



Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District

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August 27, 2009

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Jacki L. Cottingim, Ph.D.

The Honorable Ramona Garrett
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Solano County Superior Court
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, California 94533

RE: 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report Entitled:
**Administration of Policies, Procedures and Administration of Discipline
and Safety in the Education System**
Report Date: **June 9, 2009**

Dear Judge Garrett:

This letter constitutes the response of the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District to the findings and recommendations of the 2008-2009 Solano County Grand Jury with respect to its interviews of District school administrators. For convenience, this response references those findings and recommendations in the order in which responses are requested by the report.

The Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations are listed below, along with the District's response.

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.

Response:

My name is Dr. Jacki Cottingim. I have been hired by the Governing Board of the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District to serve as the Superintendent of the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District. I have reviewed the District truancy data and

trends and I am currently working with faculty, staff, parents, community and local agencies to develop and implement intervention and support programs in order to reduce truancy rates. All District schools currently follow consistent procedures and protocols for monitoring, documenting and supporting students experiencing truancy issues. An important piece of all procedures is parent/guardian contact through email, phone calls and letters outlining the specific days of school which the student has missed. All schools follow established procedures and provide opportunities which support students completing missed work and recouping ADA by attending District Saturday School.

The District has a multi-tiered School Attendance Review Board (SARB) process which begins at the site level and, if not remediated, progresses to the Central Office level, where the family meets with city and county agencies with a common goal of supporting the student and family in attending school regularly.

Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District also employs a full-time Truancy Specialist who works closely with school sites, families and the probation department to support students attending school regularly. Additionally, we have applied for numerous grants, which, if funded, will provide needed personnel and safety nets to support our students and families. Most significantly, the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District Board approved a reorganization plan last Fall (2008) that placed a full-time Director of Student Services to oversee all truancy, discipline and alternative school placements. This attention has resulted in a lowering of expulsion rates. Much work is left to be done, however, Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District has begun the process.

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.

Response:

The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District works closely with the Fairfield and Suisun Police Departments to insure that all District schools have access to a School Resource Officer (SRO). Armijo, Fairfield and Rodriguez High Schools each have a full-time SRO. Fairfield middle schools share an SRO and the schools located in Suisun share a full-time SRO. All school sites employ campus monitors and/or noon duties to assist with the supervision of students throughout the school day.

Finding 3:

Superintendent 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.

Response:

The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District places great importance on the need for ongoing parent involvement. All District schools provide opportunities for parents and guardians to participate in their student's educational process. Local Education Agency Plan Addendum "Goal G" places a priority upon developing, implementing and monitoring partnerships between the school, District, community and county. The recent "Gang Awareness" workshop, presented by the Fairfield Police Department, is just one example of the strong partnership and commitment of working together to provide information and resources of importance to all stakeholders.

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.

Response:

Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District places great importance upon parents, guardians and the community becoming partners with the development, monitoring and implementation of District Staff Development Days. The District's Local Education Agency (LEA) Plan Addendum provides ongoing opportunities for parental and community involvement. Each of the Local Education Agency Plan Addendum Goals A-G was developed with involvement from Central Office, site administrators, classified and certificated staff, and community members.

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.

Response:

The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District supports and monitors the development and implementation of each District school's School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). A critical component of each SPSA is the use of formative and summative data to pinpoint areas of need and specific plans for addressing and remediating the identified areas of need. As the Superintendent, I fully support the need for each school to identify and address its own unique needs. This process allows each site and school community to become partners in the development and implementation process. All SPSA Plans are presented to the Governing Board and the community at scheduled School Board meetings.

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.

Response:

The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District has an established policy and practice of investigating allegations against teachers. Prior to a formal investigation, the employment contract with our teachers requires that the first step in the formal process is to have site level administrators investigate and issue a written finding based on the evidence presented. There are several levels of appeal. The Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources handles one level of appeal, while the Superintendent handles another. The three levels of investigation allow for independent, upper-level management input into resolving alleged complaints against teachers or other employees.

The District has several policies addressing misconduct, e.g., Uniform Complaint, Williams Complaint, complaints against teachers, complaints against other employees, sexual harassment, hate discrimination, employment rights, etc.

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 the 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.

Response:

District administrators are entrusted with being familiar with major sections of the California Education Code. The California Education Code is well over 2,000 pages long. Most sections of the Education Code have a multitude of reporting requirements by school districts. Hence the need for various departments at the Central Office to implement and be accountable for those reporting requirements. Specialty areas needing job expertise are supervised by administrators who monitor budgets, facilities, maintenance and operations, transportation, student discipline, special education, low performing schools, low performing students, curricular areas, highly qualified teachers, instructional materials, textbooks, contract negotiations, mandated costs, etc. Every department has a reporting requirement.

School staff and District administrators are very familiar with the areas they oversee. Continuous updates are disseminated as soon as the Legislature and Governor change or add to the California Education Code. Pertinent sections of the Education Code are major responsibilities of various departments at the schools and Central Office, and these departments make certain that the reporting requirements are fulfilled.

Lastly, all personnel in the District are sworn to follow the Constitution of the State of California and all the pertinent laws related to education, or they could forfeit their credential or risk criminal sanctions.

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 ongoing 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.

Response:

The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District follows a District-wide protocol and State law in reporting incidents of inappropriate conduct by substitute teachers. At the beginning of each school year, all site administrators are trained by the Department of Human Resources in the reporting process and filing procedures. All filed reports follow a specific protocol and include a meeting between a representative from the Department of Human Resources and the substitute teacher. The outcome may be removal from a specific school site, the District and/or a report being filed with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

I believe the comments set forth above are responsive to the requests of the Grand Jury.

Very truly yours,



Jacki Cottingim, Ph.D., Superintendent
Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District

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