

This document is an extract of a larger publication.

civilgrandjury.org is a project of UnGovr.org, a US-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to government transparency and public accountability.



MENDOCINO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION COURT AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The Court and Community Schools (CCS), governed by the Mendocino County Board of Education (MCOE Board), serve students in Mendocino County who, because of probation, expulsion, incarceration or other reasons, are not able to attend regular classes on a school district campus. The CCS have 14 classrooms and programs around the county, including some on middle and high school campuses. There are also the Clean and Sober classroom, Juvenile Hall classrooms (West Hills), the River School, the Pregnant Minor Program, Young Parents Program and other CCS stand-alone classrooms in Ukiah, Willits and Fort Bragg. There is also an independent study program (Mobile Transition Studies).

Reason for Investigation

The Grand Jury received citizens' complaints.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury interviewed staff and administration of the CCS and reviewed the Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE) Audited Financial Statements for the year ending June 30, 1999, the CCS paraprofessional staffing report and reviewed MCOE Board Policy 32201.1.

Findings

1. The members MCOE Board serve as the trustees for the CCS.

Response (Office of Education): The role of County Juvenile Court and Community Schools are established by Educational Code and Welfare and Institutions Code: "The county board of education establishes and the county superintendent administers and operates the juvenile court and community school."

2. CCS instructors have a difficult mission as their student body is drawn from the group of students in the County having the most challenging social, emotional and educational needs.

Response (Office of Education): True, CCS instructors have a difficult job and are dedicated to their work with at-risk students. Their student body is drawn from **one of** the groups of students in the County having the most challenging social, emotional and educational needs. Instructors at District Community Day Schools and District Continuation High Schools serve similar populations of high-risk youth, and should also be acknowledged.

3. Some parents of CCS students are not sufficiently familiar with the intricacies of policy and are intimidated by procedures and are therefore not able to advocate successfully for their children.

Response (Office of Education): Educators throughout the country find that parents are often intimidated by school administration and procedures. A mandatory meeting between parent, student and a CCS counselor is required prior to a student's enrollment in CCS. This session usually lasts an hour. The CCS counselor develops an Individualized Learning Plan based on the student's academic and social/emotional needs. Goals and objectives are clearly defined with parent and student input. This is an opportunity for parents and students to ask questions or express any concerns about the CCS program. CCS school counselors and administrator are available to speak with parents on the telephone or in person regarding any concerns about procedures or policy. A parent-student handbook is given to all new students at intake.

The California Healthy Start Program was developed especially for the purpose of helping families work closely with schools and government agencies. A CCS Healthy Start program began operation in October 1999 in order to facilitate school and family interaction, as well as to discourage truancy, and to transport students and their families to health care appointments, court appearances, college classes, and special programs. The CCS Family Services Liaison works closely with parents and students in the program.

Recommendation

As the trustees for the CCS, the MCOE Board needs to take more responsibility in advocating for the special needs of the CCS students.

Response (Office of Education): The CCS Director meets monthly with the Board representative for CCS to discuss current issues. The CCS Director meets with the MCOE Board and the County Superintendent of Schools as needed to keep them current on CCS and to respond to concerns.

Findings

4. The CCS Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is increasing, as more students are excluded from mainstream schools.

Response (Office of Education): Not true. CCS average daily attendance has been decreasing since the 1991-1992 school year and reached its lowest ADA during the 1999-2000 school year. (See attached ADA History 1990-2000.)

5. The CCS formally budgeted funding for individual classroom materials has declined from \$1500 in 1985 to \$500 in 1999; in addition there was a one-time allocation of \$500 in 1999. During the same period, the number of students in many CCS classrooms had increased from 15 to 20 or more.

Response (Office of Education): Not true. Although ADA has decreased, the number of students enrolled in CCS classrooms has remained constant for over 10 years. Approximately 20 students are enrolled in each class with a full time teacher and instructional paraprofessional. At any given time, the average attendance per class is approximately 11-15 students.

Instructional materials funding for classrooms has increased dramatically over the past several years due to new state legislation regarding instructional materials. CCS classrooms have access to Schiff-Bustamante Instructional Materials funding, State Textbook funding, Block Grant funding, Safe and Drug Free Schools funding, and School Library funding. The CCS Leadership Team and CCS Curriculum Committee allocate educational materials to classrooms. During the 1999-2000 school year, the CCS Leadership Team allocated \$6,220 to the Willits CCS classroom, \$5,268 to the Pomolita Community School classroom, and \$3,198 to one of the classrooms at River School in Talmage. These funds were for discretionary spending for instructional materials and student incentives. Current funding for instructional materials and student incentives is well above the \$1,500 allocated in 1985 for classroom discretionary funding.

Recommendations

1. The Grand Jury suggests that funding per classroom reflect the same dollar-per-student ratio as in 1985.

Response (Office of Education): Current funding for CCS classrooms far exceeds the dollar-per-student ratio of 1985.

2. The MCOE Board and Superintendent should give their highest priority to the needs of CCS classrooms for budgetary and other support. The ADA increases should allow them to increase funding to CCS.

Response (Office of Education): The MCOE Board and Superintendent give high priority to all programs that affect children. Regarding funding, as explained above, ADA has not increased, but in fact has decreased steadily since 1991. Even with ADA decreases, CCS classrooms have greater than ever access to instructional materials funding. The MCOE Board and

the Superintendent have supported access to these funding sources for CCS, and their use for instructional materials.

Finding

6. CCS has a leadership team of two administrators, three teachers, and one paraprofessional who are charged with making decisions about allocation of lottery funds in response to teacher requests.

Response (Office of Education): True. The Leadership Team allocates lottery funds, as well as other discretionary funds.

Recommendation

Since the staff and faculty of the CCS, being a distinct entity within MCOE, have a better understanding of their students' special needs, the leadership team should continue to determine the allocation of all special funds.

Response (Office of Education): The Leadership Team will continue to meet on a monthly basis to allocate funding based on proposals aligned with CCS program goals. For the 1999-2000 school year, the only funding requests turned down by the Leadership Team were for projects not aligned with CCS goals, or without clearly defined goals.

Findings

7. Prior to the March 2000 General Election, the legislative intent for the use of lottery funds and MCOE Board Policy 32201.1 had been for expenditures beyond the usual classroom needs. Examples of acceptable uses include: incentives, field trips, materials and expenses for innovative programs.

Response (Office of Education): True.

8. Due to inadequate budget allotments, CCS teachers have been forced to request lottery funding for classroom texts contrary to MCOE Board policy and legislative intent.

Response (Office of Education): Not true. There are no inadequate budget allotments. Lottery funds have been used for field trips, ROPES course, speakers, yearbooks, instructional materials and incentives for attendance and behavior. Teachers have not been forced to use Lottery funds for textbooks. Teachers have been directed to submit requests for textbooks to the Curriculum Committee which determines alignment with state standards and alignment with possible funding sources. The curriculum committee decides on the state-funding source to use

for the purchase of textbooks. (See attached Instructional Materials Funding Requests.)

9. MCOE documents reveal a discrepancy between the projected ADA generated lottery funds and the amount actually allocated to the CCS. The difference was a 35% loss, which exceeds by 27%, the 8% usually charged by MCOE for the administration of funds.

Response (Office of Education): It would be helpful to know which “MCOE documents” the Grand Jury is referring to. It has been the practice of MCOE Administration, approved by the MCOE Board in the yearly budget, to allocate 50% of the Lottery dollars directly to instructional programs in CCS, ROP, and Special Education; and to spend the other 50% on special student enrichment programs, professional development and standards, assessment and curriculum development

Recommendation

Considering the special needs of the CCS, they should get all the funds, less the 8% administrative costs, earned through their ADA.

Response (Office of Education): See response to #7, #8, and #9 above.

Finding

10. Salaries of MCOE administrators have increased disproportionately more than those of teachers. One reason for this may be the reclassification of administrative positions with new titles and increased salaries. At the same time CCS classroom budgets have declined.

Response (Office of Education): It would be helpful to know what “reclassification of administrative positions” the Grand Jury is referring to. Again, CCS classroom budgets have not declined but have increased as indicated in response to Finding #5 above. As pay raises are negotiated with the union for certificated and classified staff, administration receives the same percent increase.

Recommendation

The Grand Jury urges that expenditures for classroom materials and instructional staff, including both teachers and paraprofessionals, receive

higher budget priority. Lottery funds should be restricted to unusual and innovative enhancement programs.

Response (Office of Education): MCOE gives the highest priority in the budgeting process to expenditures for instructional staff and classroom materials. The state average for teacher salaries is 39.3% of a district's budget. At MCOE, 48.0% of the CCS budget is spent on teacher salaries. The Leadership Team allocates Lottery funds to classroom teachers for enhancement programs.

Finding

11. Many special sources of grants (such as Tobacco Use Prevention, Healthy Start and Violence Prevention) have been obtained for the CCS by a grant writer retained on the MCOE staff for which MCOE receives 8% for administration. Since some of these funds are not completely utilized, grants are apparently written which do not reflect the needs of CCS.

Response (Office of Education): There is no paid grant writer retained on the MCOE staff. Every grant, except as noted below, that CCS has submitted and received has been written by CCS staff during their work hours. The current Director of CCS, the Coordinator for Child Development and the Coordinator for Prevention Education have written the Tobacco Use Prevention Grant, the CalSAFE Teen Pregnancy Grant, the Prevention in Action Grant, and the currently-being-developed Digital High School Grant. The Violence Prevention funding is not a grant; those funds are given to each county office and school district in the State following submission of a one-page assurance that spending will be used for specific activities. A paid grant writer, contracted for that specific purpose, wrote the CCS Healthy Start Grant. A Healthy Start Planning Grant, written by MCOE staff, provided funding for the grant writer. Two MCOE staff, along with a Public Health staff person, and a grant writer paid by Public Health, wrote the HIV/Aids Education Grant.

Recommendation

Care must be taken to seek grants more specifically aligned with the needs of the CCS students. There should be a review of all uncommitted grant funds.

Response (Office of Education): No grants are submitted which are not aligned with MCOE/CCS goals. There are no uncommitted CCS grant funds.

Findings

- 12.** The MCOE Board meetings are held during the working day and often in distant parts of the County. Parents and teachers, who are working, find it difficult to attend. Besides, MCOE no longer televises its Board meetings.

Response (Office of Education): The Mendocino County Board of Education is committed to having as much public participation as possible at their meetings. Because of the size of our County and the coast/inland accessibility factor, there is no one location that is equally convenient to all communities. Recognizing this, the Mendocino County Board of Education holds meetings throughout the year at various locations within the County, thus giving members of every community and the local school district staff the opportunity to conveniently attend and review local site-specific programs and issues.

Video conferencing and regular evening meetings were tried and were not found to increase public participation. With no noticeable benefit, coupled with the added inconvenience and risk of night travel to Board members who come from all over the County, it was decided to discontinue evening meetings. Nevertheless, special hearings are held in the late afternoon or evening to accommodate interested parties.

The Board will again review the issue of videotaping meetings. The involvement of ROP will be considered in this review.

- 13.** The Grand Jury's ability to evaluate the MCOE audited budget was inhibited by the one and one-half months delay in the document's arrival from MCOE.

Response (Office of Education): MCOE received copies of the audited budget the Grand Jury requested on April 11, 2000. A copy of this audit was mailed to the Grand Jury on April 12, 2000. MCOE did not inhibit the Grand Jury's ability to evaluate the MCOE audited budget, and responded in a timely and expedient manner to all clear requests or questions.

COMMENT ON GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT 1999-2000:
MCOE administration and Board are concerned about the many inaccuracies in the Grand Jury findings. In the future, MCOE encourages the Grand Jury to invite MCOE Superintendent of Schools or his designee or MCOE Board members, to respond to questions and provide information and backup documentation.

Recommendation

The MCOE Board should hold regular evening meetings or, at least alternately, record the meetings for later video or audio broadcast over the community

access channel, which could also be an excellent Regional Occupation Program (ROP) production opportunity.

Response Required

Mendocino County Superintendent of Schools
Mendocino County Board Of Education