



county of
education

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DATE: October 8, 2004
TO: Louis Burgelin, Foreman
Solano County 2003-04 Grand Jury
FROM: Dee Alarcón, Superintendent of Schools
Solano County
RE: Response to the 2003-04 Report of the Solano County Grand Jury

The Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) was named as an affected agency in many of the investigations in school districts, and therefore, required to respond under California Penal Code §933.05. We were named in error in many instances as the Solano County Office of Education does not conduct investigations of district issues, have jurisdiction nor monitor the findings listed. In those cases, we have responded that we don't have authority for that area because the issue is a responsibility at the district level. We assume you are checking with the district named as an affected party for the information you are seeking.

To appropriately name the Solano County Office of Education as an affected party in future Grand Jury reports, please refer to California Education Code Sections 1240-81 and AB2756 amending Education Code regarding county office responsibilities. We hope this information will be helpful to the Grand Jury for future reports. Briefly among our functions according to Education Code are:

- Provide auditing services for district business and curriculum matters
- Provide advisory services in district business administration activities
- Process and monitor teacher credentials
- Hear appeals on interdistrict attendance, student expulsion, and charter school petitions
- Facilitate due process for complaints that may arise as a result of state compliance mandates or special education IEPs

Angelo Rodriguez High School (page 13)

1. **Finding #1:** Directional and access signs to the school's parking lots are insufficient and confusing.

Response #1: School facilities and maintenance are a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #1: Post clearer directional and access signs for the school location and parking areas.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun district office if this recommendation has been implemented.

Board of Education

Larry Asera, *President* Ray Silva, *Vice President* Mayrene Bates Jose V. Briseño Douglas J. Ford John T. Galvan Geneva Watts

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Finding #2: During the Grand Jury visit, the library appeared to be underutilized. Staff indicates that hours of the library access before and after school are insufficient for student needs.

Response #2: School facilities, staffing and curriculum are district level responsibilities.

Recommendation #2: Create more opportunities for student access to the library before, during and after schools hours.

Recommendation Response: Staffing and school facilities are a district responsibility. Please inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun district office if this recommendation has been implemented.

Finding #3: Although it is a new school with a “no gum” policy, the school walkways had numerous gum ‘spots.’

Response #3: School facilities/maintenance and enforcement of district policies are district level responsibilities.

Recommendation #3: Enforce the “no gum” policy and ‘de-gum’ or steam clean and hose down walkways frequently.

Recommendation Response: School maintenance and enforcement of school policies are a district responsibility. Please inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun district office if the “no gum” policy will be enforced and if the walkways will be cleaned.

Finding #4: Angelo Rodriguez High School does not offer Home Economics or shop-type vocational programs.

Response #4: School curriculum is a district responsibility.

Recommendation #4: The Fairfield-Suisun USD allow courses of study that encompass the Vocational Arts at all high schools or designate a high school as a Vocational Arts high school.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun district office if curriculum will be changed at Rodriguez High School to include more vocational programs or if a district high school will be designated as a Vocational Arts school.

Bransford Elementary School (page 14)

Finding #1: There are a large number of Spanish speaking students at Bransford Elementary School.

Response #1: SCOE agrees with the finding.

Recommendation #1: Continue the “Newcomer” program.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury needs to inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun district office to determine if the "Newcomer" program will be continued or not as curriculum is a district responsibility.

Finding #2: The "Read 180" program appears to be an effective program.

Response #2: School curriculum is a district responsibility.

Recommendation #2: Continue the "Read-180" program.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury needs to inquire with the Fairfield-Suisun district office if the "Read 180" program will be continued.

C.A. Jacobs Intermediate School (page 15)

Finding #1: Eighty-three percent of the teachers at C.A. Jacobs Intermediate School are fully credentialed, compared to the state's average of 88%.

Response #1: CDE data supports that 83% of the teachers at C.A. Jacobs Intermediate School were fully credentialed.

Recommendation #1: The school hire fully qualified teachers and make sure that teachers on emergency credentials become fully qualified.

Recommendation Response: SCOE confirmed with the Dixon USD personnel office that four teachers were teaching with emergency credentials for part of the 2003-04 school year. Dixon USD reported that two of the four teachers were fully credentialed by December. The two other teachers were credentialed regular education teachers but were working with emergency waivers so they could teach special education. This would put the district at 93%, well above the state average. The district reported the two special education teachers were working towards their certification in that area. Therefore, the Grand Jury recommendation has been implemented.

Finding #2: The students were very polite and helpful as the Grand Jury visited the site.

Response #2: SCOE was delighted to hear that students were polite and helpful to the Grand Jury.

Recommendation #2: The school continue to promote the good citizenship shown to the Grand Jury.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Dixon USD if promotion of good citizenship has been continued as curriculum because programs are district responsibilities.

Finding #3: There was a brick missing in the walkways between portable classrooms, loose wires hanging from one classroom and a contractor's ladder was left unattended.

Response #3: School site maintenance and safety are district responsibilities.

Recommendation #3: The school repair dangerous walkways and make sure that the students are protected from other dangerous situations.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should call the Dixon USD to inquire if the walkways have been repaired at C.A. Jacobs and to make sure that all safety policies are adhered to during repairs.

Hemlock Elementary School (page 15)

Finding #1: Most of the teaching staff is older, so there may be some retirements in the next few years.

Response #1: District school personnel are a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #1: When new credentialed staff is needed, consider bringing in more bilingual teachers, not just to ease communication with students, but to encourage communication with non-English-speaking parents.

Recommendation Response: Hiring of district staff is a district responsibility. The Grand Jury needs to inquire if the Vacaville USD will implement the recommendation to hire bilingual teachers to encourage communication with non-English speaking parents.

Finding #2: The school lacks good handicap access and places to display student work outside the classrooms.

Response #2: School facilities are a district responsibility.

Recommendation #2: During the renovation process, ensure that handicap access is adequate and add additional bulletin board space in the common areas.

Recommendation Response: School site facilities are a responsibility of the district. Please contact the Vacaville USD to inquire if the handicap access has been improved and if additional bulletin board space has been added to common areas.

Jesse Bethel High School (page 17)

Finding #1: The school houses a Transition Center which serves all of Vallejo High Schools, Continuation and Middle Schools. This Center is primarily used by special education students and is federally funded; however, any student can use the career/placement facility.

Response #1: SCOE agrees with this finding.

Recommendation #1: The Grand Jury recommends continuation of this admirable program.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury needs to check with the Vallejo City USD to confirm the Transition Center is still used as stated above. The area of facilities and curriculum are district responsibilities.

Finding #2: The Vallejo City USD uses the cafeteria as the main kitchen to prepare meals for all of the elementary schools in the district, along with the meals for Jesse Bethel High. The district does not use contracted food service.

Response #2: Food service programs are a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #2: The 2004-05 Grand Jury review the cost effectiveness of this system.

Recommendation Response: SCOE assumes the 2004-05 Grand Jury will review the cost effectiveness of this system.

Finding #3: Overall school maintenance is poor, considering the age of the school. At the time of this visit, the Grand Jury randomly inspected restroom facilities, drinking fountains (T2 building), locker areas (L4) and overall campus upkeep. A drinking fountain handle was not operable, and the bowl area was dirty but working. Many lockers were vandalized to the point of exposed sharp metal edges protruding into the walkway endangering the students and staff.

Response #3: School facilities and maintenance are responsibilities of the district.

Recommendation #3: Damaged lockers need immediate attention. Drinking fountains need to be clean and operable at all times.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury needs to call the Vallejo City USD to inquire if the lockers and fountains have been repaired at Jesse Bethel High.

Finding #4: Many maintenance problems are not addressed because of the deferred maintenance.

Response #4: School maintenance is a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #4: Re-evaluate the deferred maintenance policy.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury needs to call Vallejo City USD to inquire if their deferred maintenance policy will be re-evaluated.

Finding #5: The Grand Jury observed the ramps from level two to level three are very steep. Students in wheelchairs need assistance to use these ramps. Even with assistance, coming down the ramp could be hazardous if the assistant were to lose control

Response #5: School facilities are a district responsibility.

Recommendation: The school district and the Special Education Department should look into the feasibility of changing either the slope of the ramps, putting in a lift or devising a better access from level two to level three for students with ambulatory challenges.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury needs to call Vallejo City USD to inquire if access between levels will be improved.

Tolenas Elementary (page 18)

Finding #1: There are buildings that do not conform to building codes.

Response #1: School site facilities are a district responsibility.

Recommendation #1: These classrooms should be replaced forthwith.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun USD if these buildings have been or will be replaced.

Finding #2: The decline in the API score is cause for concern.

Response #2: SCOE agrees with Finding #2.

Recommendation #2: The Principal should be reinforced in her efforts to raise the API scores. A committee consisting of district personnel, parents and staff should be organized to work with the principal in pinpointing the problem and ensuring that action is taken to reverse the decline.

Recommendation Response: SCOE agrees that actions should be taken to improve API scores that include staff, parents and district personnel. Curriculum is a responsibility of the district, but SCOE is available to offer support and assistance at the request of the district for professional development and consultation in an effort to improve student scores. SCOE doubts that a problem can be pinpointed, as there are many factors that affect results of testing in classrooms. The Grand Jury should inquire at the Fairfield-Suisun USD district office to determine if Recommendation #2 has been implemented.

Finding #3: Traffic hazards threaten the safety of the entire student population and disrupt normal traffic flow in the surrounding neighborhood. Emergency vehicles would be prevented from entering school property during peak traffic periods.

Response #3: School safety issues are a district responsibility.

Recommendation #3: The City of Fairfield and Fairfield-Suisun USD should work together to develop solutions to correct these traffic hazards.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the city and district as to whether or not the Grand Jury recommendation was implemented.

Vanden High School (page 19)

Finding #1: The school has an effective operating program which is driven by the two information “hubs,” the library and counseling department.

Response #1: SCOE agrees the library and counseling offices would be great information resources.

Recommendation: Continue to strengthen this highly effective system.

Recommendation Response: Day to day operation at school sites is the responsibility of the Principal. The Grand Jury should inquire at Vanden High if the system has been continued.

Finding #2: The school logistically is laid out so as to maximize teacher collaboration and resource availability.

Response #2: Facilities are a responsibility of the district. Day to day operation at school sites is the responsibility of the Principal.

Recommendation #2: Continue to keep similar classes in close proximity for teacher collaboration and resource availability.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire at Vanden High to determine if the system has been continued.

Finding #3: There are dangerous thorn bushes that pose a safety hazard because they overhang the walkways.

Response #3: Safety and maintenance issues are a district responsibility.

Recommendation #3: Remove the thorn bushes.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Travis USD to determine if the thorn bushes have been removed.

Finding #4: The juice machine was not working properly but the soda machine was working.

Response #4: School site maintenance is a district responsibility.

Recommendation #4: Repair the juice machine.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Travis USD to determine if the juice machine has been repaired.

Finding #5: The campus was littered with gum, especially the outside eating area.

Response #5: School site maintenance is a district responsibility.

Recommendation #5: Clean gum residue from campus walkways and eating areas.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Travis USD to determine if the recommendation to clean the walkways was implemented.

Finding #6: A glass exit door in the cafeteria was painted with opaque green paint posing a potential safety hazard.

Response #6: School site safety is a district responsibility.

Recommendation #6: Correct the safety hazard.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Travis USD to determine if the safety hazard has been corrected.

Will C. Wood High School (page 20)

Finding #1: The library is closed to students during "instructional time" if no certificated person is available to supervise the library.

Response #1: School site staffing is a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #1: Consider alternative ways to finance the hiring of additional certificated personnel to allow the students more access time to the library.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Vacaville USD to determine if the recommendation to hire additional personnel was implemented.

Finding #2: The gymnasium was found to be very dark due to ceiling lights not working even though requests had been submitted for repair. Lack of adequate lighting is a potential safety hazard.

Response #2: School site maintenance and safety issues are district responsibilities.

Recommendation #2: The district should devise a more timely system to respond to work orders from school sites.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Vacaville USD to determine if a more timely system to respond to work orders was implemented as suggested.

Finding #3: The Grand Jury observed there is only one ramp for physically challenged persons in the main quad. The ramp is located on the left side of the quad as you enter from the parking lot. It creates a long trip to get to the opposite side of the campus. There are ramps on the outside area to access the

wings on the left and right sides, but it forces those who need ramps to go out and around the buildings.

Response #3: School facilities are a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #3: Improve access to all campus areas for everyone.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Vacaville USD to determine if improvements for access to the campus were made.

Finding #4: Two out of three sinks were missing from a girl's restroom.

Response #4: School facilities and maintenance are a responsibility of the district.

Recommendation #4: Replace the missing sinks in the restrooms.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Vacaville USD to determine if the sinks were replaced in the restrooms.

Finding #5: At the time of the Grand Jury visit, there was no certified instructor for the auto shop class.

Response #5: Hiring of school personnel is a district responsibility.

Recommendation #5: Provide an instructor for the class.

Recommendation Response: The Grand Jury should inquire with the Vacaville USD to determine if a certified instructor has been hired for the auto shop class.

Benicia Unified School District (page 21)

Finding #1: The Grand Jury found no evidence that the BUSD financial problems were due to illegal activities and agrees with the police and the District Attorney findings that there were no criminal intent involved.

Response #1: SCOE agrees with Finding #1.

Recommendation #1: None

Finding #2: The Grand Jury did find unconventional bookkeeping practices and instances of inaccurate entries of income.

Response #2: Solano County Office of Education agrees with findings.

Recommendation #2: The School Board ensure that the District Superintendent, Chief Financial Officer and appropriate district personnel are fully familiar with and trained to use and understand the Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) mandated by the California Department of Education.

Recommendation Response: Recommendation has been implemented. The current Chief Financial Officer is fully familiar with and trained to use and understand SACS.

Finding #3: The Benicia School Board did not respond appropriately to the serious warning of the outside audits and, later, by the Solano County Office of Education that their budget projections were not accurate.

Response to Finding #3: Solano County Office of Education disagrees in part. The Benicia School Board found itself faced with circumstances beyond its control such as the loss of funds from declining enrollment and the state budget crisis that were exacerbated by the internal bookkeeping issues. The bookkeeping issues were resolved with the hiring of the new Chief Business Officer and the implementation of the new financial system.

Recommendation #3: The BUSD implement board policies and budget development and monitoring practices that provide an early warning of financial problems. The Benicia School Board take immediate action when the County Office of Education issues a warning regarding certification status.

Recommendation Response: Recommendation has been implemented. Benicia USD developed a fiscal recovery plan and implemented budget reductions to balance the 2004/05 budget. It is important to acknowledge that school districts have no control over the state budget which drives funding for them. However, we assist them and monitor their budget planning to ensure accuracy.

Finding #4: The Board approved retirement bonuses through the Public Agency Retirement System (PARS) based on inaccurate and incomplete budget projections.

Response #4: The Solano County Office of Education does not have sufficient information to agree or disagree with this finding, because they were not required to obtain Solano County Office of Education approval for retirement packages.

Recommendation #4: The Benicia School Board require accurate and complete fiscal information and financial projections prior to approving retirement packages.

Recommendation Response: The Solano County Office of Education agrees with this recommendation. With the implementation of an integrated financial/payroll system, the district is able to access data in a timely manner for management review and decision making.

Finding #5: The Solano County Office of Education fulfilled the minimal mandated responsibility of notifying the BUSD Board of potentially not meeting its fiscal budget by issuing "qualified" and "negative" certification.

Response #5: The Solano County Office of Education disagrees in part with this finding. The County Office provided more than the minimal mandated services by providing a business advisor to review the financial status of the District and to

assist the district in the planning of the 2003-04 budget and preparation of the fiscal recovery plan.

Recommendation #5: The County Office of Education take a strong stand in budget discussions when impending problems appear and work with the school district until budget problems are resolved.

Recommendation Response: Recommendation has been implemented. The Solano County Office of Education worked closely with Solano schools districts to implement an integrated financial software system to enhance the availability timely and accurate fiscal information for management review at the district and county level. The Solano County Office of Education continues to use the AB1200/AB2756 guidelines to review, monitor and report on the fiscal stability of the Solano school districts.