

LEGAL SERVICES IN THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS An Update

SUMMARY

Last year, the 2005-2006 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury conducted an inquiry into legal services provided to municipal government and school and special districts. The report did not include legal services costs for Hope School District, Santa Barbara School Districts, and Santa Maria Joint Union High School District. This report deals with costs of legal services provided by the three school districts. The 2006-2007 Grand Jury requested information on legal services costs and expenditures from these three school districts which were not included in the 2005-2006 Grand Jury report.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Legal services in school districts normally focus on personnel issues and dealings with unions and staff. Like many other school districts in Santa Barbara County, Hope School District and Santa Barbara School Districts have retained the Los Angeles law firm of Liebert Cassidy Whitmore on issues related to labor relations and educational law. Santa Maria Joint Union High School District retained Best Best and Krieger LLP, Cohen and Lord, and Bell, Rosenberg and Hughes LLP on issues related to construction of Pioneer Valley High School. Legal services in Santa Maria Joint Union High School District in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 were mostly related to Pioneer Valley High School construction issues. The majority of legal services expenditures for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 in Santa Maria Joint Union High School District were related to that construction project. These costs exceeded one percent of total expenditures in both years.

The first new public high school in the Santa Maria Valley in over forty years, Pioneer Valley High School, opened in August 2004. In 2004-2005 Santa Maria Joint Union High School District spent approximately \$430,000 on legal expenses related to Pioneer Valley High School construction. In 2005-2006 Santa Maria Joint Union High School District spent approximately \$978,000 on legal expenses related to Pioneer Valley High School construction. As a result, Santa Maria Joint Union High School District's legal expenses were unusually high compared to other school districts. These large expenditures for legal services related to school construction are a reminder of the importance of careful monitoring and oversight of contracts and management of construction. Santa Barbara School Districts include the Santa Barbara Elementary School District and the Santa Barbara High

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School District which operate with a common administration and school board. Legal Services expenditure numbers for Santa Barbara High School District included workers compensation insurance costs for both the high school district and the elementary district.

The following Table lists total expenditures by districts in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 and also the dollar amount and the percentage of total expenditures spent on legal services in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.

Districts	Enrollment	2004-5 Expenditure (Millions)	2005-6 Expenditure (Millions)	2004-5 Legal Services	2005-6 Legal Services
Hope	1450	\$9.44	\$9.48	\$5,269 0.06%	\$19,279 0.2%
Santa Barbara Elementary	6024	\$39.84	\$43.25	\$94,313 0.2%	\$78,923 0.2%
Santa Barbara High School	10598	\$72.56	\$76.22	\$304,721 0.4%	\$470,092 0.6%
Santa Maria JUHSD	6800	\$45.98	\$52.13	\$543,574 1.2%	\$1,065,791 2.0%

Information Copies to the following Elected Officials:

Board of Trustees of Hope School District

Board of Trustees of Santa Barbara School Districts

Board of Trustees of Santa Maria Joint Union High School District