



SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY NEWS RELEASE

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Sacramento City Unified School District continues to utterly fail its most vulnerable students

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) fails to meet the needs of students with learning, physical, and behavioral disabilities, despite receiving multiple improvement recommendations from national, state and local education experts, the Sacramento County Grand Jury found in its eight-month investigation.

“The Board of Education has failed to direct the administration to create a working plan and district-wide accepted goals to guide the Special Education Department,” said Steve Caruso, 2023-24 foreperson. “Yet the Grand Jury found over the past seven years SCUSD received reports with specific recommendations for best practices in special education services.”

“Incredibly, there’s no plan for the more than 7,000 special education students in the district,” Caruso continued. “Both the board and the administration seem content to ignore these students and their parents.”

SCUSD also fails all students by not consistently assessing each student – through “early intervention” -- to determine their specific learning needs, the Grand Jury found. SCUSD has invested in an early assessment and intervention system, but its use is limited to only a few of the District’s 47 elementary schools.

Educational experts told the Grand Jury, if SCUSD assessed students’ learning needs early and provided them with the specific support they need, many students could avoid special education altogether and thrive in the regular education classroom, Caruso said.

The Grand Jury also found that teachers and administrators throughout the district fail to update and refine Individual Educational Plans (IEP) that are created for each special education student. All IEPs are required to be reviewed annually to ensure the special education student receives the services to which they are entitled.

Tension and low morale among administration, faculty, staff, and bargaining units in SCUSD Special Education Department was a reoccurring theme from the 14 interviews the Grand Jury conducted for this investigation. Turnover adds to district-wide internal strife and low morale especially when the focus changes frequently with no clear expectations or consequences for not following procedures.

While the recent change of top administrative leadership seems to bode well for improving districtwide relationships in the future, the Grand Jury was also told infighting among district office administrators can still thwart progress.

The Grand Jury report includes 13 wide-ranging recommendations that SCUSD can improve Special Education. Among them, the Grand Jury recommends the Board of Education direct staff to create and then formally adopt a master plan for special ed. The Board should also receive quarterly updates on progress implementing the plan from SCUSD administration.

The Sacramento County Grand Jury is the independent watchdog over public entities within the county. Concerned residents can contact the Grand Jury on a confidential basis through written complaints that alert the Grand Jury to issues within public entities. We would like to hear from you at www.sacgrandjury.org.

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