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## **School Construction Management in San Mateo County**

### **Issue**

Are school districts in San Mateo County following best practices in the fiscal and construction management of capital investment projects?

### **Summary Report**

San Mateo County is comprised of twenty- two kindergarten through twelfth grade local school districts. Each is governed by a publicly elected school board. These school boards hire district superintendents experienced in the education of children. Superintendents are responsible for implementing board educational policies, preparing annual fiscal budgets, overseeing the routine maintenance of facilities, and, when necessary, managing school construction projects. With the exception of school construction, all of these tasks are responsibilities for which their training, education, and experience have been directed.

Managing major construction or renovation, usually in conjunction with a bond issue or state mandate, requires a skill set not normally associated with educators. Because of the independence of school districts, their dependence on contractors and architects, and the complexities of construction management, their inexperience can affect the cost, quality, and timeliness of construction undertakings.

The media routinely reports on project cost overruns, delays, poor workmanship, and legal actions for remedies that frequently can be traced to the inadequacy and inexperience of school management oversight.

Although the State Architect, a Division of the California General Services Department, provides school construction design and oversight services, it provides no guidance for the management process. As long as building plans meet state standards and codes, no further review is required.

The complexities of school construction are not limited to local school districts. After years of experience, the San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) has developed proven policies and procedures for construction planning and management. These techniques have been employed successfully for capital improvement projects on the three San Mateo college campuses.

## **Recommendation**

1. The San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools should convene a blue ribbon panel of district superintendents, construction industry representatives, and architectural and construction management professionals to develop a set of policies and procedures for use by local districts. These documents should be modeled after the processes currently being employed at the San Mateo County Community College District and would provide the basic structure for the control and management of district construction projects with each district making modifications for special district considerations.

August 18, 2005

The Honorable Norman J. Gatzert  
Judge of the Superior Court  
Hall of Justice  
400 County Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

Dear Judge Gatzert,

Please find enclosed the response of the County Superintendent of Schools to the recommendation pertaining to the County Office of Education in the Grand Jury's report of June 23, 2005. An informational copy of this document is also being sent to the Board of Supervisors.

If you have any questions regarding this document, please do not hesitate to contact us through the County Office of Education at 802-5550.

Sincerely,

John Mehl, Ph.D.  
County Superintendent of Schools  
San Mateo County Office of Education

c: San Mateo County Board of Supervisors  
San Mateo County Office of Education Clerk

JM/msg

# **San Mateo County Office of Education Responses to the 2005 Grand Jury Recommendations**

## **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

THE SAN MATEO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS SHOULD CONVENE A BLUE RIBBON PANEL OF DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS, CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES, AND ARCHITECTURAL AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS TO DEVELOP A SET OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR USE BY LOCAL DISTRICTS. THESE DOCUMENTS SHOULD BE MODELED AFTER THE PROCESSES CURRENTLY BEING EMPLOYED AT THE SAN MATEO COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT AND WOULD PROVIDE THE BASIC STRUCTURE FOR THE CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT OF DISTRICT CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS WITH EACH DISTRICT MAKING MODIFICATIONS FOR SPECIAL DISTRICT CONSIDERATIONS.

The County Superintendent agrees that school districts in our County and across the state face significant challenges when undertaking major construction and renovation projects. Guidance in these complex endeavors could be of assistance to school district superintendents and governing boards. Accordingly, the County Superintendent will work in conjunction with the San Mateo County Superintendents' Association to establish an appropriate panel to explore the development of policies and procedures for the planning and management of major construction and renovation projects. The past successes of the San Mateo Community College District and other local education agencies will serve as a key support in this effort. The County Superintendent of Schools will ask to have this item placed upon the agenda of the October meeting of the San Mateo County Superintendents' Association.

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John Mehl  
County Superintendent of Schools

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Date