



*Twain Harte School District*  
*District Office Located at: 22997 Joaquin Gully Road, Suite G*  
*Mailing: 18815 Manzanita Drive, Twain Harte, CA 95383*  
*Phone: (209) 586-3772 Fax: (209) 586-9938*  
*Rick Hennes, Superintendent*

**FILED**

**MAY 01 2017**

**RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT**

Superior Court of California  
County of Tuolumne  
By: URS Clerk

**School Reorganization Committee Report**

**August 10, 2016**

**Response by: Rick Hennes**

**Title: Superintendent, Twain Harte School District**

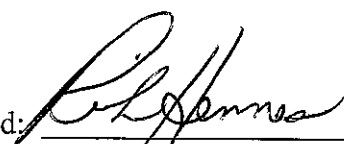
**FINDINGS**

1. I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F1 and F2
2. I (we) disagree with wholly or partially with the findings numbered: R1 and R2  
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons.)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Recommendations numbered R1 and R2 have been implemented.  
(Attach a summary of describing the implementation actions.)

Date: February 28, 2017  
Number of pages attached: Two

Signed: 



*Twain Harte School District*  
*District Office Located at: 22997 Joaquin Gully Road, Suite G*  
*Mailing: 18815 Manzanita Drive, Twain Harte, CA 95383*  
*Phone: (209) 586-3772 Fax: (209) 586-9938*  
*Rick Hennes, Superintendent*

Judge of the Superior Court  
Honorable Donald Segerstrom  
41 W. Yaney Avenue  
Sonora, CA 95370

*(Handwritten initials)*

Dear Honorable Judge Donald Segerstrom:

Twain Harte District Board of Trustees have reviewed the report dated July 12, 2016 and wish to send a response, as requested by the Grand Jury, on items related to the findings and recommendations of the School Reorganization Committee.

Twain Harte School District has a community of supportive families, who volunteer and contribute to the success of our school community at curricular and extracurricular activities that enrich our student's lives and build success in school and beyond.

#### **Grand Jury Recommendations and District Responses**

**R1:** A cost benefit analysis of opportunities for more JPA efforts should be undertaken by every school district, and greater purchasing by the JPA should be implemented where savings are apparent.

#### **District's Response:**

- **Purchasing cooperatives already implemented:** All of the districts in the county already receive lower pricing through Apple, Dell, Office Depot, Staples, Ricoh and most large vendors for school supplies due to a piggyback bid on prices negotiated by the districts, county and/or State. Sysco (food supplier) already provides discount pricing for cafeteria supplies for all school districts based upon the total number of students in the county (regardless of district boundaries). The Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools conducts joint propane bidding with the local propane companies on behalf of all school districts giving districts the lowest price possible for propane. All school districts benefit equally from E-Rate, Mandated by Congress in 1996 and implemented by the FCC in 1997, which provides discounted telecommunications, Internet access, and internal connections to all schools in Tuolumne County, funded by the Universal Service Fund.
- **Information and Network Technology cooperatives already implemented:** All school districts contract with the County Superintendent of Schools for technology services, at a significantly reduced rate than what districts could purchase independently.

- Instructional services and professional development cooperatives already implemented: The school districts within Tuolumne County collaborate with the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, who provide high quality cost efficient professional development, saving districts travel and hotel expenses for State mandated programs and/or required trainings.
- The Tuolumne Joint Powers Authority (JPA) already implemented: The Tuolumne JPA, operated by the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, administers property, liability and worker's compensation insurance programs for member school districts in Alpine, Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne. Each school district in Tuolumne County is a member of the Tuolumne JPA and receives the benefit of the group pricing for insurance, liability and workers compensation and training.
- Bus fleet management cooperative already implemented: The Twain Harte School District contracts with Summerville Union High School for bus maintenance at a discounted price.
- Shared administrative services already implemented: Twain Harte School District employs a .50 Superintendent in order to be cost effective.

**R2:** The Grand Jury recommends that an independent and definitive study of the economic benefits and costs of school district reorganization be undertaken. The results of this study, and the section of the California Education Code pertaining to school district consolidation, should be actively made available to all Tuolumne County taxpayers and elected officials. Grants from appropriate public or private agencies should be pursued to pay for this study.

**District's Response:** It is the district's understanding that this recommendation has already been implemented. There have been numerous studies conducted in the county and the state regarding unification or unionization of districts.

Please feel free to contact me should there be a need for further service or information in regards to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rick Hennes, Superintendent  
Twain Harte School District

# SCHOOL REORGANIZATION COMMITTEE REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The Grand Jury initiated an inquiry regarding potential efficacy and plausibility of reorganizing the eleven school districts in Tuolumne County. Since school enrollments continue to decline, the Grand Jury has questioned the wisdom and reasonableness of funding an infrastructure that might be better served by some form of consolidation to a lower number of districts and less overhead in management. The purpose of the inquiry was to determine if consolidation were possible, how it could be achieved, and what potential benefits and problems might be encountered by such an attempt.

## Glossary

JPA        Joint Powers Authority  
IT         Information Technology

## METHODOLOGY

The members of the Grand Jury conducted interviews with members of the Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, Tuolumne County Board of Education Trustees, County Counsel, and various other members of the education community that are responsible for maintaining oversight of current costs and employee hiring decisions. A document review of the existing California Education Code was conducted and research into other counties that had undergone some school district consolidation was also investigated.

## BACKGROUND

There are thirty-one public schools in Tuolumne County, managed by eleven school districts. Of the eleven districts, five are single school districts (elementary) and one operates two elementary schools. All of these schools are kindergarten through eighth grade. There is only one true middle school operated by an elementary district. Two districts are dedicated union high school districts, with alternative programs. Only one district is comprehensive, operating one elementary school, two high schools, and two alternative schools.

The potential for school district consolidation was an obvious consideration, however, the California Attorney General has provided an opinion interpreting both the Penal Code and case law as it relates to GJ authority, which is that the authority is limited in scope. The opinion can be found at 78 Ops. Cal. Atty. Gen. 290 and discusses the authority of the GJ related to school district overview, and such authority is related to the school district performing its duties and functions but not to policy decisions, including reorganization. Nevertheless, it is a primary task of the Grand Jury to review County government entities for efficient and effective use of

taxpayer money. It was the obvious potential for savings of taxpayer money in overhead, management, and purchasing that attracted the Grand Jury to initiate this inquiry. The Grand Jury chose to focus on this task as it pertains to the eleven county school districts.

### INVESTIGATION

Early in the inquiry it became evident that with eleven distinct school districts a great deal of redundancy, with associated costs, existed. The Grand Jury learned that several of the county school districts participate in a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) constituted to pursue common issues that would result in greater efficiencies. For example, all of the participating districts have agreed to purchase propane as one entity which has generated a favorable pricing structure.) It was suggested that greater savings may be realized by more districts participating, and by expanding JPA purchasing into other common cost centers such as cafeteria supplies, paper and office supplies, bus storage and maintenance, and IT and records support.

The Grand Jury discovered that there is a chronic issue of inter-district transfer requests. These requests create enrollment and administrative issues between school districts. This issue can also create logistical difficulties and resentment for parents of students whose requests are denied. These issues may be greatly reduced by the merging of districts with common borders. Some of the elementary school districts with common borders are Curtis Creek, Sonora, Belleview, Twain Harte, Columbia, Soulsbyville and Summerville.

In reviewing the California Education Code, the following summary of pertinent information concerning district mergers was found:

- If twenty-five percent of the electorate in a district vote to reorganize or consolidate, then it can proceed. However, in the case of Tuolumne County, all eleven school districts must pass the measure by the mandatory twenty-five percent.
- Should three of five of the sitting school board members of two adjoining districts agree to vote for consolidation, those two districts can proceed. If all eleven school boards pass the measure by at least a three out of five margin, they could all merge.
- Three of five sitting board members from each interested school board can approve a merger between interested schools.

The County Board of Education is empowered by the Education Code to serve as a committee to initiate, coordinate, facilitate and arbitrate petitions for school district reorganization. This committee is also empowered to provide several ancillary services to assist in the petition process.

The Grand Jury believes that the Code requirements concerning district consolidation are not generally known to the parents of public school students.

## FINDINGS

- F1** There is a redundancy in purchasing, bus fleet management and other management scenarios that would benefit from further transparency. Participation in a JPA appears to have potential for greater efficiencies and cost savings
- F2** The high level of inter-district transfer requests creates administrative and enrollment issues for the districts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1** A cost benefit analysis of opportunities for more JPA efforts should be undertaken by every school district, and greater purchasing by the JPA should be implemented where savings are apparent.
- R2** The Grand Jury recommends that an independent and definitive study of the economic benefits and costs of school district reorganization be undertaken. The results of this study, and the section of the California Education Code pertaining to school district consolidation, should be actively made available to all Tuolumne County taxpayers and elected officials. Grants from appropriate public or private agencies should be pursued to pay for this study.

## REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

### Required Responses

- Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools: R1, R2
- Belleview School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Big Oak Flat-Groveland Unified School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Columbia Union School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Curtis Creek School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Jamestown Elementary School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Sonora School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Sonora Union High School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Soulsbyville School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Summerville School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Summerville Union High School District Superintendent: R1, R2
- Twain Harte School District Superintendent: R1, R2

## CONCLUSIONS

There exists a method, available to the school districts, to save taxpayer funds through cooperation in purchasing and perhaps in other areas of administration. It is very likely the expansion of the current JPA purchasing efforts would result in additional savings to the participating school districts.

In addition, the Grand Jury believes that the current school district structure results in inefficiencies and reduced effectiveness in the use of taxpayer money. Pending the results of a cost benefit study of district reorganization, the Grand Jury believes it is likely current administrative and logistical support redundancies, and their associated costs, could be reduced, resulting in overall financial savings, and other benefits. These savings could be applied directly to the classroom environment with the goal of improving student performance.