



VALLEJO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ramona E. Bishop, Ed.D. • Superintendent

GOVERNING BOARD

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September 12, 2016

The Honorable Robert C. Fracchia
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Solano Superior Court
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533

Subject: Response of Vallejo City Unified School District to the 2015-2016 Solano Grand Jury Report

Dear Presiding Judge Fracchia:

Introduction

The Vallejo City Unified School District has received a copy of the 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury Report entitled "Vallejo High Schools-Are They Safe?" In its Report, the Grand Jury requests that the District's School Board of Trustees reply to certain of its Findings and Recommendations.

Responses to 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.

Governing Board Response

The contract between Vallejo City Unified School District and the Vallejo Education Association does not allow the District to mandate certificated personnel to attend professional development, however, the District has done everything in its power to ensure that each staff member, whether certificated, classified or management receives the training and support needed to be successful in the performance of their job functions. The professional development offerings are aligned with our District's focus areas, and include specific training on Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Trauma-Informed Care. The attachment includes a detailed listing of each professional development opportunity and meeting in the district. Attached

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we included a sampling of sign-in sheets and training information from on-site training for Restorative Justice and PBIS.¹

Finding 2

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

Governing Board Response

The District's social media data shows numbers of followers receiving the numerous Facebook and Twitter posts over the last two years. We have been able to reach staff members and the larger community through social media outreach, and through Dr. Bishop's Positive Weekly Message. The Positive Weekly Messages and special press releases are sent directly to local media outlets.²

VCUSD has been in conversation with bay area news outlets to work toward ensuring that coverage of VCUSD becomes more balanced. VCUSD will also continue to communicate with the Vallejo Times-Herald, our local newspaper, in an effort to achieve a more balanced approach to coverage of district activities, particularly around highlighting quality programming as well as accomplishments of students and staff members.

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.

Governing Board Response

Although the CHKS is voluntary, the District has elected to utilize this instrument as a proactive means of continuing review of school safety and climate. The District will continue to administer the student, teacher/staff, and parent survey. The District has administered and intends to continue to distribute the California Schools Parent Survey to parents ("CSPS"). The District administered the CHKS, CSCS, and CSPS in the fall 2016 and will be discussing results with the various school and parent advisory groups.

¹ Samplings of Jesse Bethel High, Loma Vista Environmental Science Academy and Franklin Middle School's RJ sign in sheets; a listing of all professional development and RJ professional development for 2015-2016

² Facebook/Twitter postings and Constant Contact data

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).³

Governing Board Response

The broken links on the website were repaired as of July 15, 2016.

Finding 5

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

Governing Board Response

Anti-bullying is not taught in isolation, it is part of the District's overall PBIS and RJ training strategy. The PBIS and RJ training includes a comprehensive discussion of aggression, violence, threats, intimidation, and isolated aggression, each of which compromises the ability of students to learn and perform in school.⁴

Finding 6

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

Governing Board Response

CA Department of Education (CDE) uploads from our database. There was a glitch between our student information system, AERIES and CDE, which has now been repaired.

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

³ Jesse Bethel and Vallejo High School Student Handbooks

⁴ Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Restorative Practices Summary

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.)

Governing Board Response

Each school has several teams that advise the principal related to issues of academic achievement, as well as, school climate and culture. The School Design Team, consisting of staff members and parents, works to ensure that the overall school program is functioning according to the Single Plan for Student Achievement. This is the team that participates in the VCUSD Leadership Training at the end of each school year. At this time, they are trained by expert consultants the district has hired to assist with the implementation of research-based programs as well as district staff. The team then works with the principal to begin making modifications in the Single Plan for Student Achievement based on information received during the presentations, a review of the data, and the goals set forth in the previous plan. Among other things, this team is responsible for working with the principal to ensure that PBIS and RJ are implemented well, which includes an emphasis on Tier 2 and 3 interventions, otherwise known as alternative means of correction.

In addition to the School Design Team, each school has a School Site Council, which also consists of staff members and parents. Leaders from the School Site Council sit on the School Design Team. The School Site Council ensures that extra funding received by the school is allocated in areas where extra programming or staffing is needed to meet the needs of students in the school who are having difficulty meeting the standards. This is the body that assists the principal in finalizing and approving the Single Plan for Student Achievement. This body can also make changes in the Single Plan for Student Achievement if they determine that they are not seeing desired results.

The District has used staff, parent, and community input received during the School Design Team and School Site Council meetings, as well as feedback received from Student Leadership Teams to create alternative methods for out-of-school suspensions, such as conflict mediation, exclusion from school activities, peer mentoring and will continue monitoring the implementation of these and other District methods.⁵

Finding 8

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

⁵ Alternative Means of Correction

Governing Board Response

In order to communicate discipline information about students, the district utilizes the Principal Notification Form and the school utilizes the Teacher Notification Form. The district will work with Vallejo Education Association (VEA) to create an accountability system to ensure teachers receive the information.⁶

Finding 9

There are indications expulsion data for "Battery on Employees" may have been underreported for both high schools.

Governing Board Response

In reviewing the data from 2009 to 2015, school sites have been able to reduce by half the number of "Battery on Employee" incidents at the secondary level.⁷

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.

Governing Board Response

Last year was the first year the district had two School Resource Officers, and the district is in agreement that they are a valuable asset to the school community. The board was sent an article called "Why are police inside public schools?"⁸ in which the author described how police forces are moving into more restorative ways of policing, particularly in schools. The VCUSD School Resource Officers and other Vallejo Police Officers attend events such as the Back-to-School and Family Nights so that parents and community members can get to know them and find out about programs and services the Vallejo Police Department (VPD) has to offer.

Over the last two summers, Vallejo City Unified School District has worked in partnership with Vallejo Police Department, the District Attorney's Office and other agencies, in a collaborative effort led by the New Dawn Vallejo Corporation known as Late Night Basketball. The group was formed to ensure that Vallejo is proactive in addressing the deep divide in the country between police officers and communities they serve. The program allows for young people ages 12 to 24 to come together each Friday and Saturday night during the summer to play basketball

⁶ Principal and Teacher Notification Forms and Student Discipline Workshop Presentation

⁷ Assault or Battery Longitudinal Data

⁸ Article "Why are police inside public schools"

in a safe and affirming environment from 10PM to 3 AM. The unique thing about the program is that each agency sends adult staff members there to supervise, coach and support the young people, including VPD. A result of the program, among other things, is that young people have an opportunity to build relationships with the police that allow for them to know them and feel more comfortable with them when they see them in the community.

Our Vallejo Police Department School Resource Officers are involved, not only in this program but have become an integral part of our VCUSD activities, and are becoming more and more familiar to our students and our school community. There is a forum scheduled at Vallejo High School on September 21 at 2 PM where one of the SROs will be speaking to a large group of Vallejo High School students. The District will continue to explore other ways to enhance our current practices, through the newly formed City/Schools Task Force.

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.

Grand Jury 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.

Governing Board Response

There is not a desire from the Vallejo Police Department to have the pictures of the SROs posted on the website. The SRO's are working with staff to make everything better, with a possibility of future training for Site Safety Supervisors on how to best handle situations. There are weekly meetings held with the SROs both at the school site and with district officials.

The recommendation of having a third SRO will be discussed at the City Schools Task Force Meeting in October 2016. The VPD hiring process includes a search for the right School Resource Officer, not just "filling a vacancy."

Finding 12

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

Governing Board Response

The board reviewed the Employee Use of Technology Policy as well as the Site Safety Standard Operating Procedures guide, and will continue to monitor the implementation of these policies

and procedures. Site Safety Supervisors use their cell phones in addition to their radios for official business.⁹

Finding 13

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

Governing Board Response

The restrooms are monitored and cleaned daily to district standards. Age, heavy use, and vandalism constantly works against us. The district has purchased new expensive restroom cleaning machinery (scrubbers) and is using new cleaning agents, solvents, deodorizers in our continuous efforts to counter the above.¹⁰

As a part of our continuous improvement efforts, the District will look at best practices in other districts, and review staffing ratios to ensure that our ratios are in alignment with best practice, and bring them back to the board for a presentation.

The board will continue to consider bond measures in the future, which will help address this issue. At the September 7, 2016 board meeting, the board heard testimony from the President of the Vallejo High School Student Body who indicated that school pride is increasing. The Board will ask staff to tap into this school pride, encouraging student leaders to assist in planning and developing strategies, as a part of on-going PBIS efforts to ensure that students take pride in keeping bathrooms clean and receive some incentive for doing so.

Finding 14

The camera surveillance systems at both campuses require improvements.

Governing Board Response

VHS has an existing comprehensive surveillance system. The District expended approximately \$12,430¹¹ for the repair/replacement of cameras at VHS in the fall of 2015. Additionally, the Board approved a purchase order in the amount of \$15,000 for additional repairs districtwide.

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.

Governing Board Response

⁹ Board Policy and Exhibit 4040 – Employee Use of Technology and Site Safety Standard Operating Procedures

¹⁰ Williams 5 Day Letter and Facility Inspection Tool

¹¹ Vallejo High School Surveillance Camera Contract, Purchase Order for Repair and Authorization to advertise a Request for Qualifications to complete the District wide surveillance system project

Where possible, inoperative window shades are repaired/replaced, but with limited funds in a high needs district, the ability to repair/replace as needed, is compromised, if not impossible. Also, the Board did not vote to place the bond measure on the ballot which would have assisted in this regard.

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. Response to Solano County Grand Jury September 9, 2016

Grand Jury Recommendation 16

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.)

Governing Board Response

The topic of Nebraska Street will be discussed at the joint Vallejo City Unified School District and Vallejo City Council meeting in October 2016. The topic will also be discussed at the City/Schools Task Force Meeting in October 2016.

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.

Governing Board Response

The 2015-16 Comprehensive School Safety Plans has been completed. The plan for Jesse Bethel was completed October 2015 and the plan for Vallejo High was completed September 2015.

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.

Governing Board Response

The Board President meets with the Superintendent to determine the agenda for the upcoming meeting. During this meeting, board member agenda requests are discussed and a determination is made as to when items will be placed on the agenda.¹² As a duly elected Governing Board each individual member has a right to express his or her own opinion on specific Board agenda items.

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. Response to Solano County Grand Jury September 9, 2016

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.

Governing Board Response

The Public Records Act Request data shows evidence of the date, person making the request, and the information being requested.¹³ Public Record Act Requests are processed according to the requirements of the law. Minutes are published in a timely manner, unless there are delays based on other staff priorities. Other items have been discussed by the Board and decisions were made, but may come up as a part of future agendas.

¹² VCUSD Board Bylaw 9322 and Education Code 35145.5

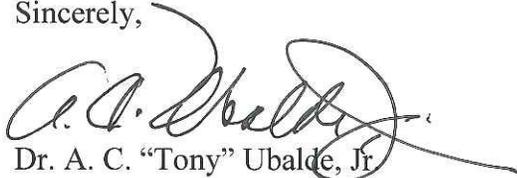
¹³ Public Records Act Request Data

The Honorable Robert C. Fracchia

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. C. Ubalde, Jr.", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Dr. A. C. "Tony" Ubalde, Jr
Governing Board President
Vallejo City Unified School District