



# Contra Costa County Office of Education

77 Santa Barbara Road, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523 • (925) 942-3388  
Karen Sakata, Superintendent of Schools

September 22, 2016

Civil Grand Jury - Foreperson  
725 Court Street  
Martinez, CA 94553

Re: Response to 2015-2016 Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report No. 1615, "Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools"

Dear Foreperson:

Pursuant to California Penal Code 933.05(a), the Contra Costa County Superintendent of Schools and the Contra Costa County Board of Education files this response with regard to the 2015-2016 Grand Jury Report No. 1615, "Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools" findings and recommendations.

## FINDINGS

F1. Based on truancy rates, during the 2014 – 2015 school year the County ranked among the worst in the State, 46th out of 58 counties.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F2. Based on chronic absences during elementary school, during the 2014 – 2015 school year the County ranked last out of the nine Bay Area counties.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F3. The SART and SARB programs help maintain and improve attendance rates, thereby increasing ADA funding for each school in the district and in the COE.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F4. Not all County school districts comply with the requirement found in California Education Code section 15497 that each district collect, track and report its chronically absent rates in an annual LCAP.

Response: The respondent disagrees with the finding. Districts have reported their goals for reducing their chronically absent rates as described in the LCAP template and directions.

F5. The COE does not currently know the chronically absent rates for all of the County's school districts because the COE lacks relevant data needed to perform the analysis.

**Response:** The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. The COE is not responsible for performing an analysis of the data for each district. This is a district role.

**F6.** To identify students with attendance issues and quickly address these issues, the school district needs complete and accurate data about attendance and a well-developed support infrastructure.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding.

**F7.** The school district has its own software system for collecting attendance information and its own process and standards for collecting, storing and utilizing the truancy attendance information gathered, which are not necessarily the same as other districts in the County.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding.

**F8.** Without a centralized attendance system or compatible software among school districts, it is challenging to get a complete picture of a student's attendance profile and patterns over multiple years or across districts.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding.

**F9.** Some school districts have little communication with other school districts and the COE about best practices, common achievement goals, and best data systems regarding attendance.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding. *Some* districts have little communication with other districts and the COE on these matters, some engage in much communication.

**F10.** The California Attorney General, Kamala Harris 2015 report, "*In-School and on Track*", indicates that over 80 percent of chronically absent students in kindergarten and 1st grade are unable to read at grade level by 3rd grade. These students are four times more likely to drop out than children who can read at grade level.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding.

**F12.** The city that has and enforces a daytime curfew sees less daytime and juvenile crime.

**Response:** The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. The County Office of Education has not reviewed this data, and is not familiar with the research in this area.

**F13.** Chronically absent or truant students, who do not get back on track before age 18, are more likely to drop out of high school before graduation.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding.

**F14.** Parent and Truancy Courts offer attendance support and are one of the last opportunities to alter a student's attendance behavior.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with the finding.

**F15.** Attendance improvement programs used by the County's Juvenile Courts, such as the Lincoln

Child Center, ankle monitors, drug and mental health counselors and tutoring classes lack long-term funding.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F16. The school districts that have Truancy or Resource Officers who connect directly with students, help get chronically absent or truant students back on track.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F17. There is currently no teen truancy court in the WCCUSD area.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F18. The WCCUSD does not provide sufficient staff to process chronically absent students through the Parent or Truancy Court in Martinez.

Response: The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. The County Office does not have knowledge of this.

F19. The amount and allocation of funds provided by the State and spent by the COE for LCFF oversight activities and instructional programs is not reported in detail by the COE, making it difficult for the public to discern the size of the programs targeting attendance improvement and their impact on attendance rates.

Response: The respondent disagrees with the finding. The COE does not receive funds that are specifically earmarked for targeting attendance improvement. The COE does not receive funds for "LCFF oversight activities" beyond one-time monies for mandated LCAP review and approval. The COE publicly discloses its detailed budget at regular intervals as required by law. The COE maintains information about its involvement in attendance improvement programs on its website.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

R1. The COE should consider developing a comprehensive multi-year plan for improving attendance rates that has annual goals.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The COE's plans for improving attendance rates are included in its LCAP.

R2. The COE should consider assessing each school district's capacity to collect, track and improve attendance, and identifying funds to do so. As part of this assessment, the COE should:

- a. Define the unique make up of each school district's student population.
- b. Analyze which attendance systems are used in the County.
  - i. How many different ones are there?
  - ii. Are they compatible and able to share data?
  - iii. Do they all provide the critical information needed to track chronically absent rates and attendance patterns in their schools?
- c. Determine what additional training and support school districts need to meet their goals and improve their attendance.

- d. Determine which school districts lack effective programs to ensure improvement in attendance.
- e. Provide an overview of the SART and SARB programs, and delineate the partners with whom they work in the County, and the services provided to the students in need.

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, goes beyond the limited authority of the COE, and would require resources beyond what the COE has available.

**R3.** The COE and the BOS should consider providing financial support to the Parent and Truancy Courts in Martinez by providing a multi-year funding plan for critical tools and programs to help struggling families most in need: e.g., funding of Lincoln Child Center, counseling programs, ankle monitors, drug use prevention and treatment, and identifying funds to do so.

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, goes beyond the limited authority of the COE, and would require resources beyond what the COE has available.

**R4.** The COE should consider helping WCCUSD reinstate a local parent and truancy court by providing the juvenile courts in Richmond information on the need for these programs and support for best practices and programs.

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, goes beyond the limited authority of the COE, and would require resources beyond what the COE has available.

**R5.** The COE should encourage all school districts to participate in the Attendance Works program and to use the free tools provided.

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. The COE regularly encourages district participation during Coordinating Council meetings, the Attendance Awareness Campaign, monthly eBlasts to district and school site administrators, and through other channels.

**R6.** All school districts should consider participating in the Attendance Works program.

**Response:** The respondent agrees with this finding. If the recommendation is to mandate participation – the COE does not have that authority. Therefore, the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

**R7.** If a school district declines to participate in Attendance Works, the COE should consider asking for a written explanation as to why the district declined to participate and what programs the district is currently using that would be comparable.

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, and goes beyond the limited authority of the COE.

**R8.** The COE's office should consider placing attendance as a standing agenda item at its monthly meeting with school district superintendents.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The agenda for these meetings is collaboratively determined by the group.

R9. School districts should raise parent awareness concerning how to prevent a student's school absence from affecting ADA funding or the student's truancy rate.

Response: The respondent agrees with this finding. If the recommendation is to mandate participation – the COE does not have that authority. Therefore, the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

R10. COE should consider creating a centralized attendance data system for the County that would include regularly uploaded information from school districts about school absences and ADA data, and identifying funds to do so.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, goes beyond the limited authority of the COE, and would require resources beyond what the COE has available. However, this is something that is included in the state's plans for CALPADS.

R11. COE should provide training in advanced tracking techniques with free tracking tools that would be compatible across schools and districts in the County, such as Attendance Works and Aries attendance tracking software, and identifying funds to do so.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, and would require resources beyond what the COE has available. However, the COE does share information about the tools that are available.

R13. The COE should help to close the communication gaps among the districts by creating an atmosphere of dedication and communication that encourages districts to freely share highlights and best practices at monthly meetings.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. Districts freely share at Coordinating Council, in the Attendance Learning Network, at Superintendents Council, at Curriculum Council, and in the CBO meetings.

R15. The COE should consider identifying funds to produce an annual County attendance report that would be publically available countywide, both online and in hardcopy, which includes:

- a. Data on measurable goals. (who achieved, who fell short)
- b. Highlighted area for both teachers and students, telling their success stories.
- c. Description of the increased funding from improved ADA countywide and what new programs help to contribute to the result.
- d. Information about district graduation rates, college enrollment, English learners and economically disadvantaged students.
- e. Information about programs available and encourage families to seek help before their child falls behind.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE, goes beyond the

limited authority of the COE, and would require resources beyond what the COE has available. Much of this information is available in CALPADS and in other locations.

R16. The COE should consider encouraging city councils that do not have a daytime curfew to pass and enforce one.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This recommendation goes beyond the scope of the role of the COE. This is a community decision.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Sakata".

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Karen Sakata, County Superintendent of Schools