

Geck: Focus on grand jury report detracts from education programs

Contributed by Dave Geck
Friday, 08 August 2008
Last Updated Friday, 08 August 2008

The staff at the Lake County Office of Education is working on a response to the grand jury findings. We are taking all of the findings very seriously and we will provide Judge Mann the requested response and share the response with the grand jury.

What is most upsetting to me at this point is that the focus on the grand jury report is detracting from the effective programs and services that are being provided by the Lake County Office of Education. Our dedicated staff spend long hours supporting students and families as they strive to succeed in our schools.

We serve students in all of the districts in Lake County and we run grants that also serve teachers and schools in the surrounding five counties.

For instance, staff in our office helped train over 600 preschool teachers and directors throughout our region, Our Safe Schools Program provided mental health counseling to over 450 students in schools throughout the county, they also collaborated with 13 agencies and programs in Lake County to sustain services to students and their families.

We provide support to 63 schools that are in Program Improvement because of No Child Left Behind requirements. Our child development programs operate 14 high quality preschool classes adding this year a new preschool in Lakeport and one in Middletown and extending the day in Kelseyville serving in total 360 students. After school programs were expanded to serve an additional 280 students this past year.

We provide business services to all of the districts helping them with payroll and budget reporting. Our curriculum and instruction program trains teachers through the year and is currently training over 160 teachers from the districts in how to implement the new math textbook series for this school year. This is only a partial list of the valuable programs and services we are providing. We are compiling an end-of-year report that will list all the accomplishments of the staff at LCOE.

I understand the role of the grand jury in investigating complaints but I am troubled by the process. We believe that many of the findings are based on either misunderstanding of the facts or incomplete information. In the interest of fairness and accuracy we are hopeful we will have the opportunity to share and discuss our response with the grand jury.

In some cases we are hampered by the general nature of the findings. In our followup with the grand jury we look forward to providing the personnel policies and procedures related to the complaints. We also can discuss specific information about specific employee cases.

We are examining all the concerns about expenditures in order to make sure that the expenditures are in line with the grant requirements. It is worth noting that grants often require training of program staff and those trainings or meetings are most often out of the county and in Sacramento, Bay Area or Southern California.

In summary I would like to say that we are committed to operating high quality programs and to continuously work on improving our services. If we have policies or procedures that need to be changed we will do so. We look forward to working with the grand jury and addressing all of their concerns.

Dave Geck is Lake County superintendent of schools.

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