

SONORA SCHOOL DISTRICT
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August 17, 2016

Judge of the Superior Court
Honorable Donald Segerstrom 
41 W. Yaney Avenue
Sonora, CA 95370

FILED

SEP 01 2016

Superior Court of California
County of Tuolumne

By:  Clerk

Dear Honorable Judge Donald Segerstrom:

I would like to thank Ms. Sandi Romena, Foreperson for the Grand Jury, and the entire membership of the 2015-2016 Tuolumne County Grand Jury for the report dated July 12, 2016, which included an investigation of school reorganization. Sonora School District Board of Trustees have reviewed the report and wish to send a response, as requested by the Grand Jury, on items related to the findings and recommendations of the School Reorganization Committee.

On behalf of the highly qualified staff members who serve the Sonora Elementary School community's children, I am proud of the work they do each day in advancing the education of our student body, with demonstrated academic progress and distinction toward meeting and exceeding state curriculum standards. Furthermore, Sonora School District has a community of supportive families, who volunteer and contribute to the success of our school community at curricular and extracurricular activities that enrich our student's lives and build success in school and beyond.

Grand Jury Recommendations and District Responses

R1 A cost benefit analysis of opportunities for more JPA efforts should be undertaken by every school district, and greater purchasing by the JPA should be implemented where savings are apparent.

District's Response:

- Purchasing cooperatives already implemented: All of the districts in the county already receive lower pricing through Apple, Dell, Office Depot, Staples, Ricoh and most large vendors for school supplies due to a piggyback bid on prices negotiated by the districts, county and/or State. Sysco (food supplier) already provides discount pricing for cafeteria supplies for all school districts based upon the total number of students in the county (regardless of district boundaries). The Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools conducts joint propane bidding with local propane companies on behalf of all school districts giving districts the lowest price possible for propane. All school districts benefit equally from E-Rate, Mandated by Congress in 1996 and implemented by the FCC in 1997, which provides discounted telecommunications, Internet access, and internal connections to all schools in Tuolumne County, funded by the Universal Service Fund.
- Information and Network Technology cooperatives already implemented: All school districts contract with the County Superintendent of Schools for

technology services, who serves as a quasi-IT JPA, offering high quality network, security and phone service at a significantly reduced rate than what districts could purchase independently.

- The Tuolumne Joint Powers Authority (JPA) already implemented: The Tuolumne JPA, operated by the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, administers property, liability and worker's compensation insurance programs for member school districts in Alpine, Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne. Each school district in Tuolumne County is a member of the Tuolumne JPA and receives the benefit of the group pricing for insurance, liability and workers compensation and training.
- Instructional services and professional development cooperatives already implemented: The school districts within Tuolumne County collaborate with the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, who provide high quality cost efficient professional development, saving districts travel and hotel expenses for State mandated programs and /or required trainings.
- Bus fleet management cooperative already implemented: For decades, the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools has contracted with one school district (Sonora Union High School District) to manage the county-wide bus fleet and transportation cooperative of special education students who are served by all school districts within Tuolumne County in a Special Education Plan Area (SELPA), a quasi-Transportation JPA. The efficiency of this transportation collaborative for special education is partially dependent on the location of the program sites and the placement of students and their special needs. Each year, the collaborative conducts a demographic and geographic review that analyzes the present location of program, program needs, and population served to develop the most efficient transportation system. Furthermore, all elementary school districts without a bus maintenance /repair shop, contract with the high schools to provide the service. School district bus routes have been consolidated to meet the state required minimum for distance. Also, in 2011, school districts in Tuolumne County coordinated a common student attendance calendar at all school sites to streamline transportation operations and other shared activities. Finally, school districts do not receive funding for home-to-school transportation, nor is it mandated to provide home-to-school transportation to non-special education students.
- Shared administrative services already implemented: Sonora School District and Summerville Elementary School District currently share a Superintendent, Chief Business Specialist, Accounting Specialist, Payroll Specialist and have until last year, shared a music teacher.

R2: The Grand Jury recommends that an independent and definitive study of the economic benefits and costs of school district reorganization be undertaken. The results of this study, and the section of the California Education Code pertaining to school district consolidation, should be actively made available to all Tuolumne County

taxpayers and elected officials. Grants from appropriate public or private agencies should be pursued to pay for this study.

District's Response: This recommendation has already been implemented. There have been numerous studies conducted in the county and the state regarding unification or unionization of districts. In 2000, the Sonora Area Foundation hired a school finance-consulting agency, School Services of California, Inc., to conduct a study about how school districts might better work together to improve education in Tuolumne County. In the opinion of the consultants, "unionizing and/or unifying school districts makes a lot of sense from a practical standpoint". However, in weighing the disadvantages to unionizing and unifying, the consultants further noted "...according to the majority of governing board members, administrators, teachers, classified staff, and parents that we interviewed, there are concerns that the system replacing the existing system will not be better and may result in loss of identity, loss of access, creation of bureaucracies, reallocation of resources, elimination of programs, etc."

Although recently, the public had an opportunity to place this matter on a local ballot and failed to get enough signatures to qualify for the ballot, Sonora School District Board of Trustees believes that a new, updated unification study is warranted. However, the board does not feel the district should pay for such a study and encourages outside sources to fund such a study.

Finally, Sonora School District Board of Trustees wish to ask for the Grand Jury's support to put kids first and focus their investigative efforts towards investigating the lack of adequate State and Federal funding for schools rather than asking schools with fixed funding to do more with less. Every child needs a qualified teacher, smaller class sizes, modernized state of the art school facilities, bathrooms, drinking fountains, cafeteria, and playgrounds. Adequate funding is necessary in order to staff our schools with personnel that had once been a mainstay of our school systems such as a registered nurse, licensed school counselor, music teacher, art teacher, physical education teacher, and present day necessities such as school resource officers and safety personnel to keep our children safe from violent intruders. At risk also are extra-curricular programs, athletic competitions, and field trips to provide every child with field experiences to local parks and historical landmarks. Adequate funding is imperative in order to provide every child with updated textbooks and instructional resources for math, English language arts, social studies, and physical and biological sciences. Adequate funding is sorely needed to provide every child access to up to date technological hardware, software, and online capabilities to truly prepare the next generation of leaders. And finally, adequate funding is needed to adequately compensate teachers and support staff for the important work they do in shaping the future generation.

I wish to thank the Grand Jury for their diligent work and dedication in fulfilling their mission of service to the Court and to the citizens of Tuolumne County. Please contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,



Leigh Shampain

Superintendent & Secretary to the Board