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September 2004

Hon. Terrance R. Boren
Marin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 4988
San Rafael, California 94913-4988

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

Subject: Response to Grand Jury Inquiry
"School Administration - Is the Cost Too High"

Your Honor and Madam Foreperson:

I am writing in response to the Grand Jury inquiry " School Administration - Is the Cost Too High" dated June 10, 2004. We share the interest of the Grand Jury in attempting to make sure that our Elementary and High School Districts are making the most of the resources they have with the intent of delivering the highest quality education for all our students.

As you know, The San Rafael City Schools comprises two districts under one central administration and board. The High School District provides instruction for approximately 2,000 students and serves the San Rafael Elementary District as well as the Dixie School District. It is a "basic aid district" securing its support from local property taxes. The San Rafael Elementary District provides instruction for approximately 3,500 students and is a "revenue limit district" and is therefore dependent upon the State's formula for average daily attendance (ADA) for its financial support.

The Grand Jury's review of budgetary data in Marin County showed that unified districts such as Novato and Shoreline spent approximately 7% of their total budgets on central administration while the County's elementary and high school districts generally ranged between 8 and 11%. The report questioned the data for San Rafael Elementary District which they found to be an apparently low 5% while the High School District data showed an apparently high 11%. The Grand Jury report states that the Jury "... could not determine whether [the difference] is a statistical coincidence or the result of an inequitable distribution of shared expenses."

We have looked carefully at the data used by the Grand Jury as well as other data reflecting the same activities and have made the following observations:

1. The Grand Jury used data from the adopted budgets in 2003-04 as the basis of comparison.

2. We found the reality of 2003-04 and other years for our districts was better represented by the "actuals" or year-end final data which shows the actual expenditures rather than what was originally budgeted.
3. Our examination of the budget information using the 2003-04 actuals shows the following:
 - The percentage of the Elementary District Budget spent on district administration (Function 7000) is 4.85%
 - The percentage of the High School District Budget spent on district administration (Function 7000) is 8.75%.
 - If the budgets of both districts are combined, the overall percentage spent on district administration is approximately 7%. (We looked at data across several years and while 2003-04 was lower than 7%, the combined figures across years showed this average.)
4. The apparent inequality between districts is explained by the fact that the budgets are disproportionate while the comparison of amounts spend on district administration is made by using a percentage of the whole.
 - The cost of district administration is generally divided equally between our two Districts.
 - The Elementary District budget, based on its enrollment of approximately 3500 students is approximately 38% higher than the High School District budget with an enrollment of approximately 2000.
 - Approximately equal portions of District administration will appear unequal when shown as percentages of very different totals.
 - In fact, the total district administration costs (approximately 7%) compare favorably with the County's unified districts.

As stated above, we share the interest of the Grand Jury in ensuring that our students get the maximum benefit from the resources we have. We also agree with the arguments expressed by the Report that smaller districts achieve greater community identification and support. Given our demographics, we believe the administrative organization of the San Rafael City Schools achieves the highest priorities of efficiency and economy while retaining responsiveness and personalization to the needs of our students and community.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further information you may require.

Sincerely,



Gregg Bender
Associate Superintendent

cc: Laura Alvarenga
Board of Education
Mary Jane Burke