



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2012-13

SAFETY AT VALLEJO HIGH SCHOOL

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I. SUMMARY

The 2012-13 Grand Jury investigation of safety at Vallejo High School confirmed concerns of parents, staff, and community members. The Grand Jury observed the following:

- Lack of discipline enforcement
- Non-adherence to the student handbook
- Absence of communication between District Administration and the Vallejo High School teaching staff
- Absence of communication between Vallejo High School Administration and the Vallejo High School teaching staff
- Incomplete and inaccurate websites
- Lack of sufficient fencing on campus to ensure security

II. INTRODUCTION

Vallejo High School is located at 840 Nebraska Street in Vallejo, California, and houses grades 9-12 with the 9th grade academy located across the street from the main campus. The combined student population is approximately 1,700 students. There are seven administrators, six counselors, three support staff, nine campus supervisors (security) and 64 teachers.

According to the Vallejo High School website, the school provides for the education of an ethnically diverse school population. The demographic breakdown is 35 percent Afro-American, 30 percent Hispanic, 21 percent Asian, 10 percent Caucasian, and 4 percent other. Over 80 percent of the student population is receiving free or reduced lunch reflecting the socio-economic composition of the school's population.

In 2011, the Vallejo City School Board voted to close two schools, one of which was Hogan High School, and combine the student population from Hogan High School with Vallejo High School.

The 2012-13 Grand Jury elected to investigate safety at Vallejo High School because of highly publicized concerns from parents, students and staff.

III. METHODOLOGY

- Toured Vallejo High School
- Interviewed the following:
 - Member of Vallejo Education Association
 - Superintendent of the Vallejo City Unified School District

- Vallejo High School Administrator
- Vallejo High School Campus Supervisor
- Vallejo High School Staff
- Vallejo Police Department Staff
- Reviewed the following:
 - Related media articles
 - California Education Codes
 - Vallejo High School Parent/Student Handbook
 - Vallejo City Unified School District website
 - Vallejo High School website
 - Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support website

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The Vallejo City Unified School District (VCUSD) has made multiple changes in the administration over the past few years. There have been three different administration teams in the past five years. The current superintendent was hired in April of 2011. The current principal of Vallejo High School (VHS) was hired in August of 2011.

VHS employs nine full-time campus supervisors who provide security on the campus, including the 9th Grade Academy. These supervisors patrol the campus on foot and in golf carts. They are identified by photo ID badges and distinctive clothing. Campus supervisors carry two-way radios to communicate with each other and administration. The Grand Jury was informed there are only a few teachers who have access to two-way radios that communicate directly with campus supervisors. When questioned, the VHS Administration could not provide an answer as to why only a few teachers possess the radios.

In the event of a disturbance in a classroom or on campus, a teacher must dial a four-digit number that connects to the main office. When a teacher calls the main office, they might get an office secretary or a student answering the telephone. The main office should then call the campus supervisors directly on their two-way radio, who responds to the disturbance. Alternatively, teachers may also dial a separate four-digit number to call the campus supervisor's office directly. However, the campus supervisor may or may not be in the office. Teachers indicated the campus supervisor's response time for an incident could be up to ten minutes.

In the past, VHS had police officers assigned to the campus; however, due to the City of Vallejo's budget constraints during the city's bankruptcy, they were eliminated. Provided there was funding, the police department would support a community resource officer(s) on campus if requested by the District. VHS Administration and Teaching Staff agree the presence of police and/or probation on campus would be beneficial. Early in the school year, Vallejo Police Staff and the District have engaged in discussions regarding school safety plans and the implementation thereof. The safety plans were to be provided by the District; however, no plans had been presented at the time of the Grand Jury visit. Previously, the District Administration's philosophy was that a police presence on campus is a "pipeline to prison." There is no indication that District Administration has changed its view.

VHS Administration informed the Grand Jury there are approximately 60 students on campus who are on court-ordered supervised probation. School Administration and Security Staff stated that a County Probation Officer's (PO) presence on campus would assist in the monitoring of the probationary students. The PO has Peace Officer status and could provide additional security on campus.

Since school began in August of 2012 through February of 2013, there were 122 calls for service to the Vallejo Police Department from VHS, 15 of which were cancelled by the school. The Vallejo Police Department reported responding to 107 calls for service to Vallejo High School. Of the 107 calls for service, 60 calls were for assaultive behavior and/or theft related incidents; four calls were for weapons incidents, including shots fired in two separate incidents; seven calls were for threats of death by a student to a teacher or administrator and 36 for other miscellaneous causes. Teachers, VHS Administration and the District Administration stated that marijuana was "the major" problem on campus. However, police reports indicated only one call was related to marijuana consumption.

Teachers said some students arrive to class "reeking" with the odor of marijuana. When those students are sent to the administration office, *qualified* staff conducts *a series of tests* (smelling of the student's hands and breath). Teachers have indicated that many of those students are not disciplined and are simply sent back to their classrooms by VHS Administration.

According to *New Jersey v. T. L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325 (1985), it is legal for a school official to search any student's bag without a warrant. The smell alone provides reasonable cause. For known users of marijuana, VHS Administration indicated they have implemented an Awareness Educational Programs. VHS Administration did not specify the details of the Awareness Educational Programs.

VHS is a closed campus. The recently installed wrought iron fence secures only the front of the campus. The fence is not secure and easily breached by intruders. The Grand Jury noted six access points through which intruders could enter the campus with little or no detection. The football and baseball complexes are more secure than the main campus. Vallejo Police staff concur the campus is wide open.

VHS has surveillance cameras on the courtyard, track and field area, and outer perimeters of the campus, which are monitored in the supervising Campus Supervisor's office and staff indicated real time video can also be viewed in the District office. The surveillance system is recorded and retained for a period of 30 days. However, blind spots on campus exist that are not monitored. Due to the openness of the campus, VHS Administration indicated the surveillance cameras need to be upgraded.

The VHS student handbook states, "All students are required to visibly wear photo identification badges while on campus. Students are required to identify themselves upon request by any school official." VHS Administration indicated the wearing of badges is not enforced. Campus supervisors stated this is not a significant problem as they "know all the students." They further

stated that it is disruptive to the students' learning day to make them go to the Administrative Office to obtain a replacement badge.

Vallejo High School Code of Conduct states, "all students will arrive on time to class with all necessary materials, class assignments and homework." During the Grand Jury site visit, it was noted some students did not arrive to class on time. VHS staff informed the Grand Jury there is a 15-minute "grace period" after the bell rings during which students may arrive to class. Teachers indicated that the lack of enforcement of the established rules affects the safety on the campus because discipline and safety go hand in hand.

Pursuant to California Education Code §49079, *school districts are required to inform teachers and counselors when it has information that a student, during the three previous school years, who has engaged in, or is reasonably suspected to have engaged in, the following criminal or disruptive conduct in school, while going to or from school or during a school sponsored activity:*

- a. Causing, attempting, or threatening physical injury to another;*
- b. Possessing, selling, or otherwise furnishing a firearm, knife, or other dangerous object;*
- c. Possessing, using or selling illegal drugs, alcohol, or drug paraphernalia;*
- d. Committing or attempting to commit robbery or extortion;*
- e. Damaging or attempting to damage school property;*
- f. Stealing or attempting to steal school or private property;*
- g. Committing an obscene act or engaging in habitual profanity or vulgarity;*
- h. Disrupting school activities or otherwise willfully defying the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties; and*
- i. Knowingly receiving stolen school or private property*

VHS teachers and administration indicated this information is not being provided. If a teacher desires specific information about a student's criminal or disruptive conduct record, the teacher must prepare a written request, make an appointment with the Dean's office and receive approval to look at the record. Teachers state the need for this information at the time a student is enrolled in their class is critical to both teachers' and students' safety.

VCUSD utilizes a student management computer program known as *Aeries*. This system manages student daily attendance, disciplinary actions, grades, and other personal information. Teachers use *Aeries* as a tool to determine actions on referrals (notes to administration about student behavior) so they can apply appropriate disciplinary and safety measures in the classroom. VCUSD teachers still do not have access to this portion of *Aeries*. This action has caused the teachers to feel unsafe as they cannot obtain vital information regarding prior disciplinary actions.

The District Administration implemented the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program in the 2011-12 school year. The Technical Assistance Center (TAC) on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support has been established by the Office of Special Education

Programs, US Department of Education to give schools capacity-building information and technical assistance for identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective school-wide disciplinary practices.

The Grand Jury's review of the PBIS website (www.pbis.org) indicated the program requires a comprehensive behavioral assessment of the student and identifies their level of risk for behavioral problems. Once identified, students should receive services in one of the primary categories: primary, secondary or tertiary. *After the School Wide Positive Behavior Support team determines the 3-5 behavioral expectations that suits the need of their school, they will take this information back to the staff to ensure at least 80 percent of the staff buy into the chosen expectations. Consistency from class to class and adult to adult is very important for successful implementation of PBIS.* The PBIS website also indicates the program will only be successful if 80 percent of the teachers agree to support this program.

Many teachers at VHS are not aware of the purpose and goals of the program. The Grand Jury was advised by teachers that this program has been unsuccessful because VHS Administration is not holding the students responsible for their inappropriate behavior in accordance with school policies.

VHS and VCUSD Administration stated that they utilize a program called Restorative Justice to deal with conflict resolution. Restorative Justice emphasizes repairing the harm caused by crime. Additionally, there is a designated "bullying coordinator" and a confidential hot line to deal with the issue of bullying. The only way one can locate the "hot line" number is through a lengthy search of the VCUSD website. The VHS website does not contain any information about the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, Restorative Justice or Bullying.

The VHS Site Safety Plan appears on the VCUSD website but is not included on the VHS website. It was last updated on October of 2011 and is incomplete. No information is included for the following sections:

- Section 2, VCUSD Board Policy on Child Abuse
- Section 5, VCUSD Board Policy on Suspension, Expulsion, and Discipline Processes
- Section 6, VCUSD Board Policy on Sexual Harassment
- Section 7, VCUSD Board Policy on Dress and Grooming
- Section 9, VCUSD Rules and Procedures of School Discipline (Student Handbook)
- Section 10, Crime Assessment.

Teachers stated that students believe they can be physically assaultive and/or threatening with the teachers because administration does not follow through with effective disciplinary action. Teachers further stated they are "held hostage by bad student behavior that goes unpunished." Additionally, they stated, "Our schools have become, and has (sic) been allowed to continue to be a chaotic, disruptive environment where 'entitled' parents and students have all the power." Information regarding suspensions on the VCUSD website was limited to one article "Update on Suspensions Fall 2011."

In the 2011-2012 school year, the Vallejo Education Association (Vallejo teacher's union) devised "listening sessions" to discuss safety issues at VHS. Teachers, the public and District Administration were invited to attend. Several teachers and the public attended these sessions, however, District Administration did not attend.

In the 2012-13 school year, VHS Administration identified teachers with high student failure rates who were mandated to attend "teacher institutes." The District implemented these "teacher institutes" whose goal is to provide teachers with the support they need to be successful in their classroom. The teachers have stated they believe their attendance at these "teacher institutes" is a disciplinary action rather than teacher assistance.

VHS Administration indicated 80 percent of the teachers at VHS do not reside in the City of Vallejo. As a result, VHS Administration stated some of the teachers have an issue with the students' behavior because of their lack of knowledge of socio/economic issues within the City of Vallejo. Further, teachers need to learn how to build relationships with the students and deal with issues affecting their community. VHS Administration said students are being sent out of class because teachers lack the ability to handle the students. The District Administration indicated their primary responsibility is to make sure the students are safe and that the teachers have a role in carrying out this responsibility.

There are two levels of on-campus discipline: daily detention and in-house suspension. A student placed on daily detention is sent to the detention room, (for the remainder of the class period) located in the Supervising Campus Supervisor's office. This room is to be monitored by a campus supervisor who may or not be present. Students are sent to the detention room when they are disruptive in a classroom and need to be removed from that particular class.

Students who are on in-house suspension are sent to the Dean's office and are not allowed to attend class for the entire day. VHS Administration stated that in-house suspension is "usually" held only once a week and may not be on the day the student was placed on suspension.

While touring VHS, the Grand Jury noticed that not all classroom doors had windows in them. Portable classrooms that had windows had wire mesh making it impossible to see inside. If a crisis should arise inside a classroom, individuals on the outside would not be aware of the gravity of a situation in the classroom.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 – There are only a few teachers who have access to two-way radios to communicate directly with Campus Supervisors.

Recommendation 1 – Vallejo City Unified School District provide all teachers with two-way radios to communicate directly with Campus Supervisors.

Finding 2 – There is currently no City of Vallejo Community Resource Officer or a County Probation Officer Vallejo High School on the campus.

Recommendation 2 – Vallejo City Unified School District provide a Vallejo Community Resource Officer and a County Probation Officer for the Vallejo High School campus.

Finding 3 – There are several locations on Vallejo High School campus that are not secure and easily accessible by intruders.

Recommendation 3 – Vallejo City Unified School District install adequate fencing on Vallejo High School campus to secure the campus.

Finding 4 – There are blind spots on Vallejo High School campus that the surveillance cameras cannot observe.

Recommendation 4 – Vallejo City Unified School District upgrade the surveillance cameras on Vallejo High School campus.

Finding 5 – Vallejo High School student handbook states that all students will visibly wear photo identification badges while on campus.

Recommendation 5 – Vallejo High School Administration enforce the policy that all students must visibly wear their identification badges while on campus.

Finding 6 – In violation of the Vallejo High School Code of Conduct, students are not arriving to class on time.

Recommendation 6 – Vallejo High School Administration enforce the policy that all students arrive to class on time.

Finding 7 – Vallejo High School Administration is not informing teachers of a student's prior criminal or disruptive conduct at the time a student is enrolled in their class.

Recommendation 7 – Pursuant to California Education Code §49079, Vallejo High School Administration inform teachers at the time a student is enrolled in their class of a student's prior criminal or disruptive conduct.

Finding 8 – Vallejo City Unified School District teachers' access to the student disciplinary portion of the *Aeries* system has been blocked by the District Administration.

Recommendation 8 – Vallejo City Unified School District reinstate teachers' access to the *Aeries* student disciplinary portion of the system.

Finding 9 – The Positive Behavior Interventions and Support program may be an effective program to assist the teachers in controlling disruptive behavior on the campus. The program is not being implemented effectively. Teachers at VHS informed the Grand Jury that this program has been unsuccessful because VHS administration is not holding the students accountable for their inappropriate behavior.

Recommendation 9a –Vallejo City Unified School District and Vallejo High School Administration provide a comprehensive explanation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support program.

Recommendation 9b –Vallejo City Unified School District and Vallejo High School Administration adhere to written policies regarding discipline.

Finding 10 – Vallejo High School Site Safety Plan is incomplete and only available on the Vallejo City Unified School District website.

Recommendation 10 – Vallejo City Unified School District update their website to include all missing documentation regarding the Vallejo High School Site Safety Plan, and include the safety plan on the Vallejo High School website.

Finding 11 – There is a Bullying Section on the Vallejo City Unified School District website but is not included on the Vallejo High School’s website.

Recommendation 11 – Vallejo City Unified School District incorporate information on bullying currently included in their website and also include it on the Vallejo High School website.

Finding 12 – Vallejo High School website does not contain any information about the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, Restorative Justice.

Recommendation 12 - Vallejo City Unified School District incorporate information on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support and the Restorative Justice Program be included on the Vallejo High School website.

Finding 13 – One of the major issues on Vallejo High School campus is the use of marijuana.

Recommendation 13 – Vallejo High School Administration and Vallejo City Unified School District implement an effective plan to deal with the marijuana issue.

Finding 14 – Vallejo High School’s daily detention is monitored in the Supervising Campus Supervisor’s Office by individuals who may or may not be present.

Recommendation 14 – Vallejo High School’s daily detention be monitored in a classroom setting by a credentialed teacher.

Finding 15 - In-house suspension is “usually” held only once a week and may or may not be on the day the student was placed on suspension.

Recommendation 15 – Vallejo High School Administration create in-house suspension on a daily basis monitored by a credentialed teacher.

COMMENTS

The Grand Jury is aware there are socio/economic issues within the City of Vallejo which impact the District's ability to provide a safe environment within its schools. However, the actions of the Vallejo City School Board, Vallejo City Unified School District and Vallejo High School Administration have exacerbated the challenges in effectively managing teacher and student safety within Vallejo High School.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Superintendent, Vallejo City Unified School District
Principal, Vallejo High School
Vallejo City Unified School Board

COURTESY COPIES

Tom Torlakson, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Vallejo Education Association
Chief of Police, City of Vallejo
Chief Probation Officer, Solano County Probation Department
Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors