



Court and Community Schools

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Issue

How does San Mateo County provide educational services for high school-aged juveniles that have been detained on legal charges or expelled from local districts?

Summary

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) is responsible for educating juveniles who are detained at the Youth Services Center for criminal offenses (Court Schools). The SMCOE also offers a Community Schools program for students expelled from school districts within the County or resulting from a Court order. Approximately 1,500 students attend the Court or Community Schools during the year, although only about 290 at any one time.

During the course of its investigation, the Grand Jury learned about the complexity of administering and managing the Court and Community School programs. The SMCOE operates three Community School campuses with a total of 118 students, and two Court Schools with about 175 students at any one time. Two of the Community Schools employ one teacher each. The Grand Jury found that few courses at the Community Schools are taught by “highly qualified” teachers. The Grand Jury also found that the Court and Community Schools are not Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accredited. In addition, the Grand Jury learned there is limited ongoing quantitative assessment of the performance of the Court and Community School programs.

The Grand Jury recommends that the SMCOE consolidate the three Community schools into one campus, evaluate whether WASC accreditation for the schools would be a good use of resources and establish measures of overall program performance.

The Grand Jury commends the staff of the Court and Community Schools for the obvious dedication they exhibit to student progress in spite of challenging circumstances.

Background

The 23 public school districts in San Mateo County enroll approximately 90,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. During the course of a school year, the Court and Community School programs serve approximately 2 percent of the students in the County.

San Mateo County school districts offer a range of options for expelled pupils depending on the unique needs of the individual students. Examples include an independent study program, placement in an adult school, continuation school or community college and referral to the County’s Community School Program. For expelled students, the SMCOE operates the County’s three Community Schools in South San Francisco, San Mateo and Redwood City. For detained juveniles, the SMCOE operates the Court Schools at the Youth Services Center in San Mateo and at Camp Glenwood in La Honda.

According to the SMCOE Single Plan for Student Achievement, the mission of the Court and Community Schools is “to empower students to become responsible and productive members of the community by providing learning opportunities in academic skills, independent life skills, positive self-concepts and effective relationships with others.”¹ While the goal of the Court and Community Schools is to prepare students for successful return to their school district of residence, students also have the opportunity to complete a course of study leading to a high school diploma or testing for the General Education Development (GED) or the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE).

Of the 293 students enrolled on a typical day in 2011, 77 percent were socioeconomically disadvantaged, 18 percent were English learners, 89 percent were non-Caucasian and 32 percent had learning disabilities.² To address this diversity, all Court and Community School teachers are certified to teach English Language Learners (ELL). At in-take, the Court and Community Schools work with feeder school districts to identify students who are ELL and determine appropriate services for the student. Also at the time of enrollment, if a student is identified as needing Special Education, his or her Individualized Educational Program (IEP) is reviewed to determine how the Court and Community School program can best support his or her educational needs. Given the transitory nature of students attending Court and Community Schools, approximately 1,500 students attend at some time during the year.

Every incoming student is assessed using a computer-based testing system called the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP). The MAP results, together with an analysis of the student’s academic transcript from the feeder district, allow the Court and Community Schools to determine the student’s appropriate grade levels in reading and mathematics and identify any academic areas where the student needs additional support. Students are then assessed quarterly using MAP to track progress. The schools track the number of core curriculum credits students earn. Most students who enter the Court and Community Schools are deficient in the number of credits and not on track to graduate. Students who are 17 when they enter the Court and Community Schools and are significantly behind in credits for graduation have the option of enrolling in an Independent Study Program to study for the GED test. Special tutoring in relevant topics is provided and the GED test is administered on-site.

As was noted, the Court and Community Schools track course credits earned to assess individual student progress while enrolled there. From interviews, the Grand Jury learned there is no formal ongoing assessment of the overall Court and Community School program based upon student credits earned or any other meaningful academic performance measure. The SMCOE does produce a School Accountability Report Card with many of the same metrics mainstream high schools report, but most of these are not particularly relevant to the Court and Community Schools and there do not appear to be established performance goals documented anywhere.

In addition to core subjects, students participate in a range of electives, both during and after school and on weekends, offered in conjunction with County Probation and the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Peninsula. The electives, depending on location, include life skills, sustainable

¹ <http://www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/StudentServicesDivision/CourtSchoolsProgram/Documents/SPSA%2010-11.pdf>

² <http://www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/StudentServicesDivision/CommunitySchoolProgram/Documents/SARcccs1011.pdf>

gardening, money skills and college preparation. The Court and Community Schools also offer a Special Education Resource program to support the IEPs and non-academic instruction on employment skills and independent living skills. Students can also take advantage of the SMCOE Regional Occupational Program, which provides coursework in career areas such as auto body repair, and business office and computer skills. Counseling is available related to substance abuse, speech/language, mental health and educational issues and goals.

Students have access to most recently approved textbooks. Internet access has restrictions in order to minimize abuse. Laboratory equipment and facilities are not available for science instruction.

Court Schools

Law enforcement refers juveniles (ages 13-17) who have committed or who are alleged to have committed a criminal offense to the San Mateo County Youth Services Center (YSC) for detention. The California Education Code §§48645-48646 mandates that the County provides educational services for juveniles in detention. Juveniles may be enrolled in the Court School for a minimum of a few days up to the termination of their detention, which can be years.

The SMCOE operates two Court Schools, one serving youths in detention at the YSC in San Mateo and the other at Camp Glenwood in La Honda. The YSC is a secure facility for youths awaiting a hearing or for court ordered placement. The average stay at the YSC, and thus the Court School, is 29 days. Camp Glenwood is a Boys' Ranch where young men reside for up to seven months. School is held 48 weeks per year at both locations.

Attendance at Court School may be interrupted due to medical treatment, segregation issues (gang or other high risk), court appearances or meetings with legal representation.

The population of the Court School changes daily. There is a complex process for admitting and evaluating detained juveniles, assessing their scholastic needs, testing, obtaining transcripts and assessing any special needs (both safety and educational). This process must be conducted under a compressed timeline, with varying degrees of interest and cooperation on the part of students. Time for education is limited during the day, and students are well aware of the limited period they will be at the YSC. Setting and achieving academic goals is challenging at best.

Community Schools

While the State Code of Education mandates Court School for juveniles in detention, there is no such mandate requiring the County to establish specialized schools for expelled students or juveniles on probation. California Education Code §48918 dictates that the governing board of each school district shall establish rules and regulations governing procedures for the expulsion of pupils. It requires expelled students who continue education to do so at an off-campus location. School districts within San Mateo County generally expel relatively few students during the course of a school year. Providing a special class or program for such students in each school district is not financially or geographically feasible. Additionally, these students vary in age, grade level, and expulsion offenses, making it difficult for individual school districts to provide them with appropriate programs. As a service to the County's school districts, the SMCOE elected to offer a non-residential Community School option for students expelled or on

Court-ordered probation. Students are enrolled for a minimum of one semester, and may complete high school studies within the Community School.

San Mateo County individual school districts refer some or all of their expelled students (ages 13-19) to the SMCOE Community Schools. During the term of expulsion, Community Schools offer instruction in both a classroom setting and independent study in order to assist juveniles in continuing progress toward high school completion or GED testing.

Between 2007 and 2011, the student population in the County's Community Schools increased from 93 to 118 while the number of Community School campuses was reduced from seven to three.³ The North Community School in South San Francisco and Central Community School in Redwood City had enrollments of 13 and 14 students respectively in 2011-2012. Each school has one teacher and one paraeducator (instructional aide). The County Probation Department also provides each Community School with a Group Supervisor to aid with school safety. The North and Central Community Schools each occupy a single room in Boys and Girls Club buildings. Student transportation is not provided but public transportation is available to the sites. The Gateway Community School in San Mateo serves about 84 students at any given time with four teachers, three aides and three Group Supervisors. Although the primary focus of the Community Schools is to prepare students to be successful so that they may return to the district school of their residence, the SMCOE does not track or set goals related to the portion of students who return to their district school or achieve other positive academic outcomes, such as earning a GED credential.

One of the challenges that alternative education programs like Community Schools face is how to provide opportunities for meaningful parent involvement when only 7-11 percent of the students remain in the program more than 90 days. In the Community School, involvement currently includes participation in the student enrollment process, student IEPs, a graduation ceremony, and special events.

Teacher and School Certification

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 places a major emphasis on the impact of teacher quality on student achievement. The law mandated that, by the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers should be "highly qualified," meaning that they hold a Bachelor's degree, have a state credential or an intern certificate and have demonstrated "core" academic subject matter competence via standardized testing. Given the small size of the North and Central Community Schools and the fact that there is just one teacher per school, it has been very difficult to staff these schools with "highly qualified" teachers. This is because there are few individual teachers who are certified in all of the core areas, including English, Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Foreign Language, Civics/Government, Economics, Arts, History and Geography. Fewer than 20 percent of courses in the Community Schools were taught by "highly qualified" teachers in 2010-2011, as compared to 100% in the Court School⁴. The SMCOE, in its 2011-2012 Court and Community Schools Single Plan for Student Achievement, states a goal of ensuring all teachers are "highly qualified" and expects to have over 80% qualified by the end of

³ Court and Community Schools Program, The Single Plan for Student Achievement, 2011-2012, SMCOE

⁴ School Accountability Report Card, Court and Community School, 2010-2011, SMCOE

the 2012-2013 school year. From interviews the Grand Jury learned that the SMCOE is considering consolidation of the Community School campuses into one site. This would facilitate reaching the goal of all teachers being considered highly qualified. Under this consolidation plan, the SMCOE would provide bus transportation from the current North and Central Community School sites to the Gateway Community School Site in San Mateo. After-school programs would continue to be conducted at the current North and Central Community School sites.

The University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) campuses require incoming freshman to have completed a series of certified high school courses called the “a-g” course requirements. In December 2002, UC faculty approved a policy that requires all California public and private high schools to be Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accredited (or a candidate for accreditation) in order to establish and/or maintain an "a-g" course list. Coursework at the Court and Community Schools has not been WASC accredited. Thus, if a student does complete his or her high school coursework at the Court or Community School, he or she would not be eligible for UC / CSU admission, regardless of performance.

Given that as of 2010-2011, according to the California High School Exit Examination, only 12% of Court and Community School students were proficient or advanced in English Language Arts and mathematics, there are likely few students seeking the opportunity to continue their education at UC or CSU⁵. WASC accreditation may also be valuable to high schools, however, because it provides a process for self-evaluation in areas such as student learning and instruction, curriculum, assessment and accountability and school organization. The process for attaining WASC accreditation is extensive and resource intensive. Any school considering such an accreditation process must weigh the time and resources involved against the expected benefits for students and the school.

Funding and Sources of Revenue

Funding and identifying revenue sources are challenges for all public schools, including Court and Community Schools. As with all revenue limit schools, state funding for the Court and Community Schools is tightly linked to school attendance. This creates a particular challenge for the Court and Community Schools due to the following:

- Attendance at Court and Community School is constantly in flux due to the transitory nature of the student population.
- Community Schools enrollment tends to increase through the school year as students are expelled from mainstream schools.
- While attendance may be mandated as part of probation, non-probation expelled students often have attendance issues. From interviews, the Grand Jury learned that typical daily attendance in Community Schools is about 80% of enrolled students. The primary revenue source for the Community Schools is state funding that is driven by the average daily attendance (ADA). So while the Community Schools must have and pay for

⁵ School Accountability Report Card, Court and Community Schools Program, 2010-2011, SMCOE

facilities, teachers and supplies commensurate with the total enrollment, their primary funding is set according to the approximately 80% of enrolled students actually attending school each day.

Complicating the financial picture further, and unlike school districts, the County Office of Education cannot issue revenue bonds to fund new facilities or services for the Community Schools. Funding must be allocated by the County or derived from grants, in addition to ADA funding.

Investigation

To investigate education for at-risk youth, the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury visited Court and Community School sites, conducted interviews with representatives from the San Mateo County Office of Education and the County Probation Department and reviewed related documents and reports such as:

Court and Community Schools Program Single Plan for Student Achievement
Court and Community Schools School Accountability Report Card
SMCOE Local Education Agency Plan
Countywide Plan for Provision of Educational Services to Expelled Students.

Findings

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury finds:

1. Fewer than 20 percent of the core academic courses in the Community Schools were taught by “highly qualified” teachers in the 2010-2011 school year. The SMCOE has plans to increase that percentage.
2. The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) is considering consolidation of the three Community School sites to one campus at the Gateway site in order to more effectively utilize facilities, teaching resources and funding. This would also provide the opportunity to increase the percentage of courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers.
3. Currently, the Court and Community Schools assess individual student progress by tracking the number of credits earned per student. The schools do not summarize earned credit data across students or set other meaningful measures to evaluate overall performance of the Court and Community School programs.
4. The SMCOE does not track the number of Community School students who return to their district school of residence or achieve other meaningful academic outcomes, such as earning a GED credential.
5. The Court and Community schools are not Western Association of Schools and Colleges accredited

Conclusions

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury concludes that:

1. Consolidation of the three Community School sites into one site makes sense in order to make better use of scarce funding and to enable the program to utilize highly qualified teachers for most or all its courses.
2. The Court and Community Schools should collect aggregate student data on course credits earned as one measure of overall program effectiveness. Student outcomes, such as successfully returning to district schools of residence or earning a GED credential, should be tracked and related program goals should be established.
3. If there are students in the Court and Community Schools who aspire to attend college after completing high school, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation of the schools would enable the students to be considered for admission by UC/CSU. WASC accreditation may also provide a process for self-evaluation in areas such as student learning and instruction, curriculum, assessment and accountability and school organization. However, the SMCOE should weigh the benefits of attaining accreditation, given the substantial time and effort that would be required and the relatively few students who would be likely to benefit. It should be noted that students aspiring to attend UC/CSU can do so by attending a Community College first.
4. The staff of the Court and Community Schools operates under very challenging circumstances and are to be commended for their dedication and serious attention to student progress.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that the Superintendent of the San Mateo County Office of Education:

1. Consolidate the three community schools into one central campus location and increase the number of core academic courses taught by No Child Left Behind-defined "highly qualified" teachers in preparation for the 2012-2013 school year.
2. Establish and periodically review performance measures of the Court and Community School program. Consider including the number of course credits earned per student /semester as one element and metrics related to student outcomes such as successful return to district schools of residence or GED credential earned.
3. Evaluate whether embarking on the process of Western Association of School and Colleges accreditation is in the best interest of the Court and Community Schools in light of the value to students to gain direct entrance to UC or CSU campuses and the significant resources that would be required to attain such accreditation.



SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Anne E. Campbell, County Superintendent of Schools

September 5, 2012

Hon. Gerald J. Buchwald
Judge of the Superior Court
Hall of Justice
400 County Center, 8th Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

Dear Judge Buchwald,

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) has received and reviewed the 2011-12 Grand Jury Report on Court and Community Schools. We appreciate the care and time taken by the Grand Jury to gain an understanding of the SMCOE Court and Community Schools.

Response to Findings

1. *Fewer than 20 percent of the core academic courses in the Community Schools were taught by “highly qualified” teachers in the 2010-11 school year. The SMCOE has plans to increase that percentage.*

SMCOE agrees with the need to increase the percentage of “highly qualified” teachers in the Community School academic courses. However, SMCOE data for 2010-11 indicate a different percentage than the “20 percent” cited in the Grand Jury Report for core academic courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers in the Community Schools. SMCOE data show that 53 percent of core academic teachers were so classified, including 63 percent for English/Language Arts, 50 percent for Mathematics, 29 percent for Science, and 71 percent for Social Studies.

2. *The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) is considering consolidation of the three Community School sites to one campus at the Gateway site in order to more effectively utilize facilities, teaching resources and funding. This would also provide the opportunity to increase the percentage of courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers.*

SMCOE agrees that consolidation of the three sites onto one campus would provide more effective utilization of facilities, teaching resources, and funding, and would increase the percentage of courses taught by “highly qualified” teachers.

3. *Currently, the Court and Community Schools assess individual student progress by tracking the number of credits earned per student. The schools do not summarize earned credit data across students or set other meaningful measures to evaluate overall performance of the Court and Community School programs.*

Currently, the Court and Community Schools assess individual student progress through a pre and post assessment tool, individual class work, projects and tests, passage of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), achievement on Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) tests and, in appropriate cases, the passage of the General Educational Development Test (GED). Credits earned are tracked and added to student transcripts.

4. *The SMCOE does not track the number of Community School students who return to their district school of residence or achieve other meaningful academic outcomes, such as earning a GED credential.*

The SMCOE Court and Community Schools and the San Mateo County Probation Department staff do assist students in returning to district schools, however, this data has not been collected as a performance measure. GED test passage is also tracked individually, but has not been collected as an overall performance measure.

5. *The Court and Community schools are not Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accredited.*

SMCOE agrees that the Court and Community schools are not WASC accredited.

Response to Recommendations

1. *Consolidate the three community schools into one central campus location and increase the number of core academic courses taught by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) defined "highly qualified" teachers in preparation for the 2012-13 school year.*

SMCOE has consolidated the three community school campuses onto one central campus at the Gateway site on Tower Road for the 2012-13 year. This has increased the number of core academic courses taught by NCLB "highly qualified" teachers. For 2012-13, that percentage is 82 percent, including 100 percent in English/Language Arts, 100 percent in Mathematics, 29 percent in Science, and 100% in Social Studies.

2. *Establish and periodically review performance measures of the Court and Community School program. Consider including the number of course credits earned per student/semester as one element and metrics related to student outcomes such as successful return to district schools of residence or GED credential earned.*

Court and Community School Staff are exploring data collection options to track individual measures in order to use them for a collective performance measure. Currently, the Court and Community Schools assess individual student progress

through a pre and post assessment tool, individual class work, projects and tests, passage of the CAHSEE, achievement on STAR tests and, in appropriate cases, the passage of the GED. Credits earned are tracked and added to student transcripts.

3. *Evaluate whether embarking on the process of Western Association of School and Colleges accreditation is in the best interest of the Court and Community Schools in light of the value to students to gain direct entrance to UC or CSU campuses and the significant resources that would be required to attain such accreditation.*

SMCOE believes that WASC accreditation provides an opportunity for the Court and Community Schools to engage in a self-evaluative process that will help improve the instructional program for students and that will promote professional growth among the staff members. While WASC accreditation is important for UC or CSU consideration, it also provides a variety of other benefits. In answer to the Why Accreditation? question, WASC provides the following reasons why embarking upon the accreditation process is worthwhile:

- Improvement of the school's programs and operations to support student learning
- Assurance to the community that the school's purposes are appropriate and being accomplished through a viable educational program
- Opportunity to manage change through regular assessment, planning, implementing, monitoring and reassessment
- Validation of the integrity of a school's program and student transcripts
- Assistance in establishing priority areas for improvement as a result of the perpetual accreditation cycle that includes
 - School self-assessment of the current educational program for students
 - Insight and perspective from the visiting committee
 - Regular school staff assessment of progress through the intervening years between full self-studies.

SMCOE will embark upon a WASC accreditation for the Court and Community Schools in 2012-13 because it will help improve instructional and support services to students.

Again, we appreciate the Grand Jury's careful study of the SMCOE Court and Community Schools over the past year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any additional information.

Very truly yours,



Anne E. Campbell
San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools