



Santa Barbara County Education Office

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June 17, 2005

The Honorable Judge Anderson
Superior Court
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Foreperson
Santa Barbara Grand Jury
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Subject: Response to the 2004-05 Grand Jury Report: The Child Not Yet Left Behind Santa Barbara County Community Schools

Thank you for the extensive time spent visiting and examining the Santa Barbara County Community School programs. Thank you, too, for the Grand Jury commendation at the very outset:

“The Grand Jury commends the teachers and administrators of the Santa Barbara County Community Schools for their dedication to the betterment of at-risk minors.”

We are pleased to see that your summary captures the spirit of the program:

“The Grand Jury looked at the Community Schools and concluded that they are doing a commendable job. The Jury is impressed by their efforts in:

- creating a supportive environment for students and staff,
- raising students’ grade levels in a short time,
- preparing students for re-entry into public school or for graduation,
- increasing test scores,
- providing a safe learning environment,
- training teachers and staff in new approaches, and
- continually seeking programs that provide greater coordination, tracking and academic achievement of the students.”

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Thank you for this acknowledgement and support.

The Grand Jury also expressed a concern:

“While dedicating funds for some program enhancements, the Santa Barbara County Education Office is contemplating cuts in staff. Everyone working with these at-risk students is dedicated to their betterment. The Jury hopes that the County Education Office continues to support the teachers, aides and all other adults at the schools, for they are critical to student success.”

We agree completely with your conclusion and I assure you that my office is dedicated to continuing to support the teachers and all involved with the program. Should future budget proposals from the state or the county threaten the services of the program, we will use your report, citing the importance of these programs, in our advocacy.

The Grand Jury also concludes:

“The Grand Jury would like to see the Community Schools enhance their good work by assuring that all three schools have access to the same services.”

We agree with this conclusion. We believe, as we will address in the specific findings, that while on one hand it is essential for each school to respond differently to regional needs and local resources, it is essential that the fundamentals of the program – i.e., staffing ratios, services, etc. are built around equitable distribution.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1

The Lompoc and Santa Maria Community Schools do not have the same ratio of permanent teachers' aides to students as does the Santa Barbara Community School.

Recommendation 1

The County Education Office should staff the Lompoc and Santa Maria Community Schools at the same level as the Santa Barbara Community School.

Response:

We believe this is a misunderstanding growing out of confusion in terms of who were the adults present in the classrooms at the time of observation.

All regular classroom teachers in all community schools each have an instructional assistant. Independent study teachers do not have instructional assistants because they see only five to six students at a time for a minimum of two hours per week (by law). At FitzGerald, the school has decided to send aides who are not busy helping students, to the independent study classroom by teacher request. None of the teachers in the community schools is assigned more than one instructional assistant. The Grand Jury may have seen the (five .5 FTE) special education aides working in the classrooms at El Puente Santa Barbara.

Finding 2

The Santa Maria and Lompoc Community Schools lack staff for special education students.

Recommendation 2

The County Education Office should provide special education teachers and aides for the North County schools.

Response:

We agree with this finding and do provide special education teachers and aides for the North County schools. Countywide, special education staff are allocated based on the number of special education students and state mandates. Special education has worked to ensure equitable distribution of services based on formula according to the number of identified special education students, no matter where they are located in the county.

Helen Rehm, Coordinator, was available to answer questions during one of the Grand Jury visits to FitzGerald. During that visit, the Grand Jury, which did not visit the special education classroom or ask questions of special education staff, may not have realized the classroom was there. This may have been where the misperception originated.

Lompoc has a Resource Specialist assigned there 30 percent of the time to serve its two special education students. The Specialist also spends time at the Boy's Camp. A half-time instructional assistant is assigned to the site everyday (three hours per day) to serve those two students. A school psychologist is assigned to the site three hours per week. Services grow or decrease based on current IEP levels/needs.

Peter FitzGerald school has a full-time Resource/Special Day Class Teacher (will be 1.5 FTE in '05-'06 to serve an increasing number of students). There are two full-time instructional assistants (will be three in '05-'06) currently assigned to the school. A psychologist is assigned to the school eight hours per week (will be 12 in '05-'06). This is also on a formula basis.

Finding 3

The Lompoc and Santa Maria Community Schools do not have volunteer counselors and psychologists from non-profit organizations as does the Santa Barbara Community School.

Recommendation 3

The County Education Office should ensure that the Lompoc and Santa Maria Community Schools work to find alliances with non-profit service groups in the community to provide comparable counseling services.

Response:

We have worked to provide support resources and services based on availability. El Puente Santa Barbara has MFCC licensed counselors (for drug, alcohol, anger management, crisis intervention, conflict mediation, etc.), but no psychologists provided through non-profits. Psychologists are assigned through Special Education. At El Puente Santa Barbara there is an agreement with community-based organizations (i.e., Fighting Back, CADA) to assign psychologist interns to the school. Unfortunately, there are more non-profit organizations upon which to draw in the South County.

At FitzGerald, Community Action Commission provides Los Compadres counseling program for young men. Also, the Santa Maria Police Department has an officer on site, which is not available in Santa Barbara.

In the spirit of this recommendation, local institutions of higher education, Family Service Agency, and other community-based organizations will be contacted by the Administrator of Juvenile Court and Community Schools to see if we can get counseling interns to work with our students.

Finding 4

Instructional space is inadequate at the Santa Maria campus. School population is likely to increase. The campus has a few vacant rooms that are occasionally used by the County Education Office.

Recommendation 4

The County Education Office and the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District should work together to find another more spacious site to lease for the school. In the meantime, the County Education Office should make their office rooms available for instructional needs.

Response:

The County Education Office and the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District are in regular communication and are working together on a variety of issues.

It is important to point out there was no waiting list this year in Santa Maria or Lompoc community schools. To our knowledge, according to the administrators overseeing both sites, all students who needed placement were accommodated. In fact, at times this year, neither school was at capacity.

Concerning office space, currently teachers at the Santa Maria campus have private offices in each room. This does not exist on other Juvenile Court and Community School sites. These offices take considerable space from the classroom. We will consider removal of the offices to maximize square footage in the classroom.

Moving the entire site would be prohibitively expensive. By law, community schools cannot be placed on comprehensive high school sites, even if there is room. Since the education budget is strained, this would have an adverse effect on human resources and the educational program.

School population may be likely to increase due to growth in the Santa Maria community. However, during the 2004-2005 school year, there was enough space to accommodate students who were in need of placement at the school. In fact, there were periods of time throughout the year when the school was not full. The only time there may be a "waiting list" is when the school district suddenly wants to send a large number of students (end-of-year, usually in June). These students may not be in school at all. The school works with the district to place the students as soon as possible, usually within one to two weeks.

While we disagree with the recommendation to move to a new site for the reasons stated above, we will explore additional space possibilities at the existing site as the need arises.

Finding 5

Absenteeism and truancy remain a problem in Community Schools. The problem is worse in the North County schools, where they have no truancy counselor.

Recommendation 5a

The County Education Office should work with community service organizations to ensure that all three schools have truancy counselors.

Recommendation 5b

The Probation Department, local Police Departments, and the County Education Office should work together to provide effective anti-truancy enforcement measures.

Response:

We agree that our office needs to work with community service organizations, the Probation Department, local police departments at all three sites; we are, and will continue to do that, based on regional resources. Partnerships are unique to resources available in each community. Santa Maria, for example, is the only site where a partnership with the Santa Maria Police Department allows for a police officer on site.

The District Attorney's office funds three Truancy Social Workers that serve all Santa Barbara, Lompoc, and Santa Maria communities (one assigned to each area) who work with minors and parents to identify barriers to school attendance and connect them to services that will assist with overcoming those barriers.

In addition, three District Attorney Liaisons also sit on the School Attendance Review Board and run the Truancy Mediation Teams after school truancy meeting. The Liaisons recommend when the minor should be sent on to the District Attorney or to the court for intervention. Two additional social workers serve all high schools in South County, including El Puente Santa Barbara, through a Fighting Back federal safe schools grant that runs out on Sept. 30, 2005.

Also, all schools in Santa Barbara County, including all community schools, have been part of the Truancy Mediation Program since 1996. This program involves the Probation Department, local police departments, the County Education Office, local school districts, the District Attorney's Office, and community-based organizations in the entire county. The program ensures that students comply with Education Code 48200 and stay in school until age 18 or graduation. Support services are provided to students and family to keep the students in school. Communication between partners increases the effectiveness of the program and improves enforcement.

We will continue to work to enhance partnerships and explore new partnerships at all sites. Both community agency and law enforcement support and participation is central to the success of each program.

We are strong believers in the power of the Santa Barbara County Community School programs to provide the academic and human support services necessary to make a real difference in the lives of young people who have faced challenges and need support as they work to redirect their lives in a positive manner. We appreciate the recognition the Grand Jury Report has provided, especially in its acknowledgement of the dedication of

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the staff and the successes of the programs. We particularly appreciate the Grand Jury's interest in making the programs even stronger and more effective, and we assure you that we share the goal of continuing our efforts in that direction.

Thank you again for the time, support, and recommendations.

Sincerely,

William J. Cirone
County Superintendent of Schools

WJC:ph