



COLLEGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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JAMES D. BROWN
Superintendent

September 15, 2011

Hon. Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
P.O. Box 5369
Santa Maria, California 93456-5369

Hon. Joni Gray, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
County Administration Building
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Dear Judge Garcia and Supervisor Gray:

This is the College School District's response to the Grand Jury's request for responses to its report, "Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County? Truancy is Troubling...for Everyone." Additionally, a CD-ROM with this letter in PDF format is attached, as requested by the Grand Jury.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James D. Brown".

James D. Brown, Ed.D.
Superintendent



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Superintendent

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College School District Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations: “Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County?”

Recommendation 1a

That the Santa Barbara County District Attorney immediately reinstate the initial letter portion of the prior truancy program for all secondary schools until a new program is developed.

Response

- a. The College School District agrees with this recommendation.
- b. The implementation of this recommendation can be applied immediately upon the beginning of the 2011 – 2012 school year, in coordination with the Santa Barbara County District Attorney’s Office.

Recommendation 1b

That the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney report the results quarterly of the truancy intervention letters data, to the Santa Barbara County Education Office and all Santa Barbara County school districts.

Response

- a. The College School District agrees with this recommendation.
- b. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the College School District.

Recommendation 1c

That the Santa Barbara County Education Office in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney, Santa Barbara County elementary, secondary, and unified school districts, immediately develop a countywide program to reduce truancy, by reinstating the School Attendance Review Boards.

Response

- a. The College School District partially disagrees with the following section of this recommendation: “...*immediately develop a countywide program to reduce truancy, by reinstating the School Attendance Review Boards.*”

- i. First, this section of the recommendation is presented at cross-purposes. It recommends the development of a program (which implies the development of strategies to reduce truancy), while simultaneously imposing a solution (in the form of School Attendance Review Boards).

- ii. Second, this recommendation needs further study before being fully adopted and implemented. Specifically, this recommendation crosses multiple agencies with no identification of the following:
 - a. the “overseeing” agency;
 - b. the costs associated with the recommended strategies (as yet unidentified) at the local agency level and the SBCEO or SB District Attorney level;
 - c. the scope of responsibility versus the scope of accountability for local school districts implementing the final truancy prevention strategies;
 - d. the role of the Probation Department as a “body of accountability” in truancy prevention measures; and,
 - e. recognition that SARBs were ineffective without the direct support of the District Attorney and the Probation Department prior to the dismantling of the truancy program in 2008 – 2009.

- b. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the College School District.

Recommendation 1d

That the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney, working with the Santa Barbara County Education Office, and the Santa Barbara County school districts, implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

- a. The College School District partially disagrees with the following section of this recommendation: “...*implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools.*”
 - i. This recommendation needs further study before full implementation. Specifically, a clear plan of action regarding a proposed “truancy enforcement” program needs to be articulated, including the corresponding levels of accountability at each level (i.e. District Attorney, SBCEO, school district, and family) before implementation.
 - ii. Additionally, cost estimates and budgetary decisions need to be firmly identified and adopted as part of the action plan before implementing a “truancy enforcement” program countywide. Without this crucial information, any new enforcement plan will cause confusion and ultimately fail.
- b. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the College School District.

Recommendation 2b

That each Santa Barbara County school district provide in its budget a proportional share, based on the number of students, to the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney to assist in funding an enforceable truancy program for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

- a. The College School District disagrees with this recommendation for the following reasons:
 - i. When compared to state cuts across all sectors, public schools in California have taken a disproportionate share of funding reductions to Revenue Limit and categorical programs since 2008.
 - ii. The Board of Supervisors asked Santa Barbara County schools to contribute a Santa Barbara County District Attorney truancy intervention position in the 2008 – 2009 school year. School districts overwhelmingly declined the request, citing state-caused financial cuts.

- iii. Funding for public schools in California is worse than it was in 2008 – 2009, as evidenced by the total number of school districts filing “qualified” or “negative” certifications in the current year. For example, there was an increase in schools filing “qualified” or “negative” of 30% from the first interim to the second interim in 2010 – 2011 (School Services of California, June 14, 2011). The schools in Santa Barbara County are also operating at critically low funding levels, resulting in severe effects to their primary mission: educating students. The recommendation to have schools divert funding away from already weakened classrooms is not reasonable at this time.

- iv. This recommendation is worthy of further study to determine how “proportional share” of school district contributions would be defined. Specifically, the differences between urban, suburban, and rural school districts needs to be determined because they each have unique needs regarding family income levels, home-to-school transportation issues, and environmental factors that affect student attendance. Further, differences between elementary and secondary school districts also need to be identified before an appropriate “proportional share” can be applied to Santa Barbara County schools.

The implementation of this recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.