

A REPORT ON THE LIGHTHOUSE SCHOOL AND THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS CAMPUS IN FORT BRAGG

May 24, 2007

Summary

In light of the fact that the Fort Bragg Unified School District (FBUSD) had not been reviewed by the Grand Jury in more than nine years, the Grand Jury chose to observe and visit the alternative schools campus, with an emphasis on the Lighthouse School. The campus is well maintained and the students are strongly supported by the administration and staff.

The Grand Jury found a serious lack of security measures for the alternative schools campus. Truancy is another problem that needs to be addressed; historically, truancy enforcement, after a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) hearing, has been non-existent by the District Attorney's Office.

Background

The FBUSD has not been visited in the past nine years by the Grand Jury. As part of an ongoing survey of schools within Mendocino County, the Grand Jury completed an investigation of the alternative schools under Special Services in Fort Bragg. The alternative schools campus is comprised of six mobile units, three of which contain the Noyo High School, Shelter Cove School, and Lighthouse School.

Truancy is a major concern for the district. After a student is determined to be truant, two letters are sent to the parents. If there is no response at this time, a parent/child conference is requested. If there is no improvement, the parents and student(s) are asked to come before a panel of the SARB; this panel consists of school officials, the Sheriff, a representative from Social Services, a Fort Bragg Police Department Officer, and representatives from the departments of the County Probation Office and Child Protection Services. If truancy continues, the case is referred to the County District Attorney's Office.

Methods

The Grand Jury toured the campus encompassing the three schools. They reviewed the Lighthouse Student Handbook and Teachers Handbook, proposed budget, and the State Health & Safety Code §11489. Interviews were conducted with district administrators, teachers, a juvenile probation officer, and concerned community members.

Findings

1. The campus for the Fort Bragg alternative schools is located approximately two blocks from the Fort Bragg High School.
2. The buildings on this campus consist of six mobile units in an area surrounded by a large field and tall trees.
3. The alternative campus buildings include:
 - the Administration Office, where the principal, office staff, equipment, and a conference area are located;
 - Noyo High School, a Continuation School for students in grades 9-12. Continuation School students attend class for four hours per day, and most work in the afternoon at local businesses.
 - Shelter Cove School, a Community Day School for students in the 6th-8th grades. These students have been suspended, expelled from the Fort Bragg Middle School, or are on probation with the County Juvenile Probation Department in Fort Bragg.
 - Lighthouse School, is a Community Day School for students in grades 9-12. Students attending this school have been suspended or expelled from the Fort Bragg High School, or are on probation with the County Juvenile Probation Department in Fort Bragg.
 - A computer lab which is available to the students of the three schools. There is a separate schedule for each school and the students are allowed in the lab only under adult supervision. Internet access is for "education and research consistent with District goals" only.
 - Exercise area with workout equipment. The students from the three schools may use the equipment, under constant adult supervision. Each school has its own scheduled time. The workout equipment was purchased with a grant.
4. The students are separated by age for all activities on this campus due to the complex issues surrounding student behavior.
5. Testimony indicates that the maximum number of students the Lighthouse School staff can effectively work with is 15. Currently, 90% of the students in the Lighthouse School are on probation.
6. Lighthouse School staff consists of one Certified Teacher and a Classified Teacher (aide).
7. The administration staff, teachers, and aides are supportive of their campus and students.
8. When a student is first enrolled in the Lighthouse School a "Level of Freedom" is strictly enforced. At first they are escorted everywhere by a staff member until they earn the teacher's and aide's trust.
9. If a student is disruptive in class at Lighthouse School, but not threatening to others, they are given tasks to do such as pulling weeds around their campus, clean chalk boards, etc. They are required to "Give Back Time", which is equal to the time they were disruptive; during which they are supervised by a staff member, usually after school.
10. The students on probation in Lighthouse School, for the most part, are students with behavioral problems. They are defiant, disruptive in class, and show very little or no

respect for the teachers. Intervention efforts are started in the late elementary or middle schools.

11. A Regional Occupation Program (ROP) within the FBUSD, located at the Fort Bragg High School, offers many different work-training classes. Due to a high level of cultural tension, the students at Lighthouse School find it very difficult to take advantage of the ROP classes offered.
12. There is no vocational training available to Lighthouse School students, other than the ROP program.
13. The atmosphere within the classroom for Lighthouse School is tense and stressful for the teacher and aide. If a student becomes disruptive or threatening to others, both the teacher and aide have cell phones with them at all times and may call the principal, or the police, as the situation requires.
14. There is no "Campus Safety Officer" at either the Fort Bragg High School or the alternative schools campus.
15. There is no security equipment installed in the alternative schools classrooms, such as video cameras. The Fort Bragg High School recently had video cameras installed in common areas.
16. Students on probation may be searched at any time if a teacher or administrator thinks it is necessary.
17. A dress code is strictly enforced on the alternative schools campus. No gang attire or paraphernalia is allowed. Clothing and accessories must be appropriate for the learning environment.
18. Counselors are available within the FBUSD. Three days a week they are available for drug counseling at the alternative schools. Two days a week the counselors are located on the elementary school campus for group counseling.
19. A large proportion of students speak both Spanish and English. Some of the teachers are not bilingual.
20. There is no additional training for new teachers prior to entering the Lighthouse School classroom.
21. Retention of teachers and aides is a problem due to the classroom situation and the high cost of living in the coastal area. Salaries are insufficient to support a family in the Fort Bragg area. There is no "At Risk Pay" or stipend for these teachers.
22. Truancy is a problem at the alternative schools. If there is no improvement after a hearing before the SARB the matter is referred to the County District Attorney's (DA) office. In the past the DA has not followed through on these cases.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. there be more than one certified teacher or aide in each classroom on the alternative schools campus. (Finding 6)
2. an intervention program be planned and implemented at the earliest possible level. (Finding 10)
3. The FBUSD instituted a job training program for the students of Lighthouse School. (Findings 11-12)
4. additional funds be sought for a Lighthouse School student work training program,

- including summertime, and the associated staff. (Findings 11-12)
5. funds be obtained to hire a "Campus Safety Officer" to be shared by the Fort Bragg High School and the alternative school campus. (Finding 14)
 6. video cameras or other security equipment, be placed in all classrooms on the alternative schools campus. (Finding 15)
 7. recruitment be made for bilingual teachers and aides. (Finding 19)
 8. additional training be offered to new teachers coming to the campus. (Finding 20)
 9. teachers and aides who work in the alternative schools receive a hazard stipend. (Finding 21)
 10. the District Attorney's Office follow up on truancy cases after the SARB hearing. (Finding 22)

Comments

The Grand Jury strongly urges the FBUSD to explore resources for improving security at the alternative schools.

Given the many challenges at the Lighthouse School and the other schools on the campus, the Grand Jury found the administration and staff are very dedicated and supportive of their students.

Responses Required

Superintendent, Mendocino County Office of Education (Findings 14-15, 20-21; Recommendations 3-6, 9)

Superintendent, Fort Bragg Unified School District (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Principal, Alternative Schools of Fort Bragg Unified School District. (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Counselor, Fort Bragg Unified School District (Findings 10, 18; Recommendation 2)

County District Attorney (Finding 22; Recommendation 10)

Responses Requested

Chief, Fort Bragg Police Department (Finding 14; Recommendation 5)

Director, Special Education, Fort Bragg Unified School District (Finding 10, 18; Recommendation 2)