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OCT - 4 2011

BY: _____



Santa Maria-Bonita School District

Phillip L. Alvarado
Superintendent

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August 3, 2011

Honorable Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
P.O. Box 5369
Santa Maria, CA 93454-5369

Re: Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations

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.

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.

SMBSD Response

SARB can be a part of an overall countywide program to reduce truancy if they have the power to refer to prosecution and the District Attorney's office will prosecute for truancy and the local courts will take that prosecution seriously. Our understanding is that the long-standing North County SARB, which has been chaired by Pete Fitzgerald Staff, will not be operational in 2011-12. Santa Maria Bonita School District is interested in being a part of SARB for the most severe attendance cases if the SARB has the power to make a difference for the student(s) involved, be a positive intervention, and also be a deterrent to those who have not heeded any other truancy warning.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

FIDENZIO "BRUNO" BRUNELLO • LINDA CORDERO • IKE OCHOA • JODY OLIVER • WILLIAM SMITH

Recommendation 1d

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

SMBSD Response

We support discussions with all stakeholders for an efficient countywide truancy enforcement plan. We cannot commit funds to this activity at this time, but we support discussion of a plan and have a desire to have an efficient and effective county wide program.

Finding 2

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

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.

SMBSD Response

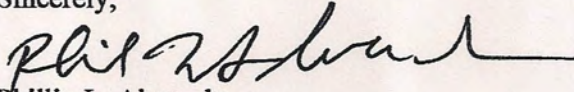
Funding for a county wide truancy program will not be an effective use of funds. A county wide program will be too slow to respond quickly to truancy issues. If there were a countywide program we might have a person one day per week in our area, or something along those lines. That type of service is not sufficient to meet truancy needs for a school district. We currently run our own program which allows us to have meetings and send letters in a manner which is timely, instead of waiting for an official of the Truancy program to come on an assigned day for a meeting. In fact 3 of our 4 highest attendance figures have occurred since the Truancy Program ended. We need a county-wide Truancy program to help us by working with the most challenging parents and students to guarantee either the students' attendance or legal consequences for the parents, guardians, and/or students. We also request that the District Attorney's office be listed as a partner on the initial truancy letter.

School funding continues to be cut and we continue to see large amounts of revenue deferred to the schools. The Santa Maria Bonita School District is currently owed \$19 million dollars in deferred payments, and recent past history shows a pattern of growing deferrals to the district. It would not be feasible or reasonable for us to pay toward county-wide truancy program at this time. Furthermore, our allotment of funds to a truancy program takes funds away from students in the classroom, and has not shown that it is a cost-effective way to spend our limited revenue.

Noted below are our average attendance numbers since 1998-99 when actual attendance was noted, and it can be seen that our highest attendance figures have actually come in the last four years. Our allocation of funds to pay proportionally for a county-wide truancy program is not likely to be cost-effective in light of the attendance numbers before and after the Truancy program was implemented and dissolved.

Year	SMBSD Average Attendance
1998-99	94.51%
1999-00	94.84%
2000-01	95.31%
2001-02	95.37%
2002-03	95.16%
2003-04	95.22%
2004-05	95.71%
2005-06	95.52%
2006-07	95.93%
2007-08	96.25%
2008-09	96.61%
2009-10	96.17%
2010-11	96.56%

Sincerely,


Phillip L. Alvarado
Superintendent
Santa Maria-Bonita School District

cc: Joni Gray, Chair, Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Steve Lavagnino, 5th District Supervisor
2010-2011 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury