

Nevada County Committee on School District Organization

Reason for Investigation

As part of its responsibility to review activities of government agencies in Nevada County, the Grand Jury conducted a review of the County Committee on School District Organization (CCSDO), which is under the direction of the Nevada County Superintendent of Schools.

Background

The California Department of Education's District Organization Handbook (2006) details the responsibilities of the (CCSDO, following enabling language in the California Education Code sections 35720-35724 and 35753 et seq.

The preface in Chapter 3 states:

“The CCSDO has a major role in the review and approval of proposals to change school district organization in the county. This chapter discusses how the members are selected, how committees should function, and how they are financed. In 32 counties in the state, the function of the CCSDO has been transferred to the county board of education.”

In Nevada County, the CCSDO is a separate committee from the county board of education.

Chapter 3.B. of the Handbook details the responsibilities of the County Committee on School District Organization:

“1. The county committee is the local initiator, coordinator, analyst, facilitator, and arbitrator for the reorganization of school districts. It formulates plans, responds to petitions, conducts public hearings, develops and releases information, and analyzes proposals throughout the approval process of a reorganization.... The county committee is charged with the duty of studying the school district organization of its county and shall, under the direction of the State Board of Education, or pursuant to a petition by local electors, hold hearings and formulate plans and recommendations for the unification, other reorganization, or lapsation of the districts in the county...”

Further, Chapter 3.C. describes how members of the CCSDO are selected. In a simplified explanation, each district in the county nominates a member to the committee. Members of the CCSDO are not paid.

Methodology

The methodology the Grand Jury used consisted of interviews and research. The current and immediate past Nevada County Superintendents of Schools were interviewed, as well as two members of the CCSDO.

We also interviewed the superintendent of two local school districts that appear to have implemented a successful consolidation of administrative duties under a single superintendent while preserving the independence of the two school boards.

The Grand Jury also reviewed student population estimates of smaller school districts in Nevada County, the records of a neighboring county's committee on school district organization, and the available minutes and records of Nevada County's CCSDO.

Findings

1. The Nevada County CCSDO has only met once a year during the last three years, and then only to re-elect members during the annual county school district dinner and award ceremony.
2. Available minutes from meetings of the CCSDO were sporadic and indicate the Committee has not performed any useful function or task since it considered a high school boundary question more than three years ago.
3. The philosophy of the current and former county superintendents has been to "call you if I need you" The former superintendent used the CCSDO only for a district boundary change over three years ago, and the current superintendent has not convened the CCSDO to consider any issue or recommendation.
4. Local school identity is considered essential to any organization or administrative configuration of schools and school districts.
5. The administrative consolidation of the Ready Springs and Pleasant Valley school districts is an example of administrative savings while preserving local school identity. It is a model for examination and consideration by the CCSDO.
6. There are five small schools districts in Nevada County, three with fewer than five hundred students.
7. No investigation of consolidation of the five small school districts has been initiated by the CCSDO, nor has the CCSDO been directed by the county superintendent of schools to commence any such consideration.
8. The Grand Jury is aware that the state's proposed budget cuts may result in the possible reduction of local teaching and program positions. The Nevada County Superintendent of

Schools estimated the possibility of the elimination of up to 26 teaching positions that would be accomplished partially by layoffs and the balance by not filling positions opened by retirements, as well as other school cuts. There was no mention of any anticipated involvement of the CCSDO in these considerations.

Conclusions

1. The Nevada CCSDO appears to have become non-functional.
2. The Grand Jury believes that the former and current County Superintendents' disregard of any advisory or consultative role for the CCSDO as part of a broad, inclusive, and proactive decision-making mode, is not in the county schools' best interests.
3. The Nevada County Board of Education and its Superintendent of Schools are not in compliance with Chapter 3 of the California Department of Education's School District Organization Handbook's policy on the function and mission of a county committee on school district organization.
4. There are five small districts that might benefit from consolidation of administrative functions while preserving school identity.

Recommendations

1. The CCSDO should be active and meet on a regular monthly or quarterly basis.
2. The CCSDO should take the initiative in its mandated role instead of passively waiting to participate in consideration of organizational issues and concerns involving potential administrative and fiscal efficiencies of county schools and school districts. Frequency of meetings should be determined by the urgency of the fiscal reductions facing the districts.
3. CCSDO inquiries should actively include the input of parents of students, teachers, administrators and administrative staff of all schools studied, as well as staff and administrators of the office of the county superintendent of schools.
4. The CCSDO should issue a comprehensive and detailed report of its findings and recommendations on consolidations, reorganizations, and administrative mergers to the County Board of Education on or before December 31, 2008.

Responses Required

County Superintendent of Schools
County Board of Education

July 2, 2008
August 13, 2008

NEVADA COUNTY
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
JULY A. HERMANSEN

June 5, 2008

The Honorable Robert L. Tamietti
Presiding Judge of the Grand Jury
201 Church Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Dear Judge Tamietti,

This letter serves as my response to the 2008 Grand Jury report on the subject of **Nevada County Committee on School District Organization**.

Findings

- 1 The Nevada County Committee on School District Organization has only met once a year during the last three years and then only to re-elect members during the annual county school district dinner and award ceremony.

Partially Agree

The County Committee on School District Organization meets each year prior to the annual School Boards Awards Dinner. The purpose of the meeting is to recognize appointments to the committee that have been made by the trustee representatives from each school district and to elect officers to the committee.

2. Available minutes from meetings of the County Committee on School district Organization were sporadic and indicate the Committee has not performed any useful function or task since it considered a high school boundary question more than three years ago.

Partially Agree

While there are agendas for all the annual meetings, there are no meeting minutes from 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. There are minutes from 2007 and years previous to 2003.

3. The philosophy of the current and former county superintendents has been to "call you if I need you". The former superintendent used the CCSDO only for a district

boundary change over three years ago, and the current superintendent has not convened the CCSDO to consider any issue or recommendation.

Partially agree

It is true that I have not yet convened the county committee to consider any issue or recommendation. My philosophy is not "to call you if I need you" as stated in the grand jury report. Since the date of my appointment (August 15, 2007), no issue or concern has come to my attention that would require consideration of the county committee.

4. Local school identity is considered essential to any organization or administrative configuration of schools and school districts.

Agree

5. The administrative consolidation of the Ready Springs and Pleasant Valley school districts is an example of administrative savings while preserving local school identity. It is a model for examination and consideration by the CCSDO.

Agree

6. There are five small school districts in Nevada County, three with fewer than five hundred students.

Agree

7. No investigation of consolidation of the five small school districts has been initiated by the CCSDO, nor has the CCSDO been directed by the county superintendent of schools to commence any such consideration.

Agree

8. The Grand Jury is aware that the state's proposed budget cuts may result in the possible reduction of local teaching and program positions. The Nevada County Superintendent of Schools estimated the possibility of the elimination of up to 26 teaching positions that would be accomplished partially by layoffs and the balance by not filling positions opened by retirements, as well as other school cuts. There was no mention of any anticipated involvement of the CCSDO in these considerations.

Disagree

The county committee has no jurisdiction over layoffs, position management, personnel or budget decisions.

Recommendations

1. The CCSDO should be active and meet on a regular monthly or quarterly basis.

This recommendation will be partially implemented. It is agreed that it would be beneficial for the County Committee on School District

Organization to meet more frequently. It should be the decision of the committee how frequently to meet, however. I will recommend at least two times each year in the fall and in the spring, unless there are issues regarding school district organization that call for more regular meetings of the committee.

2. The CCSDO should take the initiative in its mandated role instead of passively waiting to participate in consideration of organizational issues and concerns involving potential administrative and fiscal efficiencies of county schools and school districts. Frequency of meetings should be determined by the urgency of the fiscal reductions facing the districts.

This recommendation will be implemented. At each of the two meetings described in number 1 above, the county committee will be provided with a summary of the current issues facing the school districts in Nevada County. These meetings will be utilized in order for the county committee to fulfill its obligation to study the school district organization of the county.

3. CCSDO inquiries should actively include the input of parents of students, teachers, administrators and administrative staff of all schools studied, as well as staff and administrators of the office of the county superintendent of schools.

This recommendation will be implemented. When and if the county committee is looking at the organization of one or more school districts, it will include the input of those identified above.

4. The CCSDO should issue a comprehensive and detailed report of its findings and recommendations on consolidations, reorganizations, and administrative mergers to the County Board of Education on or before December 31, 2008.

This recommendation requires further analysis in order to define timelines and parameters. I agree that at this time it is appropriate to pursue a study regarding the utilization of resources across school districts in Nevada County. The parameters of the study and the timeline for implementation have yet to be determined. As Nevada County Superintendent of Schools I am willing to pursue the completion of the study, and will meet with the county committee to get input and direction for the scope and focus of the study. The results of the study will be shared with the county committee in order for them to analyze the information and consider next steps.

The Nevada County Superintendent of Schools office, as well as each of the school districts in Nevada County is committed to providing the highest quality educational programs to all the students in the county. In order to continue to do this, it is important to periodically conduct studies relating to the effective utilization of resources in the

county and across the school districts. This is an appropriate time to conduct such a study, and carefully consider the results.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Holly Hermansen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "H" at the beginning.

Holly Hermansen
Nevada County Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Mac Small, Foreman 2008 Grand Jury
Nevada County Committee on School District Organization
Nevada County Board of Education

Rec'd -
7/22/08

**NEVADA COUNTY
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**
HOLLY HERMANSEN, SUPERINTENDENT

BOARD OF EDUCATION
Dr. John Smoak, President
Marianne Slade-Landsmann, Vice President
Robert Altieri
Jack Meeks
Dr. Robert Stone

July 10, 2008

The Honorable Robert L. Tamietti
Presiding Judge of the Grand Jury
201 Church Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Dear Judge Tamietti,

This letter serves as the response from the Nevada County Board of Education to the 2008 Grand Jury report on the subject of **Nevada County Committee on School District Organization**.

Findings

1. The Nevada County Committee on School District Organization has only met once a year during the last three years and then only to re-elect members during the annual county school district dinner and award ceremony.

Partially Agree

The County Committee on School District Organization meets each year prior to the annual School Boards Awards Dinner. The purpose of the meeting is to recognize appointments to the committee that have been made by the trustee representatives from each school district and to elect officers to the committee. The CCSDO has only met one time each year due to the fact that no issues have come up.

2. Available minutes from meetings of the County Committee on School district Organization were sporadic and indicate the Committee has not performed any useful function or task since it considered a high school boundary question more than three years ago.

Partially Agree

While there are agendas for all the annual meetings, there are no meeting minutes from 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. There are minutes from 2007 and years previous to 2003.

3. The philosophy of the current and former county superintendents has been to "call you if I need you". The former superintendent used the CCSDO only for a district boundary change over three years ago, and the current superintendent has not convened the CCSDO to consider any issue or recommendation.

Partially agree

The County Board of Education has not been made aware of any issues that would cause either the former or the current county superintendent to convene the county committee.

4. Local school identity is considered essential to any organization or administrative configuration of schools and school districts.

Agree

5. The administrative consolidation of the Ready Springs and Pleasant Valley school districts is an example of administrative savings while preserving local school identity. It is a model for examination and consideration by the CCSDO.

Agree

6. There are five small school districts in Nevada County, three with fewer than five hundred students.

Agree

7. No investigation of consolidation of the five small school districts has been initiated by the CCSDO, nor has the CCSDO been directed by the county superintendent of schools to commence any such consideration.

Agree

8. The Grand Jury is aware that the state's proposed budget cuts may result in the possible reduction of local teaching and program positions. The Nevada County Superintendent of Schools estimated the possibility of the elimination of up to 26 teaching positions that would be accomplished partially by layoffs and the balance by not filling positions opened by retirements, as well as other school cuts. There was no mention of any anticipated involvement of the CCSDO in these considerations.

Agree

The county committee has no jurisdiction over layoffs, position management, personnel or budget decisions.

Recommendations

1. The CCSDO should be active and meet on a regular monthly or quarterly basis. **This recommendation will be partially implemented. It is agreed that it would be beneficial for the County Committee on School District Organization to meet more frequently. It should be the decision of the committee how frequently to meet, however.**

2. The CCSDO should take the initiative in its mandated role instead of passively waiting to participate in consideration of organizational issues and concerns involving potential administrative and fiscal efficiencies of county schools and school districts. Frequency of meetings should be determined by the urgency of the fiscal reductions facing the districts.

This recommendation will be implemented. When it meets, the county committee will be provided with a summary of the current issues facing the school districts in Nevada County. These meetings will be utilized in order for the county committee to fulfill its obligation to study the school district organization of the county.

3. CCSDO inquiries should actively include the input of parents of students, teachers, administrators and administrative staff of all schools studied, as well as staff and administrators of the office of the county superintendent of schools.

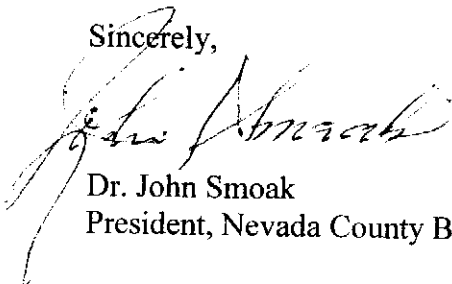
This recommendation will be implemented. When and if the county committee is looking at the organization of one or more school districts, it will include the input of those identified above.

4. The CCSDO should issue a comprehensive and detailed report of its findings and recommendations on consolidations, reorganizations, and administrative mergers to the County Board of Education on or before December 31, 2008.

Should the county committee issue a comprehensive report of its findings as the result of a study the county board of education will receive the report. It should be noted that the county board of education has no official role in taking action or making recommendations regarding consolidations, reorganizations or administrative mergers.

The Nevada County Board of Education is committed to providing the highest quality educational programs to all the students in the county. In order to continue to do this, it is important to periodically conduct studies relating to the effective utilization of resources in the county and across the school districts. This is an appropriate time to conduct such a study, and carefully consider the results.

Sincerely,



Dr. John Smoak
President, Nevada County Board of Education

Cc: Mac Small, Foreman 2008 Grand Jury
Nevada County Committee on School District Organization
Holly Hermansen, Nevada County Superintendent of Schools