

# Consultant says Greece students hurt by culture

**VICTORIA E. FREILE**  
STAFF WRITER

**GREECE** — Despite extraordinary gains in achievement, Greece students are missing "opportunities for greatness" because of a culture of negativity in the district, a six-month audit of the Greece Central School District has found.

"In many respects, this audit allows us to face our strengths and limitations," Kathleen Fitzpatrick, a nationally known educational consultant, told nearly 50 community members who attended the session in Greece Apollo Middle School Auditorium on Monday night.

In order to reunite the district, she explained, all stakeholders must first

"confront the brutal facts of their current reality."

Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Illinois-based Leadership for Learning Alliance, also met Monday with administrators and teachers to discuss her 15-page report, which was based on extensive surveys of 1,049 teachers and school administrators.

The audit is unrelated to the Board of Education's ongoing investigation into teacher discrimination charges.

While Fitzpatrick's report laid bare the distrust, misperceptions and adversarial relationships that have divided the district this year, its purpose was to identify how the district

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could forge a unified vision.

Key to her recommendations is a summit that would bring "all stakeholders to the table together."

"What's uncommon here is the depth of the negativity and the lack of trust," she said.

Fitzpatrick described Greece as an extraordinary district, with a negative organized culture and plenty of cause for concern.

Greece is the eighth-largest school district in the state, with about 13,600 students and an annual budget of \$172.2 million.

Fitzpatrick warned that "quick-fix solutions" won't make a difference in the long run. Most importantly, she said, stakeholders must focus on what's best for the students.

Because the analysis comes from someone outside the district, board member Bill Russell said he hopes folks in the community will heed her advice.

"There's a major challenge here to deal with the problems that are looming on the future," said Greece parent Gary Elling. "We've wasted several months finger-pointing to the past."

Elling said he hopes it won't be the same in the district's future.

"This report indicated that there's a lot of good coming from the procedures in place, but also indicates that there's plenty of room for improvement," said Greece parent Tom

## Background

This educational audit was commissioned in March, before former Greece Superintendent Steve Walts announced he was leaving for a job in Virginia. The idea was to better understand the contention in the district and the community. Kathleen Fitzpatrick of the Illinois-based Leadership for Learning Alliance, with a five-member task force, visited Greece's schools and met with stakeholders. Her report addresses how the district and community can move forward together. The audit is separate from the district's current investigation of teacher charges of discrimination.

Shay. "If you want a top-notch school district, you're going to have to pay the price to get it."

Shay said he hopes the board listens to Fitzpatrick's report and creates a unified plan of action.

Board President Ken Walsh said he's "extremely encouraged" by Fitzpatrick's report.

"The challenges have been pinpointed for us and we have a very deliberate target," Walsh said.

Walsh said he appreciates Fitzpatrick's plan to bring all stakeholders to the table to work toward a joint solution. The board will determine how to follow her recommendations, he said.

Greece parent Jennifer Shanley said she's not sure how that will happen.

"How do we get the stakeholders together when the board isn't willing to be open and honest about the problem?" she asked.

"The main problem is the current administration," said Greece parent Mona Francis.

"The community needs people in the administration who are genuinely concerned with students' success. That's not

happening."

If it can't be repaired, she said, the current administration should be replaced so the district can start over.

Retired Gates-Chili Superintendent William Dadey outlined his portion of the audit during the meeting. In June, Dadey had interviewed the nine-member school board and also three newly elected board members.

He concluded that Greece's school board is "dysfunctional" and is "creating a negative impact on the education of students."

Although impressed with board members' sincerity and obvious concern, Dadey said he finds it unfortunate that board members don't make a better effort to work together to do what's in the best interest of Greece students and the community.

Walsh said he believes the board has started to change its dysfunctional image by making hard decisions, sharing as much information as possible with the community and by treating each other with respect.

"But of course people will — and do — disagree," he said.

VFREILE@DemocratandChronicle.com