

SAUSALITO MARIN CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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August 1, 2002

The Honorable Lynn O'Malley Taylor
Marin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 4988
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Lowell W. Smith
Foreperson
Marin County Civil Grand Jury
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 303
San Rafael, CA 94903

Your Honor and Foreperson Smith,

The Marin County Grand Jury has done an excellent job of identifying the key issues facing school districts as they provide special education services to students. The vast discrepancy, between what was promised under IDEA and what the federal government has funded under this mandated program, contribute to the fiscal crisis every school board must address as special education costs continue to soar.

The Grand Jury recommendations have merit and can improve our services to children while reducing the conflict between service providers and parents.

Response to Recommendation # 1 & 2

It is true that the general public has limited information regarding special education services, but there is little individual districts can do to provide more detailed information without creating a conflict between the needs of special education students and the needs of regular education students. It would not be helpful to pit the needs of these different groups of students against each other. Special education is costly, but the special education students require specialized services that other students do not.

A county-wide effort that profiles the students and teachers providing services to students might be helpful to highlight the benefits of these programs. A comparison of costs to educate regular education students and special education students might also help the public understand the funding differences.

Response to Recommendation #3

Efforts to influence Congress to fully fund special education have been on-going, but the current budget shortfall derailed the bipartisan effort to restore full funding for special education at the federal level.

IDEA will be reauthorized and part of the debate and any letter writing campaign conducted by local districts and the MCOE, can request the development of a multi-year plan that will result in fully funding the special education mandate as promised.

Response to Recommendation #4

Although there are many different districts and staff members providing assessment to students, a centralized model is not necessary. Rather, uniform training and implementation of common standards for eligibility are the best way to ensure uniformity and equal opportunity and access to special education.

Each district has unique demographic characteristics that can influence special education decision making at the local level. It is important to provide a consistent set of standards for eligibility that all assessors and IEP teams follow to avoid idiosyncratic eligibility decisions.

Response to Recommendation #5

The location of the Marin County SELPA office does little, in or of itself, to separate the governance function of the SELPA from the Marin County Office of Education per se. The SELPA is independent in function, but is operationally linked to the county office through functional relationships and payroll. There needs to be a close working relationship between the SELPA and all service providers. Since the MCOE serves the most disabled population and is the largest service provider in the county, the SELPA needs to work collaboratively with MCOE and removing them from the office would seem counterproductive.

Response to Recommendation #6

Local districts are supportive of the five year strategic plan and are dependent upon the SELPA Director to facilitate relationships between the districts so that students are appropriately served.

Response to Recommendation #7 & 8

The districts are supportive of any effort to reduce the level of acrimony in providing special education services to students. There will always be differences of opinion regarding special education services, but providing local resources to resolve these differences, such as Alternative Dispute Resolution or an Ombudsman, can stem the escalating cost of due process hearings and attorney fees.

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Issues of Specific Interest to Sausalito Marin City School District

Sausalito Marin City School District is supportive of any effort to increase funding for special education students and recognizes that the increases in special education costs that are in excess of federal and state funds will deplete the available resources to educate all children.

As a small school district, Sausalito Marin City School District is dependent upon the county office and other school districts to serve the needs of our students. It is not possible for our small district to create all of the programs needed by our students, so it is critical for us to forge collaborative relationships with the county office and other districts. Our district is committed to developing more effective local programs to serve our students and is seeking to strengthen our relationship with the county office and other service providers.

Please be advised that special education is a focus area in our district. We are committed to providing services while simultaneously addressing the over-identification of special education students in our district. We are working closely with SELPA, as well as MCOE, in developing programs which serve children effectively and also comply with state and federal law.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and community, I would like to express my most sincere appreciation for your time in preparing this important report on special education. As Superintendent of Schools, I generally agree with your recommendations and findings except in those areas as noted, based upon our practice and perspective.

Cordially,

Rose Marie Roberson, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Cc: Board of Trustees

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

Report Title: SPECIAL EDUCATION IN MARIN

Report Date: April 26, 2002

Response by: Rose Marie Roberson, Ed.D. Title: Superintendent

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8.
- I (we) disagree partially with the findings numbered: 4, 5.

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefore – *see letter attached.*)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered 1, 2, & 3 have been implemented.

(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions – *see letter attached.*)

- Recommendations numbered *NONE* have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)

- Recommendations numbered 7 & 8 require further analysis.

(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report – *see letter attached.*)

- Recommendations numbered 4 & 5 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

(Attach an explanation – *see letter attached.*)

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached _____.