

August 22, 2007

The Honorable John T. Feeney, Presiding Judge  
Superior Court of California  
County of Humboldt  
825 Fifth Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

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SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

Dear Judge Feeney:

In compliance with Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, I am responding to the following findings and recommendations of the 2006-2007 Humboldt County Grand Jury. Specifically, my responses address #2007-HS-01, Humboldt County School Systems, Findings and Recommendations 1, 2, and 3.

Following are my responses:

**#2007-HS-01 Humboldt County School Systems**

*Finding 1: While the K-6 Humboldt County schools can utilize the SARB, there is a lack of funding and/or resources available for students having discipline or behavioral problems in these schools.*

*Response: I agree partially with this finding. At this time, state education funding does not specifically target truancy, discipline or behavioral problems in K-6 schools. However, a lack of explicit funding in this area does not necessarily mean that elementary schools cannot address student discipline or behavioral problems by redirecting resources to these areas. Each school has a "school site council," a formal advisory group to the school district's governing board that includes parents and teachers. A school site council is responsible for recommending expenditure priorities for the use of funds that are available to the school site. However, it is important to understand that funding is limited, and a decision to direct dollars towards one priority, such as hiring an individual to specifically focus on truancy, discipline and behavior, may mean that another priority may have to be cut.*

*Recommendation 1: That Humboldt County School District research, obtain, and allocate funds that would allow all K-6 schools to provide guidance for students with at-risk behavior.*

*Response: This recommendation cannot be implemented as stated in the Grand Jury's Report because it cannot be reasonably accomplished in the manner suggested; however, other strategies have and will be used to assist at-risk students in the county.*

To explain, the recommendation reflects a misunderstanding of the role of the Humboldt County Office of Education. The Humboldt County Office of Education is not a school district and does not, as such, allocate funds to schools. Each of the county's 32 school districts receives funding allocated by the state and federal government. The Office of Education disburses those funds, but individual school district governing boards decide (with the input of school site councils) how they are to be spent at school sites according to any laws and regulations restricting their use.

However, the Office of Education actively seeks to address the needs of the county's at-risk students through programs that serve school districts on a county-wide or regional basis.

Court and Community Schools. The Humboldt County Office of Education is required by law to provide educational services to children incarcerated in Juvenile Hall. In addition, 20 years ago, the Office of Education decided to initiate a Community School program. These schools serve at-risk students who have been referred from their districts of residence for such reasons as behavior problems, habitual truancy, or expulsion. Currently, Community School sites are located in Garberville, Fortuna, Eureka, Cutten and Hoopa. (The Northern Humboldt High School District operates its own Community Day School in Arcata, and the Fortuna Union High School District operates a small Community Day School in Fortuna in addition to the one operated by the Office of Education.) Although the Community School Program has served children as young as sixth grade, generally students referred to the program are in seventh through twelfth grades.

School Attendance Review Board (SARB) Support. In Humboldt County, SARBs are regional, rather than countywide. There are SARBs serving Eureka, the Eel River Valley, Northern Humboldt, Klamath-Trinity, and Southern Humboldt. Each high school, and its feeder elementary districts, participates in one of these SARBs. Office of Education staff attends and participates in SARB meetings, and the Office of Education provides additional support as needed. Recently, when the Eel River Valley SARB needed a coordinator, the Office of Education financially supported a contract with a retired school administrator to oversee the SARB. This individual has had great success in reducing truancy rates in the Eel River Valley region.

Gang Risk Intervention Program (GRIP). In 1996, the Humboldt County Office Education applied for, and was awarded, a competitive state grant to serve at-risk youth and deter them from gang activity. An opportunity to partner in the grant was offered to all high schools in the county, and was accepted by Eureka City Schools, Northern Humboldt and Fortuna Union High School Districts. This program has partnered with law enforcement to identify students and families in need of intervention, created multicultural recreational activities (night basketball, soccer, multicultural dance performances, camping trips) and diffused potential violence. Core to its mission is keeping students engaged in school. Over the years, GRIP has struggled with maintaining a stable funding source, but aggressive pursuit of grants and community donations has kept it alive. Recently, the Office of Education with its partners, Fortuna Union High School District and Eureka City Schools, was successful in securing a School Community Violence Prevention grant that will sustain the program at a basic level for the next five years.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). PIQE has been offered with great success to a number of county schools through a partnership with Humboldt State University (which receives a grant for this purpose from the CSU system) and the Humboldt County Office of Education. PIQE is a non-profit agency whose mission is to support and encourage low-income, ethnically-diverse parents of elementary, middle and high school children to take a participatory role in their children's education by helping them to create a home learning environment, navigate the school system, collaborate with teachers, counselors and principals, encourage college attendance, and support their children's emotional and social development. Parents complete a nine-week course. In addition to English, the classes have been taught in both Spanish and Hmong. Schools that have participated include South Fortuna Elementary School, Redway Elementary School, South Bay and Pine Hill Elementary Schools, Hoopa Elementary School, McKinleyville High School, McKinleyville Middle School, and Lincoln Elementary School.

SKIP (School Kids Insurance Program). Children who have limited access to health care are more likely to have high absenteeism and behavioral problems. For the past two years, the Humboldt County Office of Education has contracted with two retired school nurses to promote and provide support for enrollment of all school-aged children in the county in an appropriate health insurance program. The nurses contacted schools throughout the county, helped with outreach to parents, and trained school staff in enrolling eligible children in the program (Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, Cal Kids) for which they qualified. In the coming year, SKIP will be folded into CHI (Healthy Kids Humboldt), in which the Humboldt County Office of Education is a partner.

*Finding 2: There is not a Truant Officer in Humboldt County. This officer could oversee students with truancy: excessive, excused or unexcused absences. At present it is the responsibility of the individual school to contact the parent or caregiver.*

Response: I agree with this finding.

*Recommendation 2: That Humboldt County hire and fund a permanent Truant Officer.*

Response: The recommendation cannot be implemented by the Humboldt County Office of Education at this time due to funding limitations. Initial student and parent contacts regarding truancy are handled by the student's school because the school has first-hand knowledge of the absence, and school staff has a relationship with the student and his or her family. As explained previously, persistent truants are referred to a regional SARB. While the idea of a single truant officer to handle all schools in the county might relieve schools of some of the time-consuming effort involved in working with students and their families, it is doubtful that one individual could handle the entire county effectively.

Although the Humboldt County Office of Education does not have access to funding for the purpose of hiring a permanent truant officer, an individual school district, or a consortium of school districts, would not be precluded from hiring a truant officer should they choose to do so. Were a group of districts to elect to form a consortium for that purpose, the Humboldt County Office of Education would be very willing to assist in the coordination of that activity.

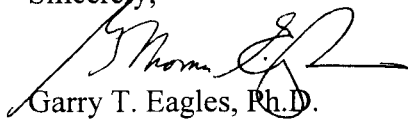
*Finding 3: It was determined that many of these at-risk students have problems with both attendance and behavior. It would benefit these students and better use resources if the CAP and SARB were operated as one program to provide better and more comprehensive guidance for these students.*

Response: I agree with the finding that attendance and behavior problems are often related and that strategies to address both problems are often needed to help students succeed in school.

*Recommendation 3: Blend the resources of the SARB and CAP to better serve at-risk students, many of whom have problems in both areas.*

Response: The Committee for Alternative Placement (CAP) is a program of the Eureka City Schools District, and decisions regarding how that program is operated are under the jurisdiction of the governing board of the Eureka City Schools District. However, it is my understanding that in practice Eureka City School's CAP and the regional SARB serving Eureka do work in conjunction with one another. A gap may exist for the five "feeder" elementary school districts that are independent of the Eureka City Schools District but which send students to Eureka's middle schools and high school. These school districts participate in the regional SARB; but, because they are not part of the Eureka City Schools District, they do not have access to CAP. Additionally, because these districts are small, using alternative placement as a strategy for students with behavior problems may not be an option for them.

Sincerely,



Garry T. Eagles, Ph.D.  
Humboldt County Superintendent of Schools

c: Stephanie J. Larsen, Assistant County Administrative Officer