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VENTURA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Stanley C. Mantooh, County Superintendent of Schools

RECEIVED

May 24, 2016

MAY 31 2016

VENTURA COUNTY
GRAND JURY

The Honorable Donald D. Coleman
Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California
County of Ventura
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Dear Honorable Judge Coleman:

On April 28, 2016, the Ventura County Office of Education received a copy of the 2015-2016, Ventura County Grand Jury Final Report, entitled: *Phoenix School Safety*. In that report, the Grand Jury required responses from the Ventura County Board of Education to findings: FI-02, FI-03, FI-05, and FI-06; and to recommendations: R-01 and R-02. In addition, the Grand Jury required responses from the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools to findings: FI-02, FI-03, FI-04, FI-05, and FI-06; as well as to recommendation: R-01.

The Ventura County Board of Education and the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools have reviewed the report and per the requirement, is submitting the attached joint response.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (805) 383-1901.

Sincerely,

Stan Mantooh
Ventura County Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Mark Lisagor
Board President

CC: Foreperson, Ventura County Grand Jury ✓
800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Phoenix School Safety

Report Date: April 28, 2016

Response by: Stanley C. Mantooth

Title: Ventura County Superintendent of Schools

FINDINGS

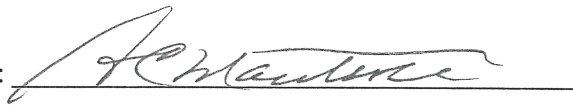
- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: FI-01; FI-02; FI-06
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: FI-03; FI-08; FI-04; FI-05; FI-07
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefor.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

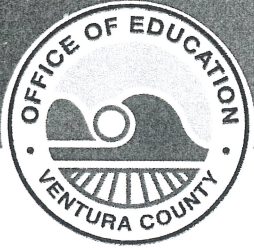
- Recommendations numbered (NONE) have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered (NONE) have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered R-01; R-02; R-03 require further analysis.
- Recommendations numbered (NONE) will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

Date: May 24, 2016

Signed: _____



Number of pages attached: 4



VENTURA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Stanley C. Mantooth, County Superintendent of Schools

Response to the Grand Jury Report

Statements to Findings and Recommendations

Phoenix School Safety

May 23, 2016

FINDINGS WITH WHICH WE AGREE:

FI-01. Phoenix School Staff are well-trained in and worked collaboratively to address and de-escalate behaviors.

We agree with this finding.

FI-02. The Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) believes that using NCPI, CHAMPS and other positive behavioral supports are preferable strategies to having a dedicated SRO on site.

For many years now the Ventura County Office of Education has been working collaboratively with the county-wide collaborative called the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). This collaborative has been extremely successful in reducing the numbers of students who unnecessarily become involved with the criminal justice system especially for offenses related to school behavior. There is ample research and evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of such practices and little evidence, if any, that school resource officers, in themselves, prevent behaviors from escalating on campus. VCOE is committed to continuing to use research-based strategies such as NCPI and CHAMPS. In addition, VCOE relies strongly on its partnership with Ventura County Behavioral Health and its on-site clinicians to serve the students' needs and prevent behaviors from escalating as much as possible.

FI-06. It is difficult to justify the assignment of an SRO at Phoenix given the low number of incidents, low number of arrests and low enrollment.

VCOE agrees with this finding and adds to these challenges that there is no dedicated funding for this purpose.

FINDINGS WITH WHICH WE DO NOT AGREE:

FI-03. The collaborative relationship between the VCOE and law enforcement is not as strong as best practice recommended by the National Education Association.

The VCOE enjoys a longstanding and productive relationship with local law enforcement. As was mentioned earlier in its response to FI-01, the VCOE works side by side with local law enforcement agencies in partnerships such as the JDAI, the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC), the Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) and numerous others. VCOE is unaware of the research base supporting the “Best Practice” by the National Education Association and believe that this recommendation should best be understood as having been made by a large labor group solely interested in teacher interests and not necessarily grounded in compelling research, local dynamics or local cultures.

FI-08. A formally trained and dedicated School Resource Officer would prove even more effective at preventing or de-escalating student behaviors than would a responding officer who was properly trained.

VCOE does not agree with this finding as it is speculative at best. Recent data reported by the Congressional Research Service (<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43126.pdf>) found that research on the impact of School Resource Officers (SRO) is inconclusive at best. Other research (<http://tinyurl.com/hsop9hb>) suggests very strongly that the presence of law enforcement on campus has historically resulted in increased processing of student misbehavior through citations and arrests as opposed to through the school discipline process. As an active member of the Ventura County Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, VCOE is committed to reducing such outcomes. More importantly, VCOE schools differ greatly from more comprehensive school settings in the County. So while we agree that in comprehensive school settings students and staff may feel safer, and that response times would be shorter with an officer on campus, the same cannot be said in the case of Phoenix Schools. This is true because there is no research that we know of to suggest that having an officer on a school campus serving students with Severe Emotional Disturbances would prove to de-escalate their behavior as opposed to escalating them. Oftentimes students with severe emotional disturbances experience heightened levels of anxiety around authority figures due to past trauma. In short, we acknowledge that SROs have given the right circumstances, yet disagree with the generalizations expressed in the report.

FINDINGS WITH WHICH WE PARTIALLY AGREE:

FI-04. Students often act out in frustration despite consistent application of positive behavioral supports and calls to law enforcement are still made 2-3 times a week.

While we agree that student behaviors still occur at Phoenix, attributing them to frustration demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the students served at Phoenix Schools. Students attending Phoenix have all been clinically diagnosed with a mental health diagnosis identified from a licensed clinical therapist the Diagnostic Statistical Manual and some form of Severe Emotional Disturbance; as such, their behaviors are directly attributable to their disability. Additionally, the students served at Phoenix Schools are placed specifically there to develop the coping skills necessary to self-regulate and therefore often while learning these new skills can have severe emotional and behavioral incidents that result in unsafe behaviors towards themselves and others. It is true that calls to law enforcement are still necessary, but the idea that the presence of law enforcement on campus would tend to de-escalate student behavior is simply not supported in the research. In fact, it is often the case that students with severe emotional disturbances are easily agitated and may be more oppositional in the face of authority than their more typical peers.

FI-05. School Resource Officer should be dedicated to a particular school in order to work more effectively. Their focus should be on building relationships as opposed to simply enforcing the law.

VCOE would agree that when an officer has been included in a school's operation, it is best to allow them to focus on one site to the degree possible and that building relationships with students and staff represent the most effective approach. This would be especially important in working with students with special needs and students with social-emotional and behavioral needs. Implicit in the finding is that such an assignment is warranted at Phoenix schools and VCOE disagrees with this for the reasons stated above.

FI-07. Law enforcement personnel responding to Phoenix may not have CIT training and because of this, behaviors may be escalated.

While VCOE agrees that it is possible that responding officers would not be trained in crisis intervention, it has no direct knowledge of the degree to which this might be true. In addition, there has been no evidence nor examples provided that an officer's lack of training has in any way escalated an incident to which they were responding. In the absence of such evidence, it is difficult to agree with this finding. VCOE believes in and appreciates the support provided thus far by local law enforcement.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED:

None

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT HAVE NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED, BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE:

None

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT REQUIRE FURTHER ANALYSIS:

R-01. VCBE, VCOE and the Ventura County Sheriff enter into a collaborative effort to increase law enforcement presence on Phoenix campuses.

The VCOE will engage in ongoing conversations with the Ventura County Sheriff to review current practice regarding law enforcement support at Phoenix schools including the possibility of increasing their presence on campus and trained CIT officers, which does not necessarily entail assigning a full-time officer on campus. Conversations have already begun.

R-02. VCBE, VCOE and the Ventura County Sheriff enter into a collaborative effort to increase law enforcement presence on Phoenix campuses.

The VCBE and VCOE are always open to the possibility of additional funding sources to assist in promoting school safety as well as improving campus climate and culture. As such sources become available, VCOE will investigate the best possible use of such sources. The absence of any dedicated funding source at present makes it untenable for the VCBE to authorize such funding at present.

R-03. The Ventura County Sheriff should ensure that all responding officers are trained in effective strategies for dealing with students with severe emotional disturbances.

The VCOE will engage in ongoing conversations with the Ventura County Sheriff to review current level of training provided by officers most likely to respond to Phoenix school and explore the feasibility of additional training as needed. Conversations have already begun.