

EDITORIAL: State Center board must focus on big challenges



When State Center Community College District called on Tony Cantú after the resignation of Cynthia Azari at Fresno City College in 2011, he accepted the challenge because of his desire to serve the campus.

FRESNO BEE FILE — THE FRESNO BEE

The sudden death of highly respected Fresno City College President Tony Cantú after a brief illness is a blow to State Center Community College District, which has been struggling to find its footing in recent years.

According to educators who saw him in action, Cantú, 64, was both a no-nonsense leader and an inspiration to students, on whose behalf he tirelessly worked.

“He told you exactly what he thought, but he was always very student-oriented in everything that he did,” Fresno City College spokeswoman Kathy Bonilla told The Bee’s Hannah Furfaro.

Perhaps the best tribute that State Center trustees could give Cantú is dedicating themselves to putting student and community interests above petty personal agendas.

Cantú was a humble man. He didn’t aspire to be Fresno City College president.

But when the district called on him following the resignation of Cynthia Azari in 2011, Cantú accepted the challenge

because of his desire to serve the campus.

State Center trustees similarly should focus their energies on serving the district — and complying with the Ralph M. Brown Act, a long-standing state law that prohibits secret meetings of official bodies except under the most exceptional circumstances.

According to emails obtained by The Editorial Board, Trustee Patrick Patterson requested Friday that a special closed session be held at the end of today's regularly scheduled meeting to consider "public employee discipline/discipline/release."

The closed session didn't make it onto the agenda posted Monday on the district website — most likely because Patterson's request wasn't received in time to comply with public noticing requirements.

However, Patterson's request was troubling because his justification for the closed session was that "a majority of the Board of Trustees are demanding (it)."

The Brown Act forbids "serial" meetings — specifically stating that "[a] majority of the members of a legislative body shall not, outside a meeting ... use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body."

Unless Patterson is blessed with extrasensory perception, how would he know what a minimum of three other trustees are demanding?

State Center has many big-ticket items on its plate.

It must recruit a new chancellor to replace Interim Chancellor Bill Stewart, and it's highly unlikely that a top-notch college leader would want to work for a board that is dysfunctional or for trustees who thumb their noses at the public, state law and transparency.

The district is in the midst of seeking accreditation for Willow International Community College Center so that it can become Clovis Community College.

It is gearing up for a bond measure. If approved, the bonds would pay for new buildings at the Clovis campus and at Madera Community College Center.

And now a successor must be found for Cantú, whose shoes will be difficult to fill.

Last November, we recommended the election of two new trustees, Miguel Arias and Bobby Kahn, over incumbents because State Center needed vastly better leadership. Both of them prevailed at the ballot box.

Unless this board shows that it can successfully carry out the important tasks at hand, the house cleaning should continue in the next election.