

---

# MARIN COUNTY

---

# OFFICE OF EDUCATION

---

1111 LAS GALLINAS AVENUE/P.O. BOX 4925  
SAN RAFAEL, CA 94913-4925  
marincoe@marin.k12.ca.us

MARY JANE BURKE  
MARIN COUNTY  
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

(415) 472-4110  
FAX (415) 491-6625  
TDD (415) 491-6611

July 30, 2004

The Honorable Terrence R. Boren  
Marin County Superior Court  
P.O. Box 4988  
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Betty J. Mattea, Foreperson  
Marin County Civil Grand Jury  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 303  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Your Honor and Madam Foreperson:

The 2003-2004 Marin County Civil Grand Jury in the report entitled "School Administration—Is the Cost Too High?" an ongoing topic of discussion for school district trustees, parents, teachers, administrators and the general public. You have delineated several of the key issues related to this complex topic. The recognition by the Grand Jury that in Marin County there are sound reasons, both educational and financial, for having smaller school districts is a reaffirmation of what the voters in our county have confirmed through elections over many years. You have noted a fundamental principle that unification and/or consolidation can only be successful where the two or more communities involved desire the change. Finally, the commendation of the efforts of our school districts and the county office to work with each other and with our city, town and county governments to seek ways to maximize resources and consolidate services is encouraging and appreciated.

My formal responses, as requested in the report, are attached. Your concern that parents, teachers, administrators and community members have the most accurate information available is one that all school districts and the Marin County Office of Education share and a standard we try every day to achieve. If, as suggested by the Grand Jury, improvements can be made, I am confident that every school district concerned will respond in a positive way.

Thank you for your interest and support of public education in our community. Marin County school districts and the county office provide quality programs that are student-centered, cost-effective and accountable. The commitment of our citizens is evidenced by the support of parcel taxes, bond issues and school foundations. Most importantly, the effectiveness of our schools is evidenced by the performance of our students. Yet, as long as one student fails, drops out or does not achieve to his or her full ability, there is work to be done. We hope we can always count on the Marin County Civil Grand Jury to help and support us in that important work.

Sincerely,

MARY JANE BURKE  
Marin County Superintendent of Schools

**RESPONSES FROM THE MARIN COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
TO THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF  
THE 2003-2004 MARIN COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY**

**F1. Finding:**        **The County Office of Education, while producing numerous statistical reports using the object codes, has produced no statistical reports using the function codes even though this information is available for each district.**

Response:        The statistical bulletins produced by the Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) have evolved over the years. When the need for different kinds of information or data has been identified or is required by state or federal regulations, statistical bulletins have been designed on a countywide basis. This is an efficient, effective way to save time, effort and costs that would be incurred if every district produced its own information. MCOE continually works with school districts to provide needed information and is committed to producing whatever statistical bulletins will assist in better utilization of resources or enhance community information.

**F2. Finding:**        **The number of students in a school district does not appear to affect the percentage of the budget spent on general administration because the Office of Education provides the administration for the smallest school districts.**

Response:        The Marin County Office of Education does provide administrative services for the small rural districts—Nicasio with an average daily attendance (a.d.a.) of 59; Laguna with an a.d.a. of 26; Lincoln with an a.d.a. of 14; and Union Joint with an a.d.a. of 17. It makes good sense for MCOE to coordinate the administration of these districts in a cost-effective way that provides quality service and avoids duplication. Because of this relationship, perhaps any countywide analysis of school district administrative costs should exclude these small districts.

**F3. Finding:**        **Although *consolidation* of smaller districts is unlikely to produce administrative savings, *unification* appears to offer up to a 3% savings of the combined budgets.**

Response:        The Grand Jury has noted that consolidation and unification are very difficult and time-consuming outcomes for communities to achieve. Because consolidation and unification are such complex and different processes, any resultant financial comparison such as the 3% savings cited by the Grand Jury needs to be approached with some caution. Meanwhile, the Marin County Office of Education and the local school districts have chosen to work together in an ongoing process as if we were one large district when that is more cost effective and, most importantly, when it is good for students. Many areas such as staffing, printing, food service, maintenance, bulk purchasing, student programs and transportation are examples of where joint operations exist to promote efficiency.

Response to the Findings and Recommendation of the 2003-2004 Marin County Civil Grand Jury, July 30, 2004 (Page 2)

The Marin County School Boards Association and the Marin Association of Superintendents established a Task Force on Cost Effective Opportunities for Sharing Resources in 2003-2004 to not only examine what was being done, but to identify areas for future cooperation. Examples of additional areas identified for ongoing investigation included supplies, telecommunications, legal and labor compliance services, administrative services, business services and audit contracts. The Task Force also met with the Marin County Council of Mayors and Council Members to examine any possibilities for cost savings by joining with city and county governments. We will continue to look for every possible way to achieve savings on a countywide basis.

**F4. Finding: In any reorganization, savings in administrative costs may be offset by other costs of reorganization such as averaging up salaries.**

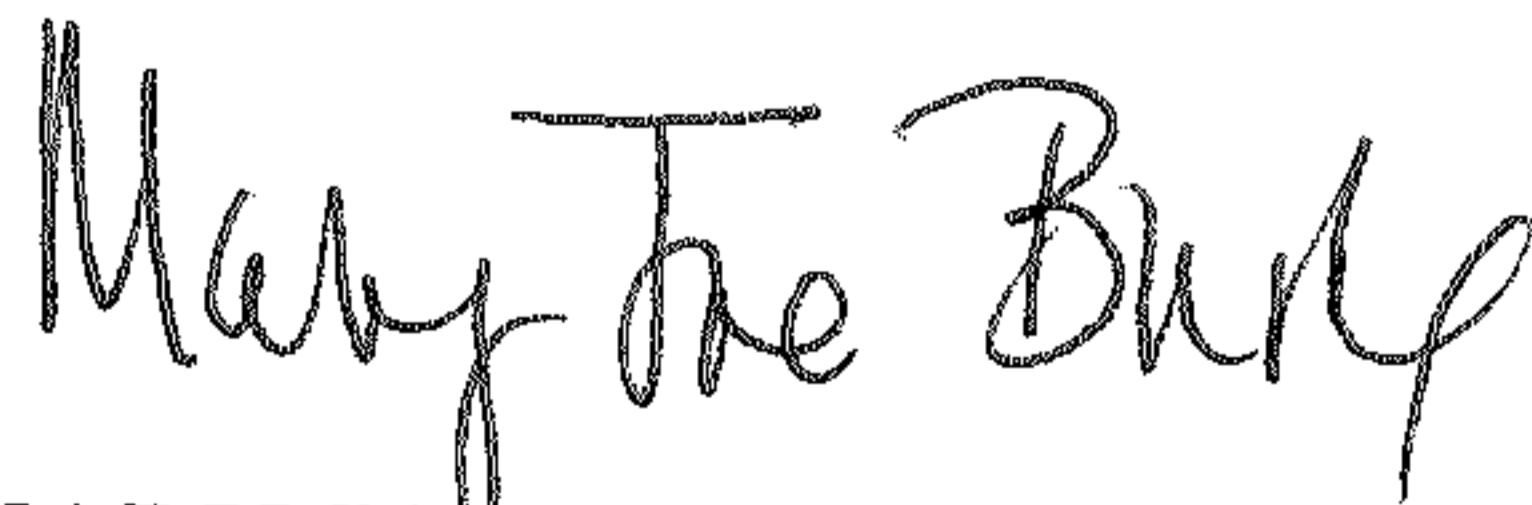
Response: I agree. Data from school districts in California support this finding.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1. Recommendation: The County Office of Education should produce countywide statistical reports of functional classification of expenses as it does for object classifications.**

Response: The recommendation will be implemented. We will report to the Grand Jury by December 1, 2004 on the status of the implementation of the recommendation as well as provide an update on the continuing efforts to expand cost effective opportunities for sharing among the school districts and with other governmental agencies.

Respectfully submitted,



MARY JANE BURKE  
Marin County Superintendent of Schools