

**HUNTINGTON BEACH UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Orange County Grand Jury

FROM: Van Riley
Superintendent

SUBJECT: Responses to “Combating Truancy in Orange County”

DATE: September 2, 2004

In its study “Combating Truancy in Orange County,” the Orange County Grand Jury identified areas for all school districts to improve. Of the 25 “Findings” and “Recommendations,” the Huntington Beach Union High School District was requested to reply to “Findings” 8, 13, 14, 15, 19, and 24 and “Recommendations” 12 and 14. The following are the District’s responses.

FINDINGS AND RESPONSES

Finding #8: In 2002-03, only 10 of the 27 school districts were represented on the County SAR Board. In 2003-04, that number has increased by one to 11. Membership on the County SAR Board is open to all County school districts and all school districts – even those without SAR Boards would benefit by their participation.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District has participated in the SAR Board meetings and will continue to participate in those meetings at the County office.

Finding #13: The Huntington Beach Union High School District’s self-described “out of control” and “epidemic” truancy situation is due only in small part to the lack of a SAR Board, but primarily to the lack of centralized attendance monitoring and control and to fragmented responsibility at the district level.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District Board of Trustees responded to the need to increase student attendance and decrease truancy by approving a new position, Director of Child Welfare and Attendance. In addition, the Board approved the use of increased resources to be used towards this effort. During the 2003-2004 school year, the district provided training for all Vice Principals on the SAR process, held two parent meetings in conjunction with the District Attorney’s Office, and piloted a SAR Board meeting with parents and students. The new Director of Child Welfare and Attendance was hired and has been on duty since July 1, 2004. The goals for the program for the 2004-2005 school year are to: 1) expand the SAR Board meetings to include all schools; 2) establish a Truancy Center; 3) coordinate attendance policies and procedures so that there is consistency of effort across the district; and 4) identify additional resources needed to improve attendance and decrease truancy.

Finding #14: Some school districts believe that SAR Boards are ineffective, particularly at the high school level; that SAR Boards are “a lot of work for no consequences at the D.A. level;” and that threats of SARB intervention and consequences that are not reinforced by the District Attorney’s office make the efforts of a SARB hollow and ineffective.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District has found the District Attorney’s Office to be responsive to our attendance recovery efforts. During the 2003-2004 school year, the Assistant District Attorney held two meetings in our district for the parents of identified truant students. Approximately 250 parents and students attended those two meetings. The schools that were piloting the SARB process reported that there were immediate changes in the attendance of the students who attended the D.A. meetings.

Finding #15: School districts that limit or curtail their participation on the County SAR Board because of budgetary constraints may not be aware of the opportunity for reimbursement, through State or federal funding afforded by Education Code 48323.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District re-instituted the District SARB process and began to work collaboratively with the District Attorney’s Office during the 2003-2004 school year. All schools will be involved in the SARB process for the 2004-2005 school year, and there will be a District SAR Board as one intervention program to improve student attendance. Students and parents who are non responsive to the SARB process will be referred to the District Attorney’s Office for action. We will certainly look into the possibility of additional state or federal funding to support the activities of the District SAR Board.

Finding #19: Periodic training of school administrators in preparing SARB referral documentation packages would be beneficial.

Response: All of the Vice Principals of Supervision in Huntington Beach Union High School District received training during the 2003-04 school year. We would appreciate and participate in any training opportunities provided by the County in preparing SARB packages.

Finding #24: A need exists among the school districts that do not have their own SAR Boards for an operating SAR Board at the County level.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District will be operating a District SAR Board for the 2004-2005 school year. All schools will be participating in the SARB documentation process, attending the D.A. parent meetings, and referring students to the District SAR Board. The District piloted the SAR Board last year on a limited basis and it will be in full operation next fall.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDINGS

Recommendation #12: Huntington Beach Union High School District centralize attendance monitoring and control at the district level, and assign ultimate responsibility for attendance monitoring and control to a single individual.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District Board of Trustees responded to the need to increase student attendance and decrease truancy by approving a new position, Director of Child Welfare and Attendance. The new Director of Child Welfare and Attendance was hired and has been on duty since July 1, 2004. The goals for the program for the 2004-2005 school year are to: 1) expand the SAR Board meetings to include all schools; 2) establish a Truancy Center; 3) coordinate attendance policies and procedures so that there is consistency of effort across the district; and 4) identify additional resources needed to improve attendance and decrease truancy.

Recommendation #14: All Orange County school districts become aware of the opportunity for reimbursement through State and federal funding, afforded by California Education Code 48323, for participating on the County SAR Board.

Response: The Huntington Beach Union High School District will certainly look into the possibility of additional State and federal funding to fund the activities of the County SAR Board.



HUNTINGTON BEACH CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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January 17, 2005

Frederick P. Horn
Presiding Judge, Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, California 92701

Dear Judge Horn:

I am writing in response to the Grand Jury report "Combating Truancy in Orange County" as to the following Findings and Recommendations:

- Finding 2: Each site's School Accountability Report Card (SARC) is posted on the district web site and this includes expectations for student achievement. In addition, the Superintendent's Message for March 2004 also addresses this topic.
- Finding 8: The district is not seeking representation on the County SAR Board at this time.
- Finding 15: The district has investigated this potential funding.
- Finding 19: Periodic training is in place.
- Finding 24: At this time, the district is not seeking to implement an advisory or networking SAR board at the county level.
- Recommendation 14: The district has investigated this potential source of funding.
- Recommendation 20: The district will investigate involvement in the Truancy Response Project.

While the Huntington Beach City School District wishes to be cooperative with the Orange County Grand Jury and respond to its findings, the Huntington Beach City School District believes that the Grand Jury lacks jurisdiction over the issues of truancy as indicated by the California Attorney General opinion. See, 78 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen.290 (1995).

Sincerely,

Gary Rutherford, Ed.D.
Superintendent

c: Orange County Grand Jury