



SPOTLIGHT: EARLY LEARNING GETS A BIG LIFT

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ISSUE

What is the status of the “Big Lift” initiative - San Mateo County’s new, comprehensive, strategic approach to improve school readiness and increase third-grade reading levels?

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

In 2018, San Mateo county stands among the top three counties in California with regard to overall physical health,¹ education,^{2,3} and prosperity.^{4,5} Despite this, in 2015, only 50 percent⁶ of the county’s third graders met state achievement levels in English-language arts necessary for academic competence.⁷ For English learners, racial minorities, and economically disadvantaged children, that percentage decreased dramatically.⁸ (See Appendix figure 1).

James Heckman, a leading economist and early learning intervention researcher at the University of Chicago, states in his publication, “*The Economics of Inequality, The Value of Early Childhood Education:*”

The evidence is quite clear that inequality in the development of human capabilities produces negative social and economic outcomes that can and should be prevented with investments in early childhood education, particularly targeted toward disadvantaged children and their families.⁹

¹ “County Health Rankings Report: California.” County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, accessed June 21, 2018. http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/state/downloads/CHR2018_CA.pdf

² “California School Ratings: San Mateo County.” School Ratings, accessed June 22, 2018. <http://www.school-ratings.com/counties/San_Mateo.html>

³ “State and County QuickFacts” U.S. Census Bureau (2016), accessed June 22, 2018 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Household Income in San Mateo County California.” Statistical Atlas, accessed June 21, 2018. <https://statisticalatlas.com/county/California/San-Mateo-County/Household-Income>

⁶ “Test Results for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics: All Students”, [California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress](#), accessed May 30, 2018 <https://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2017/ViewReport?ps=true&1stTestYear=2015&1stTestType=B&1stGroup=1&1stCounty=41&1stDistrict=00000&1stSchool=000000>

⁷ “Understanding California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance CAASPP) Summary Reports”, [California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress](#), accessed June 22, 2018 <https://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/sb2017/UnderstandingCAASPPReports>

⁸ “The Big Lift: San Mateo County Office of Education.” COE Spotlight. CCSESA, accessed June 21, 2018. <<http://ccsesa.org/the-big-lift-san-mateo-county-office-of-education/>>

⁹ James Heckman, “The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education.” *American Educator*, 35:11, (2011): 31-35, 47. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ920516.pdf>

After two years of planning, and upon receiving \$10 million in startup funds from the County of San Mateo,¹⁰ the Big Lift launched in 2013 as a five-year pilot program. The goal of the Big Lift initiative is to raise the percentage of participating third grade students reading proficiently to 80 percent by the year 2020. The program proposed to do this by improving existing preschool programs and increasing the number of preschool spaces and early learning opportunities for San Mateo County’s less advantaged children and improving existing preschool facilities.¹¹

The Big Lift was premised, in part, on findings that children who start kindergarten without the behavioral skills and pre-academic cognitive development necessary for them to benefit from formal school instruction¹² are less likely to develop adequate reading skills by third grade.¹³ Subsequently, such children are more prone to falling behind in elementary school and having difficulty with future academic success.¹⁴ Furthermore, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school than peers who learn and progress to meet grade level standards.¹⁵ Research has identified a lack of early learning opportunities as one of the major causes of this academic disparity.¹⁶ High-quality preschool and summer learning programs support children in acquiring the solid developmental foundation they will need to start school ready to learn.¹⁷

The Achievement Gap

The “achievement gap” is defined as the recognized, repeated disparity in educational performance, particularly among subgroups identified by gender, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity in the United States.¹⁸

Currently, a patchwork system of preschools serves the county’s children, which creates a variety of choices for families, but offers an inconsistent and sometimes substandard quality of service.¹⁹ This network includes private, home-based, public, and government subsidized schools (e.g. Head Start and First 5 California).²⁰ Yet, demand for preschool spaces continues to outpace the supply. In addition, for the 43-51 percent of families with one or two children who cannot

¹⁰ “Funding,” The Big Lift, accessed May 20, 2018. <http://www.thebiglift.org/funding/-funding-02>

¹¹ The Big Lift website, “Overview” <http://www.thebiglift.org/our-plan#our-plan-01> and “Our Plan” <http://www.thebiglift.org/key-programs/>, 2015.

¹² Arthur J. Reynolds, *Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 17

¹³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-PromotingEffectiveEarlyLearning-2009.pdf>

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 3

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁶ Donald J. Hernandez, *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation* (Albany, New York: Annie E. Casey Foundation, April 2011), <http://www.aecf.org/m/resource/doc/AECF-DoubleJeopardy-2012-Full.pdf>, accessed: 06/17/18.

¹⁷ Celia J. Gomez, Jill S. Cannon, Anamarie Whitaker, Lynn A Karoly *Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Findings for the 2016-2017 Kindergarten Class.* <[www.Rand.org/t/rr2131](http://www.rand.org/t/rr2131)> RAND Corporation 2017.

¹⁸ Susan Ansell, “Achievement Gap,” *Education Week*, August 3, 2004. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/achievement-gap/index.htm>

¹⁹ Kinahan, *2017 San Mateo County Childcare and Preschool Needs Assessment*, 32

²⁰ “State Preschool Eligibility and Programs,” San Mateo County Office of Education, accessed June 17, 2018. <http://www.smcoe.org/learning-and-leadership/early-learning/california-state-preschool-program-in-san-mateo-county/eligibility-factors.html>

afford the basic cost of living in this county,^{21,22} the expense of these early learning programs is often unmanageable.²³ This is especially true for disadvantaged children who would benefit most from the developmental growth early learning environments can provide.²⁴

The Big Lift Initiative

In an effort to improve third grade reading proficiency for the county's disadvantaged children, the Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council (PPLC), comprised of the San Mateo County Office of Education, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF), with support from over 300 community organizations, developed the Big Lift initiative. After lengthy consideration of proven early education interventions, the Big Lift leadership structured a comprehensive program around the integration of four evidence-based teaching approaches and learning strategies referred to as "the four pillars".²⁵

Pillar 1. High-Quality Preschool: an extensive plan targeting school readiness and literacy. The program consists of a two-year, high-quality preschool led by teachers qualified in early childhood education, a low instructor-student ratio, and up-to-date materials and resources. Another essential component is age- appropriate curriculum for preschoolers.

Pillar 2. Big Lift Inspiring Summers (BLIS): a four-week summer learning program led by local school districts, with curriculum aligned with state school standards²⁶ and developed by the Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) organization, in partnership with the San Mateo County Library System.²⁷ The daylong program emphasizes literacy instruction to reinforce existing skills and to offer new learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The student learning experiences support social-emotional development and elimination of the average two-month summer learning loss of skills gained over the preceding school year.²⁸

²¹ "Income in the past 12 Months", American Community Survey (2015), accessed June 1, 2018.

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

²² "Self-Sufficiency Standard Tool for California," Insight, accessed May 20, 2018. <https://insightccd.org/tools-metrics/self-sufficiency-standard-tool-for-california/>

²³ Kinahan, S. San Mateo County Childcare and Preschool Needs Assessment, 35

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "The Big Lift" San Mateo County Office of Education website, accessed June 18, 2018. <http://ccsesa.org/the-big-lift-san-mateo-county-office-of-education/>

²⁶ "Grade Level Reading", Bell, accessed June 3, 2018. <https://www.experiencebell.org/grade-level-reading>

²⁷ Silicon Valley Community Foundation, "Big Lift Inspiring Summers will help low-income children stay on track in San Mateo County," SVCF (blog), July 21, 2016. <https://www.siliconvalleyvcf.org/blog/recent-events/big-lift-inspiring-summer-will-help-low-income-children-stay-track>

²⁸ 2017 *The Big Lift Inspiring Summers Impact Report*.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/553e9c6ee4b0ee77fad23968/t/5a14aba7652dea2e1a98db85/1511304406156/Th+Big+Lift+Impact+Report+2017_FINAL.pdf, 3-4.

Pillar 3. Reduction of Chronic Absenteeism: a program of regular and targeted communication with families of students from preschool through third grade to raise awareness of the importance of school attendance in achieving school success.²⁹

Pillar 4. Family Engagement to Support Learning: programs to involve parents in their children’s learning and literacy and to foster partnerships among schools, families and local community organizations. This pillar includes respect for all family languages and cultures.³⁰ The programs also offer parent workshops, books, and educational tools to encourage parents to take active roles in their child’s academic progress.³¹

Participating school districts are given Big Lift funding to provide services addressing all of the four pillars to support reading development, making the initiative distinct among other early learning programs. According to the Big Lift model, it is the combined effect of the four pillars’ services on children’s academic progress that will be measured as part of an objective research study by an external evaluator.³² The first two pillars (preschool and summer learning) were reported on in RAND Corporation’s initial 2017 study. Future assessments will continue to track student progress and outcomes through the early elementary grades.³³

The Big Lift Participants

Four local school districts, identified as “Cohort 1,” were selected to participate in the pilot program for the 2015-2016 school year:³⁴

- Cabrillo Unified School District
- La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District
- Jefferson Elementary School District
- South San Francisco Unified School District

Three additional districts (“Cohort 2”) were added in the 2016-2017 school year:³⁵

- Ravenswood City School District
- Redwood City School District
- San Bruno Park School District

These districts were specifically selected based upon the following criteria: large numbers of students with lower than average English language arts test scores, racial minority student populations, English learners, and economically disadvantaged families.³⁶ Nearly 50 percent of

²⁹ Gomez, Cannon, Whitaker and Karoly, *Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Findings for the 2016-2017 Kindergarten Class*, 4.

³⁰ Ibid, 4.

³¹ Ibid, 4.

³² Ibid, 18.

³³ Ibid, 5.

³⁴ Ibid, 5.

³⁵ Ibid, 2.

³⁶ Ibid, 9.

the children in Cohort 1 were English learners and 50 percent were from families earning \$50,000 or less per year.³⁷

Evaluation

Between 2015 and May 2018, Big Lift programs served approximately 5,281 students.³⁸ One third of the children in Cohort 1 participated in one or both of the Big Lift preschool and summer programs.³⁹ The RAND and BELL preliminary assessments demonstrate the initiative as having a positive impact on the development and progress of the Big Lift students.⁴⁰

In their 2017 initial assessment, the RAND report states “When starting school, Big Lift preschoolers were significantly more likely than demographically similar children who went to no preschool at all to score in the kindergarten ready range...”⁴¹ BELL’s assessment of the 2,232 grade K-2 students who attended BLIS programs in the summers of 2016 and 2017⁴² indicated an average pre-reading/reading gain of one and a half months during the five-week summer program. In addition, students were able to eliminate two months of summer learning loss, for a total progress gain of approximately three and a half months.⁴³

After the publication of the Big Lift’s initial positive results in the summer and fall of 2017, one experienced county educator announced, “I am heartened to see the progress our children are making, which means the Big Lift is on the right track. Our challenge now is to make sure we have the resources and partner organizations in place to continue this work.”⁴⁴ The second round of evaluations has since been conducted and the results will be published in the summer of 2018.⁴⁵

At the end of the Big Lift pilot’s proposed fifth and final year in 2020, the students in Cohort 1 will take annual California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) standardized third grade scholastic testing. Utilizing those test scores and other assessment methodologies,^{46,47} the Big Lift would undergo comprehensive academic and developmental

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Silicon Valley Community Foundation: interview by the Grand Jury.

³⁹ <http://www.smcoe.org/about-smcoe/news/2017/11/press-release-rand-and-bell-studies-find-the-big-lift-children-are-making-promising-gains.html>, accessed June 25, 2018.

⁴⁰ Gomez, Cannon, Whitaker and Karoly, *Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Findings for the 2016-2017 Kindergarten Class*, 2.

⁴¹ Ibid, 14.

⁴² Silicon Valley Community Foundation: interview by the Grand Jury.

⁴³ *The Big Lift Inspiring Summers Impact Report 2017*, 1.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/553e9c6ee4b0ee77fad23968/t/5a14aba7652dea2e1a98db85/1511304406156/Thelift+Impact+Report+2017_FINAL.pdf.

⁴⁴ Official of the San Mateo County Office of Education: interview by the Grand Jury.

⁴⁵ Silicon Valley Community Foundation: interview by the Grand Jury.

⁴⁶ Gomez, Cannon, Whitaker and Karoly, *Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Findings for the 2016-2017 Kindergarten Class*, 18.

⁴⁷ “Measurement”, Bell, accessed June 3, 2018. <https://www.experiencebell.org/our-results/measurement>

evaluations of the participants’ progress and measurement of the overall effectiveness of the Big Lift programs.

With those results, the PPLC could use the findings and conclusions drawn from the external assessments to make informed decisions about the future of the program. If a positive impact on participating students is evidenced by the results, the Big Lift initiative may continue and possibly expand to include additional county school districts.⁴⁸ In that case, a sustainable long-term funding source must be identified.⁴⁹

Recognition

The PPLC received two major financial awards for the Big Lift. In September 2014, based on the strength of its comprehensive plan and community-wide support, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation was one of seven nationwide recipients of a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant from the federal government. The SIF award provided the Big Lift initiative with \$7.5 million over three years with an additional \$9 million pending congressional approval (in May 2017, the new federal budget resolution eliminated the conditional SIF monies, leaving a funding shortfall).

The Big Lift was chosen in September 2017, as one of top finalists from over 800 applicants, winning a \$250,000 grant from the Google Bay Area Impact Challenge.

In June 2018, the Big Lift received national recognition from the Learning Policy Institute for its progress in expanding access to quality preschool as a “model for the state” to “streamline processes for families and providers, maximize resources, and develop a more coherent vision of Early Childhood Education.”⁵⁰

Funding of The Big Lift

The Big Lift operates on an annual budget of \$8.1 million per year, with the total cost of the five-year pilot program initially estimated at \$41.5 million.⁵¹ Funding sources for the pilot program include \$20 million in matching SIF funds from the County’s Measure A general sales tax⁵² and a \$7.5 million federal grant from the Social Innovation Fund.⁵³

For fiscal years 2014-2018, the County has appropriated an additional \$10 million from Measure A sales taxes in annual distributions of \$2.5 million. The Big Lift has also succeeded in raising more than \$2 million⁵⁴ in contributions from a coalition of over 300 professional organizations

⁴⁸ Official of San Mateo County Office of Education: interview by the Grand Jury.

⁴⁹ Silicon Valley Community Foundation: interview by the Grand Jury.

⁵⁰ “Building an Early Learning System that Works, <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/building-early-learning-system-california-brief>, 1.

⁵¹ Official from San Mateo County: interview by the Grand Jury

⁵² “Funding,” The Big Lift, accessed May 20, 2018. <http://www.thebiglift.org/funding/> - funding-02

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Official from Silicon Valley Community Foundation: interview by the Grand Jury.

and 500 county leaders including individuals, corporations, and non-profits in support of the Big Lift.⁵⁵

As awareness of the Big Lift's positive results grows, the initiative continues to garner additional financial support. Despite this, mainly due to the cancellation in 2017 of the SIF grant funding, an additional \$11.4 million in funding is needed to complete the five-year pilot program ending in 2020.⁵⁶ This gap must be bridged, and the Big Lift leadership is currently seeking additional capital and funding streams.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Research indicates that early learning programs are an important component of preparing children to start school,⁵⁸ be reading proficiently by the end of third grade,⁵⁹ and improving overall academic achievement.⁶⁰ The results of the previously cited evaluations point to the positive effect the Big Lift program is having on early learners' progress toward school readiness.⁶¹

In a major effort toward producing greater social and economic equity, as well as preparing our youth for the competitive local and global workforce,⁶² the County of San Mateo's Big Lift initiative targets disadvantaged students.⁶³ Improved academic and economic outcomes achieved through successfully educating our youth not only benefits the individual, but the overall society and the economy of the entire county.^{64,65} Current indicators show the Big Lift's potential for positively affecting those outcomes in San Mateo county.⁶⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Official from San Mateo County Office of Education: interview by Grand Jury

⁵⁸ Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-PromotingEffectiveEarlyLearning-2009.pdf>, 14.

⁵⁹ Greg Duncan, Chantelle Dowsett, Amy Claessens, Katherine Magnuson, Aletha Huston, Pamela Klebanov, Linda Pagani, Leon Feinstein, Mimi Engel, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Holly Sexton, Kathryn Duckworth, and Crista Japel, "School Readiness and Later Achievement," *Developmental Psychology* 43.6 (2007): 1428-1446.

⁶⁰ Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-PromotingEffectiveEarlyLearning-2009.pdf>, 14.

⁶¹ Gomez, Cannon, Whitaker and Karoly, *Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Findings for the 2016-2017 Kindergarten Class*, 13-15.

⁶² Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-PromotingEffectiveEarlyLearning-2009.pdf>, 3.

⁶³ Ibid, Appendix Table A. 1

⁶⁴ Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald "Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return," *The Region* (2003): 7. https://minneapolisfed.org/publications_papers/studies/earlychild/abc-part2.pdf

⁶⁵ Martha Farrell Erickson & Karen Kurz-Riemer, *Infants, Toddlers and Families: A Framework for Support and Intervention* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 19.

⁶⁶ Gomez, Cannon, Whitaker and Karoly, *Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Findings for the 2016-2017 Kindergarten Class*, 2.

The Big Lift has confirmed there is sufficient funding to continue the pilot through summer of 2018, but it is critical that the PPLC secure additional financial assistance for the remaining two years necessary to complete the pilot program.⁶⁷

Finally, strategic planning for the Big Lift beyond the completion of the study in 2020 must start now. It will take at least two years of preparation to extend and expand the Big Lift should the proof of concept be confirmed. Officials with the Big Lift commented, “We would like to prevent a gap in services to the thousands of children and their families that count on the Big Lift.”⁶⁸ However, as of June 2018, funding for the last two years of the pilot remains uncertain.⁶⁹

FINDINGS

- F1.** As of 2015, approximately 50 percent of the county’s third graders were not reading at grade level. For English learners, racial minorities, and economically disadvantaged children, that percentage decreases dramatically.
- F2.** Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade have difficulty with later school success and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than peers who maintain grade level achievement.
- F3.** The Big Lift is an early learning initiative that incorporates evidence-based teaching approaches and learning strategies called “the four pillars:” (1) high-quality preschool, (2) summer learning, (3) reduction of chronic absenteeism, and (4) family engagement to support learning. These strategies are included in the program throughout its duration.
- F4.** The Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council (PPLC), comprised of the County Board of Supervisors, the San Mateo County Office of Education, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, developed the Big Lift initiative to improve reading proficiency of participating third graders to 80 percent.
- F5.** The 2017 BELL assessment showed that grade K-2 who attended Big Lift summer learning programs demonstrated a net gain of up to 3.5 months in pre-reading/reading skills.
- F6.** The RAND assessment found that Big Lift preschoolers were significantly more likely than demographically similar children, who went to no preschool at all, to score in the kindergarten-ready range.
- F7.** In June 2018, San Mateo County and the Big Lift were recognized by the Learning Policy Institute as a model for the state for their efforts to improve early childhood education.

⁶⁷ Official from San Mateo County Office of Education: interview by the Grand Jury

⁶⁸ Official from Silicon Valley Community Foundation: interview by the Grand Jury

⁶⁹ Official from San Mateo Office of Education: interview by Grand Jury

- F8.** The Big Lift is funded by several sources. The County of San Mateo has pledged a total of \$20 million in Measure K sales tax monies, \$7.5 million has been received from the Social Innovation Fund (along with matching funds from participating school districts), and individuals, corporations and non-profits have donated approximately \$2.2 million in other grants. Big Lift funding is now secured through Summer 2018, but another \$11.4 million must be raised to support the pilot program to completion in 2020.
- F9.** Planning for the continuation of the Big Lift beyond 2020 must begin now. It will take at least two years to extend and expand the program if/when the proof of concept is evidenced.
- F10.** San Mateo County stands to benefit from the full completion of the five-year Big Lift pilot program in 2020.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury reviewed:

- Early childhood education (ECE) studies and articles
- National, state, and local programs for ECE, including Head Start, the Big Lift, Raising a Reader, and First 5 California
- Longitudinal data from standardized achievement tests in San Mateo County school districts, including demographic data across the county
- Reports on challenges facing the county's South Coast residents
- Evaluation studies of the Big Lift, 2017
- California CAASPP test results

The Grand Jury interviewed:

- Officials from the school districts in Cohorts 1 and 2: superintendents, principals, school board members, and teachers
- San Mateo County Office of Education officials
- Board of Supervisors representatives
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation Big Lift officers
- Raising a Reader representatives
- Community Non-Profit Service program staff representatives

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<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/early-learning/matter-equity-preschool>

Issued: August 2, 2018



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: COUNTY MANAGER

File #: 18-959

Board Meeting Date: 10/23/2018

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: John L. Maltbie, County Manager

Subject: Board of Supervisors' Response to the 2017-2018 Civil Grand Jury Report, "Spotlight: Early Learning Gets A Big Lift."

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2017-2018 Grand Jury Report, "Spotlight: Early Learning Gets A Big Lift."

BACKGROUND:

On August 2, 2018, the 2017-2018 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury issued a report titled "Spotlight: Early Learning Gets A Big Lift." The Board of Supervisors is required to submit comments on the findings and recommendations pertaining to the matters over which it has some decision making authority within 90 days. The Board's response to the report is due to the Honorable V. Raymond Swope no later than October 31, 2018.

DISCUSSION:

The Grand Jury made ten findings in its report. The Board responses follow each finding and the eight recommendations that the Grand Jury requested that the Board respond to within 90 days.

FINDINGS

Finding 1:

As of 2015, approximately 50 percent of the county's third graders were not reading at grade level. For English learners, racial minorities, and economically disadvantaged children, that percentage decreases dramatically.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 2:

Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade have difficulty with later school success and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than peers who maintain grade level

achievement.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 3:

The Big Lift is an early learning initiative that incorporates evidence-based teaching approaches and learning strategies called “the four pillars:” (1) high-quality preschool, (2) summer learning, (3) reduction of chronic absenteeism, and (4) family engagement to support learning. These strategies are included in the program throughout its duration.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 4:

The Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council (PPLC), comprised of the County Board of Supervisors, the San Mateo County Office of Education, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, developed the Big Lift initiative to improve reading proficiency of participating third graders to 80 percent.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 5:

The 2017 BELL assessment showed that grade K-2 who attended Big Lift summer learning programs demonstrated a net gain of up to 3.5 months in pre-reading/reading skills.

Response:

Agree in part: Assessment data from the end of the Inspiring Summers program shows that scholars gained an average of 1.5 months of reading skills.

Finding 6:

The RAND assessment found that Big Lift preschoolers were significantly more likely than demographically similar children, who went to no preschool at all, to score in the kindergarten-ready range.

Response:

Agree in part. In addition, when comparing demographically similar children, Big Lift preschoolers were more likely to be kindergarten-ready than children who did not go to preschool at all. Big Lift preschoolers and non-big Lift preschoolers were equally likely to start school kindergarten-ready.

Finding 7:

In June 2018, San Mateo County and the Big Lift were recognized by the Learning Policy Institute as a model for the state for their efforts to improve early childhood education.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 8:

The Big Lift is funded by several sources. The County of San Mateo has pledged a total of \$20 million in Measure K sales tax monies, \$7.5 million has been received from the Social Innovation Fund (along with matching funds from participating school districts), and individuals, corporations and non-profits have donated approximately \$2.2 million in other grants. Big Lift funding is now secured through Summer 2018, but another \$11.4 million must be raised to support the pilot program to completion in 2020.

Response:

Agree. Funding for the Big Lift has been appropriated through June 2019.

Finding 9:

Planning for the continuation of the Big Lift beyond 2020 must begin now. It will take at least two years to extend and expand the program if/when the proof of concept is evidenced.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 10:

San Mateo County stands to benefit from the full completion of the five-year Big Lift pilot program in 2020.

Response:

Agree.

Acceptance of the report contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of a Collaborative Community by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with accepting this report.



Anne E. Campbell · County Superintendent of Schools

September 6, 2018

Honorable V. Raymond Swope, Judge of the Superior Court
c/o Charlene Kresevich
Hall of Justice
400 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

Dear Judge Swope,

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) has received and reviewed the 2017-18 Grand Jury Report entitled “Spotlight: Early Learning Gets a Big Lift.”

On behalf of the San Mateo County Office of Education, in partnership with the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, I wish to express our appreciation for the time and care that the Education Committee devoted to gathering information about The Big Lift, asking probing and in-depth questions, and developing the “spotlight” report. The Big Lift focuses on improving third-grade reading proficiency by providing children in under-served communities with two years of quality preschool, inspiring summer programs, attendance awareness, and family engagement. We so appreciate the Grand Jury shining a spotlight on The Big Lift – it’s immensely gratifying to have the support expressed in the report.

Having reviewed and considered the Grand Jury’s Findings, SMCOE responds as follows, pursuant to section 933.05 of the California Penal Code:

Findings

F.1 As of 2015, approximately 50 percent of the county’s third graders were not reading at grade level. For English learners, racial minorities, and economically disadvantaged children, that percentage decreases dramatically.

SMCOE agrees with this finding.

F2. Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade have difficulty with later school success and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than peers who maintain grade level achievement.

SMCOE agrees with this finding. “Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation” by the Annie E. Casey Foundation concluded that high school graduation rates are dramatically impacted by third grade reading proficiency. Approximately 16% of students who do not read proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time. This is a rate four times greater than for proficient readers.

F3. The Big Lift is an early learning initiative that incorporates evidence-based teaching approaches and learning strategies called “the four pillars:” (1) high-quality preschool, (2) summer learning, (3) reduction of chronic absenteeism, and (4) family engagement to support learning. These strategies are included in the program throughout its duration.

SMCOE agrees with this finding.

F4. The Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council (PPLC) comprised of the County Board of Supervisors, the San Mateo County Office of Education, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, developed the Big Lift initiative to improve reading proficiency of participating third graders to 80 percent.

SMCOE agrees with this finding. SMCOE appreciates and values its partnership with the Board of Supervisors, especially Supervisor Carole Groom, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, especially Chief Community Impact Officer Erica Wood. The Big Lift partnership represents the positive work that can be accomplished when governmental agencies, public schools, philanthropic organizations, and community partners work together on collective impact initiatives.

F5. The 2017 BELL assessment showed that grade K-2 who attended Big Lift summer learning programs demonstrated a net gain of up to 3.5 months in pre-reading/reading skills.

SMCOE agrees with this finding. The students who participated in The Big Lift Inspiring Summers program would not otherwise have had the opportunity for summer enrichment so it is gratifying to see the progress they demonstrated on the BELL assessment, especially because the summer program only lasted for five weeks.

F6. The RAND assessment found that Big Lift preschoolers were significantly more likely than demographically similar children, who went to no preschool at all, to score in the kindergarten-ready range.

SMCOE agrees with this finding.

F7. In June 2018, San Mateo County and the Big Lift were recognized by the Learning Policy Institute as a model for the state for their efforts to improve early childhood education.

SMCOE agrees that San Mateo County and The Big Lift were recognized in the January 2018 Learning Policy Institute report, “Building an Early Learning System That Works: Next Steps for California.”

F8. The Big Lift is funded by several sources. The County of San Mateo has pledged a total of \$20 million in Measure K sales tax monies, \$7.5 million has been received from the Social Innovation Fund (along with matching funds from participating school districts), and individuals, corporations and non-profits have donated approximately \$2.2 million in other grants. Big Lift funding is now secured through Summer 2018, but another \$11.4 million must be raised to support the pilot program to completion in 2020.

SMCOE agrees with this finding. Ongoing, sustainable funding is one of the largest challenges The Big Lift faces.

F9. Planning for the continuation of The Big Lift beyond 2020 must begin now. It will take at least two years to extend and expand the program if/when the proof of concept is evidenced.

SMCOE agrees with this finding. Assuming proof of concept is realized, The Big Lift provides a model that can be widely disseminated throughout San Mateo County to those communities where third grade reading proficiency is a challenge. Scaling The Big Lift will take intense effort and a viable funding stream. Planning for the years after 2020 definitely needs to begin now.

F10 San Mateo County stands to benefit from the full completion of the five-year Big Lift pilot program in 2020.

SMCOE agrees with this finding. Children who leave third grade reading proficiently are on a trajectory for academic success. They're more likely to graduate high school, pursue post-secondary studies, and become productive members of society as adults. They benefit, their families benefit, our communities benefit, and our economy benefits.

Both the Grand Jury Spotlight Report and these responses were presented to the San Mateo County Board of Education at its September 5, 2018, board meeting.

I wish to extend my appreciation to the Grand Jury for its Spotlight Report on The Big Lift. They devoted an impressive amount of time and energy to gaining a solid understanding of The Big Lift. I look forward to SMCOE continuing to work with our partners in demonstrating proof-of-concept for The Big Lift.

Please be sure to contact me if you have questions or require additional information.

Very truly yours,



Anne E. Campbell
San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools

AEC:a