



David W. Gordon
Superintendent

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Honorable Russell Hom, Presiding Judge
Sacramento Superior Court
720 Ninth Street, Department 47
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Judge Hom:

This letter is a joint response from Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOPE), Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD), Natomas Unified School District (NUSD), San Juan Unified School District (SJUSD), and Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD) regarding recommendations in the Sacramento County Grand Jury 2019-2020 Report entitled High School Dropouts: How are Districts in Sacramento County Doing and What are the Best Practices for Improvements?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of the Grand Jury investigation was to discover strategies and best practices that help lower dropout rates, improve graduation rates, and can be replicated in all Sacramento County school districts:

R1. The SCOPE should facilitate the identification and use of best practices to reduce dropout rates by serving as a clearinghouse for such efforts by different schools and school districts, utilizing its website and other media to share this information, and possibly convening periodic meetings and standing committees focused on this outcome. The SCOPE should advance such efforts during 2020-2021.

This recommendation is being implemented.

During 2016, SCOPE implemented Senior Extension to help young adults without diplomas complete graduation requirements within a very flexible model. The program started with sixteen students and to date has helped 487 students earn their high school diploma. School districts across the county have implemented intervention programs to reduce dropout rates and collaborated with SCOPE to provide support and options for all students to keep them engaged in school. Additionally, SCOPE facilitates a community of practice for Sacramento County school administrators with the assistance of Dora Dome Esq. to reduce suspension and expulsion

rates which contributes to students remaining engaged and enrolled in school.

As COVID-19 circumstances allow, SCOE plans to develop a formal community of practice focused on reducing the “dropout rate” in Sacramento County. This community of practice will meet three times during the 2020-2021 school year beginning in fall of 2020, and again in February and May of 2021.

R2. District school boards and employee unions should recognize that because education funding can vary widely from year to year, contracts for wages and benefits should be fair to all invested parties while keeping the district financially healthy. Because of the uncertainty of COVID-19 on individual district education budgets this needs to be addressed for the 2020-2021 school year at the earliest possible time.

Districts will take the Grand Jury’s advice under consideration.

R3. School districts and school administrators should be proactive in developing community partnerships with service clubs, area 501(c)(3) and local businesses. District Superintendents need to look for community grants and develop outreach programs in every school during the 2020-2021 school year.

Efforts around this recommendation are ongoing.

School districts in Sacramento County have secured additional funding to support community partnerships in the interest of supporting student engagement and academic persistence.

Excellent examples of collaboration between non-profit organizations and districts that have been established include partnerships with Improve Your Tomorrow, My Brother’s Keeper Sacramento Collaborative, The Square Root Academy, 916 Ink, Earth Mama Healing, the Sacramento Chinese Community Center, and many more. A recent and appropriate example would be City of Sacramento grants that funded a Summer Learning Initiative for school districts in the City of Sacramento. In addition, the “Cities Rise” Mental Health initiative involves five non-profits in providing awareness activities as well as services.

At the current time, districts are focused on implementing effective distance learning across the county and will face additional challenges if and when students return to school on a part-time basis. Districts will make data-informed decisions regarding available funding that supports student and family engagement in the interest of advancing student learning during COVID-19 restrictions and mitigating learning loss. Many of these decisions will involve strategic partnerships with local non-profits and businesses.

R4. Sacramento County district school boards should budget for providing a broad array of services for at-risk students, such as promoting volunteers for tutoring and mentoring; hiring more social service professionals, including social workers, psychologists, and counselors; and programs such as summer school, intercession and remediation to help students get back on a four-year graduation track. Schools should further such efforts during 2020-2021.

Districts are implementing this recommendation.

Districts are delineating efforts and the funds allocated to support the concepts described above in R4 in Learning Continuity and Attendance Plans. Each district will complete their plan by September 30, 2020.

Additionally, SCOE, the Sacramento County and Districts are implementing a new initiative that will ultimately place a mental health clinician in Sacramento County schools through a partnership with the Sacramento County Health Department. SCOE will hire mental health clinicians to support the first cohort of eleven schools in 2020-2021.

R5. Sacramento County district school boards should mandate that each school establish at least one new student club, one new sports program, and one other activity that engages students and keeps them in school. Schools should implement this recommendation by June 30, 2021.

During the current COVID pandemic, school districts are unable to address this recommendation. Instead, districts are transforming existing clubs and sports programs to support students virtually.

During the current COVID restrictions, districts are establishing new ways for students to engage and support social emotional learning during distance learning. These efforts include online opportunities for students to participate in activities together and build relationships with new classmates. This work is new, challenging and requires continuous innovation and collaboration across a school district. Although each school may not establish a “new” club, student clubs are under transformation to meet the current situation.

Districts are responsible to continue physical education and coaches are implementing new models to engage their teams while competitive sports are cancelled. Schools are developing and implementing virtual models to engage students and help them maintain fitness while engaged in distance learning from home.

Sincerely,



David W. Gordon
Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools



Chris Hoffman, Superintendent
Elk Grove Unified School District



Chris Evans, Superintendent
Natomas Unified School District



Kent Kern, Superintendent
San Juan Unified School District



Dr. Steve Martinez, Superintendent
Twin Rivers Unified School District

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Email: Endy Tapia-Bouthillier, Grand Jury Coordinator