



Sunnyvale School District

819 West Iowa Avenue • P.O. Box 3217 • Sunnyvale, California 94088-3217

(408) 522-8200 • FAX: (408) 522-8338

Benjamin H. Picard, Ed.D., Superintendent

FILED

SEP 21 2010

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

September 17, 2010

Honorable Jamie Jacobs-May
Presiding Judge, Santa Clara County Superior Court
191 North First Street
San Jose, CA 95113

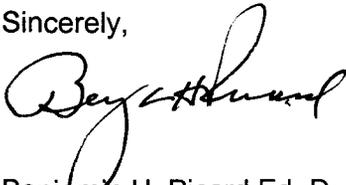
Re: Response to the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury Report: *Achieving School District Efficiency Through Consolidation*

Dear Judge Jacobs-May,

The Sunnyvale School District appreciates this opportunity to respond to Finding 1 and Recommendation 1c of the Final Report of the 2009-2010 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury entitled *Achieving School District Efficiency Through Consolidation*. The District provides its response in accordance with Penal Code section 933.05.

Should you have any questions related to this matter please do not hesitate to contact me at (408) 522-8200 ext. 202.

Sincerely,



Benjamin H. Picard Ed. D.
Superintendent

Board of Education

Sandy Agbayani • Jeffrey Arnett • Phyllis Fowler • Anita Herrmann • Nancy Newkirk

Finding 1

Education and financial benefits can be achieved by consolidation and unification of certain county school districts.

Response: The District respectfully disagrees with the breadth and general intent of this finding.

Consolidation and unification may provide opportunities for improvements to education and financial programs, but such improvements are not assured by reorganization and depend on the unique circumstances of the school districts involved. There are many examples in California of well-managed and efficient small and medium-sized school districts that use limited financial resources to provide their students extraordinary educational programs. There are also examples of large school districts that regularly encounter financial difficulties, frequently replace management teams, and struggle to provide their students adequate educational programs.

Economies of scale may be achieved in larger school districts, but smaller school districts also have opportunities to implement efficient administrative and contracting practices. Smaller school districts can maintain close contact and oversight among governing boards, administrative teams, instructional leaders, all staff members, and community members. Smaller school districts can take advantage of contract prices secured by larger entities through the CMAS program and “piggybacking” practices. Smaller school districts are also able to use technology or partnerships with other nearby school districts and educational entities to provide students a wide array of educational opportunities. Administrators in smaller school districts can effectively perform multiple roles because they know the community, needs, and staff members of the district well. A small scale allows for efficient and effective communication among staff members. Administrators are often able to maintain their roles as instructional leaders in small school districts, keeping a focus on the primary objective of delivering quality educational opportunities to students and constantly striving to improve their performance.

The Grand Jury acknowledges the great difficulty associated with unification and consolidation. The District does not believe that unification and consolidation produce education and financial benefits simply by the reorganization, and whether reorganization would produce such benefits depends on the circumstances of the particular school districts and communities that would be involved. School district size by itself does not result in educational and financial benefits. A thorough evaluation of multiple issues specific to the school districts to be involved in a potential unification or consolidation is necessary to determine potential benefits and potential losses that may result from the reorganization. The Grand Jury correctly acknowledges that, in accordance with the Education Code, consolidation and unification decisions rest with the affected communities and such decisions should be left to the discretion of those communities and their elected leaders to determine potential solutions that best address the challenge to provide high-quality public educational programs in an era of diminishing financial resources.

Recommendation 1c

The Boards of Trustees should unify Cupertino Union School District and Sunnyvale School District with Fremont Union High School District.

Board of Education

Sandy Agbayani • Jeffrey Arnett • Phyllis Fowler • Anita Herrmann • Nancy Newkirk

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

The Sunnyvale School District Board of Education does not agree that the proposed consolidation and unification would offer financial and education benefits to the residents, parents, and students of Sunnyvale School District. The District believes that it has already been able to implement many solutions, and will continue to do so, to achieve sound and efficient financial and educational practices across the District to effectively manage limited financial resources to offer District students high-quality educational programs.

The District does not believe that converting a growing, community-based elementary school district of ten schools and 6,400 students to become part of a consolidated district of over 34,000 students and 40 schools serving multiple cities would result in appreciable financial or educational gains for the District's constituency. In fact, the District believes that such consolidation may put many of the District's sound financial and educational practices, and the responsiveness and focus of the District's administrative and instructional team, at risk. The locally-elected District Board of Education believes that District students are better served educationally and economically by a school district governed and administered from within the city of residence of the students and their parents.

Sunnyvale School District is well managed and efficient. California as a state ranks well below national averages in terms of district officials or administrative ratio to the number of students and Sunnyvale School District compares favorably to existing statewide ratios. Recently, additional reductions to central administrative personnel and costs have been achieved. The most recent example was the elimination of the Deputy Superintendent position by attrition in February 2009 with duties reassigned. We believe it unlikely that meaningful additional savings in administrative expenses could be achieved through consolidation and unification of the three school districts.

California's public schools are under-funded and increasingly rely on local residents to supplement inadequate State and federal funding. Public schools in California are being financially starved by a very complex, inadequate, unstable and broken funding system. Among the states, California ranks near the bottom in annual funding per pupil. Because of the inadequate and unstable funding for public education, expenditure management has been the focus of California school districts and Sunnyvale School District for years. The Grand Jury's report focuses only on school district expenditure management, but does not address the critical issue of inadequate State funding levels to support quality public schools. In this era of diminishing State resources, school districts have frequently turned to their communities to support bond and parcel tax measures to supplement State and federal funding. The success of these measures often greatly depends on the trust that the local communities have that their local school districts are effectively using their financial resources to provide the best educational opportunities possible for the community's children. Sunnyvale School District has established and depended upon this trust of its local residents. Converting the District into a much larger entity that stretches across communities may well make maintaining that critical trust more difficult.

New resources would not necessarily become available through consolidation and unification. The Grand Jury assumes that there would be "newly available financial resources" resulting from consolidation and unification. This may not be realized in practice. The District believes it

Board of Education

Sandy Agbayani • Jeffrey Arnett • Phyllis Fowler • Anita Herrmann • Nancy Newkirk

already manages its limited resources efficiently and well to provide the best educational opportunities possible for its students, and the District is constantly evaluating its practices and striving for ways it can improve its performance. Only a thorough evaluation of the specific circumstances of the District and the other school districts to be involved in a consolidation and unification could reveal concrete benefits that may be achieved through reorganization and weigh those benefits against potential losses from the reorganization. The Grand Jury's study did not provide that information.

Consolidation does not assure new educational benefits. Having a District Board and administration that knows each school, the school's principal, and many teachers and parent leaders allows for the District to be very responsive and operate efficiently to address local needs. The District's Board and administrative team regularly evaluates and establishes open lines of communication to know of the support needed for each school's success and to be consistently responsive and supportive of students learning. The District establishes partnerships with other educational entities and nearby school districts to provide students a wide array of educational opportunities. Examples of such partnerships include: City of Sunnyvale-Columbia Neighborhood Center, Parks and Recreation and Public Safety. Partnerships have also been established with the Northwest YMCA, Stanford University, Community Health Awareness Council, Starting Arts, Santa Clara University, and San Jose State, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, El Camino Hospital and many others.

The Grand Jury Report did not address the demographics of local communities in the County. A board of education elected by a constituency of voters from within the community provides for responsive representation. Providing quality representation to a constituency spread across multiple city communities may prove challenging. Knowing parents, community members, teachers and staff personally is a critical attribute that allows for the District Board and administrative team to support and maintain a "learning for all" philosophy. The Grand Jury Report does not evaluate or review the possibility that many of the operational goals identified in the report may be practices already in place or are currently available to the school districts within the county.

For all of the foregoing reasons, the District believes that the proposed unification and consolidation would not meet the conditions established in Education Code section 35753 to provide that the respective districts are each organized on the basis of a substantial community identity, that the proposed reorganization will continue to promote sound education performance and will not significantly disrupt the education programs in the districts affected by the proposed reorganization, and that the proposed reorganization will continue to promote sound fiscal management and not cause a substantial negative effect on the fiscal status of the proposed district or any existing district affected by the proposed reorganization.

Board of Education

Sandy Agbayani • Jeffrey Arnett • Phyllis Fowler • Anita Herrmann • Nancy Newkirk