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## **Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation**

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*Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.*

**PRESENTATION BY  
Dr. Donald W. Ingwerson  
Superintendent**

**Los Angeles County Office of Education**

**Topic: Status of County Schools  
June 2, 1999**

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*Chairman Abel* introduced Dr. Donald W. Ingwerson, Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (COE).

*Dr. Ingwerson* explained that the COE is legally independent of Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors with one exception - it is the BOS which hires and fires the Superintendent. The BOS then appoints 7 individuals to act as the Board of Education for the COE. The COE is funded by the State and is fiscally independent from the County. It works in concert with Education Secretary Elaine Easton, the State Board of Education and County and local governments.

The COE is what is called an "in-between agency." It is an intermediate agency - between the State and the local school districts. The local school districts are autonomous in most areas. There are about 1,700 public schools in the County with approximately 1.5 million students (K-12). There are over 70 thousand public school teachers in the 81 school districts throughout the County.

The size of the County has advantages that have not always been properly explained. Currently County schools have a shifting ethnic demographic. Approximately 60 percent of the student population is Hispanic, 12 percent African-American, 8 percent Asian, and 20 percent Caucasian. Economics and student achievement are the primary elements of education. The question is whether local and State government will be able to raise student achievement so that students can be more competitive with students from other districts and areas throughout the nation.

*Dr. Ingwerson* stated that he approves of what former Governor Pete Wilson, current Governor Gray Davis, and the State Board of Education have done in setting standards. They have set standards for reading and mathematics that receive an "A plus" across the nation. It has only been since last year that the COE has had a test to measure student performance. State schools are currently in the second year of administering the SAT-9 test, which measures student performance in accordance with the state standards. Currently, the results are not impressive.

In the 1950s and 1960s, such results would have resulted in a lowering of the standards, but today, the standards are remaining firm. The pressure is being put on the education community (parents, students, and teachers) to bring the students up, in incremental levels, to meet these standards. The SAT-9 test merely ranks the students (according to the standards) from 1 to 100. The test results merely inform where students and schools rank compared with other individuals and schools. The State has augmented the test with additional questions in math and reading. These tests have no instructional value - they do not inform teachers of what the student needs to be taught to improve his/her ranking. If a school is below the 50th percentile on the SAT-9, that school is "at risk," which means that the State may intervene. That will begin in July, 1999. Currently, approximately 800 County schools are at risk. The County population is quite different than much of the State - about one-third of County students are not fluent in English.

Based upon her own knowledge of teachers who have left the teaching profession after only a few years, *Commissioner Hill* asked how it will be possible to make the teaching profession more attractive to current and future teachers. *Dr. Ingwerson* responded that if we want to get ahead in California, then something must be done with the governance system (from the Governor to the classroom teacher). He believes that the County, including the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has a potentially great future and could be the first large metropolitan urban area that will begin to get quality (higher student achievement) in public education.

*Commissioner Petak* stated that his daughter was a public school teacher in inner-city schools who quit in ultimate frustration after fifteen years. Her frustration was rooted in her inability to maintain discipline in her classroom. It is not possible to educate children who see no value in education, cannot speak the English language, and where there is no possibility of discipline in the system. Unless the culture of the children entering the public school system changes, as well as the government system for disciplining and separating incorrigibles, there will be very little progress. He finds the ranking of school performance absent the context within which a school operates to be very disturbing. *Dr. Ingwerson* responded by explaining that a school which falls below the 50th percentile requires a written plan of action to show how students will improve learning skills. This plan may call for a number of actions - more resources, the replacement of a principal, or a number of different alternatives. *Commissioner Petak* asked about the outcome of a fifth-grade level test if one assumes that 80 percent of fifth-grade students in a school are reading at a third-grade level.

*Chairman Abel* intervened by stating that in his years of involvement with the issue of education, he has found the topic to be very much like religion - very passionate core values. *Commissioner Philobosian* added that the word "accountability" is lacking at LAUSD. His own daughter (who is bilingual in English and Spanish) teaches classes that are half black and half latino, and is utterly and completely frustrated by the lack of accountability in the school administration. He asked if it would or should make a difference to break up the LAUSD in order to get more accountability. *Dr. Ingwerson* responded that the size of a district should not matter - organization and effectiveness should. A large or small district can be either effective or ineffective. He stated that the best way to go is to get a darned good principal, and get classroom teachers who know what he/she is doing, and have good communication with the parents

*Chairman Abel* mentioned that he recently attended a conference which addressed how to get the public involved with public education. *Dr. Ingwerson* responded that he found that parents respond well to good schools, regardless of location (inner-city or suburban). He referred to Parent University, a program that the COE markets to schools as a way of getting the parents more involved and engaged in student curriculum and achievement. Unless the parents are driving the child, the teacher generally cannot be effective.

*Vice-Chairman Breslauer* asked for clarification on the authority, resources, and staffing of the COE. *Dr. Ingwerson* responded that the COE oversees three areas:

1) Educational Finance. Before the budget of any one school district goes to the State, it comes through his office. If there is improper accounting in the proposed budget he sends it back. At any time during the year, if the school district budgets begin to show expenditure imbalance, he notices the district and may send a monitor to school board meetings. At some point the COE may stop allowing bills to be paid. The State will take over if the situation has not turned around. Last year there were 8 to 10 school districts on "red alert".

COE would call the responsible Superintendent and tell him/her that unless the problem is rectified, future expenditures will not be approved.

2) Teaching Special Education children. COE is generally responsible for teaching low incidence special education children. The County has the largest head start program in America (about 22 thousand children with a \$130 million dollar budget. In addition there is the regional occupation program which offers occupational training.

3) Educational Leadership - when the State Board of Education establishes standards, the COE is the department that informs districts and provides services as to guidelines/curriculum.

*Commissioner Padilla* offered his opinion that leverage is the big issue - leveraging the parents care and control over their children. There must be a joint effort between the parents, teachers, and students. *Dr. Ingwerson* agreed with Commissioner Padilla, and added that in some cases, such repair is already underway. He is convinced that a decade from now, County schools will be in far better condition.

*Chairman Abel* thanked Dr. Ingwerson for his presentation.

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