

**ADMINISTRATION OF POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND ADMINISTRATION
OF DISCIPLINE AND SAFETY IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM
2008-2009 Grand Jury Report**

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

Pursuant to California Penal Code §925, the 2008-2009 Solano County Grand Jury elected to examine the Policies, Procedures and the Administration of discipline and safety among teachers and students as well as their cultural make up.

GRAND JURY ACTIONS

- Interviewed Principals of Vacaville High School, Rodriguez High School, Vallejo High School, Jesse Bethel High School
- Interviewed Superintendents of Dixon Unified School District, Travis Unified School District, Vallejo Unified School District, River-Delta Joint Unified School District (Rio Vista only), Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District, Benicia Unified School District
- Interviewed Assistant Superintendent/Human Resources Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District and Vacaville Unified School District
- Reviewed Policies/Procedures of School Districts in Solano County
- Reviewed Comprehensive School Safety Plans
- Reviewed Policy/Procedure Manuals from Solano Education Districts
- Conducted high school campus visits
- Reviewed California Department of Education Data and Statistics
- Reviewed California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Requirements

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

The Grand Jury interviewed administrators using a select set of questions developed for the Districts and for school principals. Some responses led to further in-depth questions depending on the degree of information obtained. The questions were designed to:

- Establish whether the Districts and high schools are following their own policies and procedures
- Evaluate whether the Districts are conducting investigations of misconduct by teachers or students according to established guidelines
- Evaluate whether the Districts provide a safe environment for Students and Teachers
- Evaluate whether the Districts are making an effort to match the faculty socio-cultural mix with that of the student population

All Schools have developed a Comprehensive School Safety Plan and are required to review and update the plan annually. Each District maintains records of student and teacher misconduct occurring during the school year. This information is compiled and sent to the California State Board of Education.

The ethnic breakdown of the enrollment of schools and of the teachers was examined. This was done to determine possible relationships between truancy, discipline, cultural understanding, and student response to the aspects of education and study habits. At one time, school districts employed truancy officers, but this is no longer the case.

Students

All schools have developed written materials to help students and parents in understanding what is to be expected of them throughout the school year. In high schools, for example, each student is provided a handbook containing policies and procedures relating to discipline, clothing, organizations, clubs, peer groups, campus layout and possession of electronic items approved/disapproved. The schools have dress code standards that are intended to deter possible gang activity. The policies and procedures vary to some degree among the districts. All campuses address the common issues of school life.

The majority of school districts have contracted with Law Enforcement agencies to provide School Resource Officers (SROs). In addition to SROs most Districts employ four to eight campus supervisors who are also on the school grounds during school hours. Campus supervisors are trained and are updated on relevant issues that may cause disruption on school grounds, i.e., gang activity, graffiti tags, etc. This training is standardized but may vary in application from district to district. Rio Vista High School is the only high school in the county that has no SRO or on-campus supervisors. The Superintendent asserted that there are no on-campus problems; hence, there is no need for the security. At the time of this report, the Grand Jury learned that Vallejo Police Department is reluctant to give its full support to the assignment of SROs to the three high schools.

Vallejo High School has a proactive policy and has recently hired ten new campus supervisors. Each works closely with an ethnic group and makes it their business to know the students and their families. The principal and superintendent report that these relationships and the experience and information gained have the effect of enhancing safety for all concerned. The relationships that campus supervisors have built with the students and their families have helped students, including gang members, to have more respect for the school campus. This change in attitude also helps to discourage acts of violence during school hours, creating a safer environment for all. The on-campus supervisor program is designed to have similar effects on all campuses.

With the exception of Rio Vista High School, high schools throughout each district have installed or are installing cameras to monitor the campus. The cameras monitor hallways and exterior parking lots. Growing concerns are nighttime vandalism and trespassers creating disturbances during and after school hours.

The Districts have a notification system for alerting parents of emergencies and other issues important to students and parents alike. The notification system can also be used district-wide and school-specific.

Student programs include:

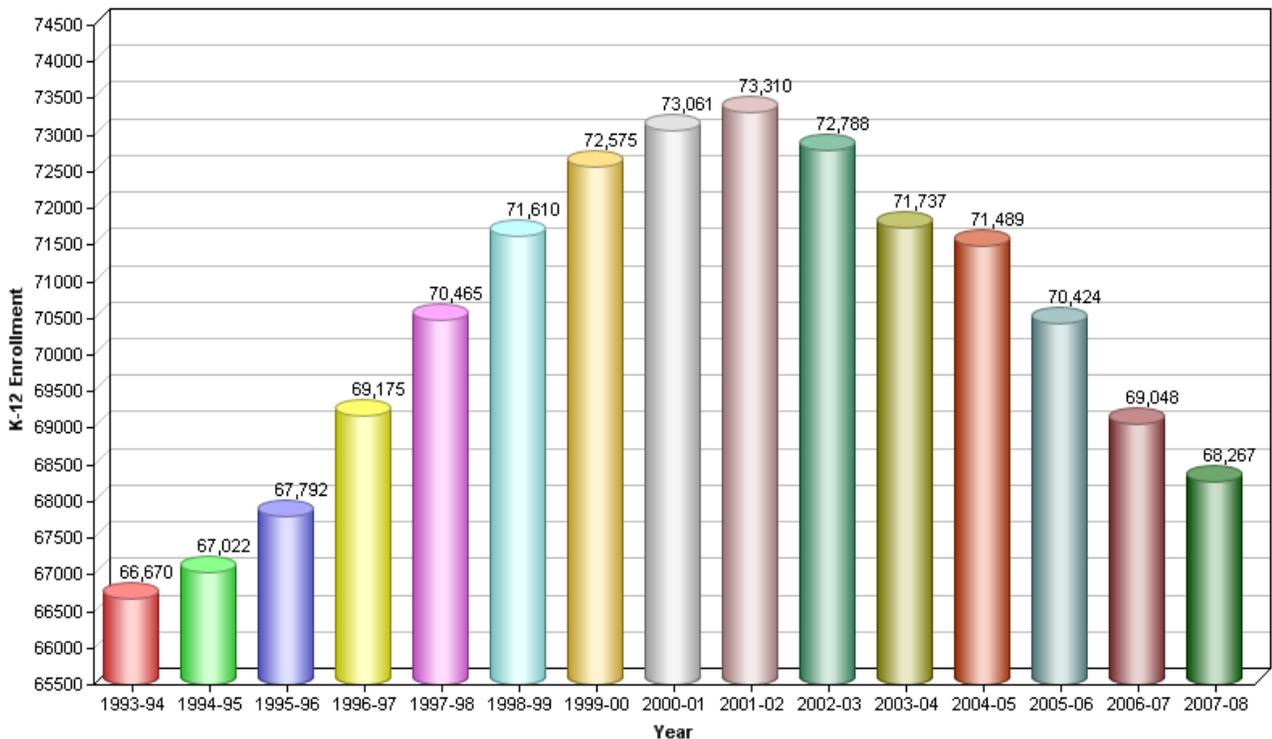
- Character Building--Focuses on building self-awareness and ethics
- Racial Challenge--Peer groups discuss issues relative to cultural understanding in a social atmosphere
- Link Crew--Assist freshmen to adjust to high school by pairing students with a trained senior volunteer

- Goal G–Builds relationships among the students to foster mentoring, enhance safety, and discourage truancy
- Peace Builders–Peer counselors who work with other students in a program to enhance school and neighborhood security
- Career Builders–Vallejo High School program where ninth graders are taught to think about careers that may interest them and that they may pursue during their following high school years
- Cultural organizations and clubs–Schools allow formation of clubs relative to student make up and groups

Each District has established many of these programs in their schools.

Public school enrollment has decreased since the 2001-02 school year, as illustrated by the California Department of Education (CDE) Chart #1.

K-12 Public School Enrollment Chart #1



The statistical information provided in this report and labeled Chart #2 reveals a correlation between high Truancy rates and the high Expulsion/Suspension rate.

Solano County public school enrollment is 68,300 in grades K-12. The information provided in Chart #2 shows the truancy rate of 35.07% in 2008. During the same academic school year, the number of expulsions in the Districts was 364 (0.5%) and suspensions were 15,953 (24%). This same period indicated FSUSD led the county with 69% of the expulsions and 40% of the suspensions. During the same period FSUSD truancy rate was 35.56%. The rate of violence/drug related incidents among students was highest in FSUSD, which recorded 34 incidents or 70% of expulsions of this type.

The Statistical information provided in this report and labeled Chart #2 reveals a correlation between high Truancy rates and high Expulsion/Suspension rate.

Solano County Expulsion, Suspension and Truancy Information for 2007-08 Chart #2

District	Enrollment*	Number of Students with Unexcused Absence or Tardy on 3 or More Days (truants)	Truancy Rate	Violence/ Drug Expulsions	Suspensions	Total Persistently Dangerous Expulsions	Number of Non-Student Firearm Incidents	Overall Total Expulsions	Suspensions
Benicia	5,005	1,688	33.73%	3	174			3	308
Dixon	4,114	141	3.43%	6	18	3		6	18
Fairfield-Suisun	22,708	8,074	35.56%	197	2,479	34		252	6,312
Solano County Office Of Education	440	36	8.18%		6				101
Travis	5,311	1,611	30.33%	9	171	3		11	517
Vacaville	13,186	4,020	30.49%	13	904			14	2,323
Vallejo City	17,238	8,279	48.03%	75	2,200	9		78	6,374
Solano County	68,002	23,849	35.07%	303	5,952	49		364	15,953
California State	6,219,657	1,598,725	25.70%	17,356	338,164	2,377	50	21,373	824,231

The demographic make-up of students in Solano County and State of California in accordance with CDE records is illustrated in Chart #3.

Students by District Chart #3

Districts	Am. Indian or Alaska Native #	Asian #	Pacific Islander #	Filipino #	Hispanic or Latino #	African American #	White #	Multiple #	Total
Benicia	44	308	43	375	660	476	2,955	154	5,015
Dixon	21	77	18	61	1,869	151	1,794	136	4,127
Fairfield	227	1,242	427	2,200	7,393	5,202	6,073	10	22,774
Travis	27	268	60	570	802	807	2,333	448	5,315
Vacaville	104	297	103	275	3,304	995	6,539	1,566	13,183
Vallejo	122	525	358	3,271	4,903	5,582	1,970	677	17,408
Solano County Totals	545	2,717	1,009	6,752	18,931	13,213	21,664	2,991	67,822
Statewide Totals	47,543	516,253	39,693	167,385	3,056,616	466,141	1,790,513	191,325	6,275,469

Comparison of FSUSD with Vallejo School District

Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District comprises 34% of Solano County’s students. African-American and Hispanic students make up 55% of the student population. African-American and Hispanic teachers make up only 13%.

Vallejo Unified School District comprises 26% of Solano County’s students. African-American and Hispanics students make up 60% of the student population and African-American and Hispanic teachers make up only 17%.

A qualified educational staff that more closely matches the demographics of the student population could lead to better cultural understanding. This was identified as a significant issue by all Superintendents interviewed. A reported obstacle in reaching this goal is the lack of similarity between the ethnic demographic of the student body and the ethnic make-up of the applicant pool.

Teachers

All Districts perform background examinations, fingerprinting, Department of Justice, and Federal Bureau of Investigation checks of newly hired teachers, school staff, and administrators. All teachers must be licensed through the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and pass the Basic Skills Requirement. Records are maintained by the District and may in addition be kept by school Principals on school employees. The policy is the same for substitute teachers when first hired.

Due to a lack of updated employment records, CCTC does not notify school officials in all cases of suspensions, loss of license or other acts. The superintendants indicated that, as a rule, only serious violations reported to them are relayed to CCTC. This is contrary to California Education Code, which directs any school official, including teachers and administrators, to notify CCTC or face criminal charges and penalties.

According to California Education Code section 44030, when principals and school administrators become aware of convictions of moral turpitude, sex offenses, lewd and lascivious conduct and controlled substance offenses by staff they must report such offenses to the CCTC. This is a State mandate. Most top-level administrators that were interviewed stated that they were not aware of this requirement, and as a result may not be in compliance.

Initial complaints of teacher misconduct are first investigated by the principal, or one or more of the vice-principals. If the allegation is deemed serious in nature, it is forwarded for action to the District or local Law Enforcement agency.

To bring greater socio-cultural demographics to their District, Vallejo Unified School District is taking that one step further by encouraging local graduates to return to the District for employment opportunities. See Chart #4.

Teacher Education and Service Report Chart #4

School District	Doctorate	Master's Degree + 30 Units	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree + 30 Units	Bachelor's Degree	Total Staff	Avg. Years of Ed. Service	Avg. Years in the District	Result of Tenure
Benicia Unified	3 (1.2%)	16 (6.2%)	35 (13.5%)	182 (70.3%)	23 (8.9%)	259	17.4	13.7	3.7
Dixon Unified	0.0%	19 (8.8%)	28 (13.0%)	158 (73.1%)	11 (5.1%)	216	13.5	11.2	2.3
Fairfield-Suisun Unified	10 (0.9%)	199 (17.8%)	97 (8.7%)	695 (62.3%)	114 (10.2%)	1,116	12.2	10.6	1.6
Travis Unified	2 (0.7%)	29 (10.5%)	49 (17.8%)	161 (58.5%)	34 (12.4%)	275	13.4	10.1	3.3
Vacaville Unified	3 (0.4%)	85 (12.2%)	77 (11.1%)	493 (70.8%)	37 (5.3%)	696	16.3	13.8	2.5
Vallejo Unified	13 (1.5%)	152 (17.6%)	139 (16.1%)	460 (53.1%)	100 (11.5%)	866	15.8	11.8	4.0
Countywide	31 (0.9%)	518 (14.9%)	430 (12.3%)	2,180 (62.5%)	323 (9.3%)	3,486	14.5	11.8	2.7
Statewide	2,663 (0.9%)	52,127 (16.8%)	57,809 (18.6%)	148,000 (47.7%)	48,983 (15.8%)	310,361	12.8	10.6	2.2

Teachers achieve tenure following two years of satisfactory service. Continuing education development following achievement of tenure is a matter of choice. Continuing education is not required by the Districts or by the Union, but participation may improve their pay status.

A growing concern in schools today is the demographic gap between students and teachers. An example is illustrated in Chart #5 below. Lacking comprehensive understanding of the cultural diversity of students limits educators in reaching minority students. Knowledge of the varying ways in which students learn, retain, do homework and act in a classroom atmosphere, can greatly assist the teacher in preparation of their class.

Number of Teachers by District, Ethnicity for the 2007-08 School Year Chart #5

Districts	Gender	Am. Indian or Alaska Native		Asian		Pacific Islander		Filipino		Hispanic or Latino		African American		White		Multiple or No Response		Total
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Benicia	Male	0		0		1		0		3		0		68	84.0%	1		73
	Female	0		5		2		5		8		4		159		3		186
	Total	0		5	8.0%	3	1.2%	5	1.9%	11	4.2%	4	1.5%	227	87.6%	4	1.5%	259
Dixon	Male	0		1		0		0		6		0		44		0		51
	Female	1		2		0		1		15		2		144		0		165
	Total	1	0.5%	3	1.4%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	21	9.7%	2	0.9%	188	87.0%	0	0.0%	216
Fairfield	Male	2		16		2		10		26		10		246		0		312
	Female	12		37		4		12		66		43		630		0		804
	Total	14	1.3%	53	4.7%	6	0.5%	22	2.0%	92	8.2%	53	4.7%	876	78.5%	0	0.0%	1,116
Travis	Male	0		5		1		1		8		5		50		0		70
	Female	1		4		5		1		16		9		168		1		205
	Total	1	0.4%	9	3.3%	6	2.2%	2	0.7%	24	8.7%	14	5.1%	218	79.3%	1	0.4%	275
Vacaville	Male	1		6		0		4		19		6		158		2		196
	Female	5		7		1		2		27		6		441		11		500
	Total	6	0.9%	13	1.9%	1	0.1%	6	0.9%	46	6.6%	12	1.7%	599	86.1%	13	1.9%	696
Vallejo	Male	0		4		0		11		14		33		162		7		231
	Female	6		20		0		42		24		75		452		16		635
	Total	6	0.7%	24	2.8%	0	0.0%	53	6.1%	38	4.4%	108	12.5%	614	70.9%	23	2.7%	866
Solano County	Male	3		32		4		26		77		56		744		10		952
	Female	25		75		13		68		159		141		2,021		32		2,534
	Total	28	0.8%	107	3.1%	17	0.5%	94	2.7%	236	6.8%	197	5.7%	2,765	79.3%	42	1.2%	3,486
Statewide	Male	594		3,709		607		1,152		35,604		4,110		60,538		1,239		86,043
	Female	1,118		12,216		255		3,266		14,446		9,484		158,961		2,993		224,249
	Not Repd	0		0		0		0		1		0		2		66		69
Total	1,712	0.6%	15,925	5.1%	862	0.3%	4,418	1.4%	50,051	16.1%	13,594	4.4%	219,501	70.7%	4,298	1.4%	310,361	

Superintendents

The Grand Jury learned that District Superintendents have less than 36 months experience in their respective positions; two superintendents have no more than seven months. The Vallejo Superintendent demonstrated that by expressing her knowledge of her position, by implementing needed programs, and by overseeing the progress of those programs, she has made the most of her 17-month position. The River-Delta Joint Unified District Superintendent stated his main concern was dealing with the district budget and he lacked the time in his current position to comment on other significant issues raised by the Grand Jury.

District Superintendents understanding of the reporting requirements regarding school incidents to the California Board of Education differed greatly. One Superintendent’s understanding is that incident reporting is no longer required by the State of California; however, the State of California Board of Education still requires this reporting.

Districts also varied on their application of policy and procedures regarding substitute teachers. All districts relied on CCTC upon initial application for background checks, fingerprinting and licensing. Several Superintendents and principals were aware of CCTC licensing verification and made use of it for their own verification, while other superintendents waited for reports to filter down from CCTC.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 - Ongoing truancy is a mainstream problem in all schools and relates to escalating violence problems in our communities. Current methods of truancy reduction have failed and each school presently attacks this problem separately. School districts do not employ truancy officers.

Recommendation 1 - Schools should work together in developing a standard that improves current methods of reducing truancy, including hiring truancy officers. School administrators should endeavor to contact parents of truant students and follow-up with written letters. Truant students should be required to make up missed classroom work and complete homework after school.

Finding 2 - School Resource Officers and Campus Supervisors are essential to the safety of students, school property and staff.

Recommendation 2 - Each community should strive to maintain the use of School Resource Officers and Campus Supervisors. Both have a common goal and working together has shown a climate that is safe for students, schools and staff alike.

Finding 3 - Superintendents and school staff agree parental involvement in schools is important. The Grand Jury agrees with this.

Recommendation 3 - District Administrators, School Board members and Teacher Unions need to implement programs that include parental involvement to heighten the development and importance of community and parent participation. Superintendents cannot handle this task alone.

Finding 4 - Multicultural sensitivity training and school violence issues are priority items for all grade level educators. It is a belief among educators that parent and community involvement is a step towards reducing violence, drug use and conflict management.

Recommendation 4 - School administrators should involve parents and community agencies when planning Staff Development Days. This would involve training, areas of support and planning.

Finding 5 - Some school District Administrators lack a pro-active approach to school programs in their district.

Recommendation 5 - Administrators should develop a hands-on approach to student programs and support of school staff. A more collective approach by Board of Education Staff, District Administrators and School Principals would assist in achieving this goal.

Finding 6 - Complaints by or against teachers are initially investigated by school staff. Serious violations are investigated by District and/or Law Enforcement. Integrity of peer investigations is always open to question by outsiders.

Recommendation 6 - Only upper-level District administrators should investigate allegations of violations of policies and procedures or misconduct.

Finding 7 - Some School and District administrators lack the knowledge of the California Education Code as it relates to reporting violations of misconduct by staff to California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Recommendation 7 - All School staff and District administrators should familiarize themselves and comply with the Education Code as it pertains to reporting requirements.

Finding 8 - The Grand Jury found that substitute teachers may teach in several Districts and Counties. After the initial security checks are made, there is no on-going evaluation. Lack of follow-up background checks at appropriate intervals has allowed substitute teachers who have committed violations to go long periods without detection by other employers.

Recommendation 8 – School districts and principals need to follow State law in reporting incidents of inappropriate conduct by substitute teachers to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. School districts and principals should utilize the on-line service provided by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing of substitute teacher misconduct. School districts should develop a more timely evaluation system, e.g., biannually.

COMMENTS

California Education Code mandates that each school site have an effective and current Comprehensive Safety School Plan (Education Code §32286). The safety plan addresses the needs of the school and students within that school and has three essential components: assuring each student a safe physical environment; assuring each student a safe, respectful, willing and emotionally nurturing environment; developing each student resiliency skills. Students and Staff have the right to a safe and secure campus where they are free from physical harm.

Each school is required to forward their safety plan to their school Board for approval. The school Board shall review the comprehensive Safety School Plans in order to ensure compliance with State law, Board policy and administrative regulation. By October 15 of each year, the Superintendent is required to notify the California Department of Education of any schools that have not complied with the requirements of Education Code section 32281. The Grand Jury was informed by the two smaller Districts in Solano County that their Comprehensive Safety School Plans were deficient in meeting the State mandate.

Each District provided the Grand Jury with a copy of their Policies and Procedures Manual as it relates to the safety and discipline of students and staff. Information appeared thorough and covered important aspects of school violence-related issues, prevention and intervention. The manuals addressed many aspects including areas of hazing, bullying, harassment, cyber bullying, intimidation, moral turpitude and sexual misconduct. Districts demonstrated a proactive approach in handling disciplinary matters and appeared well prepared to deal with these issues.

Research in the educational field published on the California Department of Education website has shown a direct correlation between serious acts of violence and the more subtle forms of harm such as pushing, shoving, and various acts of harassment. Educators and staff personnel can recognize the more subtle forms of disturbance by being mindful of their own behavior, set high expectation levels for students in all areas, being consistent with enforcing school rules and discipline and showing genuine caring and concern for students.

According to Superintendents, cultural demographics of their teachers is a very important issue to the education system and all superintendents should endeavor to accomplish the goal of hiring educators that meet the cultural demographics of their Districts.

The development of interpersonal-relationships of students to Law Enforcement and other positions of authority at this level is a very important key to their character and trust building. Many young adults develop life long opinions of authority through their first encounter with Law Enforcement, most by a simple traffic enforcement violation. Many times this initial meeting is negative. Having School Resource Officers and campus supervisors on campus creates a better understanding of the authority figure. The relationship between young adults and authority is designed to help, and not hinder in building and developing strong communities.

Community and parental involvement enhances educational growth by preparing students in career opportunities, developing leadership, purpose to volunteering, tutoring, mentoring, providing resource for after school sports and providing alternatives to street-gang involvement. Community agencies and institutions must recognize that they have a role in supporting their school efforts in reducing violence. Schools are a product of the society that we live in. Therefore, community leaders should develop a societal responsibility to educate their students. Community agencies, institutions, Law Enforcement and Schools are a partnership that cannot be ignored.

The 2008-2009 Solano County Grand Jury will suggest that the 2009-2010 Grand Jury continue this investigation. In addition, the subject of school restrooms needs to be addressed as well.

The Grand Jury wants to recognize the efforts of the Vallejo School District in developing and administering programs that enhance student development and participation. The Grand Jury would like to suggest the other school districts examine this example and implement similar programs.

RESPONDING AND AFFECTED AGENCIES

Principal Vacaville High School
Principal Rodriguez High School
Principal Vallejo High School
Principal Jesse Bethel High School
Assistant Superintendent/Human Resources for the Vacaville Unified School District
Assistant Superintendent/Human Resources Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District
Superintendent Dixon Unified School District
Superintendent Travis Unified School District
Superintendent Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District
Superintendent Vallejo Unified School District
Superintendent River-Delta Unified School District
Solano County Superintendent of Schools

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