

November 19, 2001

Dear Commissioners of Multnomah County,

As the County works to conserve resources and at the same time ensure that its programs are reaching the intended populations, I would like to convey my support for school-linked services as the means to achieve these outcomes. The reductions in budgetary allocations at the state, county and local levels should argue persuasively for system integration that can improve efficiency and access to needed services. As a governing council, you should be commended for your visionary thinking in this regard. The immediate fiscal circumstances should promote exploring a more efficient delivery system, one that reduces service fragmentation.

Multnomah County and the City of Portland established a base for implementing this vision through the creation of the Caring Communities and SUN. It should take advantage of these systems to determine what services can be linked to and through our schools. We are realizing through SUN and Project ROY how many more students are served when the services and access points are at the school versus elsewhere in the community. These services are offered typically at the preventive level which should reduce expenditures in the future which increase if problems are permitted to become chronic.

The local school is the appropriate locus for many services. Students and families are quite satisfied and feel comfortable in their local schools, a fact verified each year in the September Gallup polling. There is confidence placed in personnel in local schools that does not extend to larger organizations, known in some instances more for impersonal bureaucracy than service. The Caring Community model holds the capacity for improving service and system integration, but the capacity could be increased with the appropriate infrastructure. The SUN Initiative has expanded discussions among agencies that without its emergence would never have occurred. It also has given us a single lead agency with whom to communicate, a decided advantage that serves everyone better. Admittedly, system integration will take time to develop and mature, but that maturity can be accelerated through the fiscal crisis we are confronting.

I have learned that you are considering the creation of an Office of Community-School Partnerships. Such an office offers an auspicious opportunity for aligning programs more closely. I am intrigued and delighted that you are considering such steps to reduce program fragmentation and increase family and client access to services. If we support the concept of community policing, how similarly important it is for other services to be linked with local neighborhoods as well.

I appreciate your consideration of my thoughts. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Jim Buck
Assistant Superintendent