

JOHN SWETT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



Office of the Superintendent
Rob Stockberger
400 Parker Avenue, Rodeo, CA 94572
(510) 245-4300 • FAX (510) 245-4312

September 2, 2016

Civil Grand Jury - Foreperson
725 Court Street
P. O. Box 431
Martinez; CA 94553-0091

To Whom It May Concern:

The John Swett Unified School District is in receipt of your letter dated June 27, 2016 and a copy of **Grand Jury Report No. 1615, "Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools?"** by the 2015-2016 Contra Costa Grand Jury.

Listed below are the responses to your findings and recommendations:

FINDINGS

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding #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 an annual LCAP.

JSUSD Response: The respondent disagrees with the finding. John Swett Unified School District does collect, track and report its chronically absent rates in its annual LCAP.

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding. The District is a member of the Attendance Works consortium, hosted by the Contra Costa County Office of Education, which currently includes six districts in Contra Costa County.

GOVERNING BOARD

Norma Clerici

Brian Colombo

Deborah Brandon

James Delgadillo

Jerrold Parsons

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding. The District uses Aeries Student Information System.

Finding #8: 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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding. As noted in the response to Finding #6, the District is a member of Attendance Works.

Finding #10: 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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding #14: Parent and Truancy Courts offer attendance support and are one of the last opportunities to alter a student's attendance behavior.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding #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.

JSUSD Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #6: All school districts should consider participating in the Attendance Works program.

JSUSD Response: The recommendation has been implemented. John Swett Unified School District is currently participating in Attendance Works and Coordinating Council through the Contra Costa County Office of Education.

Recommendation #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.

JSUSD Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The District currently raises parent awareness through the District website and a letter that is included in the parent packet of information that is mailed to all parents in early August each year.

Recommendation #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.

JSUSD Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The Attendance Works team and SART teams at school sites collect, track and analyze attendance data.

Recommendation #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.

JSUSD Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted as we currently have procedures in place that support us as a very small district with limited general funds.

Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



Rob Stockberger
Superintendent