



July 21, 2004

*"Preparing today's students to
succeed in tomorrow's world"*

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

Dear Judge Horn:

Re: Response to the Grand Jury Report
"Combating Truancy in Orange County"

Enclosed is a copy of the required responses to each of the Findings and Recommendations directed to my office from the Grand Jury Report "Combating Truancy in Orange County."

Student attendance and truancy is a concern to all school districts and their administration. The Saddleback Valley Unified School District has a history of addressing school attendance and truancy effectively; consequently our student attendance approaches 96%.

We make every effort to improve school attendance. Our efforts to date to address truancy have focused on counseling, discipline, educational modifications, community resource recommendations, and providing for alternative education. Parents of students who are truant are noticed and interventions initiated. Each school district has a different community with different needs and means of addressing their respective issues and concerns. In addition, the Governing Boards of each respective school district reflect the wishes of the community and provide direction as to the most effective way to serve that community.

We appreciate the efforts of the Grand Jury in this matter and certainly support all efforts to address and improve student attendance and truancy. Some recommendations made by the Grand Jury for our District have already been addressed and others are under consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jerry C. Gross', is written over a light-colored background.

Jerry C. Gross
Superintendent

c: Orange County Grand Jury

**SADDLEBACK VALLEY
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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Jerry C. Gross, Ph.D.
SUPERINTENDENT

BOARD OF EDUCATION
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GRAND JURY FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATION RESPONSE

FINDINGS RESPONSE

A. Responses to findings 8, 15, and 19 are required of all 27 local school Districts.

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 increased by 1 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:

SVUSD is always interested in improving student attendance. To date SVUSD schools have utilized counseling, modified academic programs, alternative education placements, school nurse interventions, community resources and discipline to address poor student attendance. SVUSD has approximately a 96% attendance rate when accounting for truancy. Consideration will be given to participation in the County SAR Board and evaluation of its direct impact on student attendance in SVUSD will be reviewed by administration. A decision whether or not to participate in a county SAR Board will be made during the 2004-05 school year.

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:

School districts as well as all county agencies have had to make serious budget cuts in the last few years. Districts are always interested in seeking new sources of revenue for their programs. District administration will certainly look into the possibility of additional State or Federal funding to fund the activities of the County SAR Board during the 2004-2005 school year. In conjunction with a review of this information a determination will be made of the impact a SAR Board has on student attendance. We appreciate this information being brought to our attention.

FINDING 19. Periodic training of school administrators in preparing for SAR Board referral documentation packets would be beneficial.

RESPONSE:

The County SAR Board is planning to have a workshop(s) to provide training to school administrators in preparing SAR Board referral documentation packages during the 2004-2005 school year. Assistant District Attorneys have previously trained SVUSD administrators in SAR Board packet preparation through OCDE in-services. SVUSD currently has SAR Board packets available to school site administration, should the District decide to initiate SAR Board proceedings against a student/family. In cases of habitual truancy the students have been counseled, had modified academic programs, school nurse interventions, community resource

recommendations made, opportunity provided for alternative educational programs and disciplined, as appropriate. Intervention for truancy is on-going and District administration will participate in SAR Board Packet preparation in-services provided by the Orange County Department of Education during the 2004-05 school year.

B. Response to Findings 12 is required from the Superintendent of Schools of Cypress, Fullerton Joint Union High School and Saddleback Valley Unified school districts.

FINDING 12. Cypress School District, Fullerton Union High School District and Saddleback Valley Unified School District do not declare any of their truants to be habitual truants. Failure to identify as habitual truants those students who have been truant for three or more times during a school year appears to place those districts out of compliance with State Education Code.

RESPONSE:

Students who are truant are identified in SVUSD and are so marked as truant on attendance reports. The District has been reviewed by State auditors and through Coordinated Compliance Review by the State Department of Education and not found out of compliance. Parents of students who are truant are contacted by phone or letter advising them that their pupil is truant. The current parent contacts and letters do not specifically state that a student who is truant three or more times is by definition labeled a “habitual truant”. Currently students that are habitually truant are noticed and school administration initiates appropriate intervention (counseling, modified academic programs, school nurse interventions, community resource recommendations, provided alternative educational programs, and discipline). In response to FINDING 12 of the Grand Jury Report SVUSD has modified the current computer generated truancy parent letter to identify and state, beginning in the 2004-05 school year, that a student who is truant, three or more times, is deemed to be a habitual truant in accordance with Education Code 48262.

C. Responses to Finding 24 are required from the Superintendents of Schools of the following districts:

- Cypress
- Fullerton Joint High School District
- Huntington Beach City
- Huntington Beach Joint Union High School
- Laguna Beach Unified
- **Saddleback Valley Unified**
- Savanna

FINDING 24. A need exists among the school districts that do not have their own SAR Boards for an operating SAR Board (not just an advisory or networking SAR Board) at the County level.

RESPONSE:

Our district has gone through a series of budget cuts in the past few years due to constraints in state funding of education. Within these budget limitations, District administration will review the Grand Jury's recommendation to evaluate participation in a County SAR Board as well as into the possibility of establishing a District SAR Board. An administrative review of utilizing a SAR Board will occur during the 2004-05 school year and a determination made whether or not this is the best use of resources to combat truancy.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESPONSE

- 11. Responses to Recommendation 11 are required from the superintendents of Cypress, Fullerton Joint Union High School and Saddleback Valley Unified School District.**

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Cypress, Fullerton Joint Union High School and Saddleback Valley Unified School Districts each bring itself into compliance with the provisions of the California Education Code by identifying habitual truants, beginning with the 2004-05 school year and continuing thereafter.

RESPONSE:

Students who are truant are identified in SVUSD and are so marked as truant on attendance reports. The District has been reviewed by State auditors and through Coordinated Compliance Review by the State Department of Education and not found out of compliance. Parents of students who are truant are contacted by phone or letter advising them that their pupil is truant. The current parent contacts do not specifically state that a student who is truant three or more times is by definition labeled a "habitual truant". Currently students that are habitually truant are noticed and school administration initiates intervention (counseling, modified academic programs, school nurse interventions, community resource recommendations, alternative educational program options and discipline). In response to FINDING 12 of the Grand Jury report SVUSD has modified the current computer generated truancy parent letter to identify and state, beginning in the 2004-05 school year, that a student who is truant, three or more times, is deemed to be a habitual truant in accordance with Education Code 48262.

12. Responses to recommendation 14 are required from the Superintendents of school of all 27 local school districts.

RECOMMENDATION 14:

All Orange County school districts become aware of the opportunity for reimbursement through state or federal funding, afforded by California education code 48323, for participating on the county SAR Board. (Finding 15)

RESPONSE:

School districts as well as all county agencies have had to make serious budget cuts in the last few years. Districts are always interested in seeking new sources of revenue for their programs. District administration will certainly look into the possibility of additional State or Federal funding to fund the activities of the county SAR Board during the 2004-05 school year. In conjunction with a review of this information, a determination will be made of the impact a SAR Board has on student attendance. We appreciate this information being brought to our attention.