

NICASIO SCHOOL DISTRICT
5555 Nicasio Valley Road
Nicasio, CA 94946
415-662-2184

August 3, 2004

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

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

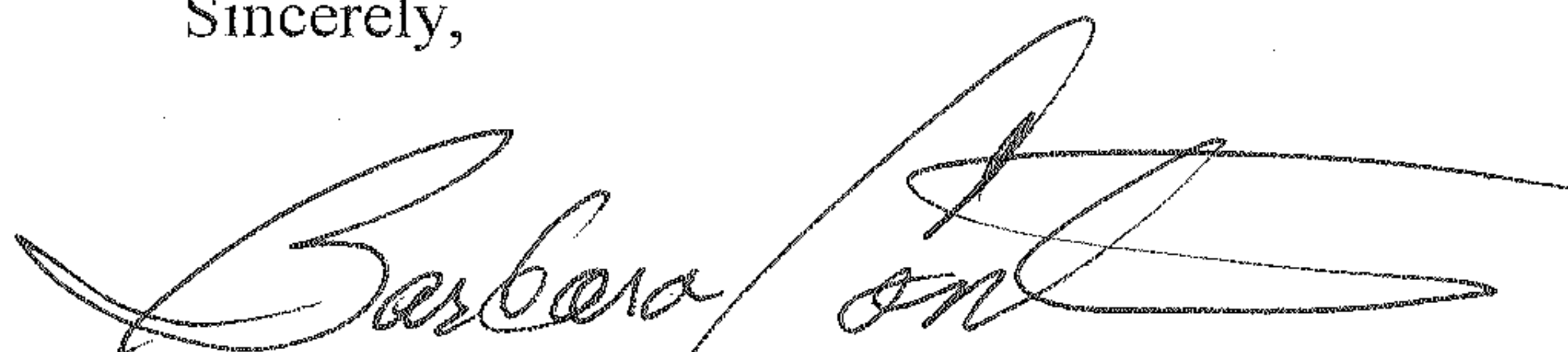
Your Honor and Madam Foreperson:

The 2003-2004 Marin County Civil Grand Jury in the report entitled "School Administration—Is the Cost Too High?" raises a question that is a constant concern for school district trustees, parents, teachers, administrators and the general public. 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 said 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.

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.

Thank you for your interest and support of public education in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Barbara Contini". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Barbara Contini, (President
Nicasio School Board

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

- F1. Finding:** The County Office of Education, while producing numerous statistical reports using 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. As mentioned in the report, the Nicasio district uses the Marin County Office of Education for business services and the district is unable to create a countywide report. We appreciate the efforts of the Marin County Office of Education and review the statistical bulletins.
- 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.
- 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 kids. 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.

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 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: The report generated by the Task Force on Cost Effective Opportunities for Sharing Resources in 2003-2004 agreed with the finding. The Nicasio School District also agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R2. Recommendation: **Every School District should ensure that it accurately codes expenses to conform with the functional system.**

Response: The recommendation will be implemented. The Marin County Office of Education provides business services for our district.

R3. Recommendation: **Every School District should analyze its breakdown of expenses for all functional categories.**

Response: The recommendation will be implemented. The Marin County Office of Education provides business services for our district and will be making the reports available.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Contini, President
Nicasio School District