1999-2000 GRAND JURY REPORT

Riverside County Schools

Background

There are 23 school districts in the county with a total of 320,000 students. There are 208 elementary schools, 53 middle/junior high schools, 65 high schools and 18 special education sites. Additionally, there are four community college districts.

Findings

1. According to the County Superintendent of Schools, the projected county growth rate is 5% annually. This means 16,000 additional students each year, and a new school will be needed every month.

2. Visitations with all of the Riverside County School District Superintendents found similar problems confronting each district as follows:

a. Not enough classrooms.

b. Class sizes are too large.

c. Insufficient parent involvement.

d. Enrollment growing faster than schools can be built.

e. Shortage and lack of counselors and nurses.

3. Heavy backpacks are becoming more common as schools eliminate student lockers. Students have no place to store books and supplies and must carry these items throughout the day. This has created back problems for students.

4. The Perris Union High School District Trustees requested that the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools develop a unification study during May 1995. This study encompasses unification of the Perris Union High School District and its four feeder elementary districts of Perris, Menifee, Romoland and Nuview. The Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team's study delineated the fiscal ramifications of unification on each district involved in any proposed reorganization. The team was also requested to report on the feasibility of proceeding with unification. The conclusion of this costly fiscal report was that unification was a viable recommendation.

5. Unification, for improving high school and feeder school matriculation, was discussed with several district superintendents and is thought inevitable. Indebtedness of individual districts would make this a difficult task at the local school board level. The time and energy required to create an integrated design and plan would be costly.

6. The lack of recent studies on recommended unification denies the electorate the proper course of action to take regarding unification. Although the responsibility for school district organization is delegated to the County Committee of School District Organization, unification must have support of the electorate.

7. A comprehensive curriculum in higher education was discussed with the Community College Presidents, Provosts and Superintendents. All campuses have remedial "basic skill courses." Community colleges are spending thousands of dollars hiring additional teachers, increasing classes, tutoring, counseling, adding learning technology, computers and software to bring students up to college-level. However, a large percentage of students enrolled in basic skills English and Math courses do not finish them. Only 20% complete a higher level course at a later time (The 2000 Little Hoover Report on California Community Colleges).

8. Community college "high dropout rate" is sometimes attributed to socioeconomic conditions. Approximately 60% of these students are not seeking a degree, but are pursuing specific educational improvement for advancement in their careers and will dropout when they have achieved that level.

Recommendations

Riverside County Superintendent of Schools and the Riverside County Committee on School District Organization

1. Implement year-round schools, where practicable, thereby gaining 20% more classrooms.

2. Increase staffing of counselors and nurses at all school levels.

3. Furnish all students with a copy of their classroom text book for home study. Additional copies of the text can be maintained in the class room for student use.

4. Conduct a study regarding unification in the Perris Valley area.

5. Transfer all remedial studies to adult education and away from the community colleges.

6. Exclude from the dropout rate all college students seeking specific educational improvement, or certification, and not a degree.