

Aligning our Communities and Schools for Success

Background

The State of California is undertaking a basis realignment of the support it provides to communities. The State is requiring communities to take more responsibility for providing social services and the administration of justice. Slowly, but surely, Sacramento is endeavoring to live within its means.

Our schools have been significantly impacted by the State's fiscal challenges. The California School Boards Association estimates that State school funding has been reduced by \$20 billion over the last four years. A key State strategy moving forward will be to transfer program responsibilities to local districts and provide schools greater spending flexibility. However, this will also mean even fewer dollars for students.

City government has also been impacted by Sacramento's efforts to get its fiscal house in order. Cities in Santa Clara County, like other jurisdictions, are finding it exceedingly difficult to provide services. This is partly due to the State's decreasing support, but also it's a result of anemic growth in the local economies. Many cities are eliminating services that were once believed to be essential.

This situation would suggest that cities and schools need to increase efforts toward collaboration in order to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources. In many cases, the services provided to constituents serve similar purposes. For example, cities often times support family and children's services that directly benefit the local school communities.

However, in many cases, the coordination of these services between schools and cities is made more difficult due to conflicting city and school boundaries. For example, there are 15 cities in Santa Clara County and 32 school districts of varying sizes. In the bizarre case of San Jose, there are 19 school districts serving the city with many of these same districts serving students who live in other cities. In addition, many communities in California are served by served by two school districts; one district for elementary schools and a different district for high school. The extent of this situation is relatively unique to California and is a product of our agrarian past. This situation only complicates efforts to form more cohesive communities.

This situation can be a barrier to community and parent participation in our schools. The structure of our schools and communities should promote collaboration. Aligning school boundaries with communities of interest could assist in creating meaningful dialog about how to best utilize our limited resources.

It should be evident that our current state of affairs demands that we explore new ways of organizing our public agencies.

The Study

The Santa Clara Board of Education has voted to hire a consultant to review school boundaries in the County. The study will primarily focus on the statutory and financial impact of realigning and consolidating districts. The plan is to engage the community in this process by establishing an Advisory Board and by sharing the results of the survey in community meetings. In addition, community meetings will be held in potentially affected communities to discuss the study findings. There is no underlying Board expectation that this survey will lead to anything but meaningful dialog. In the end, the goal is to empower communities through being more informed about their options.

The Advisory Committee

It is suggested that the Advisory Committee has broad representation from local communities and schools. The representation should include:

- City Council Members
- City Staff
- School Board Members
- District Staff
- Teachers & Union Representatives
- Community Organizations
- Charter Schools
- County Services
- Chambers of Commerce
- League of Women Voters

The expectation is for the Advisory Committee to meet three times. The first meeting will be with the consultant to review the project and provide input. The second meeting will be to review the preliminary findings and give additional input. The third meeting would be to review the final report and approve the community outreach plan.