

**SUTTER COUNTY
CHILDREN
& FAMILIES
COMMISSION**

**ENDORSED
FILED**

OCT 27 2008

1527 Starr Drive, Suite 0 • Yuba City, California 95993
Office: 530-822-7505 • Fax: 530-822-7508 • Email: dcoulter@co.sutter.ca.us
www.suttercounty.org/cfc

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SUTTER
CLERK OF THE COURT
by Debra Coulter Deputy

October 27, 2008

Honorable Chris Chandler
Superior Court of Sutter County
463 Second Street
Yuba City, CA 95993


Dear Honorable Chandler,

I have enclosed the Sutter County Children and Families Commission response to the Grand Jury Report 2007-2008. The response was approved by the Commission at a public meeting held October 15, 2008.

The Sutter County Children and Families Commission appreciates the support of the Board of Supervisors and is proud of the excellent programs the Commission funds for Sutter County's youngest citizens.

If my office can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at 822-7505.

Sincerely,



Deb Coulter
Executive Director



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OCT 27 2008

The Sutter County Children and Families Commission wishes to thank the 2007-08 Grand Jury for taking the time to carefully assess the services provided to the community under the auspices of the Sutter County Children and Families Commission. Although we do not fully agree with some of the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations, we recognize that we all share a commitment and desire to assure that Sutter County residents are provided with the best possible services.

The Commission would like to note factual errors in the Grand Jury Report Discussion section page 177, paragraph 4, shown below.

“Of net assets reported, funds held in reserve total more than three years’ operating costs. It concerned the committee that such a high reserve might preclude the SCCFC from receiving additional available grants. Also noticed, was that in the Sutter County CFC 2007-2010 Strategic Plan, the only mention of the Commission’s Reserve Fund was an allocation from that fund in the amount of \$154,628. Unless that is clearly displayed elsewhere, it would seem that the commission is being less than fully transparent about the size of their reserve. One would think that a government agency would err on the side of more disclosure, rather than place the burden on citizens to search for data.”

The commission is not simply sitting on a large reserve fund. The commission through careful evaluation has identified successful and valuable programs and through responsible and thoughtful financial planning has insured the continuation of those programs for the children of Sutter County. The Commission has not, to date, been denied any grant funding due to the size of the current reserve.

For unknown reasons the Grand Jury did not mention all of the projected expenditures from the Commission reserve. In addition to the \$154,628 mentioned, the three year budget also projects allocations from the Commission Reserve Fund in the amounts of \$212,698.16 (2008-2009) and \$268,003.77 (2009-2010), for a total expenditure of \$635,329.99 projected to be expended from reserve funds in this three year period in order to support existing programs at current levels. The Long Term Financial Plan similarly anticipates regular contributions from the reserve, until it is eventually depleted, in order to maintain SCCFC programs at levels comparable to those offered at the present time.

The Commission prides itself on keeping the community informed regarding all areas of Commission business, including the size of the reserve. In addition to conducting public hearings to adopt the Independent Audit (the financial statements, Grand Jury exhibits A and B are all excerpts of the audit), each year the Commission’s Annual Report is published which also includes financial statements. During regular public commission meetings held throughout 2006 and 2007 the Commission openly discussed and conducted an extensive review of the Strategic Plan and developed our long term financial plan (minutes available upon request).

Projections regarding the amount of the reserve fund, interest, expenditures and revenues for the next ten years can be easily found in the Long Term Financial Plan that is a separate document from the Strategic Plan and was developed and approved by the Commission in

public meetings and public hearings (minutes available upon request.). Following approval by the Commission the Long Term Financial Plan was posted and remains posted on the Commission webpage. At each meeting or public hearing where the audit or annual reports are discussed/presented/approved copies of all documents are made available to the public in attendance and of course by request at any other time.

Response to Grand Jury Findings

Grand Jury Findings from page 180

“The Grand Jury finds that the composition of the SCCFC Board of Directors still reflects that of the original board, installed predominantly for reasons other than their expertise regarding needs of children ages 0-5.

The Grand Jury finds that there is a conspicuous absence of board members with expertise in child development.”

The Commission disagrees with this finding.

The Commission would like to point out that two members of the Commission are experienced and have significant expertise in the area of Child Development, specifically Commissioner Nancy Aaberg, Superintendent of YCUSD and Commissioner Dr. Olga Gonzalez, a pediatrician.

The composition of the Commission meets all the requirements of Health and Safety Code Sec 140130. In 2001, the Board of Supervisors considered all of this information before they developed the ordinance to create the county commission. They deliberated and made a decision to meet the needs of Sutter County.

The decision of the Board of Supervisors to use some members of the Family Intervention Team “FIT” Policy Board to serve as commissioners of the SCCFC has proven to be a very good decision. The Commission consists of a functioning team with a good mix of concerned and seasoned professionals. These individuals are responsible for serving large segments of the county population with multiple programs. The Board of Supervisors recognized that the commissioners coming from the FIT Policy Board represent hundreds of years of experience both as citizens and as professionals working with thousands of families who reside in this community. As individuals, they understand the needs of the citizens of this community, especially those who can most benefit from services to help their children become successful in school and later as adults.

The commission continues to utilize qualified personnel that provide expert advice on specific issues such as literacy, health care, Pre K standards and other related fields on an as needed basis.

Grand Jury finding from page 180

“The Grand Jury finds that there are still concerns about the efficacy of SCCFC in providing services to children and their families in outlying areas of the county.”

The Commission disagrees that the commission lacks efficacy in providing services to children and their families in outlying areas of the county..

SCCFC makes services available to all Sutter County children ages birth through five. These are all voluntary programs; parents choose to receive services for themselves and their children; they are not mandated to do so. Some programs are directed to the needs of the poor and underserved by virtue of being located in a particular school or site, while others are directed to specific populations (i.e. special needs). SCCFC continues to expand outreach and marketing efforts.

SCCFC is very diligent about tracking its services and activities and sets a standard for measurement of services that should be acknowledged as part of this record. The reach of SCCFC is much larger than the result of those children served. Each year the program builds upon its prior successes while continually improving its own service efforts. Furthermore, when members of the Grand Jury use a carefully measured number while ignoring other outreach efforts to illustrate a point, this clearly understates the current efforts of SCCFC to improve upon its own work.

As examples, the Commission funded a trial school readiness program at Luther Elementary School in Live Oak, and after determining the success of that trial, it has now funded an agreement to continue the School Readiness program at Luther Elementary School in Live Oak through 2010.

In addition, in 2007-2008 the Commission staff performed dental assessments on all Kindergarten students in the outlying schools (at the school sites) to meet the new Oral Health Assessment requirements. At these school site screenings additional outreach was conducted including distribution of commission program flyers and brochures and Smart Start recruitment.

Grand Jury finding from page 180

“The Grand Jury finds that there is little cooperative effort among SCCFC, school officials in remote areas of the county, and members of the Board of supervisors relating to those constituencies.”

The Commission disagrees with the finding listed above.

The Commission Executive Director meets with all of the Sutter County Schools superintendents twice a year. An update on Commission services and activities are discussed. In addition the staff responds directly to the superintendents when a request for services is made. In 2008/2009 the Beau’s Buddies Literacy project has been expanded to 12 sites throughout Sutter County – Winship, Robbins, Meridian, Nuestro, Brittan, Marcum Illinois, Browns Elementary, Pleasant Grove, Franklin, Twin Rivers and Yuba City Charter schools.

The Kindergarten Oral Health Screenings and outreach efforts will continue at outlying school sites as well.

Grand Jury finding from page 180

“The Grand Jury finds that the SCCFC has sufficient funds, but that none have been designated specifically for developing services to rural county regions.”

The Commission disagrees with the finding listed above.

The Commission has held Smart Start at Central Gaither and Live Oak and has multi year agreements through 2010 designating funds specifically for these programs. The Commission has a multi year agreement through 2010 to continue the School Readiness program at Luther Elementary School in Live Oak. The Commission collaborated with the schools to perform the Oral Health Assessments and has expanded the Beau’s Buddies literacy project with funding designated specifically for the schools in rural county regions. The Beau’s Buddies Literacy project in addition to helping families build a library for their child conducts outreach efforts at each school for other commission services.

Grand Jury finding from page 180

“The Grand Jury finds that a huge fund of money is being held to ensure longevity of, and job security for those employed within, current programs. It further finds that the amount held is beyond that necessary for three years of program expenses, exclusive of additional income.”

The Commission partially agrees with the finding listed above.

The intent of the Commission reserve is not to assure job security per se but it is to sustain the services that are currently available for the children in Sutter County; 69% of the funds in the reserve are committed (by agreement or commission funding commitment) to existing, evidence based, and successful programs. Legislators have attempted multiple times to redirect the Proposition 10 funding. The state of California continues to experience severe budget issues. The State First Five Commission is proposing changes that may result in a loss of more than \$166,000 per year currently support SCCFC programs.

The Commission has funded an array of evidence based, successfully evaluated programs for the children of Sutter County and can continue these programs well into the future. The Commissioners believe this fiduciary strategy reflects very positive and thoughtful management of commission funds.

Response to Grand Jury Recommendations

Grand Jury Recommendation from page 181

“The Grand Jury strongly recommends that the Board of Supervisors considers changing the composition of the SCCFC Board of Directors, to include members with current training and education in the areas of child development for those ages 0-5. We are the third consecutive Grand Jury to recommend such action and it should be considered, at the very least, due to changing circumstances since the inception of the Commission and the installation of the original Board.”

The Commission disagrees with this recommendation.

In 2001, the Board of Supervisors considered all of this information before they developed the ordinance to create the county commission. They deliberated and made a decision to meet the needs of Sutter County.

The Commission would like to point out that two members of the Commission are experienced and have significant expertise in the area of Child Development, specifically Commissioner Nancy Aaberg, Superintendent of YCUSD and Commissioner Dr. Olga Gonzalez, a pediatrician. Further, the composition of the Commission meets all the requirements of Health and Safety Code Sec 140130.

The decision of the Board of Supervisors in 2001, to use some members of the Family Intervention Team “FIT” Policy Board to serve as commissioners of the SCCFC has proven to be a very good decision. The Commission consists of a functioning team with a good mix of concerned and seasoned professionals. These individuals are responsible for serving large segments of the county population with multiple programs. The Board of Supervisors recognized that the commissioners coming from the FIT Policy Board represent hundreds of years of experience both as citizens and as professionals working with thousands of families who reside in this community. As individuals, they understand the needs of the citizens of this community, especially those who can most benefit from services to help their children become successful in school and later as adults. The commissioners did not bring in pre-conceived ideas about children-services delivery models and have been receptive to many new ideas and approaches to serve 0-5 children of this community. That having been said, the Commission will consider this recommendation further and will study the issue this fiscal year.

The commission continues to utilize qualified personnel that provide expert advice on specific issues such as literacy, health care, Pre K standards and other related fields on an as needed basis

Grand Jury Recommendation from page 181

“The Grand Jury commends the SCCFC for its programs and continued efforts to expand, improve and increase visibility to county residents. The Grand Jury recommends that those efforts be continued energetically and further recommends that the Commission continue to avail itself of experts in the area of child development with equal energy and consider board involvement by regular attendance of one or more individuals with child development experience.”

The Commission would like to express its appreciation to the Grand Jury for this commendation and agrees with this recommendation.

The Commission fully intends to continue to expand, improve and increase outreach efforts to all county residents. The Commission further intends to continue to consult with a variety of experts in the area of child development including the two members of the Commission who have expertise in this area (specifically Commissioner Nancy Aaberg, Superintendent of YCUSD and Commissioner Dr. Olga Gonzalez, a pediatrician), funded program staff and community members. It should be noted that the Commission continues to encourage public participation with entities that have expertise in child development and encourage their participation and attendance at Commission meetings.

Grand Jury Recommendation from page 181

“The Grand Jury recommends that the SCCFC request Supervisors to regularly assess needs in their respective constituencies, and report them to the Commission. In turn, it is recommended that the SCCFC provide, annual, in writing, a report to each Supervisor, on services delivered in his District. It is also recommended that the Commission provide guidelines for the Supervisors’ use in gathering pertinent data.”

The Commission partially agrees with this recommendation.

Rather than focusing on individual supervisorial districts, each Sutter County Supervisor is committed to assuring that all of Sutter County is provided with the best possible services. To help achieve this end the Commission is committed to providing all members of the Board of Supervisors with complete and accurate information, at least annually or more often if requested, regarding the services being provided by the SCCFC to residents of the county.

Grand Jury Recommendation from page 181

“The Grand Jury commends the SMILES program. The Grand Jury recommends that the van visit all outlying areas of the county at least once during the year, averaging cost effectiveness with the better attended sites, to ensure accessibility to all eligible children.”

The Commission would like to express its appreciation to the Grand Jury for this commendation. The Commission agrees with this recommendation.

We agree that every eligible child should have access to the Smiles dental program. The Commission will strategize with the schools and outlying communities to extend our services to the residents in these areas if it is the choice of the parent, with the goal of providing these services at least annually.

Grand Jury Recommendation from page 181

“The Grand Jury recommends that the SCCFC designate funds specific to program development in remote areas of Sutter County. It also recommends that the SCCFC

Executive Director and members of the Board of Supervisors meet with, and provide lunch for, principals, teachers and area church leaders to develop a strategy for providing, promoting and maximizing health and educational support to outlying regions of the county.”

The Commission agrees in concept with the recommendation to commit funds to serve rural areas of Sutter County and will take this recommendation under consideration..

The Commission has held Smart Start at Central Gaither and Live Oak and has multi year agreements through 2010 designating funds specifically for these programs. The Commission has a multi year agreement through 2010 to continue the School Readiness program at Luther Elementary School in Live Oak. The Commission collaborated with the schools to perform the Oral Health Assessments and has expanded the Beau’s Buddies literacy project with funding designated specifically for the schools in rural county regions. The Beau’s Buddies Literacy project in addition to helping families build a library for their child conducts outreach efforts at each school for other commission services.

The Commission will place this recommendation as a discussion item on the agenda of an upcoming meeting. The commission must spend its funds in accordance with the Strategic Plan, therefore will have to research the issue, gather and analyze the data prior to making any funding decision. We can and will meet with the community members as you suggest, in order to solicit their ideas and suggestions.

Grand Jury Recommendation from page 181

“The Grand Jury recommends that the SCCFC responsibly reduce its reserve funds by one-third, still leaving more than two years’ operating expenses in place, and that the Commission continue to seek additional grant funding and synergistic program opportunities.”

The Commission respectfully disagrees with the recommendation to immediately reduce its reserve funds by one-third. The Commission will continue to seek grant funds and to look for other synergistic funding opportunities to best meet the needs of children in Sutter County.

The Commission has funded an array of evidence based, successfully evaluated programs for the children of Sutter County and can continue these programs well into the future. **The Commissioners believe this fiduciary strategy reflects very positive and thoughtful management of commission funds.** Due to an overall reduction in First Five funding statewide, the State First Five Commission is currently proposing to reduce financial support to current efforts, resulting in a loss of over \$166,000 per year of state commission funds currently supporting Sutter County programs. SCCFC is well positioned to absorb this funding reduction without cutting existing programs. Further, based upon our 10 year Financial Plan, much of the current reserve will unfortunately be ultimately expended to support existing programs if future commissioners choose to continue to provide local children 0-5 with services comparable to those available today.