

Governor Jerry Brown signs pension reform law exception for new leader of Inglewood Unified

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Gov. Jerry Brown signed a little-known bill Monday that allows the new state-appointed leader of the troubled Inglewood Unified School District to collect his pension while getting paid by the K-12 district.

The move makes official the appointment of the new leader, Don Brann, who in 2008 retired as the superintendent of the Wiseburn School District in Hawthorne.

The governor's signing also effectively rolls back an unintended consequence of this year's pension-reform law that was holding up the process of finding a leader for the nearly-insolvent school district, which in September was taken over by the state.

Brann, widely credited for turning around the Wiseburn district, reported to work on Monday. He said his first order of business is to embark on a listening tour and fact-finding mission to help him understand what led to the financial disaster at a district that has been deficit spending to the tune of \$17 million annually.

"I'm excited to go in and try put a dent in it and move the needle," he said. "I want to work with people to resolve the outstanding issues and get this on a level playing field we can grow on."

In September, Inglewood Unified became the ninth school district in the history of California to go into state receivership.

The state takeover came with a \$55 million loan, but also required stripping the locally elected school board of its powers, firing the superintendent they'd hired and replacing them all with a state-appointed administrator.

That leader, Kent Taylor, was pressured to resign after just two months for negotiating a contract with teachers without proper approval from the man who appointed him, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. It took six months to replace Taylor with Brann.

State officials say it took so long because they were hampered by the pension-reform law. Signed by Brown in September, the Public Employees' Pension Reform Act is a sweeping piece of legislation. Among its many tenets is a clause designed to prohibit retired administrators from collecting their pensions if they return to work and receive a full salary -- a practice referred to as "double dipping."

The law, which took effect in January, frustrated the process of replacing Taylor because it left retired administrators disinclined to take on the challenge. The job, meanwhile, has been an unattractive prospect for sitting school superintendents, as Inglewood Unified is the most financially troubled public school district in the state of California.

The bill signed Monday by Brown is a trailer bill to the state budget he signed late last week. Called Assembly Bill 86, it includes all manner of legislative amendments. One of them undoes the double-dipping clause in a very narrow sense, applying only to trustees appointed by the state to lead insolvent school districts.

Because Inglewood Unified is one of just two districts in California to currently be run by a state administrator -- the other one is South Monterey County Joint Union High School District -- and because Brann is the only of the two state-appointed administrators to be lured out of retirement, the new law appears to apply only to him.

"Without this law, either I wouldn't be taking the job or I'd be making a lot more money at a cost to the people of Inglewood," Brann said. "It's about time the folks in Inglewood got a break."

Brann plans to take a salary of \$180,000 from Inglewood Unified. That's \$20,000 less than what Taylor was paid.

Brann must purchase his own health benefits and life insurance, and will not receive any stipends for travel or additional perks. Nor does his contract include a buyout clause like the controversial one that entitled Taylor to an extra \$100,000 after his untimely departure.

However, he'll be allowed to continue receiving his pension. Brann, who put in 40 years of service, as of 2011 received an annual pension of about \$197,500, according to a public employee database created by the Bay Area News Group -- a sister news operation of the Los Angeles News Group that includes the Daily Breeze.

Stunned by Accrerator, City College of San Francisco Suddenly Faces Hard Choices

The Chronicle of Higher Education

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By Paul Basken

For the past year, the City College of San Francisco worked hard to meet accreditation rules—cutting its staff, retooling its management, and winning critical new taxpayer support. A core part of its community, the institution appeared to many to have done just enough to save its life.

Instead, last week the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges slammed the door, saying the college simply isn't making ends meet and declaring the end of its accreditation as of July 2014.

The federally recognized accrediting agency's decision was unexpected and "outrageous," said Alisa Messer, president of the American Federation of Teachers Local 2121, which represents City College faculty members. That's because the City College was making progress on governance and budgetary issues, all while showing no signs of poor or declining student performance, Ms. Messer said.

But the financial issues—the college is projected to be losing money by the 2014-15 academic year, even with new infusions of state and local tax revenue—apparently loomed too large for the accreditor to ignore.

The president of the accrediting agency, Barbara A. Beno, said in a letter announcing its decision that the City College "and many of its staff have worked very hard to move the institution forward." Still, Ms. Beno said, the college "would need more time and more cohesive institution wide effort" to meet accrediting standards.

The decision leaves the college, its 85,000 students, its 2,600 faculty members, and their surrounding city and state in a sudden and difficult bind. Regaining accreditation on its own through appeals or further reform looms as a long shot. Merging with an accredited institution is fraught with improbabilities. And the college appears to be too large to just shut down entirely.

The first step was announced on Wednesday, right after the accreditor's decision was revealed, when the California Community Colleges system outlined plans to appeal the decision, and to appoint a new and more powerful trustee to run the institution.

"A bold plan of action is needed to rescue City College," said San Francisco's mayor, Edwin M. Lee, backing the state's response.

In the longer term, however, the choices get less clear. Operating without accreditation is not an option. Accreditation is necessary for students to remain eligible for federal

student-loan and grant money, and for academic credits they have earned to transfer to other institutions. And seeking recognition from another accrediting agency is forbidden by state and federal rules.

'San Francisco Values'

In the only similar instance in state history, Compton Community College was absorbed into El Camino College after Compton lost its accreditation in 2005. The City College does have some candidates among neighboring community colleges, but none of a comparable size, making such an acquisition risky for the accreditation and survival of any institutions that might attempt it.

Another option could be a "creative alliance" with a different type of institution, such as a state college or even a private college, said Robert M. Shireman, director of California Competes, a nonprofit group of business and civic leaders.

A first step, however, regardless of who or what ends up running the City College of San Francisco, may have to involve some major bridge building. As Ms. Beno's agency made clear, the financial troubles have a story behind them: The City College has a diverse but ultimately unwieldy governance structure, in which faculty members play an unusually powerful role, according to the accrediting agency.

With the power of their shared-governance system, faculty members helped ensure their priorities as the City College coped with sharp reductions in state financial assistance during the recession. In particular, said Ms. Messer, an English instructor, the institution put a priority on cuts "outside the classroom."

Such decisions included protecting an abundance of noncredit courses, which employ faculty members but generate less revenue, said Raymond R. White, an instructor in biology at the City College who is critical of the union.

Ms. Messer said the college's choices "were not typical of the other" California community colleges. "They were a reflection of our 'San Francisco values.'"

But those haven't proved to be the values of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, part of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. In announcing its decision last week, the commission cited a "lack of financial accountability, as well as institutional deficiencies in the area of leadership and governance," as the main reasons for its decision.

Mr. Shireman, a former top official in the U.S. Education Department, said the City College's broad course catalog in part reflects its unusual role as a designated provider of adult education in San Francisco, a function handled in most cities by the elementary and secondary schools.

But over all, he said, the union has been part of a divisive leadership structure at City College, in which faculty members have been overly fearful of community colleges' focusing too tightly on job training. Some faculty members have suggested that is Ms. Beno's real agenda, with the commission part of a conservative strategy to narrow the mission of publicly financed education.

A key grievance, in that regard, was Ms. Beno's public support of a new California law—opposed by City College faculty members—that sets conditions favoring more-traditional students who either transfer to a four-year college or get vocational training.

The City College educates students from a wide range of backgrounds, including prison and violent homes, and society benefits from their educational successes, said Wendy S. Kaufmyn, an engineering instructor at the college.

"A lot of our students don't fit that narrow path, that narrow definition of what a lot of people think students are," Ms. Kaufmyn said, referring to the California law backed by Ms. Beno.

But the pursuit of such wider missions, Mr. Shireman said, needs to be properly financed. "There are broader discussions about the extent to which community colleges can do just whatever they want whenever they want, with taxpayer money, versus having some method of prioritizing what to fund and what not to fund," he said.

Student Achievements

On educational achievement, City College leaders cite state data showing that their students perform better than the California Community Colleges system's averages in important categories, including retention and graduation rates. The degree completion rate at the City College among students who arrive unprepared is almost 12 percentage points higher than the state average, according to figures compiled by Margaret C. Hanzimanolis, an adjunct English instructor at the City College and two other nearby community colleges.

But on fiscal issues, the situation is more dire. State support for California's community colleges has fallen 12 percent since the 2008-9 academic year. The City College got some help in November, when voters at both the state and city levels approved ballot measures setting aside more money for community colleges. But even with those twin infusions of cash, the City College is expected to fall back into deficit as early as the 2014-15 year, with red ink totaling \$2.5-million, according to a report last year by the state's Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team.

Union members have disputed that projection, distributing an analysis suggesting the state assessment was riddled with exaggerations and factual errors. Also, any future projections are heavily influenced by highly controversial decisions about how much money the City College should put into retirement reserves, said Richard H. Baum, who teaches social sciences.

And either way, the City College is far from the only struggling institution. Twenty-seven of California's 112 community colleges have been given sanctions or warnings by their regional accreditor.

In the past year, since Ms. Beno's agency first put the City College on warning status, the college has taken steps that include laying off faculty members, closing some campuses, reorganizing departments, and revising a mission statement that emphasizes a diverse mission reaching to cultural enrichment and lifelong learning.

The college's faculty has also fought back. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges faces its own renewal hearing this December by the U.S. Education Department, and Ms. Messer's union has filed with the department over the commission's behavior.

In a 280-page filing in April, the union questioned the commission's motives in penalizing the City College, suggesting potential conflicts of interest that include the presence of Ms. Beno's husband on a review panel that makes site visits for the commission. The union also suggested that the commission, through its power to influence budgetary reforms, was improperly suggesting the use of a retirement-fund investment structure in which two commission members have a financial interest.

And by threatening the City College with drastic consequences for its failure to meet commission standards, Ms. Beno is further scaring away students from the college, which once had as many as 120,000 students, Ms. Kaufmyn said.

Ms. Beno has rejected such talk. The retirement-fund investments are voluntary, a spousal relationship is not a conflict, and City College management is responsible for the situation it faces, she said. "Leadership, understood at a broad level, has been the problem," Ms. Beno said.

The U.S. Education Department wrote last month to Ms. Beno saying it wanted a comprehensive response to the allegations made by the union. But department officials, questioned after last week's decision to revoke the City College's accreditation, said Congress had made it clear that institutions must meet standards in areas that include financial solvency, and that student achievement alone is not a sufficient means of retaining accreditation.

Who Will Teach Nursing?

Inside Higher Ed

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By Lauren Ingeno

Don't mention the "R" word to Kathryn Grams.

The dean of the School of Nursing at the University of West Georgia is a baby boomer who became a nurse educator more than 20 years ago. Unfortunately, so did most of her colleagues.

That means an entire cohort of nursing faculty will be retiring at roughly the same time, leaving vacancies that will be burdensome to fill.

"Nursing education is in crisis," Grams said. "And I think the problem is pretty invisible until you line us all up, and you see how much older we are all than our faculty in other departments."

The faculty shortage crisis is certainly clear for nurse educators, particularly at an institution such as Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio. Its nursing program has been in danger of losing its accreditation since 2010, because too few of its part-time faculty members have master's degrees in nursing.

The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (formerly the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission) dropped Tri-C's nursing program from "full accreditation" to "accreditation with conditions," and then entirely revoked the program's accreditation. It was reinstated after Tri-C filed an appeal, and the community college is waiting for a hearing in August to find out its status. The ACEN standard says that within an associate degree nursing program, a minimum of 50 percent of the part-time faculty must hold a graduate degree. The state board of nursing will not license an individual who has graduated from an unaccredited institution.

"The demand for nurse educators in the Northeast Ohio region will increase by 11 percent between 2010 and 2015," the college wrote in an e-mailed statement. "Competing for that limited pool of credentialed nursing educators is a challenge for most community colleges, who are working to keep tuition at affordable levels."

At the time Tri-C sent its follow-up report to the accreditation commission in 2012, 32 percent of part-time faculty had MSNs, said Tri-C spokesman Alan Moran in an e-mail. After sending out more than 3,000 recruitment letters and holding a series of job fairs, the college has hired more MSN credentialed part-time faculty members. 67 percent of part-time nursing faculty will hold advanced degrees in fall 2013, Moran said.

Marywood University in Pennsylvania is facing similar woes. Its nursing program's accreditation was also revoked, but it too filed an appeal and now remains accredited

with conditions. Students filed a lawsuit in June claiming that the university failed to disclose the accreditation status of the program. The lawsuit states that the nursing program's accreditation was originally revoked in part because the number of full-time faculty members holding a doctorate did not meet the 25 percent minimum the ACEN requires. However, Juneanne Grecco, a spokeswoman for the university, said in an e-mail that this was one item cited in the appeal, because the reference was to two part-time clinical faculty members (as opposed to full-time faculty) and they were employed prior to the time that the ACEN raised the standard. She said she was not able to comment further on the other issues raised in the ACEN's accreditation review.

For institutions that are not feeling the immediate effects of nursing faculty shortages, the inevitable, looming retirements are a real fear.

The average age of a doctorally prepared professor of nursing was 60.5 in 2010, says a report administered by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. And historically it has been difficult for universities and colleges to recruit new nursing faculty who have master's or doctoral degrees. In 2012, 8 percent of full-time nursing faculty positions and 7 percent of part-time positions were vacant, according to an AACN survey of nursing programs at 662 institutions around the country. Universities and community colleges have a hard time competing with hospitals, corporations and the military, who can all offer nurses with advanced degrees much higher salaries, said Polly Bednash, who is the executive director of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

“There is intense competition,” Bednash said.

Grams said the University of West Georgia conducted six national and international searches to find nurses with doctoral degrees last year. How many candidates applied? One or two, she said.

And nurses who do not have doctoral degrees do not have much incentive to return to school.

“When a nurse practitioner comes to me and says she has a master's degree and is making \$125,000 per year, I tell her ‘You'd have to go back to school for more years, and I'm only going to pay you half of that.’ People say, ‘Why would I do that?’ ”

While the pay cut that comes with choosing an academic as opposed to a clinical career “is nothing new,” Grams said graduates of nursing programs have many more options now, and “the young folks aren't coming along” to teach like they used to.

Her generation is leaving the nursing education field at a time when nursing services are expected to be in the highest demand. When the Affordable Health Care Act is fully in place, more than 30 million newly insured citizens will need care, Bednash said. The act also calls for new health care delivery models, which means nurses will be crucial providers in nurse-managed health centers, accountable care organizations, community health centers, and minute clinics, Bednash said.

This may be good news for prospective nursing students, but not if there are not enough professors to teach them.

U.S. nursing schools turned away 75,587 qualified applicants to baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2011 due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, clinical preceptors and budget constraints, according to the Association of Colleges of Nursing.

And even the top-ranked nursing schools in the country need to recruit aggressively to find qualified faculty. Johns Hopkins School of Nursing recently boasted of its addition of seven new faculty members, but recruiting takes real strategy admitted the school's dean, Martha N. Hill.

"It's all about what kind of a package can you put together, and what can of recruitment can you do that excites them," Hill said. "And sometimes we have to be creative and introduce the notion of coming to Hopkins to people who weren't actively, or even passively, looking."

Of course, Johns Hopkins has more money to help the issue than a local community college.

"We watch the data on salaries and we pay attention to. I think we stay pretty competitive," Hill said.

The mean salary for full-time nursing professors is \$102,399, according to AACN data for the 2012-2013 academic school year. The 25th percentile is \$82,005 and the 75th percentile is \$117,075. The maximum salary, according to the AACN data, is \$272,095.

Johns Hopkins School of Nursing ranks in the 75th percentile in terms of faculty salaries when compared to its peer programs, said Jennifer Calhoun, the assistant dean for strategic initiatives and integration at the School of Nursing. The school also helps with relocation expenses for its new hires, Calhoun said.

The major shortage that Johns Hopkins nursing programs faces, along with many other programs across the country, is in nurse preceptors.

"It is a challenge because of the stressors on the clinical sites themselves, the changes now in the economic environment," Hill said. "Hospitals are having large layoffs, and it makes the demands on the nursing staff even greater. And that affects their capacity to take students who require one-on-one precepting."

Creative Solutions

It's not all gloom and doom for nursing schools. Programs at four-year institutions as well as community colleges are coming up with creative solutions to hire and retain new faculty.

At the University of West Georgia there has been reason to celebrate. Thanks to a \$503,020 award through the two-year University System of Georgia's (USG) Nursing Faculty Initiative, the university was able to support students and increase enrollment in its brand new online doctoral program — an Ed.D. degree in nursing education.

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and the Georgia General Assembly created the USG Nursing Faculty Initiative, and invited all 31 public institutions within the state's university systems to submit proposals of how they would use the money to improve the development, recruitment and retention of nursing faculty.

At West Georgia, the funding helped attract applicants to the program, because it allows any faculty member who is teaching full-time at one of West Georgia's sister institutions to teach part-time and still receive a full salary. Additionally, tuition is free for any faculty member at West Georgia or a sister institution who enrolls in the Ed.D. online program.

It gives an incentive for nursing faculty to earn their doctorate while learning how to teach effectively, and with luck they will stay and teach in the university system, Grams said.

In 2009, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation launched an initiative in anticipation of severe nursing faculty shortages in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Nursing Initiative provided scholarships and stipends to 61 scholars from nine universities across the state in order to help them earn advanced degrees. In addition to completing a nurse practitioner program, the scholarship recipients were “developed into the faculty role,” said Sue Salmond, who is one of the initiative's co-directors and dean of the Rutgers School of Nursing.

“What it is able to do is provide an immediate pool of faculty for New Jersey nursing programs,” Salmond said. “[The scholarship recipients] have gone into either full-time teaching or are taking positions as nurse practitioners, but are doing part-time teaching with many of them planning to go to full-time teaching.”

Instead of providing scholarships, Lorain County Community College in Ohio has been telling nursing instructors since 2009 that they have five years to earn a master's degree or they'll lose their jobs. Nursing faculty can also take some of that coursework at the school tuition-free. Another step some universities are taking to address the faculty shortage is for clinical agencies and hospitals to “share” graduate-prepared nurses who are interested in teaching, said AACN's Bednash. Through those arrangements, hospitals might provide salary offsets for faculty who are teaching in partnering schools or offer release time to those educators.

The University of West Georgia is taking one more approach: Get them while they're still young.

The nursing school has created a “nursing scholars” program in which high-achieving freshmen are targeted early and invited to work closely with faculty in order to learn about the advantages of becoming a nurse educator.

“We’re willing to target our young students to get them into faculty positions before they’re 35 or 40,” Grams said. “We need them there on campus when they’re 30, not 50. Just think just how many more years of productivity they can provide.”

Special trustee Bob Agrella talks about saving City College of San Francisco

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EdSource.org

By Kathryn Baron

Bob Agrella, the special trustee entrusted with saving City College of San Francisco, wants to make one thing clear: City College is fully accredited and open for business, and his intention is to keep it that way.

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges announced early this month that it would revoke City College's accreditation in July 2014 unless the school meets all the required standards. After a year on "show cause," the most severe sanction, the commission found that City College "had fully addressed just two of the 14 recommendations for change," and remained out of compliance in key areas of governance, leadership and evaluating the quality of courses.

Days later, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors approved an emergency resolution stripping all authority from the college's elected Board of Trustees and handing it to Agrella. The decision elevated Agrella from special trustee with veto power over the local board to special trustee with all the legal rights, authority and decision-making power of the board.

"I couldn't think of a more prepared person than Bob Agrella for that trustee position," said Tom Henry, who holds the special trustee spot at Compton Community College, which lost its accreditation in August 2005. (See sidebar)

Not everyone feels that way. Student and faculty groups criticized Agrella's appointment, arguing that he couldn't save the college in his first year as special trustee and should not be given another year with broader powers.

They're also critical of his salary; Agrella will earn \$22,000 a month under his one-year contract, according to the statewide chancellor's office. For someone who will be running a college with about 80,000 students, the state controller's office shows his salary is on par with other community college presidents.

Critics have also directed plenty of anger at the accrediting commission, accusing it of a conflict of interest, playing politics and overstepping its authority. It's an understandable response, said Henry, who suggested that Agrella read a dissertation comparing the volatile emotions on a campus in danger of closing to the five stages of grief outlined by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Although he's not at City College, Henry said from what he's been reading, people on campus are stuck in the early stages of denial and anger. "That's problematic. They have to get through those stages and they have to get through them in a hurry or they won't recover."

City College has until July 31 to file a formal request asking the commission to review its decision, and Agrella said it plans to make that deadline. The college will also file an appeal with the commission, and has launched an advertising campaign to let the community know that classes are open for enrollment for the fall semester.

Agrella, 69, began his career as a high school teacher before moving into community colleges. Since the early 1970s, he's been founding dean of several campuses in Arizona, provost of Pima Community College District in Tucson, president of Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz County, and, until retiring – or so he thought – in 2011, he was president of Santa Rosa Junior College for more than two decades.

EdSource sat down with Agrella at City College's Ocean campus to talk about his new powers, challenges and game plan. Despite a schedule that would test many younger people, Agrella appeared relaxed, unruffled, unwrinkled and in control.

Read on for excerpts or [click here](#) for a full transcript of the interview.

EdSource: What is the mood on campus right now?

Bob Agrella: It's hard to tell you precisely what the mood on campus is right now because it is summer and there are a lot of people not around, but I would say that the mood, in general, for those folks that I've been visiting with the last several weeks, is somber. I think people are taking this entire accreditation business very, very seriously. ... They're concerned, obviously, about what's going to happen to the institution, and I think all of that is probably to be expected.

EdSource: What has been the most difficult decision you've had to make since you became the trustee extraordinaire? And what were the immediate changes, going from the trustee who could veto to the trustee who is the board?

Bob Agrella: I think the trustee who could veto worked much more behind the scenes, tried not to get either the Board of Trustees or myself in a public, embarrassing position of trying to overturn a decision of the board. So it was much more behind-the-scenes, less operational than what it is now. Assuming the board's duties and responsibilities, I think, takes on a much bigger role, obviously, in the institution. The ability to, and the responsibility of making decisions is much greater than what it was then, and I'm just much more active now in the actual operations of the institution than I was previously.

EdSource: What is the most difficult decision that you had to make or will have to make?

Bob Agrella: I anticipate some difficult decisions, coming forward, and those difficult decisions will, of course, be in the areas that were identified by the commission, where the institution fell short of meeting the standards or the sub-standards. And those decisions will involve some finance issues.

While I think we've developed a good plan, looking forward and stabilizing the institution from a financial perspective, to carry that through is going to require continued

sacrifice on a lot of people's part, and I think those decisions are going to be difficult. And I might say that one of the things that is compounding our problems right now is the loss of enrollment.

We're down in enrollment. As you know, California community colleges are enrollment-driven institutions. You're paid on enrollment. And so, as you lose enrollment, your financial base begins to go down, and that's the situation we're in right now. We've made considerable savings this past year. We have a budget this year that I think will sustain us, but we can't continue on this slide in enrollment that we are.

EdSource: When you were talking about some of the difficult decisions, though, there has been talk about closing some of the campuses, the centers. Is that a strong possibility?

Bob Agrella: That's a possibility, because we're looking at every aspect of the institution, so at this point in time I've not ruled anything out. I want to, however, make sure that the decisions we make are made on good information. We don't have all the information that we need to make some of these decisions, and that's part of the task ahead, to get the best information possible in order to make the best decisions possible.

EdSource: How is the search for a permanent chancellor going?

Bob Agrella: The search is actually going quite well. I received information this morning from the search firm that they sent out another email blast to a little over 300 potential candidates across the country. They've reported to me that they've had some good contact with some potential candidates already. We're early in the process, but I think it's going about as well as it possibly could go – maybe even better than I had even hoped for.

EdSource: What are the skills, strengths and traits that you need, that you have, to bring to this challenge?

Bob Agrella: A sense of humor, number one! It's important. I think you need to try and maintain some stability and have a sense of humor. But once you get beyond that, the serious side of it, I think, is that you have to have some experience in running institutions. You have to have experience in observing a well-run institution and what it takes to make a well-run institution.

Personal strengths, I think you have to not be afraid to talk to people. Not be afraid to let people know where you're coming from. Be honest with them. Not everyone wants honesty. But over the long haul, I've found in my career that people appreciate an honest "yes" or an honest "no," rather than a "maybe" or never getting back to them.

I think you have to develop a pretty thick hide, understanding that you're going to get a lot of criticism if you do things one way or the other. It's very, very difficult in a college setting to please everyone.

EdSource: When I spoke to (Compton Community College special trustee) Tom Henry ... one thing he said is he would urge you to get past the anger as soon as possible.

Bob Agrella: ... What we have to try to do is not let those angry folks dictate the agenda of this institution. And the agenda of this institution right now, and for the foreseeable future, is to meet those accreditation standards, to get busy, continue to work on our action plans that we're developing in our "show cause" report, and do the best possible job we can so that we can show progress.

We've made considerable progress since last July 1. It's just that we didn't make sufficient progress. The way the commission looks at your progress is pretty simple. You either meet the standard or you don't. It's not one of those things where you're 50 percent there, or 60 percent there. And also, when you institute a new planning process, or program-review process like we instituted in the institution, before you can actually say you meet that standard – it's actually a sub-standard – you must have gone through one complete cycle. We will not have gone through one complete cycle on some of these activities until October, November, December and January, and so forth. So we've got our job cut out for us.

EdSource: ...The college (didn't) get into this situation overnight, and it can't get out of it overnight ... (Does) the accreditation process account for the fact that it could take a long time to turn a school around after it's been so entrenched in bad governance and financing?

Bob Agrella: I think the accreditation process takes that into account. You know, their extension to June 30, 2014, was actually a very good step. They could have said, "You're done right now." They could have said it after a semester. They didn't. They gave us the absolute maximum amount that they could get at this point in time. Our job is to try and show the absolute best amount of progress in meeting those standards that we can. ...

I do know that no accrediting body wants to remove the accreditation of an institution. I really believe that. Their job is to see that the institutions meet those standards, not take accreditation. And they will do everything in their power to try and help us do that, I believe. They are bound by some federal guidelines, obviously, but I think if we show significant progress while we go through that appeals process, I think we'll be OK.

California national rank on per-pupil spending abysmal, but tide is poised to change

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It's difficult to believe now, but there was a time -- through the eras of flower children, bell bottoms and disco -- when the Golden State was widely seen as the gold standard on education spending.

Class sizes were low. Schools were well maintained. Textbooks and other instructional materials were new.

Back then, California ranked in the top 10 nationwide in per pupil education spending.

The abundance made an impression on Michael Kirst, now the president of the California State Board of Education, when he moved to California from Virginia in 1969.

"There was free summer school for every kid that wanted it," he said. "I'd never heard of such a thing."

A multitude of factors has caused California's relative standing in school spending to sink like a gold coin in a swimming pool.

The state now ranks 35th in per pupil spending, according to the latest figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. Factor in cost-of-living considerations and California's place in the pecking order among all 50 states and the District of Columbia is a dismal 49. That's ahead of only Nevada and Utah, according to a widely cited annual January report by Education Week. (Per-pupil spending figures from Education Week include state and local funds, but not federal money, or funds for capital improvements. Census figures include federal dollars but also exclude capital outlay.)

However, the needle is poised to begin moving in the other direction, thanks to two big game-changers. One is the November passage of Proposition 30, the temporary tax hike that will primarily benefit public education. The other, which was signed into law in late June, is the Local Control Funding Formula -- Gov. Jerry Brown's successful attempt to revolutionize the way school dollars are distributed.

The first wave of replenishment will hit the coffers of local school districts this fall, mostly in modest fashion. The infusion is expected to increase year by year for a time, but specific numbers are tough to come by.

The Governor's Office has projected that, by 2016-17, California will boost its per-pupil spending by \$2,800 over the 2011-12 amount, bringing it to somewhere near the current national average in raw dollars. That would be quite a bump, but that projection is questioned in some education circles.

In any event, the approaching relief raises an intriguing question: to what extent -- if at all -- will more money lead to better academic performance? It's a question that the brightest minds in education have been debating for years.

"Some would argue there is very little correlation," said Maggie Weston, a research fellow with the Public Policy Institute of California. "Others would say we probably should be spending more money, but it's about wise investment. So, just spending more money in exactly the same way probably won't lead to better student outcome."

As it happens, California's level of its funding lines up pretty neatly with the performance of its students.

Much as it ranks 49th on cost-adjusted per-pupil spending, its nationwide standing in academic performance on math and English tests among fourth- and eighth-graders ranges from 46th to 49th, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress - the most authoritative source of interstate comparison on academic performance.

Similarly, Vermont, which occupies the No. 1 spot nationwide on per-pupil spending by Education Week's measure, ranks an impressive 6th in fourth-grade mathematics.

But on the other hand, test scores in California have risen steadily over the past half-decade, even though that stretch of time marks one of the worst five-year periods for school finance in state history.

"If you take the negative angle, you could say 'so money doesn't matter,' " said Peter Birdsall, executive director of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association. "Public school educators in California did a wonderful job. ... The problem is, people can only keep up that level of exertion for so long."

And then there is the puzzle of Texas.

Per pupil spending in the Lone Star State is in the neighborhood of California's, clocking in at 44th nationwide by the measure of Education Week. And yet, students in California are vastly outperformed by their peers in Texas -- the nation's second-largest state, whose demographics closely mirror those of California. (In both states, for instance, Latino students have recently become a majority population in the schools.)

Eighth-graders in Texas rank 10th nationally in mathematics; their counterparts in California are at the bottom of the heap, just above Mississippi and Alabama, at 49th.

In his book, "The Money Myth," Norton Grubb, professor emeritus at UC Berkeley, makes the case that money's ability to boost performance in schools is often overstated.

Grubb is quick to clarify this thesis.

"I would never say money doesn't make a difference; money does make a difference," he said.

It's just that some expenditures are more effective than others, Grubb said. Raising teacher salaries, for instance, correlates to better test scores, graduation rates and credits earned, he said. Investing in school counselors tends to reap similar results. Conversely, some spending has produced little in the way of measurable academic benefits. Falling into this category, according to Grubb, are the class-size reduction efforts of recent years and intervention programs for lagging students.

Grubb has even found a relationship between some forms of spending and worse performance. The biggie here, Grubb says, is traditional vocational arts classes such as automotive and shop class.

As for California's low national standing on school spending, it doesn't extend to teacher pay. At \$68,500, the salary of the average teacher in California during the 2011-12 school year ranked fifth nationwide, according to the National Education Association.

Conversely, California schools have the fewest number of adults in contact with children. This includes not only teachers, but administrators, librarians and counselors.

"We are dead last," Kirst said. "That is really compelling. More interesting even than class size. We have less of everything -- even janitors."

The history of California's funding decline is complex, but a couple of momentous events are widely seen as change agents.

The first was a landmark lawsuit in the early 1970s -- *Serrano v. Priest* -- that sought to correct an inequity: school districts in wealthy areas had way more money than their counterparts in poor areas. The courts agreed with the plaintiff, John Serrano -- a parent of a student in the Los Angeles Unified School District -- that the funding formula violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. Limits were placed on per-pupil expenditures.

The second was the 1978 passage of Proposition 13 -- an epic shake-up in government that provided tax relief to homeowners but shifted the burden of education funding from the local level to the state.

Why did this cause a drop-off? Experts aren't certain. One theory, put forth in a report by the Public Policy Institute of California, suggests that before the initiative, the property taxes paid by commercial interests subsidized schools to a greater degree.

Another theory -- expressed by Sacramento Bee journalist and author Peter Schrag -- attributes the backslide to white voters' increasing reluctance to support an education system that benefits a higher and higher percentage of nonwhite students.

In any case, by many accounts, Proposition 13 generally marks the point at which California's national standing on per pupil funding began to dip below the national average.

All the while, a massive wave of immigration has led to a demographic sea change leaving schools in a much needier position. (Latinos, who make up one of the most disadvantaged demographics in education, made up just 12 percent of the state's population in 1970, and now constitute 38 percent of all Californians.)

Approved in June by the state Legislature, Brown's Local Control Funding Formula popularly grants school districts much more local control in deciding how to spend their dollars. The controversial part is how it also dedicates significantly more money to the districts serving disadvantaged students.

Many school leaders in the suburbs fear the formula will give their districts short shrift.

Among them is George Mannon, superintendent of the Torrance Unified School District, who believes the numbers are based too much on intuition, and not enough on hard facts. He contends it would have been better to wait a year and use that time to carefully study how much more money is truly needed to educate disadvantaged students.

"We're making decisions without basing them on research," he said.

Legislatively, it has been surprisingly popular. The funding model was approved by not only a majority of Democrats in both the state Senate and Assembly, but of Republicans, who relish the return of local control.

"The current system was collapsing and had no defenders," said Kirst, a professor emeritus at Stanford who is widely considered the father of the state's brand-new formula.

(Brown's Local Control Funding Formula was based on "Getting Beyond the Facts," a 2008 report co-authored by Kirst, former California Secretary of Education Alan Bersin and now-state Supreme Court Justice Goodwin Liu.)

Grubb sees Proposition 30 and the Local Control Funding Formula as the one-two punch needed for progress: more money, and smarter use of it.

But he cautions that it could be a long time before improvements are measurable. "California has spent about 35 years making these problems," he said. "It's going to take another 35 to get us out of the problems."