



September 12, 2016

Walnut Creek School District
960 Ygnacio Valley Road
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Grand Jury Report No. 1615 Response
"Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools"

The Walnut Creek School District agrees with 8 of the findings.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

The WCSD partially disagrees with the findings.

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.

The WCSD does not have information about all school district in the county. The CCCOE has directed the WCSD to include chronic absentee data in our LCAP. We have reported our data beginning 2014.

Recommendations

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

Walnut Creek School District has taken positive steps to increase school attendance. In the Superintendent's September Newsletter, the Attendance Works information was highlighted as a major area of importance inviting parents to visit the website and learn in greater detail information about school attendance.

Walnut Creek School District will investigate the Attendance Works program by contacting Rob Stockberger, Superintendent for John Swett School District to seek specific information about the supports and benefits of use. Once more detail has been obtained, the board can consider new practices.

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.

The recommendation is currently being implemented. Walnut Creek School District currently educates and informs parents of the importance of school attendance. AS referenced in our LCAP "All schools provided consistent communication to parents on absences and tardies. This communication consisted of letters, phone calls, face to face meetings, and/or reporting of attendance statistics in school newsletters. At WCI students with attendance concerns are met with individually. The following outlines a three year involvement with CCCOE Attendance Awareness Campaign including specific practices across the district.

- **We have participated in the CCCOE "Attendance Awareness" campaign for three years. It contains helpful monthly themed communications and statistics to encourage parents to keep their children in school. The September 2016 issue of the Superintendent's Parent Newsletter focused on the Attendance Awareness website and the importance school attendance.**
- **Attendance banners and posters are posted on campus.**
- **Attendance is an area of focus at principal coffees, Back to School Night, and PTA meetings.**
- **Attendance statistics are posted in enews.**
- **Parents whose students reach a small number of tardies in the first month are called by the site administration.**
- **If attendance does not improve after that call, a meeting is requested between parents and principal to attempt to solve the attendance issue.**
- **Letters are hand delivered at Parent teacher conferences for students who have multiple tardies or absences.**
- **Letters of congratulation are written to families whose attendance improves.**
- **For families whose attendance does not improve, a SARB meeting is requested.**

R12 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.

The recommendation is being implemented using the Aries attendance system In WCSD, site administrators work with families to identify specific supports that result in an increase in school attendance.

WCSD has a designated individual that supports our homeless and foster youth to insure positive communications and supports are in place. Because there are a small numbers of homeless and foster youth, our liaison works with site administrators on specific measures needed for each individual family.

R14 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.

The recommendation is not currently implemented in WCSD. It is our position that all schools focus on the importance of school attendance. WCSD currently encourages a collaborative culture of supporting school attendance.