

Response to the Santa Barbara Grand Jury Regarding Truancy

Finding 1

“The only truancy programs in use today in the County of Santa Barbara are those independently developed and managed by individual districts or schools.”

Response 1

Goleta Union School District agrees with this finding.

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 1c

- a. Goleta Union School District disagrees. Since the attached reports show the district has a truancy rate of .07%, we have no need to participate in a countywide program.
- b. Further, this recommendation needs further study before being fully adopted and implemented. Specifically, this recommendation crosses multiple agencies with no identification of the following:
 - i. the overseeing agency;
 - ii. the costs associated with the recommended strategies (as yet unidentified) at the local agency level and the SBCEO or SB District Attorney level;
 - iii. the scope of responsibility versus the scope of accountability for local school districts implementing the final truancy prevention strategies;
 - iv. the role of the Probation Department as a “body of accountability” in truancy prevention measures; and
 - v. 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.

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 1d

- a. Partially disagree. Since the Goleta Union School District has an attendance rate of 96% and a truancy rate of .07% we manage an effective truancy program without outside influences. Should other districts or schools choose to participate it should be left to those to opt in or out of the program.
- b. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the Goleta Union School District.

Finding 2

“There currently is no available federal or state funding for truancy programs”.

Response 2

Goleta Union School District agrees with the finding.

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 2b

- a. The Goleta Union 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: education of 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.
- b. The implementation of this recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kathleen Boomer, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Goleta Union School District

August 3, 2011