even for the newly elected/appointed. Moreover, Board members claimed it had been years since they have taken any training. In California, new school district board members undergo specific training to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively oversee school operations and support student success. The CSBA offers many school board training programs including ethics, board orientation and governance, and fiscal responsibility.

Superintendent/Principal

The District Superintendent/Principal undertakes broad leadership duties for the district, including managing budgets, formulating policies, collaborating with the Board and community, and providing comprehensive reporting, while also overseeing day-to-day operations of the school. This includes guiding curriculum development, supervising staff, ensuring student welfare, and fostering engagement within the community.

The Superintendent/Principal role for the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District is a combined position, a common practice for small school districts in California. The Superintendent/Principal reports to the School Board while teachers and classified staff report to the Superintendent/Principal.

Over the past five years, PVUESD has seen three different people in the Superintendent/Principal role. The former Superintendent/Principal served for over seven years, resigning in winter 2022 and officially departing in April 2022 to lead another district. Subsequently, a Napa County Board of Education (NCOE) employee was contracted by the School Board as interim Superintendent/Principal for one year (2022-2023) as they searched for a permanent replacement.

The Superintendent/Principal, as of this report, is in year two of a three-year contract with PVUESD.

Through interviews with PVUESD staff and parents, the Civil Grand Jury was told previous superintendents lacked focus on student academics and safety, demonstrated little accountability for the behavior of teachers and classified staff, and mismanaged school operations. The current Superintendent/Principal is focused on these critical areas, according to interviews with school staff and parents.

Some parents interviewed by the Civil Grand Jury expressed concerns regarding the quality of teaching, citing a need for educators to increase focus on student achievement, establish clear lesson plans, set measurable goals, and improve instructional techniques. These concerns align with the fact that student achievement scores have remained flat and below average.

Until recently, teachers operated independently, without a structured curriculum, policies, or goals to guide their activities. There were no measures in place to evaluate teacher performance or hold them accountable for poor academic outcomes. In at least one incident, a teacher engaged in corporal punishment without facing any consequences. Teachers and staff were not provided with clear guidelines on appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior, particularly regarding having one-on-one interactions with students. School staff also informed the Civil Grand Jury that the