

Tolenas Elementary School 2003 - 2004 Grand Jury Report

I. Reason for Visitation

The Grand Jury elected to visit a random selection of schools in the County.

II. Procedure

The Grand Jury:

- Toured school facilities in Fairfield
- Talked with administrators, teachers, students and staff
- Observed teacher and student interaction in classes
- Observed campus control and pickup of students at the end of the school day
- Reviewed health, safety procedures and informational handouts

III. Background

1. The school staff was not advised of the Grand Jury visit. Consequently, classroom activity appeared to be spontaneous and unrehearsed. At the end of the class period and during lunch, the teachers, students and staff inquired about the purpose of our visit.

2. The Principal has been at Tolenas Elementary, a Gifted and Talent Education (GATE) Magnet school, for three years. GATE students are enrolled in all-day classes. At the time of the visit, student enrollment was 640 in K-6 grades. Enrollment within grades 1, 2 and 3 was 20 students per class. In a combined 4/5 grade class, enrollment was 32 students. Within grades 4, 5 and 6, enrollment was 34 students per class.

3. Most classrooms are portables, and this summer, the ones that do not meet building code standards are scheduled for replacement. Each classroom has Internet access with four or five computers in the upper classes and 17 in the computer lab. The classrooms and campus area were clean, as were the restrooms.

4. The school's Academic Performance Index (API) score, although high is slightly lower than previous years. Plans have been instituted, including requesting District assistance, to research the cause of the decline. All teachers, except one, are fully credentialed. It was reported that the one teacher would be fully credentialed prior to the release of the Grand Jury report. The school submits grant applications to foundations to obtain money to establish mentoring programs that will benefit new and young teachers.

5. Very active "Stamp Out Bullying," "Making Personal Choices" and "Student Expectations" programs have been established. These student character development programs are school-wide and are highlighted in the *Tolenas Tiger Tribune*, the school and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) newsletter, which is sent to parents. Placards, T-shirts and monthly recognition awards are other methods used to bring attention to these programs.

6. The Grand Jury observed the school "Buddy Program," where sixth grade students lead their Kindergarten Buddies, by the hand, to other campus activities. The school's other activities are: sports, music and band. There is also a Chess Club. The school's PTO, which is very supportive, recently raised money for new playground equipment.

7. A full-service cafeteria is located in a new multipurpose facility where breakfast and lunch are served. There is a fruit and vegetable bar and, from observation, it is very popular. There are adult monitors that assist during breakfast and lunch periods. Also, students assist with meal setup and serving. The Grand Jury spoke with the students and the monitors and each stated they enjoy the responsible roles they perform.

8. Tolenas School is located on a very narrow, two-way street with a double yellow line running down the middle. The double line extends from the intersection of Tabor Ave and Tolenas Road to the end of the school property. The school has one regular bus and a Special Education student bus. Private vehicles transport the majority of the students. This poses several traffic hazards at the start and end of the school day. The Grand Jury, on March 30, 2004, observed these traffic hazards first-hand. During the observation period, the parents that were unable to gain access to school property, waited in their cars, knowing they were blocking all traffic. Traffic congestion at the intersection of Tabor Ave and Tolenas Road is another contributing safety problem. Even with a stoplight controlling car traffic and a crossing guard controlling children crossing, a safety hazard still exists.

IV. Findings and Recommendations

Each finding is referenced to the background paragraph number

Finding #1 - There are classrooms that do not conform to building codes. (2)

Recommendation #1 - These classrooms should be replaced forthwith.

Finding #2 - The decline in the API score is cause for concern. (4)

Recommendation #2 - The Principal should be reinforced in her efforts to raise the API score. 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.

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. (8)

Recommendation #3 - The City of Fairfield and Fairfield Unified School District should work together to develop solutions to correction these traffic hazards.

V. Comments

“Stamp Out Bullying”, “Making Personal Choices” and “Student Expectation” programs, are character building programs that must be aggressively and continuously utilized in the school's curriculum. These types of programs must be instituted in the early development of each student. To reinforce these programs and ensure their success, every parent must be included in the process. Also, another character building program, “Challenge Days” program for upper class elementary school students, should be reevaluated and re-established. Budget constraints are a very real problem, as is helping our students develop positive character traits.

The adult monitors should be highly commended for their contributions to the children's safety as they perform their duty controlling and protecting the students during the abnormal vehicle congestion periods.

VI. Affected Agencies

- Solano County Office of Education
- Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District
- Fairfield – Suisun Unified School Board
- Tolenas Elementary School
- City of Fairfield