

April 11, 2005

RE: SUPPORT OF SCHOOL COUNSELING AND EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and elected state officials:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Ventura County School Counselors Association. We represent over one hundred public school and private school K-12 counselors who serve close to 150,000 students in Ventura County.

We implore you to support public education. Specifically, we are strongly opposed to several measures before the state legislature and possibly the voters. These measures include:

Petition for: "Public School Teachers. Waiting Period for Permanent Status"

Petition for: "Prohibition on Defined Benefit Public Pensions"

ACAX12 Proposal to eliminate Prop 98

SCAX11 Senator Runner's merit pay bill

Conversely, we support Assembly Member Mullin's AB 55 to restore funding to the Supplemental Benefits Maintenance Account.

While the above positions are related to employment conditions, the Ventura County School Counselors Association has an even more reaching list of concerns.

1. The proposal to eliminate "26.5 mental health" mandates for county mental health services to provide treatment for special needs students, with services provided by school district counselors, psychologists and contracted outside therapists, is of great concern. Schools are already overtaxed and understaffed in terms of guidance services. This proposed law, according to published reports, would cost a minimum of \$140,000,000, with the governor offering a \$100,000,000 reimbursement. In essence, the school system is asked to assume a community mental health problem with the state giving a support of 71 cents to the dollar. Equally disturbing is that the state analysts have not yet calculated the cost of residential treatment of the most disturbed students. This proposal by the governor could easily bankrupt a district.
2. In the political rhetoric of "no child left behind" there is not one mention of parental responsibility nor support. Our question to the governor and proponents of NCLB is, "Why is there no mention of parental responsibility, the number one factor in a child's adjustment, motivation and achievement?" Furthermore, there is no mention of how the high level of need in terms of parenting skills is to be addressed, which many times leads to neglect. There is not a counselor, psychologist or other therapist alive who cannot share countless cases of student failure coupled with absolute neglect and disinterest on the part of the parents due to lack of parenting skills. Why are politicians silent on this most profound factor in "leaving children behind?"
3. The above points are underscored by the fact that out of 50 states, California ranks 50th in the state support for counseling. We are dead last in the nation, even though we practice counseling in the richest state with the most diverse and needy population. Counselors average caseloads in excess of 1200 students. Most districts provide absolutely no counseling for student in the elementary grades. Where are the leaders in this aspect of "no child left behind?"

In summation, the Ventura County School Counselors Association implores our elected representatives to consider the above issues and show respect to the dedicated educators working with our most troubled youth. Respectfully, it is time to provide real solutions to real problems.

Sincerely,

André Vásquez M.S.

President, Ventura County School Counselor Association Executive Board