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2 San Jose colleges are issued warnings

CITY COLLEGE AND EVERGREEN ACCREDITATION AT RISK

By Becky Bartindale

The San Jose-Evergreen Community College District has received a warning that it must address a series of problems, some dating to 1998, or risk losing accreditation for its two colleges.

While San Jose City and Evergreen Valley colleges received praise for their work with students, they also have not progressed on some longstanding recommendations, according to evaluations by separate review teams that visited the colleges. Their evaluations put much of the blame for the colleges' failures on "micromanaging" by the district's board of trustees and top administrators.

"Clearly this has been a good wake-up call to the board, and we are changing the way we do things," said Ron Lind, the board's president. "The colleges are doing a great job on pulling people together to make the necessary changes. I am confident we will retain our accreditation status."

The warning from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges is the first step in a process that could lead to the termination of accreditation if the problems aren't fixed within two years. The district must submit progress reports in March and October.

Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental process undertaken every six years to assure the quality of a college and encourage improvement.

The commission's decision to issue a warning was based on the colleges' self-evaluations and evaluations by outside teams that visited for three days in October. Many of the problems -- such as jobs being left vacant too long and poor budget planning -- were first identified in the colleges' self-evaluations.

The reports paint a picture of a strained organization with too few administrators at the colleges. They describe trustees as micromanagers who sometimes inappropriately intervene in college affairs, particularly when it comes to hiring and budgets. They note poor communication and confusion over roles and responsibilities between top district administrators and the college presidents. The result has been a deep distrust between the colleges and the district board and administration.

"The confusion, constant change, micromanaging and general lack of guidance and support demonstrated by the district has impeded the ability of the college" to make progress on previous recommendations, reported the team that visited San Jose City College.

"The reality is that Evergreen Valley College, as a result of its relationship with both the district and board of trustees, lies in a state of suspended dysfunctionality," states the report by that college's visiting team.

However, it said, the district's new interim chancellor, Sylvia Andrews, ``has done much to bring order and provide leadership at both the college and district level."

One of the key steps each college must take to retain accreditation is to hire two top administrators to oversee instruction and student services.

The previous district chancellor, Geraldine Evans, who retired last year, had moved those positions out of the colleges after her arrival in 1996 to create two vice chancellors at the district level to oversee some of the same functions. The commission recommended in 1998 that the positions be returned to the colleges, in part because the presidents were stretched too thin. Both colleges have taken steps toward creating those positions.

Despite the criticisms, both colleges got high marks from the visiting teams for their focus on learning, said City College President Chui Tsang. ``The colleges by and large have operated quite well, and we were able to make progress and some significant improvements over the past seven years," he said.

Responding to the problems has been a boon for the college, said Jon Kangas, a former district associate vice chancellor who took over as Evergreen Valley's interim president in October. ``It's almost like returning power to the college to shape itself and run itself," Kangas said.

Accreditation reports are available in the college libraries.
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Here are sample comments from the evaluations of the visiting accreditation teams.

San Jose City College

The team commends the college administration, faculty, staff and students for creating and maintaining a culture that is educationally nurturing and focused on student learning.

The team recommends the budget development process be clearly explained to all constituencies.

Evergreen Valley College

The college supports the learning needs of a diverse student population and is committed to ongoing improvement.

The college needs to ensure that the library has the scope and quality of material that students need.

Source: Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges