



[Issue](#) | [Background](#) | [Findings](#) | [Conclusions](#) | [Recommendations](#) | [Responses](#) | [Attachments](#)

PERFORMANCE REVIEW: SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Issue

How well is the performance of the San Mateo County Office of Education (COE) perceived by its served school districts in San Mateo County (the County) and how accessible is COE information to the public?

Background

The COE directly employees approximately 650 regular and part-time employees and operates a budget with expenditures in excess of \$130 million.¹ The COE serves the twenty-three K-12 school districts in the County. The County Superintendent of Schools (County Superintendent) and the seven board members are elected.

The Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) decided to focus on how well the COE serves the school districts in the County. Further, the Grand Jury was also interested in the fiscal responsibility of the COE and the way it interfaces with the public.

County Offices of Education were created by the California State Legislature² to:

- Serve as liaison between the California Department of Education and the districts in the state
- Advise and assist school districts in managing their budgets and in saving taxpayer money
- Supervise and support school districts in complying with state and federal laws
- Provide numerous services to school districts—services that districts may not be able to offer on their own
- Educate groups of students not served by local school districts through the Juvenile Court and Community Schools and Special Education Programs
- Assist teachers by providing training opportunities, curriculum development and technology resources (See footnote 2)

The COE carries out a variety of mandates from both the federal government and the state, and receives funding from a variety of sources. An organizational chart of this multi-tasked office is attached. (See Attachment 1)

¹ “Partners in Educational Excellence,” San Mateo County Office of Education, p.4

² California Education Code: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/calawquery?codeaction=edc&codebody=&hits=20>

Investigation

The Grand Jury sent questionnaires to the twenty-three districts in the County to assess the performance of the COE. Twenty school districts responded. The Grand Jury also interviewed three COE senior administrators and two members of the County Board of Education. The Grand Jury also reviewed the education code that established county offices of education throughout California. Further, the Grand Jury reviewed websites of the San Mateo County Office of Education and other county offices of education.

Findings

A compilation of the responses to the questionnaire is attached. (See Attachment 2)

From the questionnaire the Grand Jury learned that:

- The County Superintendent of Schools was praised by everyone of the twenty districts responding.
- Seventy-five percent or more availed themselves of the COE's services.
- Some concerns and suggestions were raised by individual districts.

In addition to the questionnaire responses, the Grand Jury observed that the COE's website has been redesigned for better navigation since this investigation began. However, the budget and staff reports for County Board of Education meetings are not accessible on the COE website.³

Conclusions

The Grand Jury concludes:

1. The Superintendent of Schools and her team are broadly appreciated for effective and responsive leadership.
2. The services offered to the school districts by the County Office of Education are widely used.

There are some issues identified in the questionnaire that may need addressing.

The County Office of Education website has markedly improved since this investigation began, but there is a lack of transparency with respect to fiscal issues and staff reports provided to the Board of Education for their meetings.

³ <http://www.smcoe.k12.ca.us>

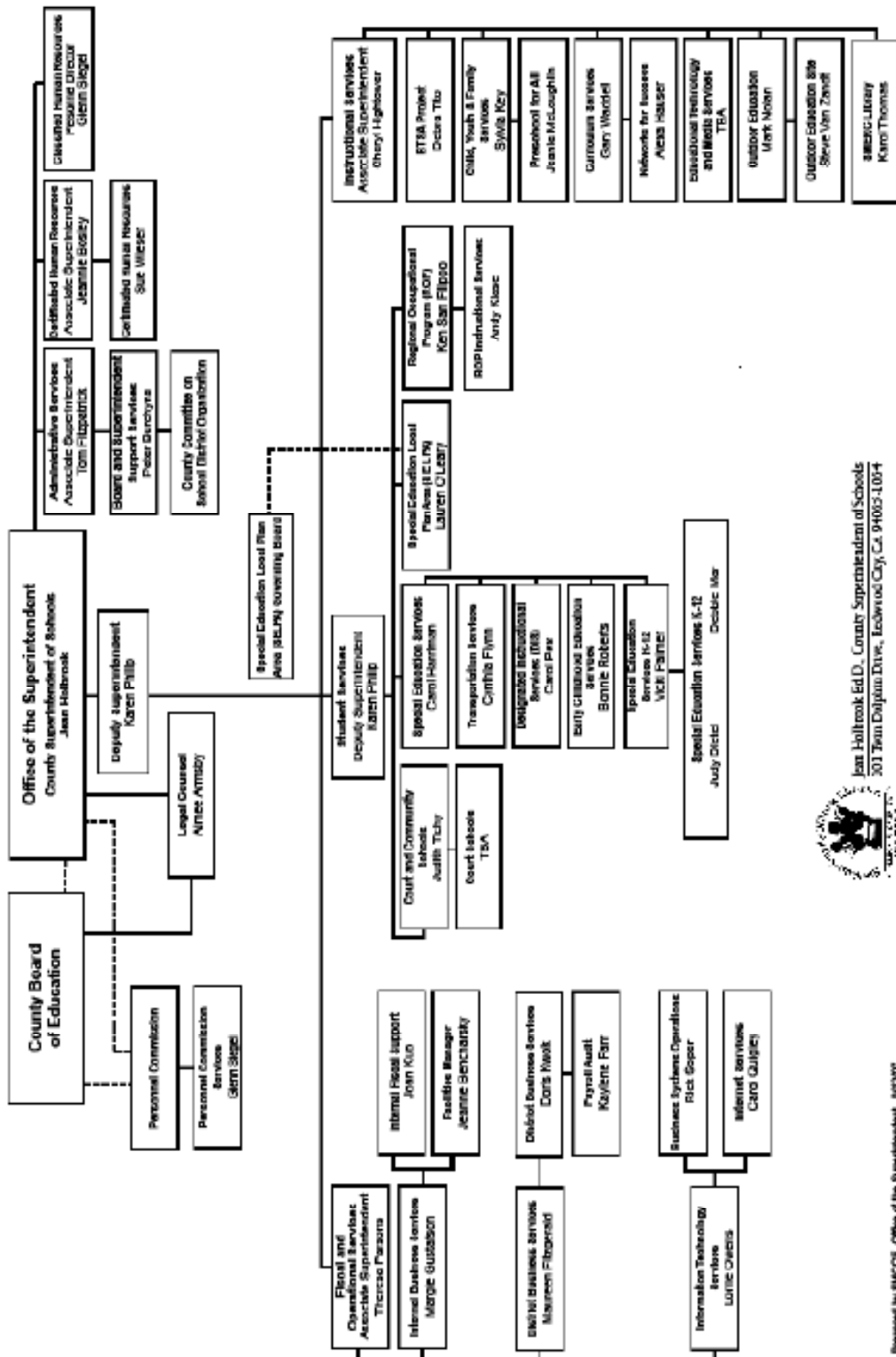
Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that the County Superintendent of Schools:

1. Provide budget information on the County Office of Education website as do other county offices of education.
2. Provide links to the staff reports for the Board of Education meetings so that the public can better understand the issues before the Board.
3. Discuss with the districts in the County the findings presented in the responses to the Grand Jury's questionnaire and implement appropriate solutions as agreed.

Attachment 1

San Mateo County Office of Education Organizational Chart - 2007



Jean Holtbrook Ed.D., County Superintendent of Schools
303 Twin Dolphin Drive, Redwood City, CA 94065-1004

Prepared by SACCS, Office of the Superintendent - 4/2007

Attachment 2

Compilation of Answers: from the Grand Jury's questionnaire sent in early 2008 to the Superintendents of twenty-three, K-12 San Mateo School Districts (20 of the 23 districts responded) (Pg. 1 of 2)

1. What services offered by the COE do you and your district use?

- a. Fiscal services - e.g. payroll, financial oversight – 20 of 20 use this service
- b. Teacher education and enrichment services – 17 of 20 use this service
- c. [Intentionally Omitted]
- d. Special education services – 18 of 20 use this service
- e. Educational enrichment for students – e.g. outdoor education – 16 of 20 use this service
- f. Regular administrator's meetings – 15 of 20 use this service
- g. Advice with respect to state and federal law, building guidelines and like. – 16 of 20 use this service
- h. Other Services Used:
 - Staff development
 - Recruiting and credentialing
 - Instructional services for math (pending) and science tool kits
 - Services regarding homeless requirements
 - Prevention services
 - Council for Instructional Development
 - Math Articulation Team
 - Science tool kit process
 - Math adoption tool kit on horizon
 - Help interpreting new mandates

2. What services should the COE supply that it does not supply now?

The following items were mentioned by at least one district:

- All state mandated training
- Better and more professional development, including new administrator training.
- Enhanced library support (plans, collections)
- Enhanced financial support (e.g. reports)
- Facilities and safety plan meetings
- Services for children with Limited Intellectual Functioning
- Employee tracking through California Education Computer Consortium
- Better dispute resolution
- More Regional Occupational Programming
- Assistance with hard-to-fill positions including speech and language personnel
- Instruction utilizing technology

3. From your District's perspective, please tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of the COE.

Strengths:

The COE Superintendent was appreciated for professional, client-oriented, responsive leadership

Financial services were generally lauded (but also, see below)

Weaknesses:

Problems noted with financial services include:

- Late fiscal services with respect to Community Day School
- Cost of Special education understated
- System's lack of updates and enhancements

Several districts cited weaknesses at some staffing levels below top leadership

Focus of the COE is too scattered

Many respondents are resigned to problems

Problems with special education mentioned include:

- Decreasing options
- High cost
- Lack of supportive software, better quality care for less cost is available with private placement (exception autism program and staff development good)



SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Jean Holbrook, Ed.D., County Superintendent of Schools

August 14, 2008

Honorable Joseph C. Scott
Judge of the Superior Court
Hall of Justice
400 County Center; 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

Dear Judge Scott:

This letter responds to the 2007-08 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury's Report entitled "Performance Review: San Mateo County Office of Education." I have reviewed the Performance Review and I concur with both the findings and the recommendations contained therein. I am providing this response as per the instructions of the Court Executive Officer.

Grand Jury Findings: The Grand Jury report contains four distinct findings which I will address individually.

Finding 1: "The County Superintendent of Schools was praised by everyone of the twenty districts responding."

I agree with the finding. As the county superintendent of schools, one of my highest priorities is to maintain a productive working relationship with every school district in the county. The Grand Jury finding indicates that efforts are successful. I am pleased and gratified by the Grand Jury finding.

Finding 2: "Seventy-five percent or more availed themselves of the COE's services."

I agree with the finding. Over the course of any given fiscal year, the County Office of Education provides multiple services to every district in the county. The Grand Jury questionnaire asked about a number of the services offered and obtained useful feedback on recent usage of some of our primary services.

Finding 3: “Some concerns and suggestions were raised by individual districts.”

I agree with the finding. Surveying the districts with a questionnaire is a useful way to solicit expression of concerns and suggestions from the districts. The County Office of Education also solicits expression of concerns and suggestions at regular meetings with the superintendents and staff representatives from the districts and by maintaining active two-way communications with the districts. The concerns and suggestions expressed by districts in response to the Grand Jury questionnaire were excellent examples of the types of concerns and suggestions continuously identified and addressed through on-going communication between the County Office and the districts.

Finding 4: “The Grand Jury observed that the COE’s website has been redesigned for better navigation since this investigation began. However, the budget and staff reports for County Board of Education meetings are not accessible on the COE website.”

I agree with the finding. Those features were not available on the website at the time the Grand Jury report was written. This finding has been addressed (see response under “Recommendations” below.)

Grand Jury Recommendations: The Grand Jury report contains three distinct recommendations. I will address these individually.

Recommendation 1: “Provide budget information on the County Office of Education website as do other county offices of education.”

The recommendation has been implemented. The adopted 2008-09 budget is now posted on the County Office of Education website at www.smcoe.k12.ca.us under the quick link “2008-2009 Adopted Budget.”

Recommendation 2: “Provide links to the staff reports for the Board of Education meetings so that the public can better understand the issues before the Board.”

The recommendation has been implemented. Staff reports for the Board of Education meetings are now posted with the board agendas and minutes on the County Office of Education website at www.smcoe.k12.ca.us under the quick link “Board Meeting Agendas and Minutes.”

Recommendation 3: “Discuss with the districts in the County the findings presented in the responses to the Grand Jury’s questionnaire and implement appropriate solutions as agreed.”

The recommendation is being implemented. Copies of the findings will be distributed to County Office staff and to each district. On-going discussions and solutions involving the districts and the County Office of Education will now include the

findings from the Grand Jury report. I have agendized a discussion of the report at a countywide meeting with district superintendents scheduled for September 19, 2008.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jean Holbrook".

Jean Holbrook, Ed.D.
San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools

JH

Copy: San Mateo County Board of Education
John C. Fitton, Court Executive Office
grandjury@sanmateocourt.org (via email)