

July 16, 2020

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

Re: Response of the Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools to the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Report dated May 29, 2020, entitled Homeless Youth

Dear Members of the Grand Jury:

Our office is in receipt of the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Report entitled "Homeless Youth: Sonoma County in Dubious First Place" ("Report") dated May 29, 2020. The report pertains to gaps in services, as well as measures that Sonoma County could take to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place.

As a preliminary matter, the position of County Superintendent of Schools, established in the California State Constitution in 1879, has evolved to meet the changing needs of the state and its students. County Superintendents operate as intermediate service agencies providing direct and regional support to school districts, and serve as the primary implementation arm of the California Department of Education ("CDE"). Education Code §§ 1240 describes the duties and authority of County Superintendents. As the Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools, I have authority over the employees and day-to-day functioning at the Sonoma County Office of Education ("SCOE").¹ However, SCOE, and I as the Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools, do not have any legal authority to dictate the curriculum, course of study, graduation requirements, etc. for school districts in Sonoma County. Each school district has its own elected governing board of trustees in accordance with Education Code §§ 35160 et seq. Therefore, any issues regarding a specific school district adopting a curriculum or any other pedagogical issues should be directed to that specific school district.

In my capacity of Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools, pursuant to Penal Code § 933.05, I am responding to the Report request for a response from SCOE. Specially, I am responding to Findings F7 and F9 and Recommendations 8 and 11.

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY'S FINDINGS

F7. Additional programs in schools are needed to provide marketable skills and financial literacy to young people.

AGREE.

We encourage financial literacy for students! This is an important life skill for all students to include students who are currently experiencing homelessness.

Education Code § 51225.3 requires all students in California in order to receive a high school diploma to

¹ The Sonoma County Board of Education ("SCBOE") has limited budgetary oversight, appellate review for student expulsions, and interdistrict transfers, and other issues in accordance with Education Code §§ 1040 et seq.

complete a one semester course in economics. The California Department of Education (“CDE”) provides school districts with guidance on the selection of curriculum and the development of state standards (in association with the State Board of Education (“SBE”).

Education Code § 51284 required CDE/SBE to, among other issues, ensure that the textbooks and curriculum frameworks address “... financial literacy, including, but not limited to, budgeting and managing credit, student loans, consumer debt, and identity theft security.”

The CDE website provides information on financial literacy and approved resources and curriculum for financial literacy stating:

Young people need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge that allow them to be savvy consumers and competent managers of their own finances. The goal of this financial literacy awareness initiative is to provide schools, teachers, students and parents with access to supplemental resources that can help students develop a keen understanding of responsible money management and increase their overall financial literacy. The California Department of Education is partnering with financial institutions, consumer groups, and other government agencies in this effort.²

Through a resolution on April 4, 2019, SCBOE and my office supported legislation that would further address student literacy, unfortunately the legislation did not pass the appropriations committee.³

My office and the SCOE continue to encourage increased financial literacy for all students.

F9. The majority of the County’s efforts related to the homeless youth population focus on providing programs and services to young people already living on the streets, rather than programs to prevent homelessness in the first place.

DISAGREE IN PART.

This finding requires me to form an opinion on the efficacy of Sonoma County’s efforts to address the prevention of homelessness for students. I believe this finding is too narrow and takes too simple a view of this societal issue – homelessness. Therefore, I disagree in part.

I do agree that everyone – individuals and institutions – should do all they can to reduce homelessness for youth and their families. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act outlines various responsibilities that K-12 educational institutions must ensure are implemented to address the needs of youth that are experiencing homelessness. SCOE has information on addressing the needs of youth that are experiencing homelessness on our website: <https://www.scoe.org/pub/htdocs/homeless-education.html>. SCOE also has a Foster and Homeless Youth Education Services Coordinator that assists school districts in Sonoma County in addressing the needs of youth that are experiencing homelessness and students in the foster care system.

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY’S RECOMMENDATIONS

R8. Sonoma County Office of Education form a partnership with a local financial institution to implement a financial literacy program for middle and high school students, by February 28, 2021. (F7)

THE RECOMMENDATION HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED.

² <https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/fl/>.

³ Assembly Bill-1087 (Cunningham). See http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1087.

As discussed previously, SCOE does not have the authority to direct school districts in Sonoma County to adopt a specific curriculum or implement a specific program. Therefore, concerns regarding a specific school district should be directed to that district.

That said, SCOE along with Sonoma County High Schools did partner with the Redwood Credit Union to offer a free 16-hour Banking and Finance Academy for local high school students with students enrolled in grades 10th – 12th at any Sonoma County high school being eligible to attend. This program was instituted in 2009.

R11. Sonoma County Office of Education, by February 28, 2021, begin monitoring the implementation and progress of the Upstream Project, in Hopkins, MN, and the Geelong model pilot project in Tukwila, WA, and consider implementing a pilot program on this model in Sonoma County. (F9)

THE RECOMMENDATION WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BECAUSE IT IS NOT WARRANTED AND IS NOT REASONABLE.

Again, as discussed previously, SCOE does not have the authority to direct school districts in Sonoma County to adopt a specific curriculum or implement a specific program. Therefore, SCOE cannot pilot a specific program such as the "Upstream Project" or "Geelong Pilot Project" with K-12 school districts in Sonoma County. A request to implement this sort of program should be directed to a specific school district(s) in Sonoma County.

In closing, I appreciate the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury's Report on this important issue and SCOE will continue to advocate for the financial literacy of all youth and assistance to address the needs of youth that are experiencing homelessness.

Sincerely,



Steven D. Herrington, Ph.D.
Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools