SONOMA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Carl Wong, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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August 7, 2003

The Honorable Mark Tansil, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California
County of Sonoma
Hall of Justice
600 Administrative Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2881

#1519
AUG 18 RECD
GRAND JURY

Dear Judge Tansil:

I am enclosing the responses to the Final Report of the Sonoma County Grand Jury 2002-2003 findings and recommendations regarding Charter Public Schools and Prevailing Wages.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, or if our office can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Carl Wong, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

c: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Sonoma County School District Superintendents and Governing Board Members

Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools
Response to Sonoma County 2002-2003 Grand Jury Report

CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

July 31, 2003

Special Education – Finding #1 (Pages 26-27)

With a few notable exceptions, charter schools have avoided the higher costs associated with special education students, while still receiving the same funding per student as the general population. This shifts an ever-increasing burden onto noncharter schools.

There are two types of charter schools with respect to special education services. The first is a charter school that is a public school within a chartering school district. An agreement is developed between the district and the school regarding responsibilities for the provision of special education services and the distribution of special education dollars. Some districts choose to provide services to the special education students enrolled in the charter school and retain the special education funding. Others pass the dollars to the charter school, based upon the same allocation method the district receives from the SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area), and the charter school assumes responsibility for providing special education services.

The second type is a charter school that is independent from the chartering school and is solely responsible for providing special education services. The school receives the special education dollars *directly* from the SELPA.

Charter schools have generally avoided the higher costs associated with special education students primarily because their programs are not usually designed to serve special education students with intensive needs. Consequently, parents of special needs children do not choose to enroll their children in charter schools.

Irrespective of the type of school, for special education purposes, charter schools receive an allocation for special education students that supplement the funding received by the general population.

School Accreditation – Finding #2 (Page 27)

Charter schools are not accredited at the present time. In 2002, the California Network of Educational Charter (CANEC) announced they were going to champion a system of accreditation for charter schools. A pilot program, in conjunction with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), has been put in place.

The Sonoma County Office of Education agrees with this finding and supports charter school participation in the accreditation process as part of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The WASC self-review process is a valid strategy in the implementation of charter school goals #2 and #3 "...the use of different and innovative teaching methods" and "performance-based accountability system". Charter school participation will clarify school mission and provide long term direction in the implementation of curricular and accountability goals.

Data Gathering and Publishing – Recommendation #4 (Page 28)

Educational leaders should gather and publish data, more than just test scores, which would enable the public to understand whether charter schools are improving pupil learning.

Collecting, analyzing, and publishing student achievement data is an important endeavor for all schools and is an emerging priority for educational leaders. Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), all schools including charter schools are required to collect, analyze, and report student achievement results in determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), regardless of whether the school or district receives federal Title I funding. Criteria-referenced tests and authentic, local measures, (teacher and/or district developed tests) are being used to not only communicate progress to the public, student, and school, but also to inform teachers and administrators whether instructional strategies and student interventions are producing desired results. The Sonoma County Office of Education has partnered with 10 school districts involving approximately 12,000 students in a pilot effort to improve the collection, analysis, and reporting of student academic results using both criteria-referenced and locally developed measurements. Four of the Sonoma County Charter schools are participating in the pilot project: Live Oak, Mary Collins, Petaluma, and Roseland Accelerated Middle. Participation in the pilot is open to all districts including charter schools.

Special Education – Recommendation #5 (Page 28)

The Sonoma County Office of Education and/or school districts should develop a more equitable way to fund special education needs across all schools and to recognize the higher costs associated with educating special education students.

As a result of the special education funding allocation model adopted by the California Legislature in 1998, the Sonoma County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) developed an allocation model that was implemented in 2000-2001. The model provides for a distribution of special education dollars to independent charter schools in the same manner as received by all school districts within the county. (One exception is a group of small school districts that receive a set amount of dollars equivalent to what they received under the previous funding model). The remaining charter schools receive special education funding (if they choose to provide the special education services) from the chartering school district, generally in the same manner as the district receives from the SELPA. In either case, the model certainly recognizes the higher costs associated with educating special education students by allocating supplemental funds beyond that received by the general population.

The SELPA has been reviewing the special education funding allocation model this past school year and will continue to do so in 2003-2004. The issue of equitable distribution of special education funds to charter schools will be reviewed along with all other aspects of the model.

Response to the
Final Report of the Sonoma County Grand Jury
2002-2003

Kid Street Charter School
P.O. Box 6784
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95401
Location: 709 Davis St.
(707) 525-9223

Findings:

F1: With a few notable exceptions, charter schools have avoided the higher costs associated with special education students, while still receiving the same funding per student as the general population. This shifts an ever-increasing burden onto non-charter schools.

Response: We don't offer special education, and we inform parents of this as a consideration in making the choice to attend Kid Street. What we do offer is a multi-age setting and small class size. Children can work at their own level and receive individualized attention.

F5: Educators in Sonoma County are trying to abandon the academic competitive model of charter versus traditional public schools and are moving toward mutual cooperation in public education. Some charter schools are now meeting with non-charter schools to share their innovative teaching methods.

Response: We have had no such cooperation thus far, but would be willing to meet to share ideas.

F8: The majority of charter schools have not provided accountability systems for measuring student progress beyond those of the standardized Academic Performance Index (API).

Response: Portfolios are used in all classrooms. Students' progress is followed throught the year and into the next. The portfolios contain reading assessments that analyze student miscues, writing samples, mathematical problem solving questions, and products from integrated thematic units. The portfolios paint an accurate picture of the student's abilities and potentials.
In addition, the students take part in the district mandated writing and math benchmarks for 3rd and 6th graders. The Report Cards that we use have a sliding scale that assesses student ability in all academic areas. They also assess life skill and emotional development.

Responses

R1: All county charter schools should join the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC) to take advantage of that resource.

Response: We are a member of CANEC.

R2: The staff of each charter school should implement a process of regular meetings with the staffs of charter schools and non-charter schools to share ideas, curriculum and innovative teaching methods.

Response: The Lead teacher at Kid Street meets with members of Santa Rosa Charter to share ideas, curriculum, and teaching methods.

R3: County charter schools should continue to promote their schools with events open to the public.

Response: Kid Street has monthly assemblies to which families and friends are invited. Our October Harvest Fair was open to the public. We are now a food distribution center for the Redwood Empire Food Bank, and the public is participating. Our weekly Parenting Classes are open to, and attended by parents outside of the charter school. Our theater productions are also performed for the public. Kid Street has also held neighborhood meetings for the Railroad Square and surrounding area to discuss common concerns. We hold a drug and alcohol program every Wednesday evening open to the public.

R4: Educational leaders should gather and publish data, more than just test scores, which would enable the public to understand whether charter schools are improving pupil learning.

Response: We are in the process of gathering video interviews of each child asking grade level, state standards, social and emotional questions, as well as questions specifically dealing with the child's personal growth and development as related to life skills.

Submitted by

Linda Conklin

Linda Conklin
Executive Director

Live Oak Charter School

1160 Schuman Lane • Petaluma, CA 94952

#5

#1668

November 5, 2003

NOV 11 RECD

Sonoma County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

GRAND JURY

Dear Jury Members:

Per your request, I am providing a response to the 02-03 Sonoma County Grand Jury Report.

F1. I think your finding that charter schools have avoided higher costs associated with special education needs qualification. Currently, about 10% of our students receive special education services. This is in line with the State average of 10%. In conversations with other charter administrators, it is clear that over time, charter schools can attract families with children with special education needs because these families are motivated to seek out educational alternatives that may be better suited to the children's distinct learning styles. Consequently, mature charter schools may actually have higher than average numbers of students with special education needs.

Start-up charter schools typically have a MOU with their sponsoring district regarding the delivery of special education services. In our MOU, the district receives all the school's special education funds, and is in turn responsible for providing special education services. However, the school is liable for the encroachment costs (any special education costs that exceed state revenue). Other districts schools pool the risk associated with what is widely known as an under-funded mandate. Charters such as Live Oak are not always invited to join district pools and are consequently at financial risk for the rare student with extreme special education needs. Young charters with relatively small student populations also typically do not have mature or high intensity special education programs such as special day classes; even in well-established public schools such programs are typically offered via district-wide approach or through the county offices of education. However, as the charters grow in size, their special education programs, and associated costs, typically increase with full-time special education personal onsite.

While your report covered issues related to special education costs, you did not cover one of the most pressing financial issues facing charter schools today: adequate local funding for facilities. Many new charters do not benefit from existing local revenue bonds and have to pay for rent out of operational funds. This approach some very painful budgetary decisions in which very important programmatic line items can be sacrificed to the essential requirement of paying for classroom space. While there has been some recent legislation that begins to address this issue, there is much more work to be done on this

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www.liveoakcharter.org

issue to insure that students attending public charters have facilities that are reasonably comparable to students other public schools.

F5. The demands of getting a program off the ground are such that there was little opportunity in the first two years for working with other local schools within the district. The attempt we made, to be included in district cabinet or principals meetings, was denied. We were able to find time to share some administrative resources with other charters with similar teaching methodology.

F8. We also use the API.

R1. CANEC has been undergoing organizational upheaval and it is not clear to us what the outcome will be. We are currently taking a wait and see attitude before joining. We do participate in regional collaboration with other charters who are using similar teaching methodology.

R.2. We meet consistently with an affiliation of like-minded schools. I think it would be fruitful to meet with other district schools. Such a meeting would be most successful if it was facilitated and promoted by the local superintendent.

R.3. We host a series of parent education events that are widely advertised and open to the general public.

R.4. This recommendation implies the undertaking of a qualitative rather than the current quantitative research methodology. I think the proposal has merit, but represents a significant allocation of what are already stretched human and fiscal resources.

Sincerely,

Will Stapp
Executive Director

PATHWAYS
CHARTER SCHOOL

#1671

NOV 11 RECD

GRAND JURY

November 3, 2003

Sonoma County Grand Jury
PO Box 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

To Members of the Human Services Committee:

Please find below our response to the 2002-03 Grand Jury Report. I apologize for my tardiness; never having been the subject of a Grand Jury Report, I misunderstood my response obligations. In some cases, I chose to respond to more than the required elements, as they pertain particularly to Pathways Charter School.

Responses to Findings

F1. Pathways represents a significant exception to this finding. In the current year, we have doubled our planned expenditures on special education students to over 9% of our total revenue. Additionally, we currently have over 12% of our student population identified as special education, in contrast to the established "norm" of 10%.

It is important for the Committee to understand that Pathways also suffers from a severe reduction in special education funding, to the tune of over $22,000 due to a arbitrary decision by the State Department of Education around "direct service" dollars for small districts. Harmony Elementary District has always received this funding for their small population of under 400 (the maximum allowance is 900 students). Although Pathways conducts its own special education program as an LEA of the county SELPA, the state incorrectly assumes that Harmony and Pathways run a mutually beneficial special education program. This assumption is based on a combined count of both student populations numbering over 1,000. As a result, Harmony lost access to the approximately $22,000 direct service dollars they would otherwise have received.

Pathways suffers a financial loss each year when we reimburse this amount back to Harmony. Because we appear to be a haven for special education students and have an excellent program very responsive to their needs, this state determination has the deleterious effect of reducing remaining funding intended for general education students. We would certainly appreciate any support the Grand Jury could provide to us in this matter.

4008-A Bohemian Hwy
PO Box 70
Occidental CA 95465
www.pathwayscharter.org

phone 707 874-0115 fax 707 874-0122 toll free 800 622-9403

F2. Pathways is proud to be one of the first independent study schools in the state to be granted an Interim Term of Accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The three year term was granted in Spring 2003.

F5. Pathways supports the notion of "mutual cooperation in public education." I have personally taken the opportunity to express this desire to other Sonoma County school officials and our school regularly refers students to other programs when their needs would clearly be better served elsewhere.

F8. Pathways is investing this second year of operation to identifying a student assessment system which will provide an alternative to the API. We will report out the results of our experiment in the Fall of 2004. The Committee should understand that all resources of the state are geared toward the yearly standardized testing and accountability system (the API) and our school must devote an excessive amount of energy toward these goals to avoid punitive sanctions by the state.

Response to Recommendations

R1. Pathways has been a member of CANEC since 2002. This year we have also joined *CharterVoice,* the charter school advocate arm of Charter Schools Development Center (CSDC).

R2. While this recommendation is admirable, the staff time and resources it would consume are untenable. Our school relies on less funding from the state than most schools and contributes a large portion of our budget to direct student services. Our staff volunteers much of their time to meeting ever increasing state mandates and toward political advocacy on behalf of the charter school movement.

R3. Pathways plans to continue to offer events open to the public.

R4. Pathways is working on a "report card" which will identify various aspects of student achievement and enable the public to better understand the role of homeschool and independent study.

Sincerely,

Karri Smith
School Director

Petaluma Charter School K-8

Board of Trustees
Sheila Deignan-Chavez
Dan Kritz
Kim Nadeau
Holly Pendley
Jeff Skubic

Petaluma Charter School
1060 Corona Road ♦ ♦ Petaluma, California 94954 ♦ ♦ (707)778-5060 (707)778-5061 fax
Christopher Rafanelli, Director

#1606

Judge Mark Tansil, Presiding
Sonoma County Superior Court
600 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Judge Tansil,

The Petaluma Charter School community appreciates the opportunity to respond to your report regarding charter schools. In the following pages we have outlined areas of agreement and a few areas where we believe that we are already successfully meeting the needs of our students and our community in general.

I hope that the information provided answers your concerns fully. If not, I would be pleased to answer any further questions.

Respectfully,

Christopher Rafanelli

PETALUMA CHARTER SCHOOL'S
RESPONSE TO THE 2002-2003 GRAND JURY REPORT

Charter School Overview

Findings-Pages 2-3

Finding 1 - With a few notable exceptions, charter schools have avoided the higher costs associated with the special education students, while still receiving the same funding per student as the general population. This shifts an ever-increasing burden onto non-charter schools.

Response: I partially agree with this finding.

While some of this finding is correct, there are large pieces of the truth missing. The fact is that while charter schools might not have the expenses of the severe special education student population, we do service special education students and also serve a population of students that would be in special education if they had remained in public schools. At our charter school, at least 10% of our regular student population was referred to special education by their home districts but chose to come to a charter rather then be pushed into a special education program. The 10% number is a very conservative number considering a great deal of families that have left a regular public setting because they believed that their child was being unnecessarily pushed into special education are reluctant to provide that type of background to their new charter school.

In addition, while our funding models might seem similar, charter schools are not able to pass parcel taxes to supplement their revenue. Even more importantly is the inability to pass a General Obligation Bond to cover the sizeable cost of facilities. According to a recent RAND Institute study, most charter schools, including Petaluma Charter, spend between 9 and 15 percent of their revenue just to cover the cost of housing students. In a typical public school, that cost is covered by state and local bonds, developer fees and state grants. I would be glad

to trade a school facility for the increased cost of special education.

As a local school board member, I understand that the cost of special education encroachment is a great burden for public schools and most districts in Sonoma County will spend approximately 7% of their regular education budget to cover this encroachment. However, in some districts in California, the encroachment is considerably less or even zero. The real question is; what are those districts doing to keep their costs down rather than how do we accept and then share an intolerable burden.

Finding 5 - Educators in Sonoma County are trying to abandon the academic competitive model of charter versus traditional public school and are moving toward mutual cooperation in public education. Some charter schools are now meeting with non-charter schools to share their innovative teaching methods.

Response: I agree with this finding.

At Petaluma Charter School, we are working much more closely with our sponsoring district to solve problems, like special education, articulation, finance and communication. In addition, we are actively looking for schools with which to collaborate on curriculum, staff development and instructional practices.

Finding 8 - The majority of charter schools have not provided accountability systems for measuring student progress beyond those of the standardized Academic Performance Index.

Response: I partially agree with this finding.

While we have not created a numbered accountability system like the API, we have created standards based academic rubrics and report cards.

Recommendations-Page 4

Recommendation 1 – All county charter schools should join the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC) to take advantage of that resource.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

Petaluma Charter has been a member of this organization for 3 years and has consistently used this resource to support the school's program. However, CANEC is currently going through a transition period and is transforming into CCSA or California Charter School Association. This new organization is still creating a core focus and may not evolve into something that can support charter schools as well as in the past.

Recommendation 2 – The staff of each charter school should implement a process of regular meetings with the staffs of charter schools and non-charter schools to share ideas, curriculum and innovative teaching methods.

Response: The recommendation has been partially implemented.

Petaluma Charter School has worked with other local small schools to cooperate on standards based curriculum and instruction. Last year, we were a part of a group of schools that matched teachers up by grade level to meet and collaborate on several occasions during the school year. We are currently trying to schedule a similar program for this school year and are also scheduling visits to other schools by our faculty.

Recommendation 3 – County charter schools should continue to promote their schools with events open to the public.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

Petaluma Charter hosts four or more public Open Houses during the school. These events are publicized in the local

newspaper, with press releases to local radio and television, and through flyers mailed to local agencies, businesses and preschools.

Recommendation 4 – Educational leaders should gather and publish data, more than just test scores, which would enable the public to understand whether charter schools are improving.

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented.

Petaluma Charter School would like to work with other charter schools to create an accountability system that reflects our unique situation. I will be meeting with other charter administrators during the year to start the process of creating some type of accountability system that would hopefully give the community some type of instrument that could be easily understood while not being excessively burdensome on our limited staff resources.

PINER-OLIVET UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

3450 Coffey Lane ◆ Santa Rosa, California 95403-1919 ◆ (707) 522-3000 ◆ Fax (707) 522-3007

www.pousd.k12.ca.us

4/5

September 26, 2003

The Honorable Mark Tansil
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California
County of Sonoma, Hall of Justice
600 Administrative Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2881

#1685

NOV 11 RECD

GRAND JURY

Dear The Honorable Mark Tansil:

The Piner-Olivet Union School District has been asked to respond to the Final Report of the Sonoma County Grand Jury 2002-2003. The District supports the responses provided by Dr. Carl Wong, County Superintendent of Schools, on the topics of Prevailing Wages and Charter Schools. To add to the discussion of Public Charter Schools the District would like to provide some further comments.

School Accreditation – Finding 32 (Page 27).
Charter schools are not accredited at the present time. In 2002, the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC) announced they were going to champion a system of accreditation for charter schools. A pilot program, in conjunction with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), has been put in place.

The Piner-Olivet Union School District created the Piner-Olivet Charter School for the purpose of providing choice to parents of seventh and eighth grade students. The school was established in 1997. Prior to the school's charter renewal the Piner-Olivet Union School District hired two independent evaluators to report on the school's progress in meeting the promises contained in the school's chartering document. The results of the review were written into the charter's renewal. The Piner-Olivet Union School District Board of Trustees monitors the charter school's progress while the school makes the changes outlined in the evaluation.

California Network of Educational Charters - Recommendations
R1. All county charter schools should join the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC) to take advantage of that resource.

The Piner-Olivet Charter School and the Piner-Olivet Union School District are members and have been members of the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC). To help demonstrate the charter school and district's involvement with CANEC, Mardi Hinton, former Office and Fiscal Manager of the Piner-Olivet Charter School, has served as a CANEC officer. District Superintendent Dr. Rod J. Buchignani has been a CANEC conference presenter.

Meetings with Non-Charter School Staff - Recommendations
R2. The staff of each charter school should implement a process of regular meetings with the staffs of charter schools and non-charter schools to share ideas, curriculum and innovative teaching methods.

The Piner-Olivet Charter School and the Piner-Olivet Union School District hold curriculum meetings on a regular basis throughout the school year. Both charter and non-charter school teachers participate in these curriculum meetings. Charter and non-charter school teachers also participate in district-wide staff development trainings and workshops.

The Piner-Olivet Union School District appreciates your interest in the programmatic operations of charter schools. If the district can be of any further assistance please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rod J. Buchignani, Ed.D.
Superintendent

PINER-OLIVET CHARTER SCHOOL
A middle school of choice

3450 Coffey Lane Santa Rosa, CA 95403 Tel. 707-522-3080 Fax 707-522-3083

#1593

BT 9/10/03

August 20, 2003

The Honorable Mark Tansil, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California
County of Sonoma
Hall of Justice
600 Administrative Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2881

Dear Judge Tansil:

I am enclosing the responses to the Final Report of the Sonoma County Grand Jury 2002-2003 findings and recommendations regarding Charter Schools.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Diana Drew-Ingham

Diana Drew-Ingham
Principal

PINER-OLIVET CHARTER SCHOOL
Response to Sonoma County Grand Jury Report 2002-2003

Finding 1 – Special Education

With a few notable exceptions, charter schools have avoided the higher costs associated with special education students, while still receiving the same funding per student as the general population. This shifts an ever-increasing burden onto noncharter schools.

Piner-Olivet Charter School is an independent charter school and we have been responsible for providing special education services to our special education students. Our percentage of students in a Resource Specialist Program is comparable to our district's percentage. We contract with Piner-Olivet Union School District to provide services to those students and the district charges us for any costs over and above the supplemental allocation to provide services.

Finding 5 – Cooperation with Other Schools

Educators in Sonoma County are trying to abandon the academic competitive model of charter versus traditional public schools and are moving toward mutual cooperation in public education. Some charter schools are now meeting with non-charter schools to share their innovative teaching methods.

Piner-Olivet Charter School works cooperatively with Piner-Olivet Union School District, its chartering district. The Charter School teachers participate regularly with other district teachers in professional development and curriculum committees. We have collaborated with other charter schools as well.

Finding 8 – Accountability

The majority of charter schools have not provided accountability systems for measuring student progress beyond those of the standardized Academic Performance Index.

Piner-Olivet Charter School identified and implemented multiple measures during the 2002-2003 school year. We will review results and continue the process during the 2003-2004 school year.

Recommendation 1 – California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC)

All county charter schools should join the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC) to take advantage of that resource.

Our school has been a member of CANEC for several years and attends the annual conference. We consider CANEC a valuable resource and have consulted with leaders many times.

Recommendation 2 – Collaboration with Other Schools

The staff of each charter school should implement a process of regular meetings with the staffs of charter schools and non-charter schools to share ideas, curriculum, and innovative teaching methods.

Piner-Olivet Charter School participates regularly in meetings with its chartering district. We have had some contact with other schools planning to expand into the middle grades or develop a charter for this age level. We would welcome an opportunity to collaborate with other charter schools and non-charter schools on a more regular basis.

Recommendation 3 – Promote Charter Schools

County charter schools should continue to promote their schools with events open to the public.

The Charter School advertises and provides an Information Evening that is open to the public. We have participated in Charter Schools Week in past years. We have notified the newspaper and provided information on special activities in hopes of coverage.

Recommendation 4 – Data

Educational leaders should gather and publish data, more than just test scores, which would enable the public to understand whether charter schools are improving pupil learning.

Some additional data on parent satisfaction is included in the Review and Renewal documents for the school. The Charter School is exploring other ways to gather a variety of data that would measure pupil progress.

Roseland School District
950 Sebastopol Road
Santa Rosa, CA 95407
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Fax 707•545•5096

Roseland Accelerated Middle School (RAMS)
Grand Jury Response 7-8-9
Submitted by Gail Ahlas
August 8, 2003

Required Responses to Findings: F1, F5, F8
Required Responses to Recommendations: R1, R2, R3, R4

F1 RAMS is currently working with their new sponsoring district, Roseland School District, to equally share in the higher costs associated with special education. A formula providing equal fiscal responsibility is the goal.

F5 Mutual cooperation in public education benefits all involved: students, their families, staff and the community. RAMs have collaborated and shared educational strategies with local non charter middle schools, local charter middle schools as well as partnering daily with the non chartered K-6 Sheppard Accelerated Elementary School. We strive to increase our level of contribution to the educational community as we move into our third year as a charter school.

F8 RAMs utilizes a multiple measures system of beyond the API that currently includes: SAMS math assessment, STAR reading inventory, 6 Traits Written Language rubrics and standards-based report card systems.

R1 RAMs is currently a member of California Network Of Educational Charters

R2 Currently RAMs meets weekly with a non Charter School, Sheppard Accelerated Elementary School, to share ideas, curriculum and innovative teaching methods. RAMS teachers have taken release time from their teaching day to visit and collaborate with several non charter as well as charter middle schools.

R3 Current public events open to the public include: Back to School and Open House demonstration evenings and locally sponsored Speech Contests. As our school grows, additional events will be included.

R4 Through national and state sponsored charter organizations, published data that demonstrate student learning at established charter schools, through multiple measures, is increasing. RAMS concurs that this is an important contribution to the community will be an enthusiastic participant.

H5

#1669

Russian River Charter School

10940 River Rd.; Box 139 , Guerneville, CA 95446;
(707) 887-8790; fax 887-8759

NOV 11 RECD

November 6, 2003

Sonoma County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

GRAND JURY

Dear Sonoma County Grand Jury,

Thank you for mailing us a copy of the Grand Jury Report. I had tried to access the Charter School Report from your website two months ago and was not able to figure out where the report on Charter Schools was or what we were supposed to reply too. Nor did I realize that it was required that we respond. I found your report interesting and respond now to the sections you have required.

F1. Russian River serves an academically diverse student body. Since our program is a graduation track, college prep program, it is important that we serve well the 10-15% of our student body who receive special ed services, because many of them WILL go on to higher education and their Individual Transition Plans include our giving them help as they transfer to the Junior College. One of our staff members, whose own son was such a student and is now in his second year at the SRJC, wants me to tell you that, "Our entire program is college-prep special ed." I think what she means is that, although we give excellent special services to our students, and routinely spend more each year than we did the last on these services, that many of the accommodations which special students receive are reflected widely throughout the program: small classes, personal attention, individualized programs, and tremendous assistance with the college preparation process including financial aide applications and counseling toward career goals. We hired a wonderful special ed teacher from the District who spends 4 hours a week providing RSP services to the group of students on her Special Ed Roster, and an additional 6 hours a week integrating their needs with other teachers via conferences and curriculum planning and assistance. In addition she does assessment for these students, IEPs, and provides support to their families as their Independent Study Mentor. Each of our Russian River students has his/her personal Independent Study Mentor. Most of their coursework is taken in our 5 day a week class program, but often they have fallen behind somewhere and need a few units of this or that to complete graduation requirements, or perhaps they are scoring poorly on the CAHSEE test and need additional help preparing to pass that test.

I would note that since we are a new program and the District is our LEA, we have NOT received a penny yet of any special education funding so that all our services are funded directly from our regular budget. SO….. This criticism of charter schools avoiding special ed costs does most certainly not apply to us.

R4. Our most impressive data is our graduation rate and college entrance rate. Although this is only our second year in this incarnation, our program has been evolving for 18 years and we average over 90% college entrance within the first two years of graduation. We keep track of lots of our students as they progress into adulthood and many of those college students maintain their grade point average in college that they had in high school, or do even better. A few drop out or develop careers before completing their programs, but most complete their college programs, as well. We are working on a press release at this time to support a need for a few more students to help fund our stretched program.

Sincerely,

Carol Miller, Principal
Russian River Charter

SEP 2 8 [illegible] #1589 GRAND JURY

Sonoma County Grand Jury
PO BOX 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

15 Sept 2003

Dear Esteemed Members of the Grand Jury,

We, the Governing Board of Directors of the Santa Rosa Charter School, have read and discussed the Sonoma County Grand Jury Final Report 2002-2003. In accordance with the requirements as specified at the end of your section on Public Charter Schools in Sonoma County, we have prepared this letter in answer to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury with regard to Charter Schools.

Findings:

F1 – Special Education in Charter Schools and non-Charter Schools

While it is true that there have been years that we been fortunate enough to not incur high special education costs, indeed, even receiving a credit from Santa Rosa City Schools, our sponsoring district, in the 2000/2001 school year, this is certainly not the case currently. Our current Special Education population of 16 students constitutes nearly 10% of our total population of 168 students. Two of these students require full-time aides. According to the invoice we received from City Schools for special education services, our campus constituted 34% of the school psychologist's caseload in 2002/03. The total cost of our special education program for 2002/03 was 60% higher than we anticipated. It is for this reason that we counter your findings that Charter Schools carry less of a burden in the area of special education.

F5 – Model of mutual cooperation amongst schools instead of academic competition

In our eight years as a Charter School, we have found that the well being of our students and program are most protected by nurturing relationships with the other Charter Schools in Sonoma County. This has been one of our main areas of outreach, as Charter Schools share similar problems and challenges. There have also been areas of outreach to other non-Charter Schools as well, such as sharing our experience in inquiry-based curriculum with educators around the world. In 2001, we received a $100,000 Dissemination grant from the California Department of Education that was used to enable us to share our innovative ideas with our colleagues all over the country. We also share information about

Santa Rosa Education Cooperative

California's first International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program

The cooperative is an umbella organization for a publicly funded K-8 charter school and a tuition based preschool & after school program on a single campus.

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Santa Rosa Cooperative Preschool & Children's Center
(phone) 707.579.3718
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Positive Discipline, IB, and parent participation to members of our community via word of mouth or by responding to direct inquiries. We would be happy to continue to build relationships with our professional colleagues in the non-Charter School sector and would welcome the opportunity to do so.

F8 – Accountability beyond API

There are several ways that we assess the progress of our students at the Santa Rosa Charter School. One of these ways is a Portfolio Review, which follows a student through their years at the Charter School and is filled with what the student and teacher identify as their best work to date. The goal is one year of progress over time (independent of when the student joins our campus). The International Baccalaureate requires an annual assessment of the progress students are making towards developing attributes such as *inquirers, thinkers, risk-takers, principled, open-minded, and reflective.* In addition, we participate in annual State standardized testing and have progress reports that assess student performance of CA state standards. Finally, we secure the services of a Professional Evaluator annually to create our Program Evaluation. The goal of this document is to understand how our children are progressing in their learning, chart logistical data such as demographic make-up and API scores, and to survey the parent community for their opinions regarding the program and their children's progress over the course of one school year. This Program Evaluation is presented to the Santa Rosa City Schools District annually.

Recommendations:

R1 – Join CANEC

Santa Rosa Charter School has been a member of CANEC since 1995. In addition, we are members of the Charter Schools Development Center. We have been well served by our membership in both organizations from board and staff training to seminars and conferences to personal phone consultations with staff members at CANEC and CSDC.

R2 – Regular meetings between staffs of Charter and non-Charter Schools to share ideas.

We have staff experienced in training educators in Positive Discipline, First Steps and IB. Staff members have presented at schools, colleges and education conferences. We open our classroom to visitors and are eager to visit other schools. In addition, members of the educational community have collaborated with us on various issues that affect the Santa Rosa Charter School.

R3 – Promoting Charter Schools with open events

There are several ways that the Santa Rosa Charter School participates in outreach activities with the community in Santa Rosa. We have had booths at the Wednesday Farmer's Market, the American Red Cross, the Family Expo, the Mother's Club Preschool showcase, and at Family Fun night at Coddingtown. We also host an annual fundraising auction that is advertised to the general public. We work in concert with CANEC to host a once yearly meeting for the Charter School community in Northern California. We march in the Rose Parade and participate in the Human Race every year. We do all of our advertising in the Sonoma Parent's Journal or the Press Democrat.

R4 – Publish data that enables the public to understand how Charter Schools improve pupil learning

Our annual Program Evaluation is presented to the Santa Rosa City Schools Board of Directors annually. This document clearly outlines not only our learning philosophy, but also our self-assessment of our progress towards becoming the school we envision in our hearts and minds. In addition, we annually hold tours for prospective parents from January through April. Prospective parents are given information filled packets that describes our program and our learning philosophy in detail. As an international school, we strive to create a more diverse population of students at our campus. To this end, we participate in outreach to the residents around our campus and invite them to learn more about the Santa Rosa Charter School. Articles about our school have been featured in the local press and we have received many awards and commendations from local and state organizations and political leaders.

Sincerely,

Ellen Roche

Ellen Roche
President
Santa Rosa Education Cooperative

(37) 9/5/03

#1576

SEP 16 REC'D

GRAND JURY

SEBASTOPOL INDEPENDENT CHARTER SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO THE 2002-2003 GRAND JURY REPORT

Findings- Pages 2-3

F1 – With a few notable exceptions, charter schools have avoided the higher costs associated with special education students, while still receiving the same funding per student as the general population. This shifts an ever-increasing burden onto non-charter schools.

Response: I disagree with this finding. Special Education services and funding are provided through a complex formula which to a large degree allocates services and funds to districts and charter schools based on the number of identified special education students enrolled and types of services needed.

F5 – Educators in Sonoma County are trying to abandon the academic competitive model of charter versus traditional public schools and are moving toward mutual cooperation in public education. Some charter schools are now meeting with non-charter schools to share their innovative teaching methods.

Response: I have not yet seen much evidence of a shift to the mutual cooperation model.

F8 – The majority of charter schools have not provided accountability systems for measuring student progress beyond those of the standardized Academic Performance Index.

Response: I cannot speak for the majority of charter schools, but I do know that our school uses a wide range of performance indicators on a daily basis as required by our approved charter. We are always monitoring our students' progress by observation of their work products, reports, art work, reading proficiency, class work and homework, physical education activities, etc.

Recommendations – Page 4

R1 - All county charter schools should join the California Network of Educational Charters to take advantage of that resource.

Response: We have been a member of CANEC since its inception. They are, however, in process of merging into a new organization at the present time, and so we will be evaluating our continuing membership in that new organization.

R2 – The staff of each charter school should implement a process of regular meetings with the staffs of charter schools and non-charter schools to share ideas, curriculum and innovative teaching methods.

Response: We are certainly open to such dialogues, but cost is always an issue. Charter schools receive vastly fewer financial resources per pupil than do the traditional public schools. Consider, in particular, the issue of facilities. Many or most charter schools receive absolutely no funding for facilities, while traditional public schools can issue bonds and receive matching funds from the State. We are forced to do more with less, and this is not at all equitable. The lack of resources makes it difficult to devote staff time to non-direct instructional activities

R3 – County charter schools should continue to promote their schools with events open to the public.

Response: We do this on a regular and annual basis.

R4 – Educational leaders should gather and publish data, more than just test scores, which would enable the public to understand whether charter schools are improving pupil learning.

Response: The charter schools are included in all the same testing requirements that currently apply to non-charter public schools. This testing data is published to the internet by the California Department of Education. Testing and compiling reports absorbs precious fiscal resources. We are already stretched to the limit in providing a superior educational experience for our pupils. This recommendation could be implemented provided funds were allocated for that purpose.

SONOMA CHARTER SCHOOL

Academic Excellence Through Engaged Learning

F 1570

SEP 09 RECD

GRAND JURY

Sonoma County Grand Jury
P.O.Box 5109
Santa Rosa, California 95402

Response to findings on charter public schools:

F1: Sonoma Charter School (SCS) has a Memorandum of Understanding with Sonoma Valley Unifed School District (SVUSD) regarding the Special Education program. All our services are provided by the district and we pay them a substantial amount for these services. Our cost has increased significantly over the past three years. Below is the formula for the determination of this cost and the previous school year's cost.

Sonoma Charter School
Special Education Excess Charge Final Calculation for FY 2002-2003

	P-2		
SVUSD	4475.41		
SCS	219.21		
Total ADA	4694.62		
Excess Special Ed. Costs		$2,056,607.22	
Cost divided by total ADA provides cost per ADA		$438.08	
SCS ADA x rate per ADA			
	219.21 x $438.08	$96,031.00	Total Amount Paid for Services

F5: SCS's director meets on a monthly basis with the SVUSD principals and superintendent. SCS teachers have shared ideas with Harmony School District and SVUSD during the past several years.

F8: SCS has used a number of different standardized assessments outside of the spring standardized tests. This information has been made available to parents and to the SVUSD board in previous years through our Annual Reports.

17202 Sonoma Highway, Sonoma, CA 95476
Tel. (707) 935-4232 Fax: (707) 935-4207

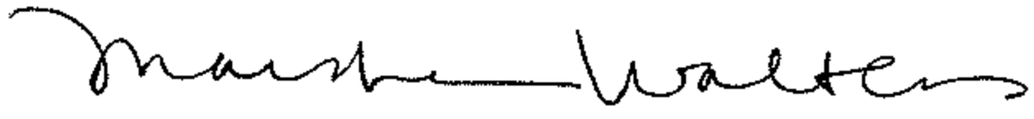
Response to recommendations:

R1: SCS has been a member of CANEC for the past 8 years.
R2: The staff has met with other schools and shared ideas concerning multiage education and the 8th grade exiting project. Ongoing observations and conversations have taken place over the past few years and will continue to occur.
R3: SCS sponsors several open houses throughout the year.
R4: We are beginning to update our website and will publicize through this means, the data we have analyzed through our multiple assessments.

Response to findings on prevailing wages:

R1: SCS is fully audited by Stephen Roatch Accountancy Corporation and reports are sent to the SVUSD as well as Sonoma County Office of Education. SCS complies with all state and federal laws.

Respectfully submitted,



Marsha Walters

TWIN HILLS
UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

700 WATER TROUGH ROAD ♦ SEBASTOPOL, CA 95472
(707) 823-0871 PHONE ♦ (707) 823-5832 FAX ♦ www.thusd.k12.ca.us

September 24, 2003

The Honorable Mark Tansil
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California
County of Sonoma
Hall of Justice
600 Administrative Drive
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2881

Dear Judge Tansil:

On behalf of the charters schools within the Twin Hills Union School District, I hereby submit this response to the 2002-03 Sonoma County Grand Jury Report. Our response to the findings and the recommendations are as follows:

F1. With a few notable exceptions, charter schools have avoided the higher costs associated with special education students, while still receiving the same funding per student as the general population. This shifts an ever-increasing burden onto noncharter schools.

Both SunRidge and Orchard View Charter Schools serve special education students. The ratio of special education students to regular education students in these schools is approximately the same as within the District's regular education schools. While the Twin Hills Union School District is the LEA for special education for both schools, SunRidge has taken it upon itself to hire a 60% RSP teacher and to contract with a psychologist, as well as a special education director to provide services. Orchard View contracts directly with THUSD to provide the services.
It should be noted that Orchard View School is an independent study school, and thus is not an appropriate placement for many students with learning disabilities. In addition, many parents who opt for such a school are not interested in the services that are available to their students. Regardless, the services are offered.

F5. Educators in Sonoma County are trying to abandon the academic competitive model of charter versus traditional public schools and are moving toward mutual cooperation in public education. Some charter schools are now meeting with non-charter schools to share their innovative teaching methods.

Directors of Orchard View and SunRidge Schools meet weekly with the management team of the Twin Hills Union School District. These charter schools are considered by the District's Board and administration as equal members of the District. In addition, all District staff development opportunities are available to teachers at these schools.

F8. The majority of charter schools have not provided accountability systems for measuring student progress beyond those of the standardized Academic Performance Index (API).

Both SunRidge School and Orchard View School use multiple measures to measure student progress. The API is only one tool used.

R1. All county charter schools should join the California Network of Educational Charters (CA NEC) to take advantage of that resource.

The Twin Hills Union School District agrees with this recommendation and both charters belong to several statewide charter organizations, including CANEC.

R2. The staff of each charter school should implement a process of regular meetings with the staffs of charter schools and non-charter schools to share ideas, curriculum and innovative teaching methods.

The District agrees with this recommendation. Directors of Orchard View and SunRidge Schools meet weekly with the management team of the Twin Hills Union School District. These charter schools are considered by the District's Board and administration as equal members of the District. In addition, all District staff development opportunities are available to teachers at these schools.

R3. County charter schools should continue to promote their schools with events open to the public.

The District agrees with the recommendation. SunRidge School had several community events during the 2002-03 school year. In addition, staff members from Orchard View School attend many educational fairs promoting their program.

R4. Educational leaders should gather and publish data, more than just test scores, which would enable the public to understand whether charter schools are improving pupil learning.

The District agrees with the recommendation. Such data is valuable in determining the effectiveness of instruction in all schools. It is important for the Grand Jury and the public to understand that charter schools exist for many reasons. While pupil learning is important, the rate and style of that learning has become a matter of choice among parents who send their children to charter schools. It is our experience that not all parents are pleased with the pressure that is placed on

students to learn in California schools. Many parents believe that their children will learn to read and write effectively without the pressures of standards and testing. Many choose charters over regular education because they may offer a more nurturing and holistic approach to learning, or have a particular philosophy of instruction. These philosophies do not always align well with the standards movement. The charter schools movement has blossomed because one size does not necessarily fit all.

If any further information or response is needed from the Twin Hills Union School District, please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Donald F. Armstrong, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Grand Jury Generic Grand Jury Generic - Charter Schools

From: Ginger Dale <gdale@wusd.org>
To: <gjury@sonoma-county.org>
Date: 10/31/03 11:24 AM
Subject: Charter Schools

FAX

#1663

I read the Grand Jury report on Charter Schools in Sonoma County. This is our required response.
R1. We do not have the extra funding to join California Network of Ed. Charters but we have attended their annual conference.
R2 Agree
R3. Agree
R4. Agree
R5. We have an equitable system of helping the district with special ed. Our students are 20% of the whole district population so we contribute from our Charter general funds the amount that equals 20% of the whole special ed. expenses for the district.