

Dear Editor,

The Conejo Valley Unified School District has failed to communicate accurately regarding official awards. Of the 22 former or current Distinguished Schools, 14 are expired and 2 more will expire in June. Expiration is 3 years after the initial June date. Only 8 of the district's 27 schools are currently Distinguished Schools. Aspen has mistakenly appeared on lists and maps provided by the CVUSD, even though it has never been selected. For more than 3 years this has been repeatedly pointed out to the proper responsible parties. Their reply was that it was too expensive to reprint. I also got a letter from Superintendent Jerry Gross threatening to take legal action if I continued to "interrupt valuable business time" or contact any more public officials. Well, I have a threat for his people: continue to use false advertisement and suffer the consequences from the Grand Jury. And next time, use the word "former"—it's good enough for US Presidents and Miss Americas.

The Accountability Report Cards (ARC's) are relied upon by the public to provide accurate information about schools. They are legal documents per State Law, yet misinformation and exaggerations appear year after year. Did you know that Los Cerritos Middle School wrote in their last few ARC's that they "recently" got a Distinguished School Award? Is 1988 recent? The students weren't even born then! It has been expired 10 years. That claim was present on the District website as late as March of this year. On that same website another middle school, Sequoia, as well as Los Cerritos, mentioned WASC accreditation in their Principal's Message. However, all 4 middle schools were dropped years ago after Burlingame received a phone call in June 1998 from our District, declining to be inspected. Los Cerritos lost its accreditation immediately, but the other 3 were kept on until June 1999 since they had prepaid their dues. WASC waited for the official letter they needed, but it never came. (No paper trail.) The seal, similar to a notary public's stamp, was never returned to WASC, despite requests. Why didn't the schools want to be inspected? Usually the answer is that you don't want guests when your house is not in order. Were they having trouble explaining the California Top 100 award?

I'm sure you've wondered about those brown and yellow signs. I bet some people were told that they came from the Department of Education. Wrong. Maybe you were told that a private company sent them. Wrong. Nobody on this planet gave this District such an award. The District was "inspired" by a solicitation letter from Lillian Clancy's California School Survey's Top 100 lists. However, Ms. Clancy has no record of selling her \$450 award to the CVUSD in 1995. 3 years ago Jerry Gross and I both received letters from Sacramento and from Dr. Weiss, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, explaining that the State of California has never given such an award. The truth is that the District had the signs carved locally in Newbury Park and then nailed them on publicly financed buildings without leaving any documentation at any of those schools. The public as well as school employees assumed that they came from the Department of Education, and that they were official. Many employees and PTA members invented stories about the "award". I've got quite a collection of them from the past 5 years. I'll be happy to share them with the new Superintendent and the Governor.

We need a law to insure accuracy in school awards. I have drafted a proposal with fines for not complying with guidelines or regulations or for giving false information to the public. Currently there are no such punishments. The school districts in California are misrepresenting themselves to the students and to the public if there are mistakes or disinformation on the Accountability Report Cards or on other publications. Since the schools have failed to self-enforce, Sacramento has told me to make this public in the newspapers and to get local support to pressure our School Board to act ethically. Sacramento has no police force to take down expired or misleading signs. They expect us to do it. It is our civic duty to be vigilant in local government.

The principals at the schools in question should remove the Top100 signs now before classes begin. I understand why they didn't want to be confrontational with their boss in the past. But since Jerry Gross is on his way out, they don't have to be afraid anymore about job performance evaluations. Take down the sign; cease to write about it in Accountability Report Cards, newsletters, Back-to-School flyers, or calendars. If not, be prepared to answer to the Grand Jury why false advertising is continuing, which adversely affects child custody and real estate decisions.

If principals are still hesitating, why not check with the Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Simpson? He'll tell them the same thing that he told an LA Times reporter who asked to see the California Top 100 School Award. He said he couldn't show it because they didn't buy it. Well then, he should stop making photocopies of lists of incomplete data on the notorious CLAS test of 1995 and telling people that this is the documentation for the Top 100 claim. If those pages did come from Lillian Clancy's book, where are the explanations that it was based on limited data, which she and her statistician told me about? The caveats are missing in the pages that Simpson supplies. She said that the CVUSD does not have her permission to photocopy her book. What part of that is not understood?

If the District continues this copyright infringement, Ms. Clancy and the District Attorney need to know about it. When I read to Lillian Clancy the letter I got from a middle school principal saying that a former administrator had applied for the California Top 100 award and that she was proud of earning it, Ms. Clancy replied, "Nonsense! No one applied for it!" She asked me more questions and I promised I would send her everything. The public should send to the Grand Jury Foreman, Senator Tom McClintock, and the editor of this paper, any similar information that you are offered as "proof" of this meretricious award that the CVUSD dreamed up. Get witnesses when making inquiries. Write to them if you know of any child custody cases affected by this or other bogus claims. I contacted all the private schools here, and discovered multiple cases where superior court judges found the private schools to be inferior to public schools, based on a reputation built on these claims. And if a certain dark brunette secretary should take a swing at you, press charges, but this time make sure that the police department doesn't lose the report. Forget about complaining to the School Board. They have failed to be forthcoming, even though several members knew the truth. Think "Bill Clinton" and ask yourselves how it feels to be lied to.

And please, CVUSD employees, please remember to tell people that the CLAS test scores were only for the 4th, 8th, and 10th graders who did not boycott the test. Remember that the State threw out the individual scores that the kids were given because of the perception that they were being graded on politically correct thinking. Also, the latent homosexual questions on practice tests and the value judgments on the dysfunctional families in the English short story portion were so offensive that entire districts boycotted the test. Are you still proud? Are you going to tell us about the teachers that you sent from Thousand Oaks to help develop the test during weekend boondoggles at expensive hotels? Did they come back and tell the 4th graders what the test was going to be like and how to take it? Still proud, Conejo Valley? Still think it doesn't matter how those signs got there? Welcome to Club Machiavelli—the Conejo Valley Unified School District.

The State discontinued the CLAS test. What an expensive fiasco. Parents and high school seniors can verify that there are no State test scores on their 4th grade record for 1995. These records are available at the secretary's computer, so an appointment with the counselor isn't necessary. According to the Education Code 34CFR,49069,344.82 Mandatory Access under the Parents' Rights and Responsibilities, the access to student records must be within 5 days. The head lawyer of the Dept of Education, Roger Wolfertz, told me that it does not specify working days. If the request is made on Friday, then Tuesday is the deadline. He also said it does not need to be in writing. A high school secretary for years falsely presented her own rules as District Policy, and imposed such limitations, including a 10-day to 2-week wait. This is against the law. Report any law violations to Mr. Wolfertz, who is well aware of the shenanigans at this District. Also report it to the District Attorney in Ventura.

The interim Superintendent must be someone honest who will insist on removing all mention of meretricious awards (meretricious: having a gaudy but deceitful appearance; showy, but in bad taste). We need a leader who will comply with State and Federal guidelines, rather than trying to skirt them. Any mention or display of the National Blue Ribbon Award must include the dates of the one-year term. Comply with federal rules or take down the Blue Ribbon signs immediately.

The new Superintendent should be someone who will not exaggerate our students' accomplishments. No, we are not one of the best districts in the state. We are pretty good, but not "second to none" as Dr. Simpson said last week. See for yourself on the user-friendly website that Sacramento wants us to use <http://api.cde.ca.gov/>. Don't bother with the site the District gave out for the Stanford Star test. It is incomprehensible and too tiny to read. The statistics on the first site are very clear. You should scroll down through all the counties to get the real picture. There are many low scoring schools in the Central Valley, as well as in urban areas. No wonder California ranks last in all the states. The good news is that there are dozens of schools scoring in the 900's in San Diego, Lodi, and Los Altos, where I am from. My child recently graduated from my alma mater, Egan Middle School in Santa Clara County. Egan and its cross-town rival Blach have been ranked empirically 1 and 2 for the last few years with scores in the 940's. Their Asian subgroups averaged 964 and 966 out of a possible 1000. That is what

an excellent school should be. It is possible to get a good education at a public school if classes are small and crime is low.

We have 11 active gangs in Thousand Oaks and their members go to public schools. Los Cerritos had a very high suspension rate, which fluctuated between 27.6% and 31.7% from 1997 to present (statistics are on the ARC). That school failed to make the 800 mark required by the Governor. Also, the nearby high school failed for the last 2 years to hit 800 on the Stanford test. However, there is a 5% “mercy rule” that allowed Thousand Oaks High School to receive the Governor’s bonus money. 11% of that school’s population was identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and averaged only 576 points. The Governor gave them a very low target goal of 577. Jerry Gross will be gone when the new statistics come out October 4th. Let’s see if that goal is reached. You can read about these target goals at the bottom of each school report on that “friendly” website. If all of our schools and subgroups meet or exceed their goals, then the new Superintendent can report that we have significantly increased our scores, indicating an improvement in education. However, if it doesn’t happen, don’t lie to us. Test scores in the 500’s are failing scores.

An excellent choice for interim Superintendent would be newly-retired principal Deanna Anderson Roth. It was she who cleaned up Meadows after Tim Stephens was pressured to retire. She took down the Top 100 sign at Weathersfield when she left. At the Principals’ Meetings she tried to correct the others’ misinformation about the Top 100, but they shouted her down. Let them eat crow now. If some are stubborn and continue to protest and to insist on saying how wonderful the “award” is, please remind them of the Emperor’s New Clothes and how the children laughed at the fools.

Speaking of fools, it would be foolish to let Dr. Tim Stephens anywhere near the job. It was he who started this whole mess in the early 1990’s. He was reportedly in hot water with parents because of poor learning in experimental classes at Meadows. He ordered special statistics from California School Surveys to compare his school with 99 others of the same economic level. Bingo—a list of 100! This was great PR that he bought. If people thought it came from Sacramento, that was their problem if they didn’t inquire further. Well, I asked and now I’m telling people what I found out. You know, I learned something important from 16 years in Naval Intelligence—trust, but verify.

Stephens wrote when he ran for School Board in 1997 that “we created a Top 100 award at Meadows”. Voters mistakenly thought that was a positive. What does “created” mean? Look it up—fabricated, made from nothing. Who is the “we”. I can find no one who will share the blame. Please note that there is an explanation to be found hidden in the Principal’s Summary of the Distinguished School applications of 1995. He wrote, “Real estate agents use the school's quality image as leverage to convince buyers to purchase in the Meadows attendance area. Meadows was identified as a ‘Top California School’ by the Department of Education.” No, it wasn’t. Why did he write that? Well, Stephens is actually a real estate broker, but neglected to include that in his campaign blurb. Who benefited from his cherry-picked statistics that he paid Clancy to evaluate?

Was this all an elaborate 10-year plan? Do we have better educated children after all this silliness and expense?

Let's call for a 2-year moratorium on applying for any award. The District spends thousand of dollars on substitute teachers and SIP clerks who get paid for award related work. That money should be spent on education, especially for the low achieving students. Manzanita School is crying for more books and more computers. Let's stop spending \$700 on wooden signs and expensive 4-color maps that are just for real estate. Who benefits from spending money on the pursuit of awards, except the realtors and the administrators who have exploited the taxpayers and the students? Were taxpayers lied to when the \$88 million bond issue was on the ballot? Did the teachers on the phone banks give false information to the voters regarding the status of our schools? Were voters told that we had 10 schools that were among the top 100 in the state? Maybe an examination of that bond issue campaign is in order.

So folks, when you start asking questions about the Top 100, if certain people at the District claim ignorance and innocence, you might let them know something interesting. Lillian Clancy has kept a copy of a check sent to her in 1995 with the signature and address of the person in Westlake Village who ordered her book. What?...Is that the sound of silence I hear?

Cathy "Bulldog" Carlson