

OCT - 4 2011

ORCUTT

Union School District
BY: _____

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June 22, 2011

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

cc. Joni Gray, Chair, Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
 2010-2011 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury

Re: Response to Grant Jury Findings and Recommendations
“Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County? Truancy is Troubling...for Everyone”

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.

Response:

- a. The Orcutt Union 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 Board.”*
 - i. While the Orcutt Union School District whole heartedly supports the idea of developing a countywide program to reduce truancy, we do not feel that SARB (School Attendance Review Board) is the entire solution to the truancy issue. SARB would be only one part of a truancy prevention program and not the sole component. Although the SARB board has continued to exist, they were not able to review truancy cases. They did continue to

meet this past year regarding behavior and school issues, but we have been told that SARB will no longer meet in Santa Maria next year. However, even with that, they were not given the authority to send a case further to the DA to be prosecuted. There has been new legislation (Penal Code 270.1) that allows for the prosecution of parents of students in K-8, however, individual districts would have to have an MOU with the DA to fund the prosecution. We are interested in having the DA involved BEFORE it gets to prosecution if at all possible. In the past, a representative from the DA's office was able to inform parents of the law but also of other resources or agencies if there were family issues.

- ii. The Orcutt Union School District feels that this recommendation needs further study and analysis before being fully adopted and implemented. Some of the issues not mentioned in Recommendation 1c that we feel need to be addressed are:
 1. Who is responsible for overseeing the SARB board?
 2. What are the costs associated with reinstating SARB to deal with truancy issues and who is responsible to pay these costs?
 3. What is the responsibility of the local school districts in this recommendation?
 4. Where does the Probation Department fit into the recommendation?
 5. Where does the District Attorney's Office fit into the recommendation?

At this time, the Orcutt Union School District cannot support this recommendation as written.

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 Orcutt Union School District partially disagrees with the following section of this recommendation:
"implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools."
 - i. While the Orcutt Union School District supports a countywide truancy enforcement program, this recommendation does not address many issues that must be in place in order for such a program to take place and needs further study and analysis before full implementation.
 1. We would want to see a CLEAR plan of action, including the levels of accountability, regarding a proposed truancy enforcement program.
 2. Who is involved and what are their responsibilities for accountability?
 3. What are the costs associated with an enforcement program and who is responsible to pay these costs?

At this time, the Orcutt Union School District cannot support this recommendation as written.

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.

Response:

- a. The Orcutt Union School District disagrees with this recommendation for the following reasons:
 - i. In 2008-2009, the Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors asked Santa Barbara County schools to contribute to a county truancy prevention program. School districts overwhelmingly declined the request, citing state-caused financial cuts. Since the 2008-2009 school year, school budgets have declined even further. 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. School budgets have spiraled downward in an effort to balance the State budget. This recommendation will cause the Orcutt Union School District to divert funding away from the classroom where it is needed and this is not acceptable.
 - ii. This recommendation not only does not address the difference between elementary and secondary school districts, it does not address the difference between rural, suburban and urban school districts located in our county. A proportional share based on the number of students in the district is unreasonable. The Orcutt Union School District is already supporting staff with budget dollars for their Truancy Programs – Data is collected, letters are sent, conferences held and interventions recommended. Most districts in these fiscally troubled times could not fund outside staff to create the rest of the Truancy program recommended by the Grand Jury.

The Orcutt Union School District does not support this recommendation and the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

Sincerely,

Bob Bush
Superintendent
Orcutt Union School District