



Brentwood Union School District

255 Guthrie Lane, Brentwood, CA 94513 (925)513-6300 FAX (925)634-8583

Superintendent
Dana Eaton, Ed.D.

August 10, 2016

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

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

Dear Foreperson Simmons:

In accordance with Section 933.05(a) of the California Government Code, the Brentwood Union School District (BUSD) has prepared this written response to the findings of 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.

Response to Finding#3:

The respondent 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.

Response to Finding#4:

We have no first-hand knowledge of reporting in other districts. The Brentwood Union School District adheres to the requirement set forth in Ed. Code to collect, track and report its absent rates as a metric. We will begin to report this data in the LCAP in the current year.

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.

Response to Finding#6:

Agreed.

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.

Response to Finding#7:

Agreed. The Brentwood Union School District utilizes “Q” which is a student information system with an attendance tracking feature. We understand that all districts in our county do not use the same software.

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.

Response to Finding#8:

The district agrees that for our more transient students, it can be more difficult to track patterns related to past attendance in other districts.

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.

Response to Finding#9:

While some districts may have little communication with other school districts and the COE; Brentwood participates in the County Coordinating Council meetings held at the COE. This group was working collaboratively to address chronic absenteeism, including issues of mutual concern and best practices.

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.

Response to Finding#10:

Agreed. While we are not specifically familiar with the referenced report, there are many educational studies that show the correlation between improved attendance and student success at school.

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.

Response to Finding#13:

Agreed.

Finding#14:

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

Response to Finding#14:

Agreed. The Brentwood Union School District currently utilizes this option with some families when other attempts to change behavior 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.

Response to Finding#15:

We cannot respond to this statement as we are not familiar with the County's funding model for these programs.

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.

Response to Finding#16:

The Brentwood Union School District does not have a specific truancy officer. Given that fact, we cannot respond to this statement as we cannot speak to the effectiveness of such a program. Principals and teachers work directly with students and their families to support improved attendance at school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation#6:

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

Response to Recommendation #6:

The district spent time last year evaluating different attendance monitoring systems. Attendance Works was one of the systems being considered. To date, a final selection has not been made. However, the COE launched the Every School Day Counts program and the district did participate in that program.

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.

Response to Recommendation #9:

This recommendation has already been implemented. The district currently communicates with all district families related to truancy and the educational importance of having students in school each day. In addition, the district works specifically with those students/families that need extra support in order to get students to school each day.

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.

Response to Recommendation #12:

The recommendation has already been implemented. The district has staff and processes in place to report and track 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.

Response to Recommendation #14:

The district will consider this recommendation.

If you need additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Carlos Sanabria
Board President