



Santa Maria Joint Union High School District

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March 11, 2013

The Honorable Judge Brian Hill
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of Santa Barbara County
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

SUBJECT: Response to Santa Barbara County Grand Jury – Request for information regarding truancy programs from the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District

Finding 2:

During the last two years 2006-7 and 2007-8 of the District Attorney sponsored SARB process of Santa Barbara County, the SMJUHSD had an effective truancy rate of 39.7 percent.

Finding 3:

During the last two years, 2009-10 and 2010-11, without the SARB process SMJUHSD has had an effective truancy rate of 81.5 percent, slightly more than twice as high. There can be many assumptions made about this dramatic increase, including among other things, changes to the data gathering process and requirement, the migratory nature of our student population, size of the district population, state of the overall economy, state of the local economy, etc. However, we can confidently state that truancy continues to be a problem for our district, and that the problem is increased over the years in spite of local efforts to combat it.

Finding 5:

With a 40% increase in the effective truancy rates in the last 4 years, we can state with a high degree of certainty that the loss of revenue to the district is significant. More on this in Recommendation 5.

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Recommendation 1:

BY: _____

The Santa Maria Joint Union HS District has been operating its own truancy reduction program since 2008 when the district Attorney's office discontinued funding the SARB model in place since 2000. Our efforts in the district focused on identification and communication with truants and their families. We were supported in this effort by the "Fighting Back Santa Maria" federal grant which helped fund truancy support positions at each site to assist with the overwhelming volume of phone calls and letters sent out to our habitual truants.

As with most educational institutions across the nation, we had varying degrees of success. We have for the most part been able to maintain our graduation rate targets as per NCLB requirements. But this has not, by and large, impacted our attendance and truancy rates which have remained motley static.

We were excited to hear from the Santa Barbara District Attorney's office that the SARB process would be re-instituted for the 2012-13 school year, and we have met with David Chen, Deputy District Attorney on several occasions to work on details regarding the process.

Recommendation 4:

The process for our district will require all the steps laid out in the District Attorney's plan at every level. By the time a student reaches the level of a SARB Hearing, he or she will have documented contracts and meetings at every level. The following details illustrate the process for our district:

1. Truancy Information letter sent from District Attorney
2. Notification Letter #1: at 3 full day or 18 unexcused period absences
3. Notification letter #2 and After School meeting: Scheduling to be determined by need, after 4 day or 24 period unexcused absences.
4. Notification Letter #3 and Assistant Principal, Discipline Meeting: After 6 full day, or 60 period absences.
5. Notification Letter #5 and School Attendance Review Board (SARB) Meeting: After 12 full day, or 84 unexcused period absences.

Recommendation 5:

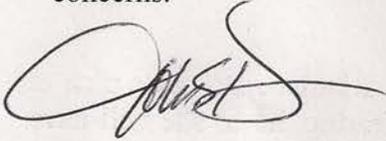
1. According to the CDE, truancy rates in the SMJUHSD actually dropped from 82.02% in 2009-10 to 80.8% in 2010-11. Using this as a guide, we could estimate that the gain in revenue from these two years to be approximately 1.1% of our total ADA attendance of 7,793, divided by 180 days of attendance, and multiplied by the ADA equivalent of 33.3 per day per student. So any drop in the number of students crossing the threshold into the level of "truant" would represent increase in ADA. Of course, determining the "cut point" at which we pursue loss or gain in revenue terms is problematic. If the goal is to reduce truancy, we can target both ends of the spectrum. Many, many excellent students accumulate more than 3 all day cuts during the course of a given academic school year. Students who will engage in the SARB process hearing after 18 all day cuts are at the

other end. But either way, if we use the 80.8% truancy figure as our "line in the sand" we can see if the reconstituted SARB makes a dent in our truancy figures for the 2012-13 school year. But for estimation purposes we could accurately state that if 1% of approximately 7800 students were to not attend, that would translate to 78 students X \$33 per day = \$2574 in lost revenue each day the students were absent. If that same 1% were to move from 3 days worth of cuts to 18 days worth of cuts, the loss becomes exponentially higher. $78 \times \$33 = \$2574 \times 15 = \$38,610$.

Recommendation 6:

1. Using the attendance data from the last two years with regards to truancy, we can compare the data from the 2012-13 school year, in which the SARB process has been implemented, to determine the cost effectiveness of the program and its ADA benefit to the district as a whole. The cut point will be the 80.8% truancy rate.

Please feel free to contact me at (805) 922-4573, Ext. 4211 if you have any questions or concerns.



John Davis
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum

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