



# Knightsen Elementary School District

1923 Delta Rd./P.O. Box 265  
Knightsen, CA. 94548  
Phone: 925-625-0073  
Fax: 925-625-8766

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*"A community cultivating the success of children"*

**Superintendent**  
Theresa Estrada

October 31, 2016

Michael Simmons  
Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury  
725 Court Street  
PO Box 911  
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

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

Dear Foreperson Simmons:

Pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Governing Board of the Knightsen Elementary School District files this comment with regard to the 2015-2016 Contra Costa Grand Jury Report #1615 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

The Knightsen School District agrees with this finding and participates in a regional SARB Board that consists of representatives from the 4 far east Contra Cost County elementary school districts. Knightsen Elementary School District holds regular SART meetings.

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.

The Knightsen School District neither agrees or disagrees with this finding. The Knightsen School District has included Chronic absenteeism rates in our 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 LCAPs.



**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

The Knightsen School District agrees with this finding. Our Student Information System provides us with many types of attendance reports that can be disaggregated as needed.

**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.

The Knightsen School District agrees with this statement and notes that due to the District's small size, the cost of programs and staff limitations, a one-size fits all program will not work for us unless financially and technically supported by the County or State.

**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.

The Knightsen School District neither agrees or disagrees with this finding. In Elementary Districts, report cards usually contain the attendance information for each child and the cum files follow each student when they change schools. Our teachers look through these files when a student enrolls and administrators also look for previous attendance issues when a student is demonstrating attendance problems. Also the State CALPADS system is set to begin collecting attendance data in 16-17 in order to identify chronic absentee rates.

**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.

The Knightsen School District neither agrees or disagrees with this finding. We do not know what all Districts in the County do, but we do participate in our regional SARB Board and discuss these issues during SARB meetings. The CCCOE provides our district with meeting notes and updates regarding attendance issues as they are discussed through the coordinating council. Our regional SARB Board chair represents our SARB Board at these meetings.

**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.

The Knightsen School District agrees with this 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.

The Knightsen School District agrees with this finding.

**Finding #14**

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

The Knightsen School District agrees with this 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.

The Knightsen School District agrees with this 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.

The Knightsen School District agrees with this finding.

**Recommendation #6**

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

The Superintendent has utilized some of the resources on the Attendance Works website and will be experimenting with them to see if the spreadsheets for tracking absenteeism provide more information than what is already attainable in our Student Information System.

**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.

This recommendation has already been implemented. The District currently communicates with all district families regarding truancy and the importance of each child being in school each day in our back to school letters and periodically throughout the year in newsletters and on website. In addition, the district works specifically with those students/families that need extra support in order to get students to school each day.

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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.

This recommendation is already implemented. The Principals monitor attendance reports for their schools. SARB letters and SART team meetings are generated at each school site. The District also appoints an administrator to serve on the regional SARB Board.

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.

Knightsen School District is a small district of 580 students. Financial resources are limited in a small district, but we have supportive caring staff that understands the importance of student attendance and we work together as a team to collaborate together to support our students in need. We are able to maintain a personal connection with our students and families. Teachers note when a student is absent and bring it to the administrator's attention for action. School secretaries have the primary responsibility for tracking attendance. School administrators are responsible for analyzing data and following up on students that appear to be at risk.

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.

The District is currently in its first year of having more than one school. The District maintains an attendance incentive program for students. Students with perfect attendance are honored monthly at an assembly and receive a trophy at the end of the year.

Sincerely,



Theresa Estrada, M.A.  
Superintendent  
Secretary to the Governing Board