



NOVATO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dr. Jan La Torre-Derby
Superintendent

August 16, 2004

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

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

Your Honor and Madam Foreperson,

Thank you for completing the extensive report entitled, "School Administration – Is the Cost too High?" As the Superintendent in the largest district in Marin County that consolidated in 1965, I found your report to be accurate and the recommendations sound. Talk of consolidation is challenging due to the nature of ownership in each small district. However, I do believe your report will trigger some exciting conversation for the smaller districts to pursue cost savings measures. Our 19 school districts do share services, and cost savings is a direct result. However, I do believe consolidation would further enhance cost savings.

I have provided responses to Findings 1 – 4 and Recommendations to 2 and 3 as requested. Marin County Office of Education and our individual districts provide a wide variety of information regarding the budget to our constituents. If enhancement is needed, we would be happy to provide whatever would clarify budget allocations and expenditures.

Thank you for your extensive interest and work in public education. I consider it the corner stone of our democracy and look forward to continued state, federal and local support. Our communities have stepped forward time and again through PTA, School Foundations, Parcel Taxes and Bond Measure to support public education. For this I am grateful.

Please call me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jan La Torre-Derby".

Jan La Torre-Derby, Ed.D.
Superintendent

"An Equal Opportunity Employer"

**RESPONSES FROM THE NOVATO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT
TO THE FINDING 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 Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) provides extensive, detailed information to districts. Whenever additional information is needed they are responsive and accommodating. I am certain that if function codes were requested, MCOE would be more than willing to provide what is requested.

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

Response Novato Unified School District allocates a significant percentage of its budget to students rather than administration. Based on State required ratios, it is evident NUSD has fewer administrators than the California Department of Education allows. Therefore, administrative costs are reasonable and appropriate.

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

Response: I am a proponent of unification when districts come together for a common cause, with similar goals of consolidation in mind. Mutual interest is required if the consolidation to succeed as it did in Novato in 1965, and twenty years later, in 1985, for San Anselmo and Fairfax. I do believe there would be an administrative savings if consolidation were to occur.

The Marin County Office of Education has made an effort to consolidate six small districts under their supervision. I consider this a step in the right direction. Other small districts should follow suit and experience cost savings.

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

The data provided by the California Department of Education supports your comments in Finding 4.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R2. Recommendation: Every school district should ensure that it accurately codes expenses to conform with the functional system.

Response I agree. Functional systems coding could further clarify expenditures for districts.

R3. Recommendation: Every school district should analyze its breakdown of expenses for all functional categories.

Response I agree. Analyzing expenses by functional code is extremely helpful.