

SONORA UNION HIGH SCHOOL

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The reason for this investigation was two-fold. It was partially complaint driven and also noted by the Grand Jury that Sonora Union High School (SUHS) had not been looked at since 1996/97.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury heard a presentation from the District Superintendent. Members of the jury held two (2) meetings with Certificated Staff members of SUHS and toured the facilities. The second meeting also included two representative students.

NARRATIVE/COMMENTS

The first meeting was scheduled for, and held on November 18, 2009. Jury members went to the meeting hoping to learn as much as they could about SUHS in order to produce an accurate report on the school as per their charge. They came expecting the school employees to be cooperative and helpful. Instead, the meeting began on a negative note when an administrator asked pointedly, “why are you here and what do you want”? This made the jury members feel uncomfortable and the meeting continued with negative undertones.

At this meeting, jury members asked for several documents. These were a Student Handbook, a Faculty Handbook, and a copy of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) report for SUHS. All of these should be available to the public upon request, but none of these documents were given to the members at this time.

A visit to the District Office in December, 2009 did produce one (1) document. This was not one of the original three (3) requested.

A second meeting was scheduled for and occurred on January 28, 2010. This meeting had a more positive tone as two SUHS students were present. But some members felt constrained by the presence of the two students; so much so that they felt pertinent questions could and should not be asked with students present. The documents mentioned above were again requested and the members went on a tour of the campus. Once again the documents were not given to the members.

The requested documents were finally delivered to the Grand Jury in late March, over four (4) months after the initial request. But, they did not come directly from the school. A juror contacted the County Superintendent of Schools and asked for his help. Subsequently, he obtained the documents and had them delivered to the jury. This late delivery, however, precluded using the documents in the final report as there was insufficient time for all panel members to peruse each document in the detail necessary.

Included with the requested documents were copies of the California Public Records Act Request along with instructions on how to fill out the request. Only one mention was made of the possibility of needing a formal written request for these documents. The

person questioning the request just said they were not certain a verbal request was sufficient. No mention was made of the best method to obtain the requested documents. This is, apparently, to make the request through the District Office.

FINDINGS

1. SUHS representatives did not respond to jury member's requests for documents even though these documents should be readily available to the public.
2. The SUHS cafeteria has no unprocessed or whole grain food products available. It serves no whole wheat breads, pastas or brown rice. The food available has only highly processed starches. While the cafeteria meets minimum state nutritional requirements, the food being served does not enhance overall student health.
3. The SUHS campus was unkempt and messy. Paper and other trash were along the fence lines, by the outdoor tables, and in what plantings were present. Weeds were growing through cracks in the paved areas and in the plantings.
4. The SUHS security staff looked unprofessional and showed little apparent concern for student safety. Panel members were not required to sign in or out at the office for the meetings. No juror was asked for identification. At no time did security approach and ask why the members were on site, even after the meetings when some panel members had to leave the group and walked across campus on their own. Other panel members went to different points on the campus and were not challenged. (After asking about this, panel members were informed the security personnel had been told the Grand Jury would be on site.)
5. Jurors requested, but did not receive, a copy of the security protocols.
6. Certificated Staff members were quick to blame parents and students for any academic shortcomings. Blame was also placed on lack of money and the 'limitations of rural students'.
7. Proposals to cut the present 240 credits required for graduation to 220 credits due to no summer school program have been made
8. There is a dress code for students, but little enforcement was apparent.
9. Just over two percent (2%) of the SUHS students are enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Findings 1 and 5, staff members at all levels need to recognize the mandated requirements to respond to Grand Jury requests for documents in an expeditious manner. Grand Juries normally do not make written requests for documents.
2. For Finding 2, more unprocessed food products need to be made available to students. This can be done within the mandated state guidelines.
3. For Finding 3, if grounds keepers have been cut due to budget constraints, students can be encouraged to help clean the grounds following the examples of the staff members. If a student sees a staff member pick up a piece of trash, most likely the student will follow suit.
4. For Finding 4, security staff members need to present a more professional appearance. Button down shirts and neat slacks should be worn. Identifying badges or jackets should be worn to make identification easier for both visitors and new students.

5. There is no recommendation for Finding 6.
6. For Finding 7, in this age of technology, students need to learn more not less. No cuts in requirements should be made.
7. For Finding 8, consideration should be made to require student uniforms. Uniforms are considerably cheaper to the parents and students. This would also eliminate the “mine is better than yours” climate so prevalent in today’s society. If parents reject the uniform idea, the present dress code needs to be strongly and strictly enforced for all students.
8. For Finding 9, emphasis must be placed on getting more students into AP courses and a greater number of courses need to be offered as soon as possible.
9. This recommendation does not relate to any specific finding. More agriculture/vocational classes are needed, especially in a “rural community” such as Tuolumne County. The present staffing needs to be maintained in order to keep the program as strong as possible. Most other “rural” counties have three (3) to five (5) teachers in this field. It is doubtful there are other staff members at SUHS with the proper credential that can teach all of the present vocational classes and continue to build the program. SUHS needs to maintain and increase these classes because Tuolumne County is a “rural community” based on many facets of agriculture.
10. This recommendation does not relate to any specific finding. Future Grand Juries need to look long and hard at the Sonora Union High School over the next several years. This level of oversight is needed to insure compliance with the school’s own written policies and guidelines as well as complying with the responses to the Grand Jury’s recommendations.