

Response to Grand Jury Report "Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report – Part 4
Gold Street Education Center - \$1.38M for What?"

Finding 1

The Gold Street Education Center will not improve watersheds, streams or the natural resources therein. It is not an Environmental Enhancement as described in Board Policy E-3.2.

Response: Respondent partially disagrees with the finding

When the proposed project was originally presented to the Board for consideration in 2002, it was described as an environmental enhancement project. Since that time, there has been greater understanding of what may constitute an environmental project and a subsequent need to develop a clearer understanding of the Board's Environmental Enhancement Policy (E-3.2).

The Board will be re-examining its current Policy E-3.2 in a work study session planned for September 2009. The policy discussion will address possible categorization of enhancement projects to more clearly define their character and intent. Possible categories could include environmental enhancements, restoration/preservation enhancements, recreational enhancements, and/or enhancements that improve public access.

Recommendation 1

Educational efforts should no longer be masqueraded as Environmental Enhancements. Irrespective of educational goals, the District should communicate with the public as to its full purpose and mission beyond water supply.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable

The District's educational efforts have never been masqueraded as Environmental Enhancements. The district has a long history of providing comprehensive public information and educational programs to targeted audiences such as water users, home and business owners at-risk from flooding, creekside neighbors, school-aged children and their teachers, creek clean-up volunteers, and direct customers of our services such as well owners, permit applicants, etc.

Finding 2a

None of the Directors interviewed had knowledge of the effectiveness or use of the Coyote Creek Outdoor classroom. It was originally expected to be used 20 times per year, but is only used an average of six times a year. The Morley Park outdoor classroom is used as a classroom five times a year.

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Attachment 4

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DAVID H. YAMASAKI
Chief Executive Officer/Dark,
Superior Court of CA County of Santa Clara
BY D. ALDYCKI

Response: Respondent partially disagrees with the finding

The Coyote Creek and Morley Park outdoor classrooms were built at a time when schools had greater flexibility and funding to schedule field trips. Federal “No Child Left Behind” regulations and corresponding state standards have increased the pressure on schools to adhere strictly to fundamental instruction, often at the expense of enrichment programming. The water district has adjusted its educational programs to sustain its reach in and outside of the classroom – continuing to educate more than 10,000 students per year.

Recommendation 2a

If the District’s goal is truly to educate the public, the educational content should be related to the District mission and Board policy should include clearly defined objectives and metrics.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented

The District’s FY 09/10 budget continues funding and states measurable outcomes for educating the public on the District’s mission through school-based outreach, customer relations and public relations as follows:

The District’s School Program is a comprehensive education outreach program for early childhood, elementary, middle school, high school and college-aged students including age-appropriate classroom presentations and tours, teacher in-service training in water education and the planning, development and promotion of water awareness programs and lessons. The program serves a diverse population, is aligned with state instructional standards and regularly integrates messages and issues of other water district communication programs.

Customer relations efforts educate the public of the District’s mission by connecting with the water district’s external customers served by the Water Utility Enterprise, Watershed Operations, and their respective capital projects. Key components of customer relations include: determining customer requirements, expectations, and preferences to ensure the continuing relevance of the organization’s services, and building relationships to better serve customers. Milestones include producing and sending various mailers to inform customers of work in local streams or recharge ponds, annual flood awareness and preparedness, maintenance updates for treatment plant operations or pipeline work, and groundwater production charge-setting process.

Education efforts include information campaigns to focus on critical issues such as water conservation and flood awareness, providing news stories to the media to inform the public, developing and distributing quarterly e-newsletters, and distributing annual countywide mailers.

Finding 2b

No estimates have been published as to how often the Gold Street Education Center would be used as a classroom.

Response: Respondent agrees with the finding

The Planning Study Report for the Gold Street Educational Center, presented to the Board for their consideration at the June 24, 2008 Board meeting, did not include this specific information. However, the report did state that the educational center would be open daily to the public, thus providing passive educational opportunities to any visitor in addition to serving as a destination site for school field trips. It would also serve as a link to adjacent recreational trails.

Recommendation 2b

The District should consider more cost-effective and creative educational channels. For example, as an alternative to the Gold Street Education Center, the District should consider partnering with the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge and Environmental Education Center and the Santa Clara County Marina. It should also explore outreach activities that reach all of Santa Clara County as a whole such as the Orange County Annual Children's Water Festival.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented

The District has cultivated partnerships with the above-mentioned organizations and many others in Santa Clara County, the Bay Area and throughout California. For more than 15 years, our school-based education program has reached all school districts in the county as well as institutions of higher learning such as San Jose State, Stanford, and Santa Clara universities. The District's education outreach coordinator is considered to be a statewide leader in the field whose methods and programs are emulated by others. Recently, staff at the state's Department of Water Resources characterized the Santa Clara Valley Water District, San Diego Water Authority, East Bay Municipal Water District and Metropolitan Water District as the *"...four water agencies that have School Education programs that have been around for many years and have been the leaders in the field."*

Finding 3

The majority of Directors interviewed was unsure whether the Gold Street Education Center had been approved, and none knew the source of funding.

Response: Respondent wholly disagrees with the finding

On June 24, 2008, staff presented the Gold Street Educational Center Planning Study Report to the Board for its consideration. The Board considered staff's report and adopted a Resolution stating the Board's intent to consider undertaking this work of improvement. In adopting the Resolution, the Board did not approve this project, but gave staff preliminary authorization to proceed with project design and to complete the CEQA evaluation and documentation process. To date, the Board has not taken further action on project approval.

The source of funding for this project was presented in the June 24, 2008 Board Agenda Memorandum and in staff's Planning Study Report.

Recommendation 3

The District should not expend further funds or resources on the Gold Street Education Center project.

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis

Consistent with Board Policy, the Board will seek and receive extensive public input prior to deciding whether to proceed with the project. The Board will then determine whether to expend further funds or resources on this proposed project. Staff is currently working on project design and completing the CEQA review and documentation. Staff will be requesting the Board to adopt the CEQA document and associated findings and approve the project in July 2009.

Finding 4

The GSEC site is at the entrance to the Summerset Mobile Estates, a mobile home park that has been owned for many years by the family of the Board member from District 3. In June, 2006, the same Board member recused himself, upon advice of District Counsel, from participating in any manner on the GSEC because his family owns property near the site. He had failed to recuse himself from voting on the GSEC at earlier Board meetings.

Response: Respondent agrees with the finding

The Board member did not acquire an ownership interest in the family property until fall 2005; no disqualification was required prior to that time.

Recommendation 4

No recommendation.