



HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

3970 LA COLINA ROAD • SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93110 • PHONE (805) 682-2564
Daniel Cooperman, Ph.D., District Superintendent FAX (805) 687-7954

June 22, 2011

Kathryn D. McKee, Foreperson
2010-11 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Grand Jury Suite 12
411 East Canon Perdido Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101-7531

The Honorable Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
Post Office Box 5369
Santa Maria, CA 93456-5369

The Honorable Joni Gray, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
County Administration Building
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

**Responses to Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury
Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County? Truancy is
Troubling....for Everyone
Hope School District**

Dear Ms. McKee:

Here are Hope School District's responses to the selected findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury's report concerning truancy.

Please contact my office right away if further information is needed to complete our response. Thank you for this opportunity to express our point of view.

Sincerely,

Dan Cooperman, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Hope School District

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

Agree.

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

This recommendation requires further study. The recommendation assumes that a single approach, the School Attendance Review Board, would address the issue with equal effectiveness in every school district. Yet, the cause of truancy varies across school districts. For example, truancy in an elementary school district is mainly an adult issue. Within a secondary school district, the cause of truancy more commonly involves the student. In our elementary school district, truancy often arises among families that have the resources to take vacations on school days. The approach to address this problem would vary from that needed for an adolescent who leaves school without permission.

Cost-effective, alternative solutions should also be considered. For example, data in the Grand Jury report demonstrate that the single most powerful inducement for school attendance is a letter to parents from the District Attorney. Hope School District promotes school attendance with letters from our principals to families with truancy issues (copies attached), meetings with school staff, and family outreach to provide independent study for children away from school more than five days. Since public schools are faced with steep funding reductions that affect the ability to provide basic educational services, cost effective approaches that reduce need for personnel and enforcement, such as the District Attorney's letter, should be carefully evaluated.

In sum, the study would need to address whether decisions of the single proposed solution—the School Attendance Review Board—could adequately address the varied root causes of truancy in different school districts, the cost required to reinstate this program, and whether alternative solutions would be more cost effective. Because the lead agency in the Grand Jury recommendation is the Santa Barbara County Education Office, Hope School District would defer to the county

office to further define the scope of the study and timeframe for completion within the required six months.

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

Although Hope School District is concerned about truancy and the loss of county truancy prevention programs, this recommendation requires further study to determine what enforcement measures should be implemented, whether there are additional costs, and if so, the amount and source of required funds. As stated in the response to Recommendation 1c, elementary and high school districts face very different issues to effectively tackle truancy issues. This variation necessitates thoughtful consideration to avoid an ineffective, one-size-fits-all approach.

If the proposed solution would require more funding, steep cuts to school budgets make it extremely unlikely that school organizations would be able to find the necessary resources to take over this new responsibility.

Hope School District would defer to the county agencies specified in the Grand Jury report as the lead agencies to conduct this study within the six-month time frame required by law.

Finding 2

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

Response

Agree.

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

Hope School District will not implement this finding because it is unreasonable. Given current fiscal restraints, it is unreasonable to expect that one public agency pay another to fulfill its responsibilities. For example, the District Attorney would likely frown upon any suggestion that school districts be given the ability to charge the District Attorney a proportional share for the cost of much needed textbooks. Each agency must fulfill its responsibility to the maximum extent possible within budgetary limits. If more funds were available through some mechanism to generate additional revenue, this recommendation would become more feasible. Government services require financial support.

Furthermore, the Grand Jury report states that truancy enforcement should be focused on secondary schools, where its application would be most effective. Proportional share payment for an elementary school district, such as Hope School District, would therefore be a disproportionate burden to districts that receive less benefit.

Finally, the Grand Jury notes that the cumulative data strongly indicate that a letter from the District Attorney had the most positive impact to reduce the need for subsequent Truancy Intervention and Parent Accountability Program activity. This approach is highly cost effective. Hope School District additionally sends parents letters (attached) to advise them that their children are truant, another cost effective approach to inform parents of the legal requirement that children attend school. Hope District additionally arranges meetings with parents of truant students and school administration, as well as offers of independent study to families whose travel plans take children out of school for longer than five days. For this purpose, local school districts are best equipped to economically meet the individual needs of their students. Hope School District respectfully asks that lower cost local interventions be developed to address the important issue of truancy.

HOPE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Parent Notification of Irregular Attendance
APRIL 26, 2011 - JUNE 7, 2011

Dear Parents/Guardians of _____,

Your child has the following attendance record:

Late _____ Unexcused Absences _____ out of 30 days (10%)

Since the beginning of the school year:

Late _____ Unexcused Absences _____ out of 180 days (10%)

Children who are late or absent from school may rapidly fall behind and become discouraged while trying to catch up. Irregular attendance and/or lack of punctuality create an added concern for teachers who are trying to provide high quality experiences for all of their students. When children are late or absent, they disrupt the instructional process for everyone. Instructional effectiveness and academic progress depend on punctual arrival and regular attendance.

Please do whatever is reasonable and appropriate to ensure that your child arrives at school on time every day, and is not absent unnecessarily.

Thank you for your assistance with this vitally important matter.

Sincerely,



Barbara LaCorte

Principal

Please sign and return to school

This is to acknowledge receipt of this Parent Notification of Irregular Attendance. I understand that it is my responsibility to make sure that my child attends school regularly and is on time every day.

Student: _____ Teacher: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

MONTE VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

730 N. HOPE AVENUE • SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93110 • PHONE (805) 687-5333

Nancy Lorenzen, Principal

2/1/11
(Date)

Parent Notification of Irregular Attendance

Dear Parents/Guardians of _____,

For the last 30 days, your child has the following attendance record:

Late 5 Absent 0 (excused) 0 (unexcused).

Since the beginning of the school year:

Late 19 Absent 3 (excused) 1 (unexcused) out of 96 days.

As you know, Compulsory Education Laws for the State of California require that children ages 6 through 17 be in school and on time every day that school is in session, unless there is a valid excuse. Please be advised that only absences for illness, doctor/dentist appointments, bereavement, or court hearings are considered valid excuses by the California Department of Education. All other absences are considered unexcused even with a parent note.

California Education Code 48260 states that any student who is absent from school without a valid excuse for three full days or is tardy by more than 30-minutes without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year shall be considered truant. Furthermore, schools are required to inform parents in writing when students have irregular attendance.


Children who are late or absent from school may rapidly fall behind and become discouraged while trying to catch up. Irregular attendance and/or lack of punctuality create an added concern for teachers who are trying to provide high quality experiences for all of their students. When children are late or absent, they disrupt the instructional process for everyone. Instructional effectiveness and academic progress depend on punctual arrival and regular attendance.

Furthermore, if your child will be absent 5 or more days, we ask that you complete an independent study contract with your child's teacher.

Please do whatever is reasonable and appropriate to ensure that your child arrives at school on time every day, and is not absent unnecessarily.

Thank you for your assistance with this vitally important matter.

Sincerely,


Nancy Lorenzen
Principal

Please sign and return to school

This is to acknowledge receipt of this Parent Notification of Irregular Attendance. I understand that it is my responsibility to make sure that my child attends school regularly and is on time every day.

Parent Signature

Date



HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

VIEJA VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

434 NOGAL DRIVE • SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93110 • PHONE (805) 967-1239
Mariann Cooley, Principal

_____ Date

Parent Notification Letter of Irregular Attendance

Dear Parents/Guardians of: _____

For the last 30 Days, your child has the following attendance record:

Tardies: ____ . Absences: ____ consisting of ____ excused and ____ unexcused.

Since the beginning of the school year:

Tardies: ____ . Absences: ____ consisting of ____ excused and ____ unexcused

As you know, Compulsory Education Laws for the State of California require that children ages 6 through 17 be in school and on time every day that school is in session, unless there is a valid excuse. Please be advised that only absences for *illness, doctor/dentist appointments, bereavement, religious holidays, or court hearings* are considered valid excuses by the California Department of Education. All other absences are considered unexcused even with a parent note.

California Education code 48260 states that any student who is absent from school without a valid excuse for three full days, or is tardy by more than 30-minutes without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, shall be considered truant. Furthermore, schools are required to inform parents in writing when students have irregular attendance.

Children who are late or absent from school may rapidly fall behind and become discouraged while trying to catch up. Irregular attendance and/or lack of punctuality create an added concern for teachers who are trying to provide high quality experiences for all of their students. When children are late or absent, they disrupt the instructional process for everyone. Instructional effectiveness and academic progress depend on punctual arrival and regular attendance.

Furthermore, if your child will be absent 5 or more days, we ask that you complete an independent study contract with your child's teacher.

Please do whatever is reasonable and appropriate to ensure that your child arrives at school on time every day, and is not absent unnecessarily.

Thank you for your assistance with this vitally important matter.

Sincerely,

Mariann Cooley
Principal

_____ Please sign and return to school.

This is to acknowledge receipt of this Parent Notification Letter of Irregular Attendance. I understand that it is my responsibility to make sure that my child attends school regularly and is on time every day.

_____ Parent/Guardian Signature

_____ Date



HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

VIEJA VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

434 NOGAL DRIVE • SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93110 • PHONE (805) 967-1239
Mariann Cooley, Principal

Date: _____

Dear Parents/Guardians of: _____,

This is the second letter being sent to you to inform you that your child,
_____ in the _____ grade continues to have an attendance
problem.

For the last 30 Days, your child has the following attendance record:

Late: _____ Absent: _____ Excused: _____ Unexcused: _____

Since the beginning of the school year:

Late: _____ Absent: _____ Excused: _____ Unexcused: _____ Out of _____ days.

Please contact the school within the next five school days in order to schedule a
conference to discuss the problem and attempt to find a solution. Please call
_____ at _____ to schedule the
conference.

Administrator Signature

Date

Cc: File

Teacher _____

• ** TO BE SIGNED AND RETURNED BY PARENT/GUARDIAN *****

I have discussed this issue with my child _____. I will be calling the
school to arrange a conference. The morning/afternoon is the most convenient time for
me.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date