

State Center Community College District board reprimands Trustee Eric Payne

By Rory Appleton

Eric Payne

The State Center Community College District Board of Trustees voted Tuesday to reprimand Trustee Eric Payne, but decided not to strip him of his ability to represent the district at public events.

The board voted 5-2 to officially express its disapproval of several of Payne's recent actions. The board debated whether or not to censure Payne or ban him from representing the board in public for one full year, but it decided instead to instruct Payne that his behavior was not appropriate.

The resolution, which was opposed by Payne and Trustee Miguel Arias, states that the board "would like to have Trustee Payne improve his boardsmanship." It also suggests that Payne seek additional online training seminars and seek the guidance of senior board members.

The issue began when Bill F. Stewart, Interim Chancellor for the State Center Community College District, submitted a list of seven allegations against Payne in September.

Stewart's list accused Payne of tampering with several hirings within the district, asking a college administrator to use her position to solicit campaign funds for himself, reporting a "baseless and misleading" accreditation concern to the college accrediting body, plagiarizing a Fresno Bee column and using a disability placard to illegally park at a board meeting.

In October, the board approved the appointment of an ad hoc committee of three trustees to investigate the allegations against Payne. This committee hired attorney Jack Lipton for guidance, and Lipton appointed private investigation firm Nicole Miller & Associates to [investigate the allegations](#).

The investigation concluded that Payne did make false accreditation concerns, plagiarize the column and was charged with a misdemeanor crime involving the misuse of a disability placard. The firm did not find enough evidence to support the other claims.

Tate Hill, president of the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce, came to Payne's defense before the motion was debated. Hill said the investigative report indicated that there was very little evidence against Payne and that the grievances listed were simply issues with Payne's character, not his official conduct.

The board spent an hour deliberating the issue, then voted 6-0, with Payne abstaining, to strike the year-long punishment from the resolution before the final vote.

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