

“Sonoma County Office of Education – An Overview”

R1: SCOE must ensure that school districts do not sacrifice important programs or decrease the number of teacher’s aides as a way to balance the budget.

The Sonoma County Office of Education is in agreement with the Grand Jury’s findings that projected State budget cuts of 10 percent will impact art and music programs and possibly reduce the number of teachers’ aides.

The Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools, acting as an intermediate agent between the state and the districts in the county, is responsible for the fiscal oversight of districts in the county. As the fiscal oversight agency, the county superintendent provides management assistance and progressive intervention to districts whose financial condition requires such assistance and intervention. The first level of fiscal oversight remains with the board of education and administration of each district.

The assistance and intervention required by of the SCOE by the state does not allow the SCOE to prescribe or mandate the types of programs offered or staffing for any district in the county. It is at the district level that decisions are made on how to balance the district budget. Local school boards are accountable to the electorate in their district. Local school boards have the responsibility to determine what programs and staffing will best meet the needs of the students in the district.

R2: SCOE should explore the possibility of establishing an internship program for education majors at Sonoma State, Dominican college, and Santa Rosa Junior college to give student teachers classroom experience and allow them to assist teachers.

The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program is currently working with institutions of higher education through a regional network that already provides opportunities for student teachers and paraprofessional program participants placing them in classrooms throughout a seven-county region. BTSA program participants do assist classroom teachers through the development, implementation and assessment of classroom curriculum.

In addition, most institutions of higher education require at least forty (40) hours of field work observation prior to the actual student teaching assignment. This field work can and should be utilized to assist classroom teachers at school site not only to increase their knowledge of classroom instruction, but also to assist teachers who have experienced a decrease in or elimination of classroom teaching assistants. Representatives from all surrounding Institutions of Higher Education attend our quarterly Advisory Meetings through our Beginning Teachers Support and Assessment program and this recommendation on restructuring the field work experience will be placed on the agenda for discussion.

R3: The Sonoma County Board of Education should explore options to increase its effectiveness. The board represents a wealth of knowledge and needs to seek ways to change the paradigm of its work and increase its influence.

The Sonoma County Board of Education has always been vigilant with regard to its duties, responsibilities and effectiveness and better communicates this to the public. The Board is appreciative of the recognition by the Grand Jury of the knowledge base of the Sonoma County Board. The Board also appreciates the Grand Jury's vision of operational issues and the recommendation that would increase the role and influence of the County Board of Education. The County Board will continue its work with statewide educational groups and local legislators as one means to implement the recommendation to explore options to increase the role and effectiveness of the County Board.