



**ORANGE COUNTY
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September 2, 2004

The Honorable Fredrick P. Horn
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Horn:

Enclosed is the Orange County Department of Education's response to the 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Combating Truancy in Orange County."

If you have any questions regarding our response, please call me at 714.966.4001.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William M. Habermehl".

William M. Habermehl
County Superintendent of Schools

WMH:ps

Enclosure

cc: T.W. Staple, M.D., Foreman
2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury



Orange County Department of Education
Response to the
2003-04 Orange County Grand Jury Report
"Combating Truancy in Orange County"

FINDINGS

Grand Jury Finding 8

In 2002-03, only 10 of the 27 school districts were represented on the County (Department of Education) 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 to Finding 8

Orange County school districts make autonomous decisions about county SAR Board attendance.

Grand Jury Finding 9

The Orange County Superintendent of Schools/Department of Education has not done enough to encourage all of the school districts to participate on the County SAR Board. However, on March 4, 2004, the Department of Education did send all school districts an open invitation to attend any or all County SAR Board meetings.

Response to Finding 9

The OCDE does not mandate county SARB participation. But strongly encourages participation. This is done through annual information meetings about SARB, letters of invitation and presentations to district assistant superintendents.

Grand Jury 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 to Finding 14

Accurate data is shared by the D.A. at the county SARB meetings. All meetings are open and items of concern are agendaized.

Grand Jury Finding 22

School districts repeatedly identified a Deputy District Attorney, a law-enforcement officer and a Probation Officer as three key people who should make presentations to habitually truant students and their parent(s) at the District Attorney's Community Meetings. Yet, more often than not, neither a law-enforcement officer nor a Probation Officer is present at such meetings.

Response to Finding 22

Best practice encourages SARBs to include law enforcement, a Deputy D.A. and a Deputy Probation Officer at meetings.

Grand Jury Finding 23

In each of the four school years studied, five of the school districts without SAR Boards were slightly more successful at controlling attendance, on average than 15 of the school districts with SAR Boards.

Response to Finding 23

The cause has not been studied by the Superintendent of Schools. We would appreciate getting a copy their data and statistics so we can review it and share it with appropriate staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Grand Jury Recommendation 8

The Orange County Superintendent of Schools/Department of Education strongly encourage each of the school districts in Orange County – even those without School Attendance Review Boards – to appoint a representative to the County SAR Board and to participate more fully in County SAR Board activities. (Findings 8 and 9)

Response to Recommendation 8

The OCDE annually invites and encourages every district to attend the county SARB. Multiple requests and invitations are made. This outreach will continue.

Grand Jury Recommendation 13

The Orange County Superintendent of Schools/Department of Education respond to a school district's perception that "SAR Boards are a waste of time at the high-school level." The District Attorney respond to school districts' views that "SAR Boards are a lot of work for no consequences at the DA level" and that "when SARB interventions and consequences are not reinforced by the District Attorney's Office, efforts of the SARBs become hollow and ineffective." (Finding 14)

Response to Recommendation 13

Best practices and data are shared to evidence the added value of SARBS. This information will continue to be shared at county SARB meetings, Assistant Superintendent meetings and other appropriate forums.

Grand Jury Recommendation 22

The Department of Education identify factors that might account for five school districts without SAR Boards, being slightly more successful at controlling attendance, on average, than 15 school districts with SAR Boards. (Finding 23)

Response to Recommendation 22

Orange County Department of Education will informally examine the data collection process and the prevention, intervention, and incentive processes at the five school districts identified.

Grand Jury Recommendation 23

The Department of Education establish an operating SAR Board (not just an advisory or networking SAR Board) to meet the needs of those school districts that do not have their own SAR Boards (Finding 24)

Response to Recommendation 23

The County SARB has been established based on California Education Code. It is responsive to changing county needs.

Grand Jury Recommendation 24

The Department of Education formulate a plan whereby all school districts provide equitable financial support to the Probation Department and the District Attorney's Office to ensure that these agencies are able to continue the truancy-abatement services for which the districts are the financial beneficiaries. (Finding 25)

Response to Recommendation 24

The Orange County Department of Education does not provide fiscal mandates for the 27 Orange County school districts. The districts are independent political subdivisions with elected boards who make that determination.