



Santa Ana Unified School District

Jerry Almendarez
Superintendent of Schools

09/05/2023

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge,

The Santa Ana Unified School District is deeply committed to the well-being of both our students and the broader community. We are acutely aware of the critical issue of Fentanyl in Orange County and recognize the significance of active participation in a model educational program and joint task force to address this concern.

Our dedication goes beyond awareness, as we strive to empower the youth in our community with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions regarding substance use. We emphasize the promotion of various coping strategies, equipping students with effective tools to avoid substance abuse and make healthier life choices.

Please see below for the responses to each required Finding as requested in the Orange County Grand Jury report and attached cover letter dated June 14, 2023.

F #	Finding	Agree/ Disagree	Response And Explanation (if Required)
F1	Illicit fentanyl is sold on the streets and through social media marketed as legitimate pharmaceuticals, or as other drugs laced with fentanyl, or sold as straight fentanyl, leading to exponentially increasing fentanyl addiction and deaths in Orange County.	NA	NA
F2	Illicit fentanyl is a pervasive problem in Orange County.	Agree. The Respondent agrees with the finding	According to CalMatters.org, California witnessed a staggering 121% increase in opioid-related deaths within a span of merely three years, from 2019 to 2021. The primary culprit behind the vast majority of these fatalities was identified as fentanyl. In 2021, Orange County ranked 8th among all counties in California with the highest incidence of Fentanyl-related overdoses. The rate of such overdoses in Orange County was

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BOARD OF EDUCATION

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			recorded at 21.352 per 100k residents, surpassing the overall rate in California (15.625), Riverside (17.053), Los Angeles (13.752), and San Diego (20.125), as reported by the California Department of Public Health. (CDPH) and Skylab. The specific impact on regions within Orange County may need further analysis and buy-in from all partners will be important.
F3	Drug dealers use social media to sell fentanyl and other drugs. Social media business models impede law enforcement investigations.	NA	NA
F4	California law limits prosecution of fentanyl deaths as homicides. Fentanyl death related cases are selectively referred for federal filing consideration. The Orange County District Attorney has cross-designated one of its own senior deputy district attorneys to prosecute such cases under federal narcotics laws.	NA	NA
F5	California law does not provide for uniform admonishment of drug dealers of their potential criminal liability for drug-related deaths. Proposed legislation requiring judicial admonishments has been rejected multiple times by the California Legislature.	NA	NA
F6	Under current California Law, fentanyl related felonies are not subject to additional penalty for weight enhancements as are other dangerous drugs such as cocaine and heroin.	NA	NA
F7	Orange County will benefit by establishing a chartered multi-agency Task Force to address the fentanyl crisis in Orange County.	Agree. The Respondent agrees with the finding	A chartered multi-agency Task Force has the potential to create a more focused, collaborative, and effective response to the fentanyl crisis in Orange County and reduce the impact of the opioid epidemic on the community. It can bring a coordinated response, enhanced information sharing, a comprehensive

			approach, increased resources, targeted strategies, rapid response to emergencies, public awareness and education, and improvement in treatment and support services.
F8	As long as there is a demand, producers will find ways to supply drugs. Orange County cannot law enforce its way out of the fentanyl crisis. Education, prevention, and treatment are critical to reducing demand.	Agree. The Respondent agrees with the finding	<p>Fentanyl is a dangerous synthetic opioid, which has caused a significant public health crisis in Orange County.</p> <p>Law enforcement efforts alone cannot fully resolve the issue, as the demand for illicit drugs like fentanyl remains high due to various complex factors. To address this crisis effectively, a comprehensive approach that includes education, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, harm reduction, consideration of socioeconomic factors, culture, and community engagement is crucial.</p>
F9	There is a need to increase public awareness and acknowledgement of the risks of illicit fentanyl.	Agree. The Respondent agrees with the finding	<p>Increasing public awareness and acknowledgement of the risks of illicit fentanyl is crucial in combating the fentanyl crisis. Many people may not be fully aware of the dangers associated with fentanyl use, which can lead to unintentional overdoses and fatalities. Raising awareness will potentially prevent overdoses, reduce stigma, empower individuals and communities, target prevention efforts, promote safe practices, inform community partners, and engage families and support networks.</p>
F10	Some educational institutions are not participating in available educational and preventive fentanyl/drug programs.	Agree. The Respondent agrees with the finding	<p>It is possible that educational institutions are not participating in the available educational and preventive fentanyl/drug programs. There could be several reasons why this may occur; lack of resources, lack of awareness, stigma, and resistance, focused on other priorities, perceived lack of relevance, lack of time to implement, and administrative hurdles. Schools could use support, resources, funding, sample policies, tailored programs, and incentives and recognition. SAUSD does do some work in alcohol and substance abuse prevention and intervention</p>

			through programs such as TUPE and contract provider contracts, but it is not adequate to have a district-wide impact.
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Please see below for the responses to each required Recommendation as requested in the Orange County Grand Jury report and attached cover letter dated June 14, 2023.

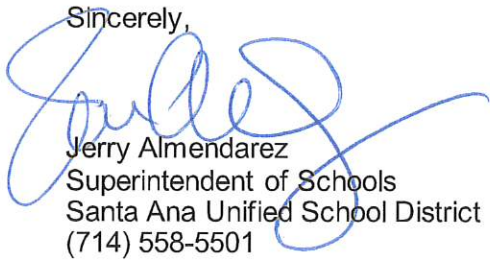
R #	Recommendation	Implementation	Response And Explanation (if Required)
R1	By January 1, 2024, the Orange County Board of Supervisors should charter a multi-agency Task Force to address the fentanyl crisis.	Recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be in the future (see right for timeline)	<p>Creating a multi-agency Task Force to address the fentanyl crisis in Orange County is an initiative-taking step that could help address the serious public health issue.</p> <p>A multi-agency Task Force can bring together various stakeholders, including representatives from law enforcement, public health agencies, educational institutions, healthcare providers, community organizations, and individuals with lived experience. The Task Force should develop a coordinated and comprehensive strategy through various approaches; data collection/analysis/intervention/evaluation process, coordination and information sharing, public awareness and education, prevention and harm reduction programs, treatment and rehabilitation services, enforcement, policy, and community engagement. School Districts would participate in the "multi-agency Task Force" if invited.</p>
R2	By July 1, 2024, the Orange County Board of Supervisors, the Orange County District Attorney, and the Orange County Sheriff should lobby the California State Legislature to add fentanyl to the list of drugs subject to penalty enhancements in felony drug convictions and to add statutory authority for judicial admonishments when drug dealers and	NA	NA

	traffickers are convicted of fentanyl-related crimes.		
R3	By July 1, 2024, Orange County Law Enforcement agencies should work with social media companies to ensure law enforcement has timely access to drug-related criminal activity information on their platforms.	NA	NA
R4	By January 1, 2024, the Orange County Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, and Orange County Health Care Agency should collaborate to evaluate the effectiveness of existing in-custody and post-custody sobriety treatment programs and determine where improvements can be incorporated.	NA	NA
R5	By January 1, 2024, the Orange County Department of Education should develop a model fentanyl/opioid educational program to be offered to all K-12 school districts in Orange County.	Recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.	The Orange County Department of Education has indicated its intent to develop a model fentanyl/opioid educational program and offer it to all K-12 school districts in Orange County. Should this program be offered to Santa Ana Unified it will be considered for review and implementation. A program of this caliber is an essential step in addressing the fentanyl crisis by educating and empowering the youth in our community, so they can make informed decisions about substance use. The program can help raise awareness of the dangers of Fentanyl and fake pills, promote different coping strategies, and provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to avoid substance abuse.
R6	By October 1, 2023, the Orange County Department of Education should promote the use of	Recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be	The Orange County Department of Education has indicated that it will promote the use of currently established and in-place fentanyl and drug-related educational programs offered by OC agencies and non-governmental

	<p>currently established and in-place fentanyl and drug-related educational programs offered by OC agencies such as Health Care Agency, OC Sheriff's Department, and non-governmental organizations to all K-12 school districts in Orange County.</p>	<p>implemented in the future.</p>	<p>organizations to all K-12 school districts in Orange County. Should these programs be promoted to Santa Ana Unified they will be considered for review and implementation. The Orange County Department of Education's support has assisted the District staff in raising awareness about the dangers of Fentanyl and other drugs. They have presented to our staff (4/2023) on the dangers of Fentanyl and are presenting to families at the individual school sites (8/2023).</p>
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Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Jerry Almendarez
 Superintendent of Schools
 Santa Ana Unified School District
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