

LUCERNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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To: The Honorable Judge Stephen O. Hedstrom
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of Lake County

From: Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees

RE: Response to Grand Jury's Final Report

Date: August 15, 2013

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This response is from the Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees.

GENERAL RESPONSE

We commend the Public Services Committee of the Lake County Grand Jury on its report entitled "Financial and Educational Benefits to be derived from the Unification of Lake County School Districts".

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LAKE COUNTY GRAND JURY IN ITS REPORT ENTITLED "FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE UNIFICATION OF LAKE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS"

FINDING:

F 1. Based on the totality of the facts above, consolidation/unification of the seven Lake County school districts into one would be beneficial both financially and educationally to Lake County Schools.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees does not agree that a larger district is necessarily a better district. Comparatively, our small district has always been able to stay fiscally sound and provide quality educational programs to our students. Some of the larger districts in the county have experienced much more fiscal instability.

FINDING

F 2. The PSC, guided by LCOE expenditure analysts, calculates that non-educational direct administration costs for the combined seven school districts amount to approximately \$10 million or approximately 15% of 2011-2012 Lake County total audited school expenditure of \$64,110,445. The potential savings may differ when the collateral costs of real estate, buildings and equipment are factored into the cost data. [See Appendix A]

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees with the finding. However, please note the following:

- County wide unification would require establishing a county wide uniform salary schedule for all teachers in Lake County (EC 45028). Currently the largest numbers of teachers are employed by the Konocti Unified School District. There are a smaller number of teachers employed by certain smaller school districts at a higher pay rate than the Konocti Unified School District. The cost of salary increases for the teachers of the Konocti Unified School District would need to be determined in order determine the overall savings achieved by unification.

Also, please note the following:

- There are differences in the dollar amount paid toward employee health benefits in each of the school districts. The increased cost of providing health benefits for employees as a result of unification would need to be considered.
- There are differences in the dollar amount paid for classified salaries in each of the school district. The increased cost of salaries for classified employees as a result of unification would need to be considered.
- There are differences in the number of work days in each of the school districts. The increased cost of additional work days as a result of unification would need to be considered.

FINDING

F 3. With the internet, instant communication links and two-way electronic access to each individual school in Lake County, LCOE administrative staff stated they can adequately and cost effectively manage all of the Lake County's seven school district administrations.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees does not have enough information as to the degree of management the Lake County Office of Education would be responsible for to be able agree or disagree. Please note that the Lake County Office of Education stated they would need to hire additional staff. To do this could eliminate potential cost savings.

FINDING

F 4. There will be additional costs involved with the unification/consolidation process and the revising/upgrading of various systems upon completion of consolidation. These costs are unknown at this time but they should not curtail the effort of consolidation/unification. The potential savings realized could be funneled back to improve the education of Lake County students.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees that consolidation would be a costly endeavor; however there is no data to confirm that the education of Lake County students would improve.

FINDING

F 5. Each of the seven Lake County school districts has their own unique identity and characteristics (sports and other competitive programs) which should remain unaffected by unification/consolidation. Students should not be required to relocate to different schools.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees with the finding.

FINDING

F 6. After review of the LCBOE regular meeting minutes for the last twelve months, it appears that no business for the County Committee has been conducted and no petitions for reorganization have been received.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION:

R 1. Residents of Lake County review the Lake County Civil Grand Jury's report in its entirety. (F1 - F6)

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees with the recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION:

R 2. The Boards of Trustees for all school districts in Lake County consult with all school districts to identify opportunities for consolidation with a view to petitioning the County Superintendent of Schools pursuant to Education Code 35700. (F1 - F6)

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees already consolidates several services with the Upper Lake Districts and the Lake County Office of Education. A continuing effort will be made to identify additional opportunities for consolidation of services.

RECOMMENDATION:

R 3. The Boards of Trustees for all Lake County school districts adopt and deliver to the CCSDO a resolution proposing consideration of consolidation all districts in Lake County, pursuant to Education Code Section 35721 (c). F1

RESPONSE:

This recommendation requires further analysis. Unification can be an expensive process that could use up funds that are needed for the classroom. Several times in the past, Lucerne Elementary School District has looked at the advantages and disadvantages of unification with the two Upper Lake Districts. On these occasions the disadvantages have always outweighed the advantages for our small school district. Furthermore, we have never had a substantial number of community members that have expressed a desire for unification.

RECOMMENDATION:

R 4. The County Committee on School District Organization (CCSDO) formulates plans for the consolidation of Lake County school districts pursuant to Education Code Section 35720.

RESPONSE

This recommendation requires further analysis. Unification can be an expensive process that could use up funds that are needed for the classroom. The cost of formulating plans for the consolidation of Lake County school districts could be in excess of \$20,000. For this reason, it would seem that the first step should be for each of the school boards to look at the advantages and disadvantages of unification. At the same time, each of the boards could hold public

hearings to receive input from the public regarding whether there is public support for unification. After that, a decision could be made as to whether the school districts should fund the studies that would be required to commence the unification process.

RECOMMENDATION

R 5. The Lake County Board of Supervisors adopt and deliver to the CCSDO a resolution proposing consideration of consolidation of local school districts in Lake County, pursuant to Education Code 35721(c). F1

RESPONSE:

This recommendation requires further analysis. Unification can be an expensive process that could use up funds that are needed for the classroom. For this reason, it would seem that the first step should be for each of the school boards to look at the advantages and disadvantages of unification. At the same time, each of the boards could hold public hearings to receive input from the public regarding whether there is public support for unification. After that, a decision could be made as to whether the school districts should fund the studies that would be required to commence the unification process.

RECOMMENDATION

R 6. The County Committee convenes one or more public hearings to gauge the electorate support for such unification/consolidation pursuant to Education Code Section 35700(a) and 35721 (a). (F1)

RESPONSE

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees with the recommendation.

GRAND JURY REPORT --
"OVERSIGHT OF EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION IN LAKE COUNTY"

GENERAL RESPONSE

We commend the Public Services Committee of the Lake County Grand Jury on its report entitled "Oversight of Education Transportation in Lake County"

FINDINGS

FINDING:

F 1. The various transportation departments are doing an excellent job considering the budgetary constraints under which they operate.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees agrees with the finding.

FINDING

F 2. Each district handles purchasing according to their own needs.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees agrees with the finding, although is currently consolidated with Upper Lake High School District for all transportation purchasing.

FINDING

F 3. The procedures are fairly uniform between districts.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees has no information of purchasing procedures in other districts, thus we do not agree or disagree.

FINDING

F 4. Administrative savings could be realized with centralized Information Technology for record keeping and purchasing. This could eliminate the teaching staff, principals, et al. from being responsible for transportation needs of the students (see "The Educational and Financial Benefits Derived from the Unification of all Lake County School Districts" in the 2012-2013 Civil Grand Jury Report).

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees agrees with the findings on IT being beneficial for centralized purchasing and record keeping. We however feel strongly that the transportation needs of students are a part of site administrators responsibility that would not go away with a central administration. Teachers in our district have never been responsible for a student's transportation needs.

FINDING

F 5. The inclusion of GPS transponders allows for real-time location reporting which enhances student safety and security.

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees agrees with the finding. We currently use GPS technology to track the location and speed of our bus.

FINDING

F 6. Middletown bus barn security is in need of repairs

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees is unaware of this situation and thus has no response.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

RECOMMENDATION

R 1. The transportation departments of all districts be commended for their performance under difficult circumstances. (F1)

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees agrees with the recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION

R 2. The committee recommends coordination of administration and IT into one office with one director. This can facilitate better contracts, inventory control and record keeping and governmental reporting. The IT system can further facilitate performance measurement of staff and facilities. This could eliminate the teaching staff, principals, et al from being responsible for transportation needs of the students. (F4)

RESPONSE:

This recommendation requires further analysis. Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees has consolidated transportation services with another district. The district would welcome cost savings of a larger consolidation if quality of service can be maintained or improved.

RECOMMENDATION

R 3. All buses and white fleet in the county have GPS transponders installed. (F5)

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School Board of Trustees agrees with the recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION

R 4. The Middletown School District repair their security fence to control theft. (F6)

RESPONSE:

The Lucerne Elementary School District Board of Trustees has no information that would allow them to agree or disagree with this recommendation.