



**SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY**  
2015 - 2016

**VALLEJO HIGH SCHOOLS –ARE THEY SAFE?**

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2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury

## **I. SUMMARY**

While the 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury was unable to arrive at a simple ye or nay regarding safety progress in Vallejo's high schools, we did find numerous issues which need to be addressed:

- News and social media emphasize the negative events at the high schools.
- Transparency by the Vallejo School Board (Board) and Vallejo City Unified School District (District) is questioned by many community members.
- A divided School Board has often failed to clearly define and communicate their policies to the Superintendent.
- Additional staff training is required for current school discipline programs.
- Alternatives to out-of-school suspensions have not been examined or implemented.
- School climate surveys have been under-utilized and not shared with the public.
- Bullying continues to be a serious problem and has not been addressed with recent faculty/staff training and Website information.
- There are data discrepancies in the reporting of expulsions.
- Assault/Battery on school employees remain a problem and may be under-reported.
- Teacher notification of dangerous/disruptive students is not consistent.
- School Resource Officers (SROs) are valuable additions to the school safety program and an additional SRO would be beneficial.
- The chronic poor condition of restrooms at both schools needs addressing.
- Other facility issues, such as surveillance cameras and classroom window shades at one or both high schools need to be addressed.

School safety is a nationwide concern as numerous studies have shown it is a prerequisite for learning. There is growing awareness that a positive school climate fosters academic achievement in its students and the well-being of the entire school community.

## **II. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

The issue of safety in Vallejo's schools has been an area of concern over 25 years and the subject of past Grand Jury reports. Financial difficulties have contributed to the problem and in 2004 the state had to take over the Vallejo City Unified School District (District) and issue a \$60 million dollar bailout loan. Under the state appointed administrator, some schools were closed, teachers and employees were laid off, maintenance was deferred and school property was sold in an effort to bring the deficit under control. As times worsened, the recession drastically affected state funding for schools and the city itself, went into bankruptcy. SROs, sworn Vallejo Police Officers, dropped from eight down to zero as neither the City of Vallejo (City) nor the District could fund them.

Vallejo schools, particularly the high schools, began having an increasing number of safety issues and the news media publicized student and teacher safety concerns with regularity. Several highly publicized fights occurred at both high schools, and in May 2015, a Jesse Bethel High School (JBHS) student was tragically shot and killed near the campus.

The Grand Jury acknowledges that safety in Vallejo's high schools is a complex issue going beyond school violence. Safety cannot be achieved by enacting a single process or a simple set of procedures. The Grand Jury has taken an objective and broad look into the many ways safety is being viewed and addressed by District and school-site administration.

Because of the scope and complexity of this investigation, the 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury, was limited to focusing its attention to student discipline, campus safety personnel, school climate surveys, bullying, board/district interaction, school-site facilities and several other areas. Although important topics, the Grand Jury for the purpose of this report will not address possible correlations between safety and teacher morale, academic achievement, graduation rates, dropout and truancy rates.

While acknowledging the hard work and many successes of the District during these difficult years, the persistence of these noted above factors, along with the steadfast position of the District that its high schools are, in fact safe, led the Grand Jury to again focus on this very important and divisive matter.

The Grand Jury directed its attention not only to the District itself, but also to the School Board, the Superintendent's Office, the Vallejo Education Association and to community members, parents, teachers and students in an effort to ascertain how their actions and interactions have affected safety at the community's two main high schools, Jesse Bethel High School (JBHS) and Vallejo High School (VHS).

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

#### Reviewed:

- Contract between Vallejo City Unified School District and Vallejo Education Association
- 2014-2017 School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Vallejo and the Vallejo City Unified School District
- 2015-2018 First Amendment To School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Vallejo and the Vallejo City Unified School District
- Compared City of Vallejo's School Resource Officer (SRO) program with other SRO programs in Solano County
- California Department of Education Codes (CDE)
- CDE Data and Statistics Website
- Vallejo City Unified School District Website
- Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School Websites
- Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School Comprehensive School Safety Plans
- [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org) Website (a program of the Lucile Packard Foundation)

- www.cestoohigh.com Website (Adverse Childhood Experiences, October 24,2013)
- The U.S. Department of Education Website for the “Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” March 2010
- 2015-2016 Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Self-Study Report and 2015-2016 WASC Visiting Committee Reports for Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School
- 2014 WASC Visiting Committee Report for Vallejo High School
- Jesse Bethel High School 2015-2016 Student Handbook
- Vallejo High School 2015-2016 Student Planner
- School suspension articles and studies
- WestEd Website
- Vallejo Police Department Incident Reports for Jesse Bethel High and Vallejo High for school years: 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-present.
- Printed and online newspapers articles, related media articles, and California Department of Education press releases
- YouTube videos, social media and television news archives of occurrences at Vallejo High, Jesse Bethel High, Fairfield High, Armijo High, Pittsburg High, Antioch High and several other Bay Area high schools
- California Department of Education Website for School Climate Report Card, School Accountability Report Card, DataQuest for Expulsion and Suspension reports, and www.eddata for schools in the following districts:
  - Vallejo City Unified: Vallejo High, Jesse Bethel High
  - Fairfield-Suisun Unified: Fairfield High, Armijo High
  - West Contra Costa Unified: El Cerrito High, De Anza High, Richmond High
  - Oakland Unified: Oakland High, Oakland Technical, Skyline High
  - Antioch Unified: Antioch High
  - Pittsburg Unified: Pittsburg Senior High
- California Healthy Kids Survey, California School Climate Survey, and Crimereports.org for the following school districts:
  - Vallejo City Unified
  - Fairfield-Suisun Unified
  - West Contra Costa Unified
  - Oakland Unified
  - Antioch Unified
  - Pittsburg Unified

Interviewed:

- District Administrators and Local Site Administrators of Vallejo City Unified School District
- School Board Trustees of Vallejo City Unified School District
- City Officials of the City of Vallejo
- Former and current Benicia High Administrators
- Jesse Bethel High and Vallejo High School Resource Officers
- Police Officer with the Vallejo Police Department

- Site Safety personnel for Vallejo City Unified School District
- Vallejo Education Association representatives
- Teachers at Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School
- Students at Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School
- Parents of students at Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School
- Retired High School Principal of Contra Costa County Schools for high-risk youth
- Vallejo community members
- Conference call with WestEd Coordinators

Attended:

- Attended and /or viewed bi-monthly Vallejo City Unified School District Board meetings
- Special Board listening session on school safety, 8/13/15
- Community Forum on School Safety, 8/24/15
- Restorative Justice Presentation sponsored in conjunction with WIT Academy 9/21/15
- Toured Jesse Bethel High School and Vallejo High School campuses

**IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

The District has two comprehensive high schools, Jesse Bethel High School (JBHS) and Vallejo High School (VHS). In addition there is John Finney, a continuation high school with less than 200 students and Vallejo Educational Academy with approximately 30 students. There is also a charter school, Mare Island Technology. Only VHS and JBHS were looked at for this investigation due to their diverse student population and size.

VHS is an old campus (oldest building built in 1939) and is located at 840 Nebraska Street in the City of Vallejo. The campus has been combined with the former Middle School across the street at 1347 Amador. The addition of the Amador campus has exacerbated security and vandalism problems. VHS has a student population of 1,612 this school year. According to the school’s 2015-2016 School Accountability Report Card (SARC), the school has 69 teachers. Each of the five Academies has an Academic Counselor and a Vice Principal.

VHS has a diverse student population for the 2015-2016 school year:

Black or African American	31%	White	6%
Asian	1%	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2%
Filipino	16%	Other	1%
Hispanic or Latino	43%		

77% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, reflecting the socio-economic status of the student body. English learners comprise 12.4% of the student body.

JBHS is located at 1800 Ascot Parkway in the City of Vallejo. It is a three tiered campus built in 1998. Like VHS, the open campus design presents security and vandalism issues. JBHS has a student population of 1,650 students this school year. According to the 2015-2016 SARC there are 65 teachers with an Academic counselor and a Vice Principal for each of the six Academies.

JBHS also has a diverse student population for the 2015-2016 school year:

Black or African American	30%	White	8%
Asian	4%	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2%
Filipino	28%	Other	3%
Hispanic or Latino	25%		

56% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, which is approximately the state average. JBHS has 6.1% English learners, nearly half that of VHS.

### **Programs**

Starting in the 2011-2012 academic year, the District began implementing school programs recognized as evidence-based best practices. Studies have shown these programs help improve school safety, overall school climate and keep students in school. It has established the Full Service Community Schools Program, Wall-to-Wall Academies and the Positive Youth Justice Initiative (PYJI), which works with crossover youth in the juvenile justice system. Another program implemented by the District in 2012-2013 is the Integrated Intervention System.

The Integrated Intervention System uses the following best practices related to school-wide discipline and student health: Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), Restorative Justice (RJ) and Trauma Informed Care (TIC). PBIS emphasizes teacher classroom management and preventive school discipline. RJ focuses on mediation and agreement between students rather than punitive discipline for problem behavior. TIC gives students with histories of trauma the tools they need to understand their trauma and make positive changes in their lives.

A particularly successful program established at JBHS in 2015 is the Law Academy's Youth Court, which has given a few JBHS teachers an opportunity to apply their RJ training to teaching. Youth Court is a student run mock court focusing on peer-to-peer RJ outcomes. The 2015-2016 WASC Report alludes to JBHS's 45% reduction in referrals from the previous year could possibly be attributed to the RJ procedures used in Youth Court. During our tour of the JBHS campus, a site administrator and teacher told us they would like more sessions in RJ.

The District attributes the declines in behavioral problems, referrals, suspensions, and expulsions to the Integrated Intervention System, and other alternative programs.

Contrary to the District’s perception that training in the Integrated Intervention System has been “good,” nearly every teacher we spoke to commented on the lack of training, or minimal training in PBIS and RJ. The 2015-2016 WASC Self-Study Visiting Committee Report for VHS reiterated that staff has received “some training” in PBIS and RJ but, “. . .there appears to be a lack of consistent policy, procedures and implementation.”

While some teachers acknowledge PBIS and RJ have potential, many others think the District has instituted too many programs simultaneously and they cannot be fully effective until trainings are well organized, systematic, at more convenient times, as well as, mandatory.

After our second request, the District provided us with its PBIS and RJ training logs. PBIS training workshops began in January 2012 for the high schools’ administrative teams. District logs show teacher trainings began in November 2012.

The following timeline shows the types of trainings, dates, training hours, and the numbers of high school teachers and certified staff who have received training since November 2012. The tables below also show there have been six PBIS and RJ trainings for VHS and JBHS teachers in the past four years. Most sessions ran for about three hours or less. It should be noted; one site administrator thought the PBIS/RJ/TIC training on September 9, 2014, was “too big to make it effective.”

**2012-2013 School Year**

<b>PBIS – 3 trainings: November 2012, January 2013, March 2013 – 3 hours training each day.</b>					
	2012-13 - VHS teachers on staff:	Total VHS teachers trained:		2012-13 - JBHS teachers on staff:	Total JBHS teachers trained:
VHS	105	7	JBHS	95	9

**2013-2014 School Year**

<b>PBIS/RJ – 5-Day Leadership Institute: June 16-17, 2013 &amp; June 24-26, 2013. Training was for site administrators, instructional reform coordinators, design team, cabinet, and teacher leaders. June 24-25 focused on core curriculum. 7-1/2 hours training each day.</b>					
	2013-14 - VHS teachers on staff:	Total VHS teachers trained:		2013-14 - JBHS teachers on staff:	Total JBHS teachers trained:
VHS	76	6	JBHS	80	8

**2014-2015 School Year**

<b>PBIS/RJ/TIC – Optional Staff Development Day: August 6, 2014 – Full day training with A.M. &amp; P.M. sessions.</b>					
	2014-15 - VHS teachers on staff:	Total VHS teachers trained:		2014-15 - JBHS teachers on staff:	Total JBHS teachers trained:
VHS	76	31 full day 4 half day	JBHS	68	18 full day 4 half day
<b>PBIS/RJ/TIC – Mandatory Minimum Day, Positive School Culture: September 9, 2014 – 3 hours training.</b>					
VHS		65	JBHS		50
25 VHS teachers took trainings on both August 6, 2014 and September 10, 2014.			12 JBHS teachers took trainings on both August 6, 2014 and September 10, 2014.		
VHS		-25*	JBHS		-12*
<b>PBIS/RJ/TIC – Optional, Positive School Culture: March 9, 2015, March 11, 2015 – 1 hour 45 min. training each day.</b>					
VHS		5	JBHS		5
<b>Total Number of Teachers and Certified Staff Trained in 2014-2015</b>					
VHS		80	JBHS		65

### 2015-2016 School Year

PBIS- Professional Development Day: August 13, 2015 – 3 hours 15 min. training.					
	2015-16 – VHS teachers on staff:	Total VHS teachers trained:		2015-16 - JBHS teachers on staff:	Total JBHS teachers trained:
VHS	69	10	JBHS	65	9

\* The subtraction of 25 VHS teachers and 12 JBHS teachers provides an unduplicated count of those teachers who participated in the August 6, 2014 training as well as the September 9, 2014 training. The unduplicated count is reflected in the total number of teachers who took trainings in 2014-2015.

The numbers of teachers on staff were taken from each school's SARCs for those respective years.

Further complicating the issue of the lack of, or minimal training for relatively few teachers in the last four years is the problem of high teacher turnover at VHS and JBHS. At VHS, for example, over 59% of teachers have left since 2010. The absence of systematic and mandatory trainings has left incoming teachers without the development and skills they need to effectively implement PBIS and RJ in their classrooms.

### News/Social Media

As the Grand Jury began its investigation, we decided to first look at the apparent escalating number of fights and violence at the two high schools. Our intent was to take a very subjective and complex subject such as safety and to quantify it in more easily understandable terms.

While violent and dangerous incidents have taken place at the high schools, the Grand Jury found many of those interviewed believe the news media, coupled with social media such as YouTube, cellphone videos and Facebook, amplify incidents by keeping them alive on the Internet. This rapid dissemination of negative events to multiple media outlets has worked to influence public perception that the high schools are persistently dangerous places.

On May 29, 2015, a large fight at VHS was recorded by a student on a cellphone and submitted to the news media. The local TV station sensationalized the fight by calling it a "riot" and "all-out melee." The TV station repeated the story on the following Monday and the video, via live streaming, still remains on the Internet. There are numerous still images of fights and YouTube videos of fights occurring 2, 3, even 7 years ago. These incidents are flamed by video looping, or the linking of individual videos to an existing video Internet address. Video loops run continuously and easily blur the boundaries of where and when fights actually happen.

At every District School Board meeting, as part of the agenda, student representatives from the high schools report on constructive school activities and student accomplishments. Sadly, the media at large neglects these positives and elects to emphasize the negative.

### California Healthy Kids Survey

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) was developed by WestEd, an educational research and development non-profit, for the California Department of Education (CDE) to help school districts meet the requirements of the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994. Over the years it has added content to more fully address school climate and safety. It is administered to grades 5, 7, 9 and 11. Recommended participation is every two years during the spring semester. The District last administered CHKS in 2013-2014.



If given biennially, the District would have administered CHKS in spring 2015-2016. During our interviews we learned neither students nor teachers knew if the survey had been given this year. Although the CDE grant ended in September 2015, the cost to administer CHKS is only 30 cents per student.

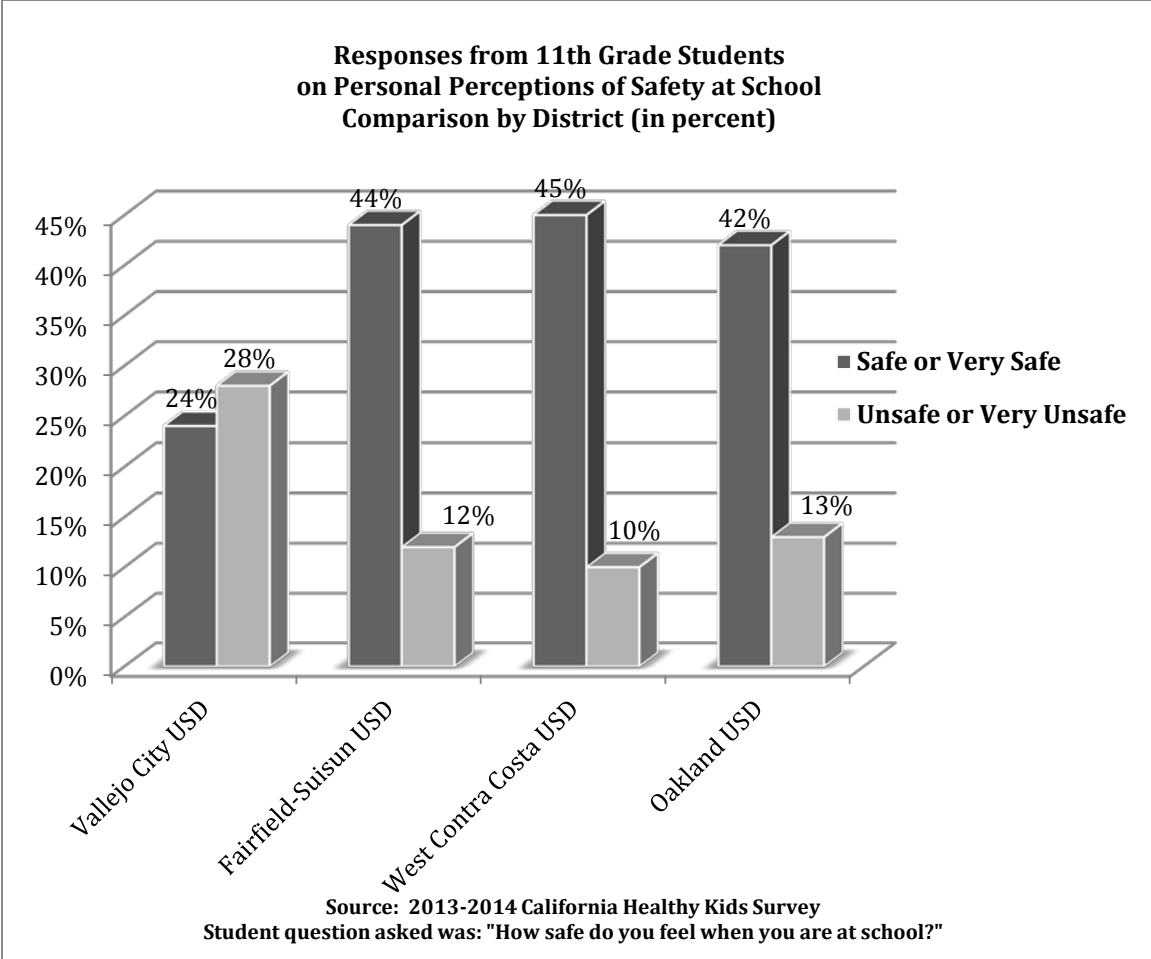
CHKS's companion surveys are the California School Parent Survey (CSPS) for parents and the California School Climate Survey (CSCS) for teachers, administrators and certified staff. The combined data provides comprehensive information to schools and districts. The staff CSCS can be taken online, and is of no cost to the District when taken with CHKS. The District's total cost to administer the parent CSPS online is \$300.

A high-ranking District representative told the Grand Jury it would continue to participate in CHKS, in addition to using other tools. During the 2013-2014 CHKS's cycle, the staff CSCS was offered. However, many teachers were unaware CSCS was offered and expressed surprise about not being told of this availability.

The same representative who said the District will continue with CHKS, said it does not participate in the parent CSPS. This excludes parents from a process developed to provide the District with parents' perceptions of school climate and performance. It was also created to encourage parent involvement, which many students, teachers, administrators and parents said is sadly lacking. WestEd told us some districts participate in the surveys annually to help support their annual Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Examples of the types of safety-related questions CHKS and the staff CSCS asks are illustrated in the following two charts. The Grand Jury compared the District's survey results to three other school districts: Fairfield-Suisun, West Contra Costa, and Oakland. These districts also participated in CHKS and CSCS in 2013-2014.

One question CHKS asked of 11th grade students was: "How safe do you feel when you are at school?" The percentages of student responses to this question were taken from the 2013-2014 CHKS Core Module, Section 5 on "School Violence, Victimization and Safety."

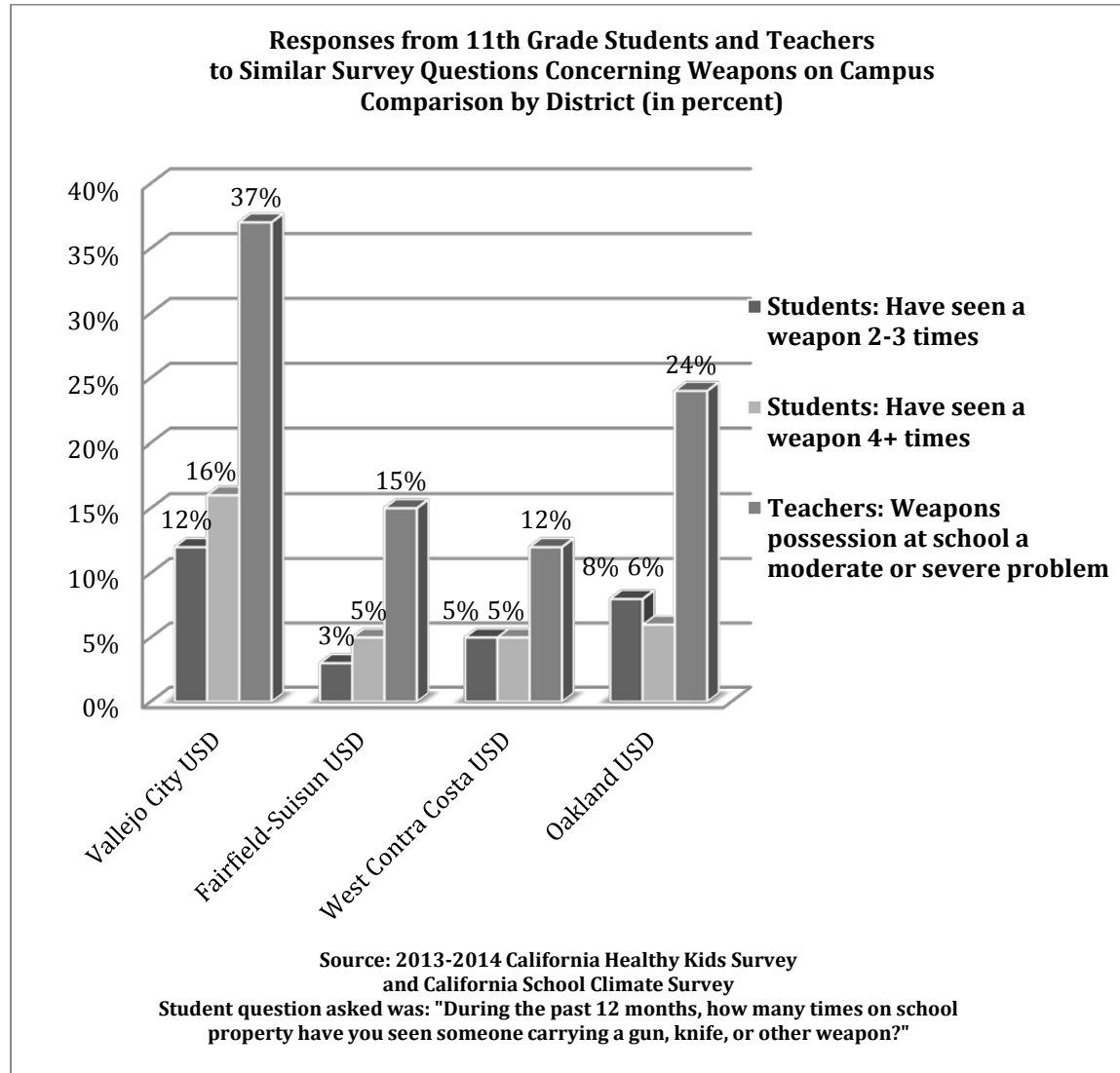


The District did not administer CHKS in 2014-2015 or 2015-2016. The chart above shows in 2013-2014 fewer 11th grade students in the District felt safe or very safe, and more students felt unsafe or very unsafe than did high school students in the other districts studied.

During our interviews with JBHS and VHS students, we learned most, yet not all of them feel safe at school. However, all said fights, cellphone thefts, and marijuana use are major problems. In spite of both schools maintaining closed campuses, several students told us it's easy to leave campus and have witnessed students leaving during school hours to smoke marijuana. All but one student have seen weapons on their campuses which, we learned, are easy to conceal.

Similarly, all of the teachers we interviewed feel safe at school, but some know colleagues who don't, and some will not remain on campus after dark. Many told us it's easy for students to leave campus and there are unsupervised areas without surveillance cameras on both campuses where students congregate.

Another question CHKS asked of 11th grade students was: “During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you seen someone carrying a gun, knife or other weapon?” CSCS asked high school staff if they considered weapons possession at their school to be a moderate or severe problem. The percentages of staff responses were taken from the 2013-2014 CSCS Core Module, Section 8 on “Student Health and Risk Behavior.”



The chart above shows in 2013-2014 a greater percentage of the District’s 11th grade students saw weapons multiple times at their schools than did students in other districts. Comparatively, a greater percentage of the District’s high school teachers and staff think weapons possession at their school is a moderate or severe problem than did teachers in other high schools.

Certain CHKS modules collect data on gang awareness, involvement, and victimization. Gang violence on campus does not appear to be a serious problem at either JBHS or VHS, but several teachers, site administrators, school safety personnel and students told us rival gangs are present

on both campuses. One teacher and one student at VHS said “ethnic gangs” on campus are a serious problem. We were told gang members no longer wear identifying colors at school. Instead, they’ve created their own dress codes, hand signs, tattoos and more subtle signs of gang affiliation. One student told us about witnessing a gang member show a rival gang member a bullet while in class. The student told us the teacher was unaware of the incident and students are “afraid to snitch.”

When researching CHKS data, the Grand Jury was unable to locate the survey on the District’s or school Websites. Some school districts transparently include CHKS on their Websites.

## **Bullying**

A generally accepted definition of bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

During our interviews District administrators, Board members, site administrators and school safety personnel all reported that bullying, particularly cyberbullying, is a major problem. Cyberbullying uses electronic media such as cell phones, texts and social media outlets to target individuals at any time with anonymity.

The CHKS also assesses the prevalence of cyberbullying in schools. The 2013-2014 CHKS asked 11th grade students, “During the past 12 months, how many times did other students spread mean rumors or lies about you on the internet (i.e., Facebook™, MySpace™, email, instant message)?” Below is a comparison by school district, of the percentages of students who responded to the question: “**4 or more times.**” The Grand Jury observed all of these districts had an 11<sup>th</sup> grade cyberbullying incidence over 8%, but when students were asked about multiple incidents Vallejo 11<sup>th</sup> graders had a much higher rate. This would indicate for those who were cyberbullied, it would likely be a more pervasive problem.

Vallejo City	7%	West Contra Costa	4%
Fairfield-Suisun	5%	Oakland	4%

The Safe Place to Learn Act (the Act) mandates all California school districts adopt a policy prohibiting bullying based on disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, race, religion and other actual or perceived characteristics.

In 2014, the WASC Visiting Committee witnessed bullying at VHS. The incident was described in its report and reads: “**The Visiting Team observed students bullying others and threats being made which were reported to the Administrator who seemed to minimize the situation.**” The District’s Board Policy and Administrative Regulation (AR) 5145.3, and earlier AR 5131.2, state: “**Intervene immediately and take corrective action when bullying is observed.**” (Emphasis added for this report.)

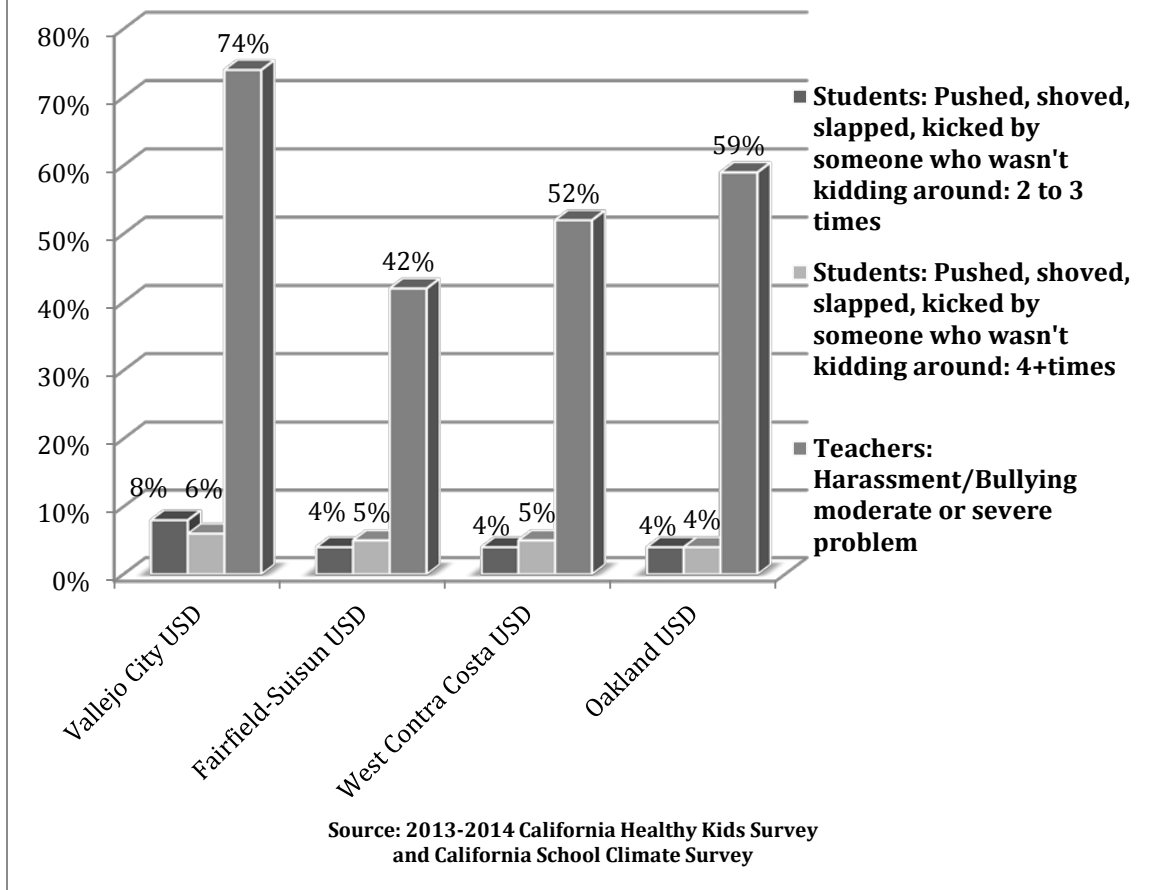
Our investigation revealed a number of weaknesses in the District's and the high schools' adherence to the requirements of the Safe Place to Learn Act.

- District and school Websites contain very little public information on anti-discrimination, anti-bullying, anti-bullying policy, and complaint procedures
- District's Website shows the last anti-bullying training for school site staff occurred in Fall 2012. There is no updated information on subsequent trainings. The 2012 training was a requirement of an agreement between the ACLU and District regarding a 2009 antidiscrimination settlement on behalf of a District high school student
- All of the links on the District's Anti-bullying Information and Reporting Forms webpage are broken
- VHS's "Stop Bullying Now" weblink takes the user to the District's School and Accountability webpage. Its anti-bullying hotline is VHS's main phone number. JBHS's Website lists the phone number for WeTip, a national anonymous crime reporting hotline
- JBHS's online Student Handbook lists the consequences for bullying. It also includes a District-wide Notice to Parents/Guardians on discrimination and harassment. VHS's Student Planner does not include this information

The Grand Jury compared the District's 2013-2014 student CHKS and staff CSCS with Fairfield-Suisun, West Contra Costa, and Oakland school districts to see if discernible numbers of 11th grade students are victims of bullying, and if teachers perceive bullying and harassment to be a moderate or severe problem. The question to students was: "During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you been pushed, shoved, slapped, and kicked by someone who wasn't kidding around?"

The chart below illustrates the District has a greater percentage of 11th grade students being victims of intentional pushing, shoving, slapping, or kicking than students in similar districts. Also, a greater percentage of the District's high school teachers and staff perceived harassment and bullying to be a moderate or severe problem than teachers in other districts.

**Responses from 11th Grade Students and Teachers to Similar Survey Questions Concerning Bullying Comparison by District (in percent)**



### Suspension/Expulsion Rates

Most educators and the public now realize the once heavy-handed approach to school discipline no longer works. The prevailing attitude had been to “get the disruptive pupil out of class in order for the rest of the students to learn.” Numerous studies and statistics show little benefit to this method, either to the suspended/expelled student or the remainder of the classroom. These same studies show these forms of school discipline (referrals, suspensions and expulsions) are applied disproportionately to minority students.

Due to state mandates, the District started to modify how, when and why a student was to be suspended/expelled from the classroom. The entire District’s total went from an astounding **71,260** referrals in 2010-2011 to **19,245** in 2012-2013. During the same time period, suspensions went from **7,191** to **2,313**. Expulsions also showed a dramatic drop from **91** to **44**.

The trend to reduce suspensions and expulsions began when improved data reporting at the CDE revealed extremely high numbers, prompting the passage of Assembly Bill 420 (Dickinson).

The law, which went into effect in 2014, was the first in the nation to eliminate expulsions for minor misbehavior known as “willful defiance,” which accounted for 43% of suspensions statewide. CDE data show between 2011 and 2015, suspensions at VHS dropped from 763 to 487 for a 36% reduction. During the same time suspensions at JBHS went from 498 to 284, for a 43% reduction.

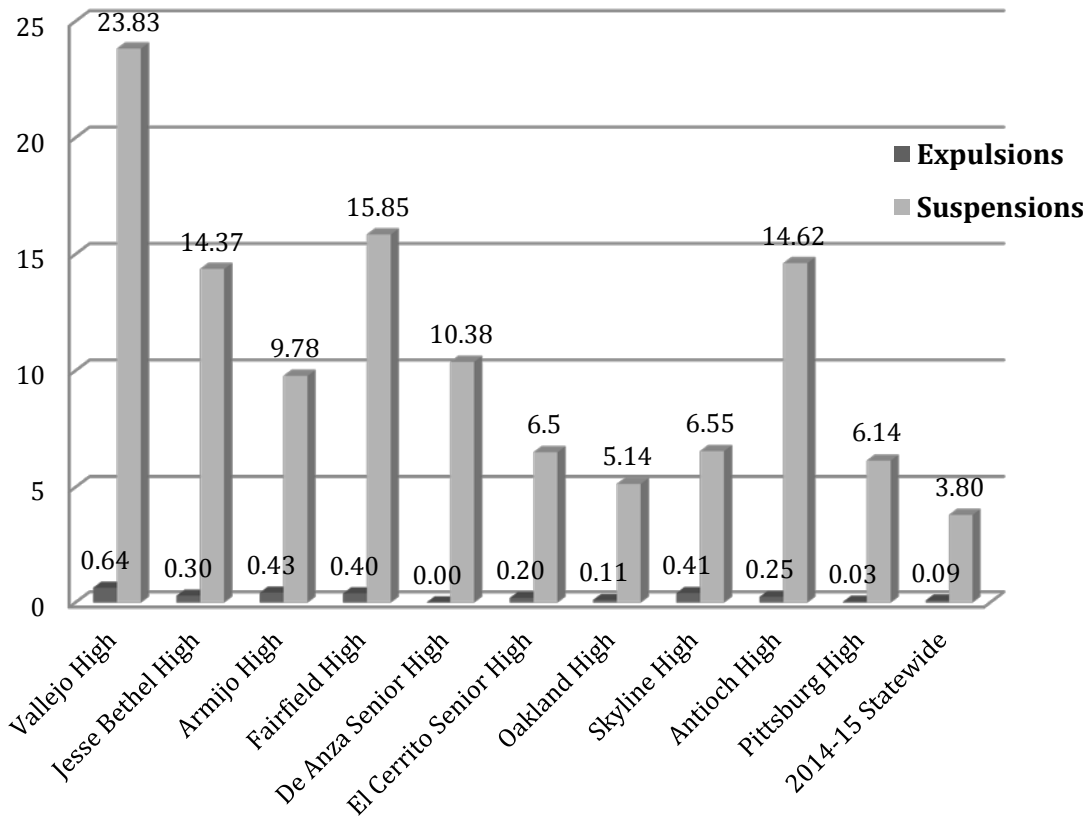
Throughout California and in the District the downward trend in traditional discipline continues. The District attributes this reduction primarily to their Integrated Intervention System (e.g. PBIS, RJ, and PYJI). The Grand Jury found many others (e.g. parents, teachers, students, community members) think disciplinary reduction is often arbitrarily applied with no consequences whatsoever for disruptive/dangerous behavior. Many expressed the opinion site administration effectively discourages faculty from filing referrals and suspensions. The VHS 2014 WASC Visiting Committee Report indicated, “in many classrooms, students swear at teachers and nothing happens to them.”

Whether the truth lies at one end of the spectrum or somewhere in between, the perception persists that the reduction in referrals/suspensions/expulsions is artificially achieved at the expense of school safety and a healthy learning environment.

The Grand Jury compared the expulsion and suspension data of eight area high schools to JBHS and VHS. The data is from each school’s 2015-2016 School Accountability Report Cards (SARC), which reports data from the previous year. Armijo High, Fairfield High, De Anza Senior High, El Cerrito Senior High, Oakland High, Skyline High, Antioch High, and Pittsburg Senior High were chosen because of their similarity to VHS and JBHS in student enrollment and demographics.

According to the CDE, it pre-populates portions of the SARC with data provided by the schools. The pre-populated data includes expulsion and suspension rates. The chart below compares percentages of student expulsions and suspensions based on cumulative enrollment. The District provided the expulsion data for VHS and JBHS.

### 2014-2015 Expulsions and Suspensions Percentages of Students Compared by District



**Source: 2014-2015 School Accountability Report Card**  
**Data taken from 10 area schools with similar student enrollment and demographics in the Unified School Districts of Vallejo City, Fairfield-Suisun, West Contra Costa, Oakland, Antioch, Pittsburg**

Number and Percent of Students Expelled and Suspended in 2014-2015			
Data and Expulsion Suspension Percent Formula is from the California Department of Education			
School	Expulsions	Suspensions	Cumulative Enrollment
Vallejo High School	13 (0.64%)	487 (23.83%)	2,044
Jesse Bethel High School	6 (0.30%)	284 (23.83%)	1,977
Armijo High School	11 (0.43%)	252 (9.78%)	2,578
Fairfield High School	6 (0.40%)	243 (15.85%)	1,533
De Anza Senior High School	0 (0.0%)	140 (10.38%)	1,350
El Cerrito Senior High School	3 (0.20%)	96 (6.50%)	1,477
Oakland High School	2 (0.11%)	89 (5.14%)	1,732
Skyline High School	8 (0.41%)	12 (6.55%)	1,967
Antioch High School	5 (0.25%)	296 (14.62%)	2,025
Pittsburg Senior High School	1 (0.03%)	199 (6.14%)	3,061
2014-2015 California Statewide	5,692 (0.09%)	243,603 (3.80%)	6,414,044
Expulsion and Suspension Percent Formula: number of expulsions and suspensions divided by cumulative enrollment multiplied by 100			



Comparisons of 2014-2015 expulsion data from the District, CDE reports, SARCs, and VHS administration and JBHS administration, revealed several discrepancies in expulsion numbers. At the time of this investigation, District-supplied data show 13 expulsions at VHS and 6 at JBHS. However, both CDE and the SARCs show zero expulsions at each school. The CDE told the Grand Jury that data reported to the CDE by the District is certified. Neither the District nor the CDE could explain this discrepancy. The CDE informed the Grand Jury the discrepancy would be investigated.

As the chart above shows, out of school suspensions, although reduced from recent years, are still higher than most similar high schools that the Grand Jury examined. Many in the school community, particularly students and teachers, told us they consider discipline, or lack of, as a significant measure of school safety.

### **Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension**

Expelled Vallejo students normally are required to attend the Vallejo Educational Academy, an alternative school with lower classroom size and specialized instructors.

Out-of-school suspensions, while a quick fix for student disciplinary problems, don't address the issue of what caused the disruptive behavior in the first place. Many studies show these suspensions can actually hamper safety because the students return even further behind in class with no modification of behavior.

In-school suspension with a Supervised Suspension Classroom is one way of keeping these students in school and holding them accountable, while not disrupting the regular classroom environment. Board bylaws BP 5144.1 require this in stating "students who are suspended for any of the reasons enumerated in Education Code 48900 and 48900.2, but who pose no imminent danger or threat to anyone at school and for whom expulsion proceedings have not been initiated, the Superintendent or designee **shall** establish a supervised suspension classroom which meets the requirement of law." (bold added for emphasis)

The Board seems to recognize the potential benefit for in-school suspension as several trustees, during Board meetings, have requested information from the Superintendent on starting such a program. To our knowledge this information has never been presented nor has the topic been added to the Board agenda.

The Grand Jury learned Benicia High School has a successful program called Isolated Classroom Environment (ICE). The classroom supervisor is non-credentialed, but is experienced at working with troubled youth and providing a structured classroom environment. The classroom contains students both on daily detention and short term suspension. While the obvious advantage is to keep these students in school, the Grand Jury was told the ICE program might also have a deterrent effect on further disruptions from the same students.

Some District Administrators indicated a Supervised Suspension Classroom might have questionable benefit and disciplinary methods, should be and are, left to the individual school sites. The same District attitude seems to prevail for other alternative disciplinary actions, such as, after school detention and Saturday detention. The Grand Jury learned some teachers conduct lunch time detention as a way to hold the student accountable but avoid the stigma of a referral. Community members have approached the Board with these detention and in-school suspension suggestions on several occasions but they are never addressed by the Board or Superintendent.

### **Teacher Notification**

In addressing safety concerns at the high schools, one of the more frequent comments made by teachers was lack of consistency by Administration in notifying them when a student assigned to their classroom had previously engaged in criminal, disruptive or dangerous conduct related to school or school attendance.

Although the privacy of student records is considered a high priority protected by both federal and state statutes, there are situations when privacy rights must be balanced against the safety rights of others. The State of California addresses this issue directly in Education Code Section 49709, which provides in relevant part as follows:

- (a) A school district *shall* inform the teacher of *each* pupil who has engaged in, or is *reasonably suspected* to have engaged in, any of the acts described in any of the subdivisions, except subdivision (h), of Section 48900, or in Section 48900.2, 48900.3, 48900.4, or 48900.7...The district *shall* provide the information to the teacher based upon any records that the district maintains *in its ordinary course of business, or receives from a law enforcement agency*, regarding a pupil described in this section. (Emphasis added. All references are to the Education Code.)

The sections referred to above pertain to behavior for which suspension or expulsion may be appropriate, including, but not limited to the following:

- Caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause physical injury to another person
- Possessed, sold, or otherwise furnished a firearm, knife, explosive or other dangerous objects
- Committed or attempted to commit robbery or extortion
- Committed or attempted to commit sexual assault or sexual harassment
- Disrupted school activities or willfully defied any school personnel (No longer expellable offense under AB420 )
- Has made terroristic threats against school officials or school property
- Bullying of another student

Consistent with the applicable Education Code sections, the District's own *Comprehensive School Safety Plan* (CSSP) directly discusses this issue under the heading, "Notice Regarding Student Crimes and Offenses"

The Superintendent or designee shall inform the teacher of **every** student who has engages in [sic], or is reasonably suspected to have engaged in, any act during the previous three years, which could constitute grounds for suspension or expulsion, with the exception of the possession or use of tobacco products. This information shall be based upon written district records or records received from a law enforcement agency. (Emphasis in original, Bold Added)

To further protect school personnel, the CSSP specifically addresses potentially violent or dangerous students under the heading, "Notifying Teachers of Dangerous Pupils", (emphasis in original) which provides that any student who "has caused or tried to cause another person serious bodily injury or any injury that requires professional medical treatment" shall have a confidential file created.

"When such a student is assigned to a teacher's classroom, the *principal shall provide the teacher with written notification.*" Teachers are then asked to review this information in the office and are required to keep the information strictly confidential. (See CCSP, updated 8/8/15, page 44, Emphasis and bold added.) The CSSP thereafter combines portions of California Education and Penal Code sections along with District Administrative Regulations supportive of this mandate.

In further recognition of the importance of teachers being informed of "dangerous pupils" in their classrooms, the District also allows, but does not require, the Superintendent to inform various school personnel about crimes a student has committed that are unrelated to school or school attendance. The purpose here is to provide the teacher with information that permits the teacher to "work with the student appropriately, avoid being needlessly vulnerable, or protect others from needless vulnerability."

Finally, despite the clear-cut language of the statutes and the school safety provisions, the District and the Vallejo Education Association (VEA) teachers' union still included a specific clause within their current contract directly outlining their position on this subject:

- 13.7 Unit members will be informed by the District of any student assigned to his/her class who during the previous three years, engaged in criminal or disruptive conduct at school, while going to or coming from school or during a school sponsored activity as provided in Education Code 49079.

In that the issue of "dangerous students" is plainly of importance to both the District and its teachers, and because written rules in this regard are clear, concise, and easily accessible to all district employees, the Grand Jury was surprised to learn this was still a problem.

Our investigation revealed teachers find notification to be very untimely (sometimes months after the student has been in class), inconsistent at best and sometimes non-existent. On inquiry in this regard, administration expressed concern for student privacy despite state legislation and their own safety standards. The administration also misquoted the District's own rules, indicating notification was required only when the juvenile justice system (police/probation department) was formally involved.

District personnel also quoted federal statutes such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as a reason to not inform teachers of dangerous students (without parent or student consent), despite the fact that there are express instances where consent is not required. Specifically, it is deemed appropriate to disclose information regarding specified disciplinary actions to teachers and school officials, including those in other schools, who have a legitimate educational interest in the behavior of the student.

Prior to November 2015, the Grand Jury was told VHS did not always make this information available because "a student's privacy could be jeopardized." At the time of our VHS tour on March 17, 2016, an administrator said teachers are notified in writing to review the student's file in the office but could provide no proof the teachers ever receive this written notification.

JBHS has a log book of students on probation, and they indicated teachers are notified via email to review pertinent information in the office. Several JBHS teachers told us this did not happen on a consistent basis. A District Administrator told us part of the problem could be Academy VPs at both high schools might not always notify their teachers in a timely manner. It should be noted the 2012-2013 Grand Jury addressed this same teacher notification issue and it remains a problem to this day.

Despite inquiries by the Grand Jury, the VEA was unable to provide information pertaining to any grievances filed by the teachers alleging non-compliance with the notification requirements.

### **Police Calls/Assault/Battery**

The Grand Jury decided one way to measure safety would be to analyze police calls to the high schools for both volume and type of calls. The hope was to find evidence either supporting or disputing the contention that safety issues for the faculty/staff and students were of legitimate concern.

The 2012-2013 Grand Jury Report noted for about 80% of that school year there had been 107 calls for service to VHS. Of those police calls, four were for weapon incidents including two incidents of shots fired.

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury examined police call logs from the school years of 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015 to April 2016. Dropped/canceled calls, follow-up calls and after school hour calls were redacted from the count of the service call logs. Multiple call codes for the same incident were counted as one call, i.e. a verbal disturbance which also became an assault/battery call was counted as one incident.

<b>Vallejo High</b>	Total Incidents	Battery Penal Code 242	Robbery Penal code 211	Weapons Related	Narcotics Related
2013-2014	70	18	9	1	3
2014-2015	76	19	8	3	7
2015-2016	49	17	2	4	3

<b>Jesse Bethel</b>	Total Incidents	Battery Penal Code 242	Robbery Penal Code 211	Weapons Related	Narcotics Related
2013-2014	59	21	7	1	1
2014-2015	52	12	8	5	2
2015-2016	38	6	8	3	3

Review of the last three years' call logs show little if any improvement at VHS, except for robbery calls. JBHS shows a decline in both number of incidents and calls for assaultive behavior. This is not to downplay the tragic shooting death of the JBHS student in May 2015. Any incidence of weapons on campus is to be taken seriously. The 2013-2014 CHKS underscored this problem when 45% of the District's 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and 41% of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students responded they had seen a weapon on campus **at least once** in the last 12 months.

Vallejo Police Department (VPD) call logs were of no benefit in determining if the calls for battery were for a student or a school employee since the data was not differentiated. We also examined data from Crimereports.org, a national organization which publishes neighborhood crime information provided by local law enforcement agencies. The VPD confirmed this data is provided by their agency. The Crimereports.org Website did show "Battery on School Employee," but the data only goes back six months. At the time of this report it showed VHS had **three** Battery on School Employees for the 2015-2016 school year, while JBHS had **none**.

Replying to our inquiry regarding school employees who had been victims of battery the District would only say "we had a few arrests for battery (student/student), as well as, on teachers." The definition of battery provided to the Grand Jury by the District was "touching another person and the person feeling victimized." Both VHS and JBHS student handbooks take their definition of battery from the California Penal Code 242 which calls battery "An unlawful and willful use of force or violence upon the person of another." The schools and California Penal Code apparently choose to use stronger language for battery than does the District.

School faculty/staff complained that if a District employee was assaulted by a student, the site Administration often left it up to the victim to file a police report rather than the school. Education Code 44014(a) requires law enforcement authorities to be notified any time an employee of the school district is “attacked, assaulted or physically threatened by a pupil.” The same Education Code 44014 (b) (c)) also imposes monetary fines if the school district impedes or imposes sanctions for making the report.

Despite the few reports being made for assault/battery on employees the CDE data for 2014-2015 shows nine “Committed Assault or Battery on a School Employee” suspensions for both VHS and for JBHS. It could be higher, because as reported earlier, CDE data show zero expulsions for both high schools yet the District reported to us there had been 13 expulsions at VHS and six at JBHS. It’s very likely some assault/battery offenses resulted in expulsions, but do not show up in the CDE data.

Several Board meetings have included “Battery on Employee” as a topic when discussing the District’s Workers Compensation (W/C) rate. When the statistics were first presented to the Board on February 3, 2016 some Board and community members wondered how much of the 5.2% W/C rate was attributed to assaults on employees. Since the District’s 5.2% rate was at least twice that of the next highest Solano County school district (Fairfield-Suisun, 2.53%), some felt at least part could be due to assaultive behavior to school employees. To our knowledge this information has not been shared with the community.

### **School Resource Officers**

District Administrators, even during the state takeover in 2004, realized the contribution of SROs in helping maintain a safe school environment. Their vision was to have SROs not only patrol the campus, but to develop a relationship with the students. This philosophy continued even as the recession and the City of Vallejo’s impending bankruptcy made it more difficult to fund an SRO program. By 2009 the SROs had gone from a high of eight down to zero.

Previous Solano County Grand Juries recognized the need for SROs, but the new District Administration seemed lukewarm to the concept. The 2012-2013 Grand Jury noted the Administration’s philosophy had been that “a police presence on campus is a ‘pipeline to prison’.” The District cautioned the 2013-2014 Grand Jury by noting a Congressional Report that read, “research suggests that the presence of SROs might result in more children being involved in the criminal justice system for relatively minor offenses...”

When a new SRO was hired in February 2015, the contract was formalized by the SRO *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU), signed by the City of Vallejo and the Vallejo City Unified School District. It appeared to expand on the previously limited SRO objectives that had been in place.

The new MOU objectives included:

- Maintaining a safe and secure environment on school grounds.
- Reducing incidents of school violence.

- Reduction in the number of criminal offenses committed by juveniles and young adults.
- Establishing a rapport between the SRO and the student population.
- Establishing a rapport between the SRO and parents, faculty, staff and administrators.

The subsequent MOU, formalizing the addition of a second SRO was signed in late 2015. One officer each is assigned to VHS and to JBHS. The SROs work four 10 hour shifts weekly and each work half day at the other school when the assigned officer is off or on vacation. They also visit other District schools when needed. To maintain high visibility the SROs park their police vehicle in a prominent location when on campus. Each has an office located on campus and the JBHS officer has a computer monitor connected to the camera surveillance system.

Our interviews confirmed the SROs are well liked and site administrators think they are effective and work well in the school environment. We were told that in late January the SRO at VHS was able to defuse a potentially dangerous student confrontation because he happened to be on campus.

District administrators say that two SROs are sufficient. One District Administrator at VHS didn't know the SRO had a campus office and did not know how many hours a day the SRO was actually there. Our interviews revealed many students and some staff were surprised there was an SRO on site. Some students thought the police were there to make an arrest when they saw the SRO's parked vehicle. Some interviewees indicated they would like to know where the SRO office was so they could contact the SRO if needed. The Grand Jury could find no SRO information on either the district or school Websites.

Despite the Board often being divided, all those interviewed agreed more SROs are needed. In fact, the Board has budgeted \$100,000 which would pay for ½ of the \$200,000 funding needed for a third SRO. Unfortunately in recent budget hearings the Vallejo City Council and Vallejo Chief of Police specifically excluded a third SRO from the 2016-2017 budget.

It was reported to the Board on April 20, 2016; the city has proposed a 3<sup>rd</sup> SRO be added as an item in the participatory budget hearings. They list the cost as \$255,000 annually, which is \$55,000 more than the present annual cost and this would only provide funding for one year.

As a comparison, the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District employs six fulltime SROs, while West Contra Costa Unified School District has eight SROs. Benicia Unified School District now has three SROs. Pittsburg High School has one SRO and one fulltime probation officer.

### **Site Safety Supervisors**

Both high schools employ Site Safety Supervisors. These are campus monitors who help maintain safety and security on and around the school grounds. At present, JBHS has 8 and VHS has 11 site safety personnel. Many are originally from Vallejo and still live in the community. According to both District and site Administrators, there is good rapport between the students and the site supervisors and they are oft times able to head off trouble before it starts. Site

administrators said they try to keep at least one site supervisor near each of the high school's Academies to monitor between class activity or in case trouble should develop in the classroom.

However, we were informed by some teachers they are not always readily available in an emergency situation.

Due to the large sprawling nature of both campuses, golf carts are utilized to help navigate the grounds. Bicycles are also used at VHS to help patrol the campus.

During our investigation the Grand Jury was made aware some site safety supervisors might be too young to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Although we were limited to one JBHS visit and two tours at VHS we did not witness this as a problem. The Grand Jury did notice two site safety officers were on their cell phones at VHS and some students in their vicinity were milling around between classes with little or no response from site supervisors.

Site Safety Supervisors were recently honored for their good work at the Board meeting on April 20, 2016. JBHS site safety supervisors were especially commended for starting their own student mentoring program, called *I Care*.

### **School Facilities**

During our tours of VHS and JBHS, the Grand Jury was interested in looking at several different areas of the school facilities.

Restrooms were an area of concern for every student we interviewed. More than one student said they would go all day, if possible, without using the restroom. At the November 4, 2015 School Board meeting, a JBHS student addressed the Board presenting 209 student complaints regarding the poor maintenance and condition of the restrooms. The 2015-2016 WASC Self-Study Report for VHS also noted for the entire facility "the process for communicating the need for a repair and receiving a response is an area for growth." We were told the custodians do an admirable job, but understaffing is a problem throughout the district.



VALLEJO HIGH 03/17/16





JESSE BETHEL HIGH 02/29/16

Our inspection of the restrooms was not a pleasant experience. The walls of the restrooms at both campuses are painted black to discourage graffiti. Additionally, it was observed there was insufficient lighting to offset this darkroom effect. Even though we visited JBHS on a Monday morning, at least one restroom had no toilet tissue and one of the women's restrooms was littered and unsanitary. VHS also had no toilet tissue in one or more restrooms and one restroom was closed. Both schools utilize hand blow driers to discourage litter, but a few driers did not work. Sinks were generally clean and in working order at both schools. The 2015-2016 WASC Visiting Committee's Report also found issues with VHS restrooms and said the bathrooms "smell of urine and are without toilet paper and soap." It must be noted the students appear to do little to help the situation.

Another area of concern was the camera surveillance system at the high schools. Camera monitors are accessible in the main JBHS office and in the SRO's office. At VHS, according to an Administrator, selected staff members can access the cameras from laptops, but this does not include the campus SRO. Both schools use the cameras to review and document past events rather than monitoring in real time.

Vandalism of the cameras, especially at VHS, is a chronic problem according to custodial personnel, teachers and students. Much of the vandalism happens on the weekends partly due to the open nature of the campus. Many cameras at JBHS are mounted at heights more easily accessible to vandals but they don't experience many of the same difficulties. The Grand Jury learned the cameras at both schools have malfunctioned at critical times when they were needed for identification or for documentation of incidents.

There are a few areas at JBHS where camera coverage is poor, particularly toward the east end of the campus leading to the ball fields and in the parking lot. The parking lot has been the scene of several car break-ins and at least one physical assault. We were also told some of the cameras are outdated and don't cover the intended target area properly. At the time of our VHS tour we were told by an administrator the surveillance system there was "working fine and there were no blind spots."

The Grand Jury also looked at several classrooms and all appeared to have lockable doors in case of emergency lockdowns. Classrooms at JBHS had blinds on the windows, but VHS had some classrooms without functioning blinds. Some rooms at VHS had tinted door glass, which could obstruct visibility from the outside, but not completely block as recommended. Being able to close the classrooms from outside view would be critical in the case of an intruder on campus or a campus lockdown. Both schools had some classrooms without a plainly visible evacuation plan/map/kit.

The Grand Jury was informed and also observed the perimeter gates of the VHS main campus, bordering Amador St., were chained and padlocked during school hours. The intent is to inhibit students from leaving the campus during school hours, but it could also prevent students from a quick exit during an emergency. It should be noted however, the approved emergency escape route is in the opposite direction from the locked gates. Students told us emergency lock-down policy is inconsistent. Per the school's own 2015-2016 WASC Self Study Report, "lockdown policies are in place, but have not been consistently practiced."

Nebraska Street, a major thoroughfare, separates the main VHS campus and the former 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy. Many students going to and from classes must cross this busy street several times during the school day. The District has tried to be proactive and has Site Safety Supervisors to help direct student foot traffic on Nebraska Street. During our tour this system appeared to work well. Observations at times, other than the tour, showed this supervision was inconsistent. On one occasion, a site supervisor was observed sitting on the steps of a building over ten minutes. While he was looking at his cell phone students were crossing Nebraska Street on their way to classes.

### **Site Problems At Vallejo High School**

In May 2016, the District announced the hiring of a new principal for VHS effective July 2016. On May 6, 2016 the Vallejo Times-Herald, reported on the new principal and mentioned her awareness of VHS's accreditation problems and her plan to use the WASC report as a "road map" to address the school's problems.

In spite of the above news, in recent years, VHS has suffered from a high turnover of both teachers and campus administrators. The 2015-2016 WASC Self-Study Visiting Committee Report (2015-2016 WASC Report) noted there had been four changes in VHS principals since 2010. In December 2015, the District had to place a District Oversight Administrator to oversee the site operation on a day-to-day basis. The report goes on to say, "VHS students, parents, faculty, and staff have paid a high price due to the impact of these changes. VHS stakeholders have had to deal with the lack of continuity in the area of school processes and procedures, program implementation and leadership."

This leadership vacuum has certainly contributed to the ongoing morale issues at VHS, as related by many teachers we interviewed. The Grand Jury was told, and it has been vocalized at several Board meetings, the new District oversight administrator, since December 2015, has been very heavy handed with a "my way or the highway" approach. Board meetings, news articles and

Grand Jury interviews have called attention to the morale issue and how it affects school climate for both teachers and students. Several times VHS teachers have presented to the Board letters from students on their feelings, and/or concerns regarding school climate and safety. To our knowledge these letters have not been shared with the public.

### **A Comparative Look at VHS and JBHS**

During its investigation, the Grand Jury noticed enough differences between VHS's and JBHS's school Websites, Student Planner/Student Handbook and Comprehensive School Safety Plans to warrant a closer look at the two schools. The purpose of this examination is not to criticize but to point out similarities and differences in the schools' student and parent support materials and safety plans. Keeping Website, support materials and safety plans up to date reflect on a school's overall commitment to maintaining a healthy school environment.

One important difference is in VHS's and JBHS's Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSP). The following is a partial description of the state's requirements for CSSPs: A "Comprehensive School Safety Plan SB 719 & AB 115 Compliance Document" is required under California Education Code (sections 32280-32288). It mandates all K-12 schools adopt, review and update their plans by March 1 of each year. Education Code (Section 32282) requires plans include an assessment of the "current status of school crime committed on school campuses and at school-related functions, and identify appropriate strategies and programs that will provide or maintain a high level of school safety and address the school's procedures for complying with existing law related to school safety. . ."

Additionally, California law requires schools to report on the status of its CSSPs, including a description of its key elements in their annual School Accountability Report Cards. The school safety plan section in JBHS's 2014-2015 SARC (published in 2015-2016) describes the key elements, and in part, reads:

"The last revision of the School Safety Plan occurred January 2015. Key elements of the School Safety Plan include, but are not limited to Crisis Management Plan (Emergency Action Plan), School Accountability Report, School Crime Report, Child Abuse, Suspension/Expulsion, Sexual Harassment, Bell Schedule, School Handbook, Student Discipline, and standards for student behavior."

The school safety plan section in VHS' 2014-2015 SARC does not include the key elements, but in part, reads:

"Vallejo High School completes the annual update of its Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) by October of every year. The plan focus is on campus wide safety for students and staff in emergency situations. The plan is reviewed with the faculty at the first after school Wednesday staff meeting meeting in October." (Double "meeting" appears in VHS's SARC.)

Because VHS's CSSP is incomplete, the Grand Jury questions whether or not the faculty reviews the plan every October. Education Code (32288 (a)) mandates each school forward its CSSP to the district or county office of education for approval.

See Appendix for tables with side-by-side comparisons of JBHS's and VHS's Websites, student handbook/student planner and CSSPs.

### **Board/District/Public Interactions**

The Vallejo School Board of Trustees (Board) is the governing body of the District and among other important functions; it sets policy for and oversees the control and management of the District. The Superintendent of the District is hired by and reports to the Board.

The Board consists of five members who serve four year terms. Two current Board Trustees were appointed due to vacancies. Three of five positions will be available during the upcoming November 2016 election, including the two positions filled by vacancies.

The 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury attended many Board meetings and/or viewed them online via *Ustream*. A common complaint of the community was the District and the Board ignored the public's concerns regarding safety in the schools and often took a "circle the wagons" approach when school safety concerns were broached.

We were surprised to find Board minutes were often four months or more behind before being approved for public dissemination. This problem finally eased in early 2016, but then the minutes became much more generic in detail, especially when disapproval or questioning of District/Board actions or inactions took place.

One example was a speaker who presented several VHS student letters to share with the Board. According to the speaker, some letters talked about chaotic discipline, violence and no consequences for misbehavior. The minutes read "... spoke about speaking with students about their experience at VHS." On another occasion more student letters were presented and the speaker said "5% of the students had taken over the campus, ruining PBIS." The minutes read "... spoke about PBIS."

At another Board meeting a community member addressed the Superintendent and the Board regarding the need for revising the District's detention policy to include such programs as Saturday detention, after school detention, etc. The speaker was interrupted and thus unable to finish speaking within the allotted three minutes. The speaker also requested the topic be placed on the next Board meeting agenda. The meeting minutes stated "... spoke about in-house suspension, "... responded." Untimely minutes and a generic approach to reporting comments may be unintentional; it does nothing to convince the public that the Superintendent and Board are well intentioned and transparent.

The Grand Jury also found the Board is often divided on important topics and is not able to clearly communicate a clear and consistent policy to the Superintendent.

- Information on an In-House Suspension program has been requested by different Board members on several occasions, followed by requests to have the topic placed on the Board agenda. To our knowledge this has not happened. The Board President and Superintendent are responsible for setting the next meeting agenda.
- A joint Vallejo City–District Task Force on safety, conceptualized in mid-2015 has yet to meet.
- Early in the 2015-2016 school year, two Board members announced a Community School Forum on safety to be held August 24, 2015, yet no other Board members nor any District representatives attended.
- A Restorative Justice Symposium on September 21, 2015 was sponsored by a Board trustee and WIT Academy. Despite being well publicized, only one other Board member attended and no one from the District attended. Of the audience, 16 of 32 attendees were current or retired Vallejo teachers.

During the 2015-2016 school year several incidents occurred which gave the appearance the District was not always forthcoming in providing information requested under the *California Public Records Act* (PRA). One community member began to initiate a lawsuit for failure to provide information from CHKS. A Board member had to threaten use of the *California Public Records Act* to obtain information from his own District. The District has said some requests under the *California Public Records Act* are frivolous and require valuable staffing time to research and copy the requests.

While there may be reasonable explanations for the above incidents, the public can only conclude the present system hinders the parents and public from having a voice in the school system. Many have expressed the opinion neither the Board nor the District are acting in the best interest of the school community. Ultimately parents and the community lose confidence in the process and the entire school system suffers.

The bi-monthly Board of Trustees' public meeting sessions start at 5:00 p.m., despite repeated requests from the public to have a later start time. Many community members view this as an attempt to shield the meetings from the public.

## **V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Finding 1**

The Vallejo City Unified School District (District) has implemented several excellent programs to improve school climate and safety in the high schools, but inadequate training and inconsistent application has undermined faculty and student support thereby limiting the effectiveness of these programs.

### **Recommendation 1**

- 1A. The District prioritize the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) and Restorative Justice (RJ) programs so all teachers and staff understand their importance and are able to fit them into their schedules for training. Training be consistent and ongoing.
- 1B. The District increase the PBIS and RJ sessions held at each high school.
- 1C. The Vallejo Education Association assist the District by encouraging teachers to participate in training and professional development.

### **Finding 2**

News and social media emphasize only negative events that occur at the high schools.

### **Recommendation 2**

- 2A. The District utilize all tools to publicize student achievements and awards such as on District's and school Websites, Facebook and the Vallejo City Unified School District App.
- 2B. The District explore ways to develop a relationship with local news media to balance reporting, including utilizing Vallejo Community Access Television (VCAT).

### **Finding 3**

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), along with the California School Climate Survey (CSCS) and the California School Parents Survey (CSPS) are excellent and economical tools to help gauge school climate and student safety, yet the surveys have been underutilized in the District.

### **Recommendation 3**

- 3A. The District continue student participation in the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) on at least a biennial basis.
- 3B. The District increase teacher and staff participation in their portion of the California School Climate Survey (CSCS).
- 3C. The District include the parents in the California School Parents Survey (CSPS).
- 3D. The District make California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) available for public dissemination on the District Website.

### **Finding 4**

District and school Websites contain limited information on anti-discrimination policy, anti-bullying policy and complaint procedures. School Websites are outdated and the District Website contains broken links to sources for anti-bullying. The *Student Planner* for Vallejo High School (VHS) has little anti-bullying information. This was a Finding in prior Grand Jury Report (2013-2014).

### **Recommendation 4**

- 4A. The District update and fix broken links to District/School anti-bullying Websites.
- 4B. The District include the same anti-bullying information in the VHS *Student Planner* as in the Jesse Bethel High School's (JBHS) *Student Handbook*.

### **Finding 5**

There has been little or no current anti-bullying training for school site faculty and staff.

### **Recommendation 5**

The District increase anti-bullying training for all school site faculty and staff.

### **Finding 6**

Expulsions reported to the California Department of Education (CDE) do not agree with those reported to the Grand Jury by the District.

### **Recommendation 6**

The District work in conjunction with the CDE to correct the apparent discrepancy in the expulsion count reported by the CDE for both VHS and JBHS.

### **Finding 7**

The Board and District have not explored alternative methods to out-of-school suspensions, as required by Board bylaws.

### **Recommendation 7**

- 7A. The Board and District examine ways to implement a Supervised Suspension Classroom at VHS and JBHS.
- 7B. The Board and District examine the Benicia High School's Isolated Classroom Environment (ICE) program as a possible template for a successful Supervised Suspension Classroom.
- 7C. The Board and District consider implementation of other alternative methods to out-of-school suspensions (e.g. Saturday detention, after school detention, etc.)

### **Finding 8**

JBHS and especially VHS site administrators are inconsistent with teacher notification of students with violent, criminal or disruptive behavior.

### **Recommendation 8**

- 8A. The District and the Vallejo Education Association (VEA) work together to reach agreement on notification procedures acceptable to the teachers.
- 8B. The District develop a tracking system for teacher notification so the system is transparent and verifiable, while still protecting the privacy of the student.



### **Finding 9**

There are indications expulsion data for “Battery on Employees” may have been under-reported for both high schools.

### **Recommendation 9**

The District work in conjunction with the California Department of Education (CDE) to resolve these discrepancies.

### **Finding 10**

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury found School Resource Officers (SROs) to be a valuable asset, but they are under-utilized by the District.

### **Recommendation 10**

The 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury recommends the District and Vallejo School Board (Board) explore ways to help the SROs interact more with students, teachers and parents.

A. Meeting with the individual Academies, at assemblies and at community/parent forums are all ways to promote this interaction.

B. Posting SRO information (with SRO’s photo) on the school Websites would send the message the SROs are a regular part of the school community and are there to help.

### **Finding 11**

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury finds a third SRO would be of great benefit to the District, as it would enable both high schools to have full weekday coverage and the lower grades could utilize an officer on an as needed basis.

### **Recommendation 11**

The Board explore ways, in conjunction. with the city to fund a third SRO, using the \$100,000 already budgeted for this purpose. The long awaited joint City-School Task Force could help address this issue.

### **Finding 12**

A few Site Safety Supervisors at VHS were observed on their cell phones when students were walking between classes.

### **Recommendation 12**

The District develop a cell phone policy for Site Safety Supervisors.

### **Finding 13**

Students at both schools are reluctant to use school restrooms. Restrooms at both schools require better maintenance.

### **Recommendation 13**

The District provide staffing to regularly maintain restrooms and explore incentive programs for students to take pride in keeping them clean.

### **Finding 14**

The camera surveillance systems at both campuses require improvements.

- A. JBHS – More cameras are needed in blind spots (e.g. parking lot, upper quad, east side of campus facing ball fields). Several cameras offer poor quality due to camera type or lens cover distortion.
- B. VHS - Administration did not or would not identify any problems with their surveillance system. The campus SRO has no video access in his office.

### **Recommendation 14**

The District provide needed upgrades as identified at both schools.

### **Finding 15**

Some classrooms at VHS have inoperative window shades or tinted glass which do not completely obstruct the view from the outside in case of a lockdown.

### **Recommendation 15**

VHS update classroom window coverings in order to block any view from outside in case of campus lockdown.

### **Finding 16**

Nebraska Street is a potential safety hazard for students crossing the street between classes. The District has attempted to be proactive by stationing Site Safety Supervisors at the crosswalks when students are present.

### **Recommendation 16**

- 16A. VHS continue their use of Site Safety Supervisors to monitor students crossing Nebraska Street and maintain coverage during school hours.
- 16B. The Board interact with the joint City-School Task Force to explore possible solutions to the Nebraska Street crossing problem (i.e. closing street or limiting automobile access during school hours, upgrade crosswalks with flashing lights, etc.).

### **Finding 17**

VHS Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) is incomplete; Student Planner (Handbook) is not available on the school Website; and student activities and athletic calendars are out of date.

### **Recommendation 17**

- 17A. The District direct VHS staff to bring the Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) up to date, including missing sections.
- 17B. The District direct VHS staff to make the VHS Student Planner (Handbook) available on their Website.
- 17C. The District direct VHS staff to update student activities and athletic calendars on their Website.

### **Finding 18**

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury finds the current School Board has often been divided and sometimes failed to clearly define and communicate their policies to the Superintendent. Requests for future board agenda items are sometimes ignored.

### **Recommendation 18**

- 18A. The School Board endeavor to resolve internal conflict, find common ground so they may develop clear, concise, explicit policy goals for the Superintendent with verifiable results.

18B. The Board President ensure all requested agenda items appear on the next meeting agenda.

### **Finding 19**

Parents and the public complain their safety concerns are often ignored and there is a lack of transparency by the School Board, administration and the District.

### **Recommendation 19**

19A. The Board direct the District be more forthcoming when citizens request routine information. Use of the *California Public Records Act* (PRA) should not be the norm for acquiring this information.

19B. When the PRA is used; the District comply with the request in a timely manner.

19C. Minutes of Board meetings are published in a timely manner.

19D. Public comments are more detailed to reflect the intent of the speaker.

19E. The Board consider the start of Board meetings later than 5 p.m., so more of the public may attend.

### **COMMENTS-**

While the 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury concentrated on the two comprehensive high schools, some of our findings and recommendations may also apply to other schools in the District.

Although our report has identified areas of concern, the Grand Jury applauds the hard work and dedication of the entire Vallejo City Unified School District during these difficult years. While philosophies and methods may differ, the Grand Jury's extensive interviews found every interviewee was passionate about the well-being of the students and their futures.

The Grand Jury hopes this report does not further divide the District, the Board and the community, but instead helps to promote dialogue and identify problems which are fixable and that all parties can work together to solve. Transparency is the key, as no one wants to think they are lied to or are shielded from the truth. As long as the facts, no matter how painful, are shared with the community everyone feels they are a stakeholder and all can participate in the process of making our schools safer and better.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

**School Board of Trustees, Vallejo City Unified School District  
Recommendations:**

7A, B & C  
11,  
16B  
18A&B  
19A, B, C, D&E

**Superintendent, Vallejo City Unified School District  
Recommendations:**

1A&B  
2A&B  
3A, B, C&D  
4A&B  
5, 6  
7A, B&C  
8A&B  
9  
10A&B  
12,13,14,15  
16A  
17A, B&C

**COURTESY COPIES**

Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors  
Chief of Police, Vallejo Police Department  
Vallejo Education Association  
Vallejo City Council  
Superintendent, Solano County Board of Education

## APPENDIX

While not all items are directly related to safety, significant differences were found in some of the schools' online and printed materials. The tables below show some of the differences in material content and quality.

Comparison of JBHS's and VHS's Websites:

JBHS	VHS
Home page is attractive, well designed, font size is easy to read	Homepage in need of redesign to update calendars and add content, font size is small making page difficult to read
Athletic calendars updated	All athletics calendars are outdated
Student clubs and meeting times listed	Student clubs page is blank
Yearbook teacher, room number, and class period listed	Student yearbook page is blank
Parent portal to Aeries: page has active hyperlink to District Website	Parent portal for Aeries: hyperlink at top of web page contains no information
	A second parent portal for Aeries is located on left side of webpage
PBIS and RJ resources online	No information on PBIS or RJ
Student Handbook online	Student Planner not online or on District's Website
2016 Parent and Student LCAP Survey available to take online	No LCAP survey information
2016 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade Scholarship information online	No current scholarship information
Bullying hotline is WeTip, a nationwide anonymous crime reporting hotline	Bullying hotline is VHS's main phone number
2014-2015 School Accountability Report Card online (but outdated)	No School Accountability Report Card
Course Catalog on webpage	Course Catalog on webpage
Updated information scroll at top of homepage	None
Video streaming of campus events	Still photos of campus events
College and Career Center with application quick links to colleges and universities	Student Resources Locker page is blank
Online transcript order requests	Not available
Descriptive financial aid information for college	None

No food bank information	Vallejo parent and Vallejo families food bank distribution calendar is for 2014-2015
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Comparison of JBHS's 2015-2016 Student Handbook and VHS's 2015-2016 Student Planner:

JBHS	VHS
Well-designed double column format, font size easy to read	Contains numerous typographical, punctuation and formatting errors
Available on JBHS Website	Not on VHS Website or District's Website
Quick reference sheet with important dates, grading periods, graduation requirements	No quick reference sheet
Descriptive information on Academies	Brief information on Academies
Descriptive information on parent involvement and volunteer opportunities and how to become a volunteer	Brief information on parent involvement opportunities and how to become a volunteer
Information on other school programs such as National Honor Society and Upward Bound	No information on other school programs
Information on student recognition programs such as Jaguar Awards and Honor Rolls	No information on student recognition programs
No emergency procedures	Contains emergency procedures
Contains District-wide note to parents/guardians on nondiscrimination harassment policies and information on Uniform Complaint Procedures	No District-wide notice to parents/guardians or information on Uniform Complaint Procedures
Descriptive table of behavior expectations for common areas	Brief table of PBIS school-wide expectations
Extensive information on attendance, tardy and truancy procedures	Comparatively brief information on attendance, tardy and truancy procedures
General information section with information on bus transportation, daily bulletin, work permits, etc.	General information section lists office hours and phone numbers for main and attendance office, athletic director, bully hotline, counselor's office
Information on interscholastic athletics	No information on athletics
Well organized section on school-wide rules and expectations	Section on discipline procedures
Contains Williams Uniform Complaint Procedures form	No Williams Uniform Complaint Procedures form

Under California Senate Bill 719 and Assembly Bill 115, Comprehensive School Safety Plans must contain the following 11 sections:

1. Policies enacted to maintain a safe and orderly environment
2. Child abuse reporting procedures
3. Disaster procedures
4. Procedures to notify teachers of dangerous pupils
5. Suspension and expulsion policies
6. Discrimination and harassment policies
7. School wide dress code policies
8. Procedures for safe ingress and egress
9. Rules and procedures on school discipline
10. Assessment of school crime committed at school and at school-related functions
11. Hate crime reporting procedures

CSSP's formal title is "Comprehensive School Safety Plan SB 719 & AB 115 Compliance Document."

Comparison of JBHS's and VHS's 2015-2016 CSSPs:

JBHS	VHS
CSSP complete	Section 9 missing
	Section 10 missing
	Section 11 missing
	Contains numerous typographical and formatting errors
	2012-2013 Grand Jury Report found VHS's CSSP to be incomplete; it was last <b>updated in October 2011</b>