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SCICON A NATURE EXPERIENCE

BACKGROUND

In 1955 the Outdoor School of Science and Conservation (SCICON) was only a dream. Since that time, the efforts of thousands of people throughout the valley have turned that dream into a reality. In 1958, Clemmie Gill donated the first 35 acres to Tulare County and that dream became a reality.

School districts, communities, and dedicated individuals rolled up their sleeves and started to work. Student cabins, dining facilities, roads, hiking trails and instructional areas were built. All this was done through the efforts of volunteer labor and donated building supplies.

The area surrounding the original 35 acres was in the process of being sold for a housing development. This would have destroyed what was meant to be a grand educational facility. In 1972, "The Friends of SCICON" sponsored a fund drive called "Acres for SCICON", which successfully purchased the 1,100 acres meant for the housing development. The purchase of the additional acres helped to insure the natural beauty of the area for generations to come.

SCICON is located eight miles above Springville in the foothills east of Porterville at an elevation between 2,000 and 3,500 feet. Within this 1,100 acre campus are many miles of hiking trails, a museum of natural history, planetarium, observatory, raptor center, and amphitheater for evening activities. There are more than 20 cabins for students, teachers, and staff. Meals take place in the John Muir Lodge.

Today SCICON serves nearly 15,000 national and international students and visitors yearly and is an exemplary program for environmental education. The motto of SCICON is "SCICON is people working together".

PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

1. Toured SCICON
2. Interviewed relevant personnel

FINDINGS

1. Under the direction of the Tulare County Board of Education, the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools operates and conducts SCICON.
2. There are two advisory boards made up of educators and interested citizens of Tulare County. They are the SCICON Administrative Board and the "Friends of SCICON" Board of Directors.

3. A SCICON Program Administrator oversees the program with the assistance of nearly 30 additional on-site staff, which includes instructional, clerical, maintenance and food service personnel. A full time nurse is on duty at all times.
4. A SCICON Lead Teacher (Teacher) is a fully credentialed professional who specializes in teaching outdoor education. The Teacher provides leadership to the SCICON instructional team, conducts environmental studies and provides curriculum and program organization.
5. From August through June of each year, all Tulare County fifth graders attend SCICON for one school day and sixth graders attend SCICON for one school week (five days).
6. Each cabin may house up to 11 students and one Cabin Counselor.
7. Cabin Counselors are students chosen from local high schools and they are instructed in rules of conduct and safety for the students. They sleep in the cabins with the students and accompany them on all trail walks.
8. Having students representing various districts at the same time helps them learn to socialize with each other.
9. There are two cabins, one for the boys and one for the girls that are specifically designed for the handicapped.
10. On a daily basis SCICON presently accommodates up to 300 students only because the cafeteria has a maximum capacity of 300.
11. Because of the increasing population of children within the County, SCICON is in the process of expanding. East of the present cabins and facilities, is a new site called "The East Village". As of March 25, 2011, six cabins have been built and are being used. Once completed, The East Village will be a mirror image of the present facilities, including a new cafeteria. The two sites combined will be able to accommodate up to 600 students.
12. SCICON has one building that was built from a grant. All the remaining buildings (i.e. cabins, cafeteria, etc.) were built from donated supplies, labor, and fundraisers. Additional funds are generated from outside organizations or individuals, such as weddings, church groups, etc.
13. "Friends of SCICON" are in charge of the fundraising activities. The most recent fundraiser was a barbecue lunch held in April 2011 at SCICON.
14. Large arbors were built by the LIONS and Rotary Clubs. Both arbors are equipped with speakers, tables with benches and a cooking area. During bad weather, heavy tarps may be used to enclose the arbors. An installed heating system keeps the students warm on those cold days or evenings.
15. At SCICON, the students learn about nature, not from books, but from a natural

outdoor setting. They are taught about everything from composting to the mating habits of salamanders. They study the stars at night and also use the planetarium.

16. The museum has stuffed wild animals, natural stones/rocks, a Native American display and much more.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the time SCICON was first a dream, a wonderful thing happened to all the citizens living in Tulare County. County citizens came together and made a dream come true. The students of yesterday and the students of tomorrow did, and will, come away from SCICON with a better understanding of what nature is and how it works. They did, and will, experience what a book cannot truly teach. A book is one thing; actually seeing, touching and feeling is the best educational tool of all.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Continue to do what is done best, "EDUCATE" the youth.

RESPONSES REQUIRED

None

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' COMPENSATION

BACKGROUND

There are 43 elementary and 10 high school districts within Tulare County. Seven of those districts are unified creating 46 school districts with a total of 180 schools. Two communities, Exeter and Woodlake, have a single superintendent managing their elementary and high school districts, but have a separate Board of Trustees for each district. This investigation, therefore, looked at a total of 44 superintendents.

Each school district is governed by an elected Board of Trustees (Board). The Board for each district contracts with a superintendent to execute all Board policies and to manage the academic and administrative staffs. The superintendent interviews potential employees and presents recommendations for hiring to the Board. Each superintendent periodically evaluates employees of the district, and serves as the district's representative to all collective bargaining matters. The district superintendent typically acts as Secretary of the Board and represents the district to the community and various agencies. School superintendents are evaluated periodically by each district's Board of Trustees.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The decision by the 2010-2011 Tulare County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) to investigate the compensation costs for the superintendents of the Tulare County school districts was driven by a recommendation from the 2009-2010 Tulare County Grand Jury, recent media attention to the issue, as well as statewide education budget cuts.

PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

1. The Citrus South Tule and Liberty School Districts were eliminated from the investigation since both have retired administrators serving as interim superintendents on a part-time basis.
2. Reviewed copies of the 2010-2011 superintendent contracts from all public school districts in Tulare County. When a contract did not reference a particular form of compensation, a follow-up request to the Board president was made.
3. Determined the total compensation for each superintendent by adding the base salary to, where applicable, health and pension plan contributions, transportation allowance, as well as any additional forms of compensation operant during the current school year.

Attachment A

Superintendent Compensation Comparison

| <u>District</u> | <u>Ref.#</u> | <u>Base Sal.</u> | <u>Health Ins.</u> | <u>Pension</u> | <u>Transportation</u> | <u>Additional Comp.</u> | <u>Total Comp.</u> | <u>ADA</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Allensworth Elementary | 1 | 114,368 | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | 114,368 | 76 |
| Alpaugh Unified | 2 | 121,610 | 11,815 | 10,033 | ----- | ----- | 143,458 | 306 |
| Alta Vista Elementary | 3 | 103,341 | 13,422 | ----- | ----- | 1,000 | 117,763 | 483 |
| Buena Vista Elementary | 4 | 82,143 | 14,060 | 6,777 | ----- | ----- | 102,980 | 180 |
| Burton Elementary | 5 | 153,291 | 12,412 | ----- | ----- | 18,302 | 184,005 | 2,748 |
| Columbine Elementary | 7 | 118,560 | 15,363 | 9,781 | 1,200 | ----- | 144,904 | 197 |
| Cutler-Orosi Unified | 8 | 167,130 | 10,863 | 14,891 | ----- | 2,500 | 195,384 | 3,974 |
| Ducor Elementary | 10 | 80,000 | 14,088 | 6,600 | ----- | ----- | 100,688 | 175 |
| Earlhart Elementary | 11 | 125,000 | 12,062 | ----- | 3,000 | ----- | 140,062 | 1,923 |
| Farmersville Unified | 16 | 130,616 | 11,568 | 10,449 | ----- | ----- | 152,633 | 2,441 |
| Hope Elementary | 18 | 72,617 | 14,886 | ----- | ----- | ----- | 87,503 | 131 |
| Hot Springs Elementary | 19 | 93,448 | 13,163 | 7,943 | ----- | ----- | 114,554 | 19 |
| Kings River Union Elementary | 22 | 102,900 | 13,118 | 8,489 | 4,200 | 1,000 | 129,707 | 485 |
| Lindsay Unified | 24 | 168,299 | ----- | 14,189 | ----- | ----- | 182,488 | 3,917 |
| Monson Sultana Elementary | 29 | 95,000 | 12,819 | 7,838 | ----- | ----- | 115,657 | 402 |
| Oak Valley Union Elementary | 30 | 98,160 | 11,727 | 8,098 | 2,100 | 900 | 120,985 | 408 |
| Outside Creek Elementary | 32 | 82,283 | 16,122 | 6,843 | ----- | ----- | 105,251 | 118 |
| Palo Verde Union Elementary | 34 | 103,368 | 12,400 | 8,528 | 3,600 | ----- | 127,896 | 554 |
| Pixley Union Elementary | 35 | 130,640 | ----- | 11,108 | 3,600 | 2,000 | 147,348 | 955 |
| Pleasant View Elementary | 36 | 128,158 | ----- | 10,986 | 3,600 | 1,400 | 144,144 | 531 |
| Richgrove Elementary | 38 | 136,341 | 15,571 | 12,852 | 18,228 | ----- | 182,992 | 689 |
| Rockford Elementary | 40 | 90,000 | 15,826 | 7,425 | ----- | ----- | 113,251 | 331 |
| Saucelito Elementary | 41 | 61,018 | 14,013 | 5,034 | ----- | ----- | 80,065 | 79 |
| Sequoia Union Elementary | 42 | 95,000 | 14,695 | 7,838 | 3,600 | ----- | 121,133 | 345 |
| Springville Union Elementary | 44 | 82,416 | 13,805 | 6,799 | ----- | 865 | 103,885 | 341 |
| Stone Corral Elementary | 46 | 85,000 | 11,348 | 7,013 | ----- | ----- | 103,361 | 131 |
| Strathmore Union Elementary | 47 | 127,765 | ----- | 10,541 | 3,600 | ----- | 141,906 | 761 |
| Sundale Union Elementary | 48 | 130,017 | ----- | 3,600 | 3,600 | ----- | 137,217 | 596 |
| Sunnyside Union Elementary | 49 | 97,458 | 11,835 | 7,900 | ----- | 1,000 | 118,333 | 397 |
| Terra Bella Union Elementary | 51 | 110,824 | 13,867 | 10,006 | 3,900 | 1,000 | 139,597 | 873 |
| Three Rivers Union Elementary | 52 | 92,059 | ----- | 7,365 | ----- | ----- | 99,424 | 147 |
| Tipton Elementary | 53 | 100,788 | 11,386 | 8,398 | ----- | 1,000 | 121,572 | 581 |
| Traver Joint Elementary | 54 | 90,000 | 12,083 | 7,425 | 3,000 | 5,000 | 117,508 | 184 |
| Tulare City Schools | 56 | 149,250 | ----- | 12,313 | ----- | ----- | 161,563 | 8,760 |
| Visalia Unified | 57 | 150,512 | 10,890 | 27,203 | 6,000 | ----- | 194,605 | 25,089 |
| Waukena Joint Union Elementary/High | 58 | 88,082 | 11,834 | 7,267 | ----- | ----- | 107,183 | 255 |
| Woodlake Union Elementary/High | 63 | 133,750 | 12,524 | 11,034 | 7,200 | 500 | 165,008 | 2,253 |
| Woodville Union Elementary | 64 | 85,000 | 15,993 | ----- | ----- | ----- | 100,993 | 540 |
| Exeter Elementary/High | 68 | 172,110 | ----- | 14,100 | ----- | ----- | 186,210 | 2,995 |
| Tulare Joint Union High | 72 | 150,792 | ----- | 12,440 | 4,800 | ----- | 168,032 | 4,876 |
| Dinuba Unified | 77 | 145,000 | 9,673 | 12,613 | 7,200 | ----- | 174,486 | 5,609 |
| Porterville Unified | 78 | 154,987 | 14,200 | 15,048 | ----- | ----- | 184,235 | 12,153 |