

Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1012

TRUANCY

“The Kindergarten of Crime”

**TO: Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
Contra Costa County Office of Education
Contra Costa County Board of Education
School District Governing Boards:**

**Acalanes Union
Antioch Unified
Brentwood Union
Byron Union
Canyon Elementary
John Swett Unified
Knightsen
Lafayette
Liberty Union High School
Martinez Unified
Moraga
Mt. Diablo Unified
Oakley Union Elementary
Orinda Union
Pittsburg Unified
San Ramon Valley Unified
Walnut Creek Unified
West Contra Costa Unified**

SUMMARY

Even though there are laws governing truancy, most school districts in Contra Costa County are complacent in handling this serious problem. Haphazard methods used by some school districts in tracking and reporting truancy negatively impact attendance. Truant children are in jeopardy of receiving failing grades, dropping out, joining gangs, using drugs and alcohol, and engaging in violent behavior. The majority of students who are serious juvenile offenders began their criminal careers as truants.

Education Code Section (EC) 48260(a) states: “Any pupil subject to compulsory full-time education or compulsory continuation education who is absent from school without a valid excuse three full days in one school year, or tardy or absent for more than any 30 minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof, is a truant and shall be reported to the attendance supervisor or the superintendent of the school district.”

Upon a pupil’s initial classification as a truant, the school shall notify the pupil’s parent or guardian by first-class mail or other reasonable means. (EC 48260.5)

In 1984 the California State Department of Education (CDE) established the State School Attendance Review Board (SARB). Additionally, in Contra Costa County, each school district established a SARB. EC 48263 states: “When a student is a habitual truant, or is irregular in attendance at school or is habitually insubordinate or disorderly during school, the student may be referred to a school attendance review board (SARB) or to the county probation department”. The student may also be referred to a probation officer or a district attorney mediation program pursuant to EC 48263.5.

Education Code Sections 48240 and 48241 state that the Board of Education of any school district and of any county shall appoint a supervisor of attendance. No supervisor of attendance shall be appointed unless lawfully certified.

BACKGROUND

In October 2009 the Grand Jury evaluated various educational programs and processes and decided to address the subject of school attendance and truancy.

A survey requesting the following information was sent to all 18 Contra Costa County School Districts:

- SARB Report
- Suspension, Expulsion and Attendance Report
- Annual P-3 Attendance Report
- List of absence codes for Average Daily Attendance (ADA)
- Amount of ADA funds received

This report is based upon data from the school years 2007 - 2008 and 2008 - 2009.

METHODOLOGY

To comprehend and appreciate the scope and importance of truancy, the Grand Jury consulted with and interviewed school and public officials:

- Superior Court
- Contra Costa County Probation Department
- Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE)
- Contra Costa County Board Of Education (CCCBOE)
- School District Governing Boards

The Grand Jury also reviewed relevant documents, statutes, policies and procedures:

- Specific statistical data requested from and provided by all school districts
- California Department of Education on-line reports
- Annual SARB data provided by each school district submitted to CCCOE (Exhibit 1)
- Multiple California Education Codes
- Welfare and Institutions Code: 601-601.4 and 11253.5
- The Journal of Urban Youth Culture (February 2003)

FINDINGS

1. There are 18 school districts in Contra Costa County, each with its own superintendent.
2. SARB is the body that refers students to the juvenile court system for truancy.
3. The school districts do not provide timely documentation of truancy to the courts resulting in the delay of court intervention.
4. The 2008-2009 Combined Districts-SARB Report identified 113 referrals to the court. The court indicated that only 10 cases were received.
5. Many schools do not have the required Certified Attendance Supervisor for reporting truancy.

6. The review of truancy cases in some districts is not completed in a timely manner due to the infrequency of SARB meetings.
7. CCCOE receives truancy statistics but does not address truancy issues.
8. There are no County Probation Officers assigned to schools to deal with truancy.
9. According to the California Department of Education SARB Handbook, students and parents must understand that school attendance is not a matter of choice but a mandate.
10. To deter truancy, some school districts have implemented curfews during school hours.
11. Not all school districts comply with EC Section 48260.5 for the reporting of truancy and subsequent parental notification.
12. Truancy is detrimental to student achievement, promotions, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential. Students lose the benefit of instruction, districts lose income and communities suffer.
13. Exhibit 1 to this report shows the number of students referred to SARB, the gender of the referred students, the reason for the referrals, the number of students referred to the court, and the total enrollment for each identified school district.

CONCLUSIONS

As early as 1915, sociologists were calling truancy the “**kindergarten of crime.**” Truancy is often the first indicator of future problems and early intervention is the key to prevention. Frequently, cases are not referred to court until very near the end of the school year when adequate time to impose corrective action has passed. Courts would like to have case referrals earlier in the school year.

SARB is not merely a punitive body but serves as a safety net to help students stay in school. SARB efforts are minimally effective if they do not link youths and their families to all appropriate school and community resources.

Certification of attendance supervisors provides the opportunity for the successful and accurate tracking of truancy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All school districts shall strictly and uniformly enforce the Education Code Section 48260.5 regarding truancy tracking and parental notification.
2. All school districts shall initiate a stronger link between SARB and the courts to provide an opportunity for timely intervention.
3. All school districts shall provide a Certified Attendance Supervisor in each school pursuant to EC Section 48241.
4. All school districts shall notify parents and students of school attendance policies and truancy consequences.
5. CCCOE shall conduct an annual or semi-annual county-wide SARB conference to evaluate, discuss and share program strengths and weaknesses.
6. All school districts in the County shall consider implementing curfews during school hours.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Findings

Contra Costa County Office of Education	7
School District Governing Boards of:	3-6 and 8-13
Acalanes Union	
Antioch Unified	
Brentwood Union	
Byron Union	
Canyon Elementary	
John Swett Unified	
Knightsen	
Lafayette	
Liberty Union High School	
Martinez Unified	
Moraga	
Mt. Diablo Unified	
Oakley Union Elementary	
Orinda Union	
Pittsburg Unified	
San Ramon Valley Unified	
Walnut Creek Unified	
West Contra Costa Unified	

Recommendations

Contra Costa County Office of Education	5
School District Governing Boards of:	1 - 6
Acalanes Union	
Antioch Unified	
Brentwood Union	
Byron Union	
Canyon Elementary	
John Swett Unified	
Knightsen	
Lafayette	
Liberty Union High School	
Martinez Unified	
Moraga	
Mt. Diablo Unified	
Oakley Union Elementary	
Orinda Union	
Pittsburg Unified	
San Ramon Valley Unified	
Walnut Creek Unified	
West Contra Costa Unified	

EXHIBIT 1

2008-2009 COMBINED DISTRICTS - SARB REPORT

Districts	Referred to SARB			Referrals for:			Refer to Court	*District Enrollment
	Total	Male	Female	Behavior	Irregular Attendance	Habitual Truancy		
Acalanes	38	22	16	2	32	4	0	5,683
Antioch	169	80	89	0	0	169	6	20,046
Brentwood	17	8	6	0	14	11	1	8,247
Byron	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1,665
Canyon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	69
John Swett	31	17	14	0	14	17	4	1,708
Knightsen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	500
Lafayette	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	3,176
Liberty	15	8	7	0	0	15	0	6,900
Martinez	42	26	16	1	0	41	8	3,987
Moraga	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	1,749
Mt. Diablo	677	414	263	128	38	565	57	34,953
Oakley	18	2	16	0	0	0	0	4,620
Orinda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,422
Pittsburg	272	163	109	22	156	96	0	9,581
San Ramon	38	19	19	0	15	38	21	26,940
Walnut Creek	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	3,236
West C.C.	61	35	26	0	0	61	16	30,348
Totals	1383	798	582	153	283	1018	113	164,122

*As indicated in the 2008-2009 CCCOE SARB Report