

Who Controls Sutter County & For Whose Benefit? (published 6/24/15)

While Marysville would seem to be under Munchheimer's thumb, Sutter County's Board of Supervisors would seem to be caught in the web and under the spell of Michele Blake. The evidence for this observation, as reported by parents attending meetings addressing the Program is compelling; While the law (Prop 10B) requires the Sutter Co Children and Families Commission to operate with administrative costs not exceeding 18% of revenue, it seems an unofficial audit by an accountant with the State shows Executive Director, Blake, operates with administrative costs in excess of 30%. Having personally guaranteed the future of the School Readiness (SR) Program in June 2014, without explanation, parents report Ms Blake has subsequently sought to scuttle it, in spite of it being the Commission's most successful, delivering outcomes (test scores) 47% higher than any other program. Sutter County Supervisor and Commission Chair, Jim Whiteaker, is reported to have stated 'SR would be the last Program standing'. Over 10,000 children have undertaken the program since inception. In March, 2015, Ms Blake questioned the quality of the Program. This begs the question, 'How experienced is Ms Blake to make that assessment?' It seems Ms Blake has no qualifications or experience in child development/education. Ms Blake holds a Masters Degree in exercise physiology. The vote on the future of the SR Program was understood by parents to be happening during the March 2015 meeting. It was heavily attended by parents who also sought explanations from Ms Blake on her proposed budgeted expenditures, and the alternate programs she was considering. Parents understood they had the support of at least 5 of the 9 Commissioners, including Chair Whitaker, for the Program continuing. In the face of strengthening probing and apparent opposition, Ms Blake decided the matter of the Program's future should be referred to a 'special committee'. In the April 2015 meeting, Ms Blake stated there would be no vote. Further she stated, 'It's not fair that the same people always receive the money; we will be opening it up to the community so others can apply for the funds! And YCUSD will not be applying for the funds!' Nancy Aaberg, Superintendent YCUSD, told the parents she wasn't going to apply for SR Program funding and that if they (the parents) wanted the Board to apply, the parents would need to ask them. She is reported to have gone on to say, 'They will just do anything I tell them'. Sutter County Supervisors and Commissioners who had stated their commitment to retaining the SR Program, were silent throughout. More disturbingly, in the April Workshop Meeting 1 week later, in the face of enormous hard evidence to the contrary, parents report Ms Blake stated 0 – 5 programs 'just don't work!' When a parent retorted, 'You do realise you are the Executive Director of a program that services 0 – 5?', Ms Blake had no answer. The May

2015 meeting revealed Sutter County Library, with the apparent support of Commissioner Aaberg and Ms Blake, has applied for \$735,000 funding to commence a new untested program, to be delivered by un-nominated personnel, but essentially the same content as the thoroughly proven and highly successful delivered, SR Program. The State of California created the Proposition 10 'cigarette' tax, in part, to engage communities in developing their own future. It was designed to provide maximum support for community participation in decision-making. Specifically, voting on funding was intended to be driven by community members who were not County Supervisors or employees, nor City Council members or their employees. As stated at the outset, funds were intended to be spent in service delivery, and administrative costs to be limited to 18% of revenue. However, in Sutter County, parents report Ms Blake is effectively empowered by the Board of Supervisors and the Commission to ignore all community input, spend monies as she sees fit, including substantially increasing her own salary, decide on programs she has no experience to administer or staff, let alone supervise their implementation or delivery. As also suggested above, in the face of this apparent extraordinary absence of due process and abuse of power, the Sutter County Board of Supervisors and Commission have to date, remained largely silent and refused to publicly question Ms Blake. When a parent posed the question as to what could be done to preserve this so incredibly productive program, delivering a superb transition into elementary school and the most important years of a child's education, Ron Sullenger, Chair of the Sutter County Board of Supervisors, suggested she 'go to the newspaper'. Apparently, he perceived the Chair of the Commission, his fellow Supervisor Jim Whiteaker, doesn't appreciate any interference from his fellow County Supervisors. Sullenger may well be correct in his assessment, as Whiteaker seems equally reluctant to require Ms Blake to be publicly accountable. Instead, parents are concluding Ms Blake to be misguided, inept and/or possibly guilty of illegal actions.