



August 23, 2016

Via Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested

Michael Simmons, Foreperson
Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury
725 Court Street
P.O. Box 911
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

**Re: Response to 2015-2016 Contra Costa Grand Jury Report 1615,
"Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools"**

Dear Foreperson Simmons:

The following is the Oakley Union Elementary School District's (the "District") response to Grand Jury Report No. 1615, "Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools"

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS

Finding No. 3:

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 to Finding No. 3

Agreed.

Finding No. 4:

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 the annual LCAP.

Response to Finding No.4

I have no knowledge of reporting in other school districts. However, the Oakley Union Elementary School District complies with the requirements found in Education Code section 15497 and reports this data in our LCAP.

Finding No. 6:

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 to Finding No.6

Agreed.

Finding No. 7:

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 to Finding No. 7

Agreed. The Oakley Union Elementary School District uses Illuminate as our student information system software. It is also my understanding that school districts within Contra Costa County use different software for tracking student information such as attendance.

Finding No. 8:

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

Response to Finding No. 8

I agree that it can be more difficult to track students who move frequently between districts or counties.

Finding No. 9:

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 to Finding No. 9

While it may be true that some school districts have little or no communication with other districts and the COE regarding attendance, the Oakley Union Elementary School District works closely with our neighboring districts through the Far East County School Attendance Review Board. Oakley also participates in the County Coordinating Council meetings held at the COE which brings districts together to address issues such and chronic truancy and create best practices for corrective action.

Finding No. 10

The California Attorney General, Kamala Harris 2015 Report, *"In-School and on Track"* indicates that over 80% 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 to Finding No. 10

Agreed. Although I am not familiar with that specific report from 2015, the link between chronic absenteeism and poor performance in school has long been proven.

Finding No. 13:

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 to Finding No. 13:

Agreed.

Finding No. 14:

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

Response to Finding No. 14:

Agreed. The Oakley Union Elementary School District currently engages parents in these programs after other efforts to alter poor attendance behavior have failed.

Finding No. 15:

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 to Finding No. 15:

I have no knowledge about the availability of funding for programs used by the County's Juvenile Court programs.

Finding No. 16:

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 to Finding No. 16:

The Oakley Union Elementary School District does not have a specific truancy officer so I cannot comment on the efficacy of such programs. However, the principals, teachers and other staff members at each of the schools sites within the District work diligently with families facing issues such as chronic truancy to offer resources and support in order to help improve student attendance and achievement.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 6:

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

Response to Recommendation No. 6

The Oakley Union Elementary School District has been exploring various attendance monitoring programs including Attendance Works. The District has already made the decision to participate in the Attendance Works program for the 2016-17 school year.

Recommendation No. 9:

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 to Recommendation No. 9

Implemented. The Oakley Union Elementary School District employs various lines of communication with families to stress the importance of student attendance. Additionally, the District works closely to offer resources and support to families of students with chronic absenteeism.

Recommendation No. 12:

Each school district should consider designating staff to collect, track and analyze attendance data in order to follow up on students that appear to be at risk and identifying funds to do so.

Response to Recommendation No. 3 ^{12?}

Implemented. The Oakley Union Elementary School District has processes and staff in place to monitor student attendance.

Recommendation No. 14:

The school district should consider incentivizing schools to seek increased ADA funding by means such as splitting the additional ADA money between the district and the school for achieving increased ADA funding.

Recommendation No. 15: ^{-14?}

I will consider this recommendation.

Sincerely,



Greg Hetrick
Superintendent
Secretary to the Board