

# ***Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District***

1301 E. Orangethorpe Avenue, Placentia, California 92870  
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*Board of Education*  
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August 4, 2004

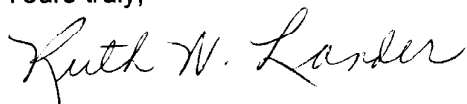
The Honorable Frederick P. Horn  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
700 Civic Center Drive West  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Horn:

Enclosed is a copy of the responses prepared by the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District to the *Findings and Recommendations* of the 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury pertaining to "Combating Truancy in Orange County."

Hopefully, these responses include all the information requested for each area. Should you have additional questions, please call me at (714) 996-2550, extension 651.

Yours truly,



Ruth W. Lander, Ed.D.  
Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services

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## ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

### ***“COMBATING TRUANCY IN ORANGE COUNTY”***

In its study “Combating Truancy in Orange County,” the Grand Jury identified areas for all school districts to improve. Of the 25 “Findings” and “Recommendations,” the Placentia–Yorba Linda Unified School District (PYLUSD) was specifically directed to reply to “Findings” 1, 8, 15 and 19 and “Recommendations” 1, 14, and 20. In compliance with Penal Code section 933.05 the following responses are being submitted.

#### **FINDINGS AND RESPONSES**

**Finding #1:** “The Websites of the following (named) school districts provide an inadequate treatment of attendance matters and lack explicit expectations for student’s attendance.”

**Response:** The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District amended its website to include the following information:

School Attendance:

California State Law requires all children between the ages of six and eighteen years to attend school daily. Education Code section 48200 states that no student is permitted to leave school at recess or any other time before the regular hour of closing without the approval of the school principal or designee. *Violations of this code section will be considered trancies.*

In an effort to provide the best education to our students, the district is committed to helping any pupil that requires assistance in arriving at school. Busing is available and may be arranged through the PYLUSD Transportation Department (some restrictions on distance do apply). Many schools have adopted the Student Valet Program that has streamlined access for parents who transport their children. School crossing guards have also been deployed throughout the district for the safe crossing of students who walk to school. Should a student encounter a problem that is not addressed by the aforementioned measures, they are directed to contact their school principal for any additional assistance.

Reporting Absences:

Parents of elementary school and middle school students are expected to report student absences to the school office at least one-half hour prior to the beginning of school. Notification of a child’s absence is required for each day that the student is not in attendance. At the secondary school level, parents are to send a note with their student on the day of the student’s return to school. The note should provide an explanation of the student’s absence.

### Excused Absences:

California Education Code section 48200 defines excused absences as:

1. Due to illness
2. Attendance at a medical doctor's appointment
3. Attendance at a funeral of an immediate family member
4. Quarantine by the county or city health officer
5. Jury duty
6. Justifiable personal reasons including (but not limited to):
  - a. religious holidays or celebrations
  - b. appearance in court
  - c. attendance at a funeral
  - d. illness of a child where the student is the child's parent
  - e. attendance at an employment conference (requires previous approval by the school principal)
  - f. working at an election precinct

All students absent from school under any of the above stated reasons are entitled to complete all assignments and tests missed during the period of absence. Completion must be within a reasonable period of time and shall be given full credit.

### Unexcused Absences:

Unexcused absences are those absences that do not meet the above listed criteria. An unexcused absence is an absence that occurs with the approval of the parent or guardian, without a prearranged agreement with a school administrator.

### Truancy:

Any full-time or continuing-education student who is absent from school without a valid excuse for three full days in one school year or tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof, is a truant (Education Code 48260).

### Placentia-Yorba Linda School District Intervention:

After a student is identified as "truant," the school will mail a letter to the parent or guardian informing them of the student's attendance situation. Should the problem persist, an additional letter will be sent followed by a meeting of the School Attendance Review Team (S.A.R.T.). The student and the parent/guardian must also be present at this meeting. Failure to comply with the direction of S.A.R.T. will result in the student's referral to the School Attendance Review Board.

#### School Attendance Review Board (S.A.R.B.):

Although voluntary compliance with mandatory school attendance laws is expected, the Placentia–Yorba Linda Unified School District has teamed with local law enforcement agencies to form the district's School Attendance Review Board, or "S.A.R.B." This board is committed to actively enforcing state laws relating to school attendance. The district's School Attendance Review Board meets bi-monthly in order to intervene with students that are defined as habitual truants.

This collaborative effort of the district and law enforcement in the S.A.R.B. process has proven to be an effective tool in correcting the troublesome problem of truancy. Students who fail to comply with the directives of this Board are referred to the Orange County District Attorney's Office. In 2004, one student was incarcerated for not attending school.

The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School utilizes the S.A.R.B. process as the last effort in a series of measures aimed at correcting a student's unacceptable school attendance. It is hoped that all students would voluntarily comply with school attendance laws.

#### District Philosophy:

It is the desire of the Placentia–Yorba Linda Unified School District that all students attend school everyday. Some circumstances may necessitate a student to be absent, and those situations are certainly understandable. Before allowing a student to miss school it is hoped that parents/guardians will carefully evaluate the reason for the absence and consider the loss of important teacher to student interaction.

The district encourages parents/guardians to help their child develop good attendance habits. Here are a few suggestions:

- \* You are your student's best role model. Be sure you are not the reason they are absent or late.
- \* Have students organize their clothes, lunch, homework and projects, the night before school.
- \* Teach students to get up in the morning utilizing their own personal alarm clocks.
- \* Help students develop good sleeping habits and make sure that they are in bed at a reasonable time. (Get homework done early!)
- \* Allow an adequate amount of time for students to have a good breakfast.
- \* Reward student's on-time behavior and give consequences for being late.

Remember, today's practices become tomorrow's habits!

**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:**

Although the Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District resolves its truancy issues at a local level SAR Board, our district is a member of the county SAR Board. The Placentia–Yorba Linda Child Welfare and Attendance Coordinator regularly attends meetings relating to attendance and truancy issues that are sponsored by the Orange County Department of Education. The coordinator also participates in the administrative meetings of the Orange County Truancy Response Project.

**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 the *Education Code section 48323.*"

**Response:** The Placentia - Yorba Linda Unified School District annually applies for (and receives) state reimbursement for truancy intervention under the authority of the *California Education Code*.

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

**Response:** School administrators in the Placentia Yorba Linda School District receive on-going training. This year, each high school was provided with a SARB handbook that outlines the proper procedures for documenting the measures that are taken to address individual truancy cases. Additionally, principals at two elementary schools were instructed on and assisted with the documentation process required by the Orange County District Attorney's Office.

**Recommendation # 1:** "Each of the (named) school districts improve their respective Websites with an enhanced treatment of attendance matters that includes explicit expectations for student's attendance."

**Response:** The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District recently updated its website to address truancy and attendance issues. Readers may go on-line at [www.pylusd.k12.ca.us](http://www.pylusd.k12.ca.us) and find the following information:

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- \* Allow an adequate amount of time for students to have a good breakfast.
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**Recommendation # 14:** "All Orange County school districts become aware of the opportunity for reimbursement through State or federal funding, afforded by *California Education Code section 48323*, for participating on the County SAR Board."

**Response:** The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District annually applies for (and receives) state reimbursement for truancy intervention under the authority of the *California Education Code*.

**Recommendation # 20:** "School Districts that are not involved in the Truancy Response Project become involved as a means to significantly improve their truancy problems and to increase awareness among parents and students of the importance of regular attendance."

**Response:** The Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District has appointed the Child Welfare and Attendance Coordinator to represent the district in all matters pertaining to truancy. In that capacity, the coordinator attends county truancy/attendance meetings and participates in administrative meetings of the county Truancy Response Project held at the Juvenile Court.