

Vanden High School

2003-2004 Grand Jury Report

I. Reason for Investigation

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

II. Procedure

The Grand Jury:

- Talked to district administrators, school administrators, teachers, librarian, counselor and students
- Toured the school facility
- Observed cafeteria, student eating area, classrooms, gym, library and restrooms
- Observed the presentation by Vanden personnel of “school hubs”
- Obtained school test information from the California Education website

III. Background

1. Vanden High School in Fairfield is adjacent to Travis Air Force Base. A large percentage of the students are dependents of military personnel. Vanden is a four year, comprehensive high school offering a wide variety of classes and activities.

2. At the time of the visit, the enrollment was 1,328 students.

3. According to the principal, the school operates around two “hubs”, which are central focal points for information. They are the counseling department and the library.

4. The counseling department provides a number of services to the students and parents including the following: officially seeing each student once a year, providing parents and students with the opportunity to receive academic/class counseling during the summer months, providing a four-year plan for each student, providing a print-out of transcripts for each student each year, providing college and career counseling and providing personal counseling on an as-needed basis.

5. The library/technical center provides a number of services including: supporting student reading for school work and pleasure, locating information, promoting computer literacy, housing an instructional center, integrating materials with classroom instruction, holding book talks and maintaining a school website.

6. The school has had a consistently high scholarship award-rate. The class of 2003 (324 students) was awarded \$2.5 million in post-high school scholarships.

7. Vanden’s API scores for 2001, 2002 and 2003 were 729, 712 and 774, respectively. Their state-wide ranking for those years in the State of California was 9, 8 and 9. When compared to similar schools, Vanden achieved a ranking of 10. Both rankings were on a scale of 1 to 10. According to the principal, in the school year of 2002-2003, Vanden High School was the highest ranking traditional, comprehensive public high school among schools of similar size in the state of California.

8. The campus appears to be well organized for teacher collaboration and access to teaching materials within each department.

9. In touring the facility the Grand Jury found: thorn bushes extending over the walkway, posing a potential safety hazard; juice machine not functioning properly which limited students' choices of beverages; massive amounts of gum discarded on campus, specifically in the eating area; glass exit door painted with opaque green paint.

10. The school cafeteria program is privately contracted. According to staff, healthy menus are encouraged.

IV. Findings and Recommendations

Each finding is referenced to the background paragraph number.

Finding #1 - The school has an effective operating program which is driven by the two information "hubs," the library and counseling department. (3)

Recommendation #1 - Continue and strengthen this highly effective system.

Finding #2 - The school logistically is laid out so as to maximize teacher collaboration and resource availability. (8)

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

Finding #3 - There are dangerous thorn bushes that pose a safety hazard because they overhang the walkways. (9)

Recommendation #3 - Remove the thorn bushes.

Finding #4 - The juice machine was not working properly but the soda machine was working. (9)(10)

Recommendation #4 - Repair the juice machine.

Finding #5 - The campus was littered with gum, especially the outside eating area. (9)

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

Finding #6 - A glass exit door in the cafeteria was painted with opaque green paint posing a potential safety hazard. (9)

Recommendation #6 – Correct the safety hazard.

V. Comments

The school administration and staff are commended for the high ranking it has attained among schools of similar size in the State of California.

The school schedule is meshed with the district master schedule to ensure a smooth progression of activities throughout the school year.

The administration appears to have a clear understanding and firm management of the school budgets to drive the success of the “hubs” of the school.

VI. Affected Agencies

- Solano County Office of Education
- Travis Unified School District
- Travis Unified School Board
- Vanden High School