

## District regains limited control

### State retaining power over Oakland schools' finances, staffing, facilities

By Katy Murphy, STAFF WRITER  
Inside Bay Area

Article Last Updated:07/10/2007 02:51:59 AM PDT

OAKLAND — A sizable group of local politicians and educators assembled at Oakland's Franklin Elementary School Monday morning to announce a milestone in the state-run school district's history: the transfer of some powers from the state superintendent to the school board.

The largely symbolic development comes four years into a state takeover — an era of dramatic reform efforts, continued charter school growth and rapidly declining enrollment.

Monday's announcement means the board will oversee matters relating to community outreach and school governance. Practically speaking, however, much in the near future will remain the same.

Jack O'Connell, the state superintendent of public instruction, still has authority over most of the district's operations, including finance, staffing, student achievement and facilities.

As a result, the board's new powers are limited. For example, it will now be able to oversee the numerous "school site councils," which approve budgets and set many school policies, but it won't have the authority to approve extra resources for the schools.

Still, the district's locally elected board members now will begin shaping policy in matters relating to community outreach and school governance.

They also will receive a stipend, which they lost under the state takeover along with their vote.

"We are doing everything we can to be the best, most responsible and most responsive school board that the people of Oakland have seen in quite some time," said David Kakishiba, the board president.

While the mood at the press conference was celebratory, a less crowded board meeting held immediately beforehand struck a more sober tone.

"The year 2008 is the most critical, the most challenging, year this district will face — with local control or without local control," said board member Noel Gallo, referring to an upcoming parcel tax renewal and an ever-diminishing student population and budget.

Board members spoke of the difficult decisions ahead. Kerry Hamill urged her fellow board members and the public to avoid the "shame, blame and recrimination" that often accompanies such discussions.

Oscar Wright, co-chairman of the African American Education Task Force, has expressed doubt the board is ready to lead the district. He told the board Monday morning he hoped the news was a "step in the right direction."

Still, he said, "I certainly hope that we get these politics out of this thing somewhere along the line."

Jeanette MacDonald, principal of Franklin Elementary School, said local governance of the district was important, but not something to be rushed. She said her staff has managed to make the school a better place to learn regardless of the changes at the central office.

"We've gone through lots of superintendents and many school boards, and the teaching goes on," she said. "I can work under anybody. That's the bottom line."

Read Katy Murphy's Oakland schools blog at <http://www.ibabuzz.com/education>.

Close Window

Send To Printer