

# PITTSBURG UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. Janet Schulze, Superintendent  
2000 Railroad Ave ▪ Pittsburg, CA 94565  
(925) 473-2347 ▪ Fax (925) 439-1650



October 31, 2016

Michael Simmons, Foreperson  
Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury  
725 Court St  
P.O. Box 431  
Martinez, CA 94553

Sent 11/01/16 via email: to Elsa Pantaleon  
- epant@contracosta.courts.ca.gov  
Sent 11/03/16 via U.S. mail: CCC Superior Court  
P.O. Box 431; Martinez CA 94553

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 Pittsburg Unified School District's Response to Grand Jury Report No. 1615, "Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools."

## 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 Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with this 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 reports its chronically absent rates in an annual LCAP.

The Pittsburg Unified School District has no knowledge of other districts reporting. PUSD reports chronically absent rates within our 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.

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with the finding. PUSD currently contracts with School Innovations and Achievement (SIA), which takes the district's attendance data and creates accurate and timely reports for the administration of the district. SIA also supports the district through an infrastructure to notify parents by sending letters in a timely manner.

Finding #7

The school district has its own software system for collection 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 Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with the finding. PUSD currently utilizes Aeries data system to collect and store truancy attendance data and School Innovations and Achievement (SIA) to create reports for the data.

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 Pittsburg Unified School District partially agrees with the finding. Districts should share attendance history for transferring students. This may be done through another process other than a centralized attendance system.

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 Pittsburg Unified School District does not agree with the finding. PUSD participates regularly in County meetings regarding truancy such as the Coordinating Council and the Contra Costa Learning Network. Pittsburg USD is also part 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 1<sup>st</sup> grade are unable to read at grade level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. These students are four times more likely to drop out than children who can read at grade level.

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with the finding. PUSD is aware of the correlation between attendance and student achievement at school. PUSD holds group Pre-SARB meetings to discuss the importance of attendance and correlation between attendance and achievement. PUSD has also been working with families and conducting early literacy classes with parents and students. In addition, PUSD does home visits to discuss the importance of on time daily attendance.

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 Pittsburg Unified School District 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.

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with this finding. PUSD participates in these options when all other resources in the district have been exhausted.

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 Pittsburg Unified School District cannot comment on this finding. We are not familiar with the particular funding model that the county uses for these programs. We do agree that the Juvenile Courts will require long-term funding to help with truancy issues.

Finding #16

The school districts that have Truancy or Resource Officers who connect directly with students, help get chronically absent or truancy students back on track.

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with this finding. PUSD has Child Welfare and Attendance workers, Parent and Family Liaisons, as well as School Resource Officers who continually make contact with students and parents regarding improving attendance.

**Recommendations**

Recommendation #6

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

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with the recommendation. PUSD does participate in Attendance Works and finds it has a lot of useful resources.

Recommendation #9

School districts should raise awareness concerning how to prevent a student's school absence from affecting ADA funding or the student's truancy rate.

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with the recommendation. PUSD already conducts Pre-SARB group parent meetings that discuss the impact of chronic truancy and has a Response to Intervention (RTI) that includes an array of interventions that are utilized. PUSD is also creating an informational video to highlight the importance of attendance; we have used "wraps" on our District vans with positive attendance messages; we hold an annual district recognition ceremony for students who have 100% attendance.

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.

The Pittsburg Unified School District agrees with the recommendation. PUSD school site staff, as well as the Child Welfare and Attendance workers at the District continuously gather attendance data information and follow up with students and parents. LCAP funds have been utilized for such purposes.

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 Pittsburg Unified School District would need to consider the details regarding this recommendation. LCAP goals, that are implemented, and funds are already in place that specifically address improved attendance. Also, our school site funding allocation beyond staffing is already aligned to our unduplicated count numbers for each school.

Sincerely,



Dr. Janet Schulze  
Superintendent  
Pittsburg Unified School District