



MT. DIABLO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
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OFFICE OF
SUPERINTENDENT

September 15, 2016

Honorable Judge John T. Laettner
Judge of the Superior Court
725 Court Street
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

Civil Grand Jury Foreperson, 2016-17
Contra Costa County Superior Court
725 Court Street
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

RE: Response to Grand Jury Report No. 1615: "Truancy And Chronic Absence In Contra Costa County Schools"

Dear Judge Laettner and Foreperson:

The Mt. Diablo Unified School District ("District") Board and staff have reviewed the Facts, Findings and Recommendations in the Grand Jury Report No. 1615 "Truancy And Chronic Absence In Contra Costa County Schools" filed on June 24, 2016. The following constitutes the response of the District and its Governing Board ("Board") to the Findings and Recommendations applicable to the District as directed by the Grand Jury.

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS

F.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: The District agrees with this finding. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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.

Response: The District has no information in its possession on which it could base an agreement or disagreement with this Finding and, on that basis, agrees with this finding for the purposes of this Response to the extent the Grand Jury has this information. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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: The District agrees with this finding. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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: The District agrees with this finding. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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.

Response: The District has no information in its possession on which it could base an agreement or disagreement with this Finding and, on that basis, agrees with this finding for the purposes of this Response to the extent the Grand Jury has this information. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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: The District has no information in its possession on which it could base an agreement or disagreement with this Finding and, on that basis, agrees with this finding for the purposes of this Response to the extent the Grand Jury has this information. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).) The District is open to providing information about its best practices and programs as identified by the Grand Jury to any school district which asks.

F.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.

Response: The District agrees with this finding. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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: The District agrees with this finding. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

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

Response: The District agrees with this finding. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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: The District has no information in its possession on which it could base an agreement or disagreement with this Finding and, on that basis, agrees with this finding for the purposes of this Response to the extent the Grand Jury has this information. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

F.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: The District agrees with this finding as to the experience in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District. (Penal Code § 933.05(a)(1).)

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

R.6. All school districts should consider participating in the Attendance Works program.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. (Penal Code § 933.05(b)(1).)

Explanation: As noted in the Report, Mt. Diablo Unified School District is one of five school districts in Contra Costa County currently participating in Attendance Works.

R.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: The recommendation has been implemented. (Penal Code § 933.05(b)(1).)

Explanation: The District's program for parent awareness includes:

- MDUSD Local Control Accountability Plan, goal 3 has specific goals for reducing truancy rates and chronic absences. Our goals are on our website and discussed with our Parent Advisory Committee.
- Our Parent Information Packet (PIP) has information which provides parents/guardians with details on Reasons for Excused Absences, Strategies for Good Attendance, Truancy Intervention and Reducing Chronic Absences, and Education codes requiring regular attendances and procedures for truancy.
- School web pages, newsletters, and student handbooks provide parents/guardians with information regarding attendance expectations also.
- Administrators inform parents/guardians of the importance of school attendance at parent meetings
- Schools send parents/guardians letters informing them when students have reached significant numbers of absences.
- Schools develop Attendance Intervention Plans every year. Each year the new plan is based on attendance data from the previous school year along with reflection on interventions used the previous school year. The intervention plans include strategies that involve parent/guardian education and/or involvement.

R.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: The recommendation has been implemented. (Penal Code § 933.05(b)(1).)

Explanation: In addition to those techniques identified in R.9. above, the District's program for collecting, tracking, and analyzing data for student attendance improvement is as follows:

This month Contra Costa County Judge John T. Laettner met with principals and discussed the idea of creating Attendance Monitoring Teams. The model Judge Laettner discussed is based on the model implemented by Oakland Unified School District's Roosevelt Middle School. We are encouraging our schools to move toward this preventive model instead of waiting for the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) to respond to student attendance issues. We are encouraging sites to recruit highly skilled and highly motivated school staff that is committed to helping students succeed by getting these students to attend school daily. There should not be a need for a funding source because meetings can be held during the work day when all staff are already working. If funding is needed sites should design the

team to support goals of the MDUSD LCAP and/or their site level Single Plans for Student Achievement and access funds in those programs.

R.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.

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis.

Explanation: I, as Superintendent and through administrative staff, will engage the school principals on the topic of attendance improvement techniques and possible incentives to achieve higher attendance. A budget analysis will need to be done to determine possible pass through funding or other transfers. This work will probably occur over the next four months with a presentation to the Board after some time in the New Year 2017.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Governing Board and its staff of the Mt. Diablo Unified School District, we appreciate your concern for our District.

Sincerely,

MT. DIABLO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



Superintendent
Secretary to the Board

