

A Report of the 2003-2004 Civil Grand Jury
For the City and County of San Francisco

**COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:
POOR STEPCCHILDREN
OF THE SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Released June 2004

Reports of the Civil Grand Jury do not identify the individuals interviewed, pursuant to California Penal Code sec. 929, which in part, the name of any person, or facts that reveals the identity of any person who provided information to the Grand Jury, shall not be released. The California Legislature intended this provision to encourage full candor and cooperation by City and County personnel.

Parties identified in the report must respond to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within the number of days specified, with a copy sent to the Board of Supervisors. As to each finding of the Grand Jury, the response must either (1) agree with the finding, or (2) disagree with it, wholly or partially, and explain why. Further, as to each recommendation made by the Grand Jury, the responding party must report either (1) that the recommendation has been implemented, with a summary explanation of how it was; (2) the recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation; (3) the recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation of the scope of that analysis and a timeframe for the officer or agency head to be prepared to discuss it (less than six months from the release of this Report); or (4) the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable, with an explanation of why that is. (Cal. Penal Code, secs. 933, 933.05.)

Summary of Recommendations

1. SFUSD should move immediately to relocate the Phoenix School away from its crime-ridden address on Mission Street and insure that all other locations are safe.
2. The Superintendent and the School Board should make every effort to establish equity in the per-student allotments to both city and county schools. Creating two separate budgets would eliminate confusion and would be in keeping with two separate administrations.
3. SFUSD should, with increased funding that would be provided by the State of California, make plans to upgrade the County Community Schools program to the more challenging Community Day Schools program.
4. SFUSD should educate administrators, School Board members, the general public about the mission, needs, potential and amazing successes of The County Community Schools.

GLOSSARY

SFUSD – San Francisco Unified School District

CCS – County Community Schools (County’s current program)

CDS – Community Day Schools (proposed upgraded program for county schools)

CGJ – Civil Grand Jury

wrap-around services – Provided by community-based health and social service agencies to continue and/or enhance SFUSD’s services.

OVERVIEW

The San Francisco Unified School District has a website, www.sfusd.edu. Supposedly, it has all the information about the city/county schools one might ever need. There is one glaring omission. There is not a single word about the eighteen County Community Schools. As a result, unless you are a suspended or expelled student or the parent of a problem child, you probably don’t know that there are such schools. Except for this brief description in the handout, San Francisco Unified School District’s “Enrollment Guide: Excellence for All, 2004/2005,” page 79, the committee found written descriptions to be almost nonexistent:

County Community Schools administrative offices located at 1950 Mission Street, provides [sic] an educational program for pupils in grades 6--12 that are expelled from a school district, referred for dropout prevention, and pupils who are on juvenile probation. Students are taught in smaller classes and support services are provided by community-based organizations. Community school programs are located at various sites throughout the San Francisco [sic]. Pupil Services staff at 555 Portola Drive facilitates referral and enrollment to County Community Schools. Documents required for enrollment are the same as those described above. Please contact the Dropout Prevention Office at 695-5501 or Student

Placement Committee at 695-5517. A call to the Dropout Prevention Office got this response: “We don’t have anything to do with the County Schools. Call the School District.” Calls to the Placement Committee and the SFUSD Educational Placement Center yielded little useful information.

Two face-to-face interviews with a CCS administrator provided Grand Jury members with insights into what appears to be the poorest-funded educational program for the poorest students—fiscally poor and educationally poor. A two-page handout from the administrative offices lists four campuses and nine community sites (not including court schools) for the county schools. One thing these “schools” have in common is that they are staffed by wonderfully caring people many of whom work under pitiful conditions to salvage the city/county’s least acknowledged, least motivated, least successful children. Some schools look better than others; some settings look safer than others. Some kids are criminals, some are anti-social, some are pregnant, and some are just losers. They are habitual truants, probationers, kids too difficult at home or school, druggies, gang members: in one way or another, youths who would be called “a handful.” The California Department of Education website (www.ca.gov) describes the current CCS curriculum:

They provide students with learning opportunities in academic skills, independent life skills, positive self-concepts, and effective relationships with others. . . . A minimum day program for county community schools is 240 minutes. Although many students graduate from county community schools, the programs are designed to transition students to an appropriate educational, training, or employment setting upon the completion of their attendance in county community school or after the court terminates its jurisdiction.

All CCS are linked to available wrap-around support services provided by community-based organizations and made available to any student willing to accept them. The problem is that these services may be available as seldom as one day a week or once a month or almost never. Availability of services is different for each location. Often, a student needs to travel to some other site to get needed assistance.

Locations are as varied as the students. Some CCS are one-room schools in which a single teacher must teach all subjects in the 6—12 curricula. These may be located in community centers, SFUSD school premises no longer in use for city schools, on the campus of City College, etc. Areas in which these schools are located are equally diverse; most are in reasonably safe neighborhoods.

With the impending retirement of several older teachers, CCS one-room schools may be in jeopardy. Newer teachers hold secondary credentials that allow them only to teach their major and minor subjects; whereas older teachers were issued secondary credentials that allowed them to teach all subjects offered at the secondary level. It appears that there is no plan yet in place to address an inevitable modification.

BACKGROUND

The California Education Code (Sec. 1981) mandates that all children (except those who are legally excused) between the ages of 6 and 18 attend school full time. When students' special needs are not met by District Schools within a county, it becomes the responsibility of the County Offices of Education to provide educational programs for them. Programs are offered for children with exceptional needs, homeless students, pregnant minors, and youths detained in homes and camps. They include County Community Schools, vocational programs, and Community Day Schools. To fund these educational services, county offices receive local, state and federal monies. In the case of San Francisco's County Community Schools, that funding is \$93,679,984.

As one of seven counties that have a single city school district with the same geographic area as the county, San Francisco maintains County Community Schools that have the same oversight as the SFUSD schools, though—technically—they are separate systems. That is to say that the Superintendent and School Board of SFUSD are also the administrators of county schools. This duality of jurisdiction can be very confusing, especially in the sorting out of budgetary allotments. The CGJ found it nearly impossible to determine exactly how CCS funds are allotted and why there appears to be a significant discrepancy in the per student amounts apportioned for CCS students and the amounts **actually** used. The Grand Jury committee also discovered that San Francisco County could apply for a more rigorous alternative, Community Day Schools, a state program that requires a longer school day, has more classes, gives vocational training, and offers more services. In order to make these improvements, participating counties receive additional state funding. On its website (www.cde.ca.gov) the California Department of Education describes the Community Day Schools as follows:

Community day schools are a relatively new educational placement option, having been first implemented in 1996; they are operated by school districts and county offices of education. Community day schools serve mandatorily and other expelled students, students referred by administrators or by School Attendance Review Board, and other high-risk youths. The 360-minute minimum instructional day includes academic programs as well as programs that focus on social skills, esteem, and resiliency. Community day schools are intended to have low student teacher ratios, counselors, and pupil discipline personnel. Students also receive collaborative services from offices of education, law enforcement, probation, and human services agency personnel who work with at-risk youths.

INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Members of the CGJ Schools Committee interviewed:

- Administrators of San Francisco Unified School District/County Schools
- SFUSD/County School Board members
- Pupil Services personnel
- Budget specialists
- CCS administrators and teachers

- Dan Sackheim, California Department of Education/Community Day Schools

Members of the CGJ Schools Committee visited and/or interviewed personnel of:

- Phoenix Campus
- RAP/Hilltop Campus
- RAP High School
- Community Scholars of Success Campus
- Community Youth Center
- Walden House
- Bay High School/Middle School
- CCS Middle School Academy
- Ella Hill Hutch Community Center

Members of the CGJ Schools Committee read and/or reviewed:

- Enrollment Guide: “Excellence for All, 2004/2005”
- www.sfusd.edu
- California Department of Education’s DataQuest website
- “Educational Alternatives in Public Schools,” *Fact Book*, California Department of Education (www.cde.ca.gov)
- “Core Elements for Describing a Community Day School,” California Department of Education
- “County Community Schools: A Profile of the County Community Schools, SFUSD”

I. SFUSD DOES NOT PROVIDE SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL OF THE COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

FINDINGS

- 1.1 When the Grand Jury arrived at 1950 Mission Street, the County Community Schools’ Phoenix Campus, for its first interview, committee members were disconcerted by what they saw. The neighborhood, with a crime rate second only to San Francisco’s Tenderloin, is disreputable. It is obvious to even the most unenlightened observer that drug use and prostitution are thriving here with impunity. In addition to an apparent lack of safety, the twelve outdated and obsolete brown bungalows, the asphalt schoolyard, and the one broken basketball backstop loom as an indication of the District’s lack of interest in the CCS students’ welfare. The school is surrounded by a very necessary chain-link fence, which promotes safety, but hardly a positive learning environment. It does not help that the school day ends at 1:30 PM, when “business” is brisk. A police officer told committee members that, at the local police station, this school has the nickname of “Heroin High.”
- 1.2 On another school visit, CGJ interviewers noted that one of the one-room county schools (Community Youth Center) is located on the second floor of a building that houses a strip joint on the first floor. While the school’s access is on a different street, the area would be deemed unsuitable for a city public school, as

it should also be for CCS. As in the case of the Phoenix campus, SFUSD again ignores one of its stated goals (<http://portal.sfusd.edu>): "Maintain school environments that are *safe, secure and attractive*." (Emphasis added.)

- 1.3 One-room schools may soon become unfeasible—due to the change in the state’s credentialing of new teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1a. SFUSD owns properties that are not presently being used for city schools. The Board and Administration should study the availability of suitable sites for relocation of Phoenix.
- 1b. SFUSD should move immediately to relocate the CCS Phoenix School campus.
- 1c. Ideally, a new Phoenix School campus would be ready for the 2004-2005 school year.
- 1d. A secondary priority is the relocation of the Community Youth Center’s one-room school from its location on Polk Street, above a strip joint.
- 1e. The five-year plan should include preparations to replace all one-room schools in the county system.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Superintendent of Schools – 60 days

Board of Education – 60 days

Mayor – 60 days

Board of Supervisors – 90 days

II. SFUSD SHOULD INSURE THAT PER-STUDENT ALLOTMENTS TO CCS ARE BEING USED FOR INTENDED PURPOSES

FINDINGS

- 2.1 It was only after repeated requests to various administrators that this CGJ committee was able to obtain budget print outs for SFUSD. The committee found it almost impossible to sort out the columns of figures in order to determine sources of funding for city schools and funding for county schools. The committee was able to ascertain that the 2003/2004 funding for CCS is approximately \$93 million, and the budget for County Community Schools, **not including court schools or locked facilities**, is almost \$4.5 million, a discrepancy that is unexplained in documents or by administration. What is of additional interest is per-student allotments:

- In the city of San Francisco’s secondary schools, per-student amounts range from a low of \$3976.68 at Lincoln High School to a high of \$6497.53 at Balboa High School.
- The per-student allotment for CCS should be approximately \$8,000, but CGJ members could only verify a per capita expenditure of approximately \$1250. (Figures derived from information submitted to CGJ by SFUSD’s Chief Business Officer.)

2.2. Although the Superintendent and the Board of Education members function separately for the city schools and for the county schools, it is not apparent that two separate budgets are maintained. Since the schools function independently and since funding sources are not the same, it would be reasonable to keep separate budgets to insure that each entity gets and uses all the money to which it is entitled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2a. SFUSD should make its budget readily available for inspection by authorized agencies, in particular, the Civil Grand Jury.
- 2b. Budget information should be presented clearly, if possible, with explanatory summaries.
- 2c. To insure the equitable distribution of funds and to avoid co-mingling of assets, two separate budgets should be kept for the separate school systems of city and county.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Superintendent of Schools – 60 days

Board of Education - 60 days

Mayor – 60 days

Board of Supervisors – 90 days

III. SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT DOES NOT FULFILL ITS PROMISE OF “EXCELLENCE FOR ALL”

FINDINGS

3.1 In spite of its per capita allotment of approximately \$8,000, County Community Schools offer the minimum schooling and services required by California law— a 240-minute instructional day, minimum services, no libraries or librarians, no physical education or coaches, no music or art, no vocational training or community service--“bare bones” services.

- 3.2 The County of San Francisco is eligible to apply to the California Department of Education to become part of the enriched Community Day Schools Program. By so doing, SFUSD would increase funding for county schools, upgrade the curriculum, acquire additional services, and keep at-risk students in the classroom for a full school day.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3a. Replace the minimum-service County Community Schools with the more challenging Community Day Schools.
- 3b. Use all available funding for county schools by upgrading and making the necessary commitment to Community Day Schools.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Superintendent of Schools – 60 days

School Board – 60 days

Mayor – 60 days

Board of Supervisors – 90 days

4. SFUSD SHOULD EDUCATE ADMINISTRATORS, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT THE MISSION, NEEDS, POTENTIAL, AND AMAZING SUCCESS OF THE COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

FINDINGS

- 4.1. On its website, the School District has a section entitled, “About SFUSD.” While it is not specifically addressing the County Community Schools, the clear implication is that the article addresses *all schools* under its jurisdiction. These are some points that are made:
- [San Francisco’s comprehensive plan for improvement is] a commitment to providing an *excellent* education to all public school students.
 - We have established *rigorous* academic standards indicating what all students are expected to know and be able to do.
 - If we are to achieve our vision of an excellent education for all students, we must **provide more intensive help to struggling schools and students.**
 - Additional funds are provided to schools for each English Language Learner, each Special Education student, and each student living in poverty. These students are recognized as having greater educational needs.

- Our **comprehensive**, five-year plan, Excellence for All, identifies several needed task forces to address important issues facing SFUSD, including high school and middle school reorganization . . . [Emphasis added.]

Notwithstanding its good intentions, SFUSD has made no mention of its dual role as city *and* county administrations. A reasonable inference to be drawn is that this five-year plan applies only to the district’s city schools and does not provide for excellence in the CCS.

4.2 Civil Grand Jury members spoke to an assistant administrator of Phoenix. The person did not know that there is no information on the District’s website about County Schools. S/he could not recommend any publications with information and said, “Call the district.” S/he was even unaware of the handout CGJ members had received on which are listed the eighteen schools and their teachers and/or contacts.

4.3 Several telephone conferences were conducted with teachers and/or directors. Most were followed up with school tours by CGJ members. The results are as follows:

- A representative of RAP/Hilltop Campus and RAP High School, said that there are actually two separate schools—one for pregnant teenagers, designed to meet their special needs; and RAP High School for students who are suspended, expelled or have dropped out. The representative is very enthusiastic about the good job they are doing at RAP with 75-80 students yearly. Approximately 25% of the students graduate with a regular SFUSD diploma. The school day is 8:30 AM-2: 30 PM, and the campus is located in a safe neighborhood. The person encouraged the CGJ to “drop by for a visit” and gave the committee copies of handouts that are distributed to incoming students.
- A representative of Community Scholars of Success Campus has been a part of County Schools since their inception in 1988. This person said that the program began with 18-20 youths in a single location and has grown to over 1300 children at eighteen locations. 72 students are currently enrolled at Community Scholars of Success Campus, and 10-15 earn diplomas each year. Wrap-around services (mental health, social workers, medical care) are available on campus. The representative agreed with CGJ members’ impression that the work of these dedicated teachers is pretty much ignored, and the achievements of graduating seniors are not celebrated.
- Community Youth Center has 19-20 students, from grades 6-12. Achievements are a source of pride—especially the graduation of 18 students in 2003. A teacher will be retiring in June of 2004, and worries

about whom the District will find as a replacement. Before coming to CYC, the instructor taught at Phoenix High School for two frustrating years, hating the location and the drug trading and prostitution that were carried on openly in the area. This person found the students to be very distracted (and, in some cases, corrupted) by the environs. By comparison, the Chinatown location of CYC “is ideal.” The interviewee would like to see the school better supplied, especially since probation students bring more money to the district than do students who are not part of the Juvenile Justice System.

- A Walden House Schools employee discussed the basic difference between locked facility schools and the other County Day Schools. Boys and girls attend separate schools. Almost all of the students have criminal records, and most have serious mental health problems. The school is frustrated in attempting to get appropriate IEPs (Individual Education Plans) for students; the District is dilatory and resistant. The representative described the situation of one student who needed an IEP that would provide a resource specialist for him. It took nearly six months to get that IEP, and the resource specialist who was assigned is so burdened that she rarely makes an appearance. (Instead of 2 schools, she is assigned to 8). Nevertheless, teachers are proud of Walden’s achievements; 12-13 seniors graduate every year. Four alumni are enrolled in college. CGJ members were warmly thanked for their interest in County Day Schools and members were assured that all CCS teachers and principals will be grateful for any light this committee can shine on their genuine needs and their unheralded achievements.
- At Ella Hutch Community Center, there are 30 students, grades 9-12, aged 15-18. Conditions are crowded, but the area is safer than Phoenix’s, and CGJ visitors were told, “We got all new textbooks just this year.” For the first time ever, County Day Schools will soon be getting a school nurse and a truancy officer—one of each to serve all eighteen schools. The interviewee said that students respond to a nurturing approach; for some, school is the only place where someone is kind or caring. Last year, six students earned SFUSD diplomas. Each year, there are good reports from alums who have gone on to colleges and vocational schools. They want to share their progress and achievements.
- A teacher at Bay High School for some time laments that there are no physical education classes, no drivers’ education, no music or art classes. The school is really a group of schools, including Impact High School (a Juvenile Hall school) and a group of students from group homes. Teachers and students find the lack of resources enormously discouraging. The location of the school is safe and only a few blocks from the ocean. Even though a number of students have a 1 ½ -hour commute, they enjoy the safe and attractive location.

- At County Community Schools Middle School Academy the mood is enthusiastic and upbeat. Middle schoolers usually are there for the better part of a semester, then return to their former schools or are given a new placement. There was disappointment when district officials nixed an idea for a mural and some planting projects. One teacher said the biggest problem with the district is that they seem to regard the County Day Schools as *punitive*. The teacher believes it would be more correct to regard them as *therapeutic*. “These are not throw-away children.” Many are disappointed that there is no vocational training for the students who do not want to go on to college but who aspire to learn a trade. It was suggested that training children how to fix and maintain bicycles could teach mechanical skills; at the same time children could be learning about protecting environmental resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4a. Add comprehensive information about CCS to the SFUSD website and printed materials.
- 4b. Devise a separate five-year plan for county schools—with special consideration to upgrading to Community Day Schools--and publicize it.
- 4c. Educate district personnel about County Community Schools and familiarize them with descriptive publications and websites.
- 4d. Celebrate the dedication and hard work of administrators, teachers and students in the county system. Give them the supplies they desperately need. “Nothing succeeds like success,” but even the most dedicated laborers will burn out if their efforts are not recognized.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

SFUSD Superintendent – 60 days

School Board – 60 days

Mayor – 60 days

Board of Supervisors – 90 days