

Grand Jury Report

REQUIRED RESPONSE FORM

Grand Jury Report Title : *Advancing Education Through Sharing*

Report Dated : April 3, 2019

Response Form Submitted By:

(use address block as inserted on first page)

Response MUST be submitted, per Penal Code §933.05, no later than:

I have reviewed the report and submit my responses to the FINDINGS portion of the report as follows:

I (we) agree with the Findings numbered:

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the Findings numbered below, and have *attached* a statement specifying any portion of the Finding that are disputed with an explanation of the reasons therefore.

I have reviewed the report and submit my responses to the RECOMMENDATIONS portion of the report as follows:

The following Recommendation(s) have been implemented and **attached, as required**, is a summary describing the implemented actions:

The following Recommendation(s) have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future; **attached, as required**, is a time frame for implementation:

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- The following Recommendation(s) require further analysis, and **attached, as required**, is an explanation and the scope and parameters of the planned analysis, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared, discussed and approved by the officer and/or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed: (This time frame shall not exceed six (6) months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report)
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- The following Recommendations will NOT be implemented because they are not warranted and/or are not deemed reasonable; **attached, as required**, is an explanation therefore:
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I have completed the above responses, and have attached, as required the following number of pages to this response form:

Number of Pages attached: 3

I understand that responses to Grand Jury Reports are public records. They will be posted on the Grand Jury website: www.mendocinocounty.org/government/grand-jury. The clerk of the responding agency is required to maintain a copy of the response.

I understand that I must submit this signed response form and any attachments as follows:

First Step: E-mail in pdf file format to:

- The Grand Jury Foreperson at: grandjury@mendocinocounty.org
- The Presiding Judge: grandjury@mendocino.courts.ca.gov

Second Step: Mail all originals to:

Mendocino County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 939
Ukiah, CA 95482

Printed Name: MARK WESTERBURG

Title: Superintendent of Schools

Signed: 

Date: 6-20-19

Dear Members of the Grand Jury:

I am responding on behalf of the Willits Unified School District (WUSD) to the Grand Jury report dated April 3, 2019 titled, Advancing Education Through Sharing. Please see WUSD's responses below.

FINDINGS:

F1 – Innovations (creative teaching methodologies which benefit students) at any school are neither utilized nor shared between charter and district schools.

* AGREE

WUSD has a very positive relationship with the charters schools within our community. However, we do not meet and exchange ideas of best practices. Willits Charter is an A-G focused high school, La Vida Charter blends independent study work with part-time attendance, and Willits High School (WHS) is a comprehensive program for all types of students. WHS has A-G college bound students, 11 Career and Technical Education Programs, an Alternative Education program, Special Education Programs, as well as independent study. At the elementary level, the district and WECS have similar programs. It's important to understand that we compete for students and competitors generally are not working in chorus with one another. We believe in parental choice and want to be the right choice, as do the charter schools.

F2 – Since district schools operate under more restrictive rules and regulations, it is difficult for the district schools to offer some of the same options or programs as charter schools.

* STRONGLY AGREE

Rules, regulations, accountability and paperwork are piled on to the public schools compared to the charter schools. Charter schools don't have to have the same requirements for teacher credentials, they are non-union, have limited building codes, and a board that can function much more like a business. I am not advocating for the charter schools to follow our rules, we would like to have their rules. Public schools would be far more responsive to student needs and change if able to avoid the incredible mountain of educational legislative code dictating everything. EdCode makes a basic assumption that local control cannot be trusted and must be micromanaged by Sacramento and the County School System. It also important to note that WUSD is also running state regulated programs such as: special needs programs, year around food service programs, busing, alternative high school, adult education, athletics, a pool, tennis courts, auditorium, school farm, community gym and more.

F3 – The district schools are changing their curricula to attract students and increase their ADA funding.

*DISAGREE/AGREE

WUSD adjusts curriculum because the state mandates it and produces the tests that we are held accountable to. Again, local control is not an option. If I knew of a program that

the district could afford to do and would draw students back to WUSD, I would do it without question. My goal is to make WUSD the best district it can be for all students. The entire concept of the state funding schools based on ADA is wrong, districts are being punished for lack of attendance by students. This is like punishing the waitress when people don't show up to eat at the restaurant. All public schools in CA should join together in a class action lawsuit against the state, due to the direct conflict with the mandated requirements of the Williams Act.

F4 – Where existing, the assigned oversight person between the district and the charter schools has not looked for opportunities to broaden the success of district schools. Currently, the GJ found no evidence of collaborative processes between the charter and district schools.

* AGREE

WUSD has a very limited role in oversight in regards to the charter schools. WUSD follows the state guidelines and makes sure the charters have the required documents and provide solvent financial information. We have a great relationship with the charter schools but not a collaborative problem-solving situation. However, with special education we do work in collaboration because public schools are required to provide services for those students. Our district has a large number of *high need* students since the charter schools do not have the numbers nor the capacity to provide for those programs.

F5 – Many parents are not aware of the availability, or even the existence, of SARC, API, and other scores and reports to determine the best educational experience for their students. Parents have traditionally not been educated in the availability of these tools.

*AGREE

WUSD works hard to provide all the state requirements, which include all of the items mentioned above and more except API (which has been changed). The majority of parents are not aware of the documents and reports available to them, they rely on the local schools to do their best. There is a small group of parents who will check available data and reports, however reports that are 50- 80 pages will often get put down quickly. Comparing schools is usually based on programs and services offered, just like the other businesses in town.

F6 – The GJ has found in Mendocino County the mission of charter schools as originally envisioned has not been fulfilled.

* AGREE

The mission of charter schools is to provide parents with an alternative to traditional public schools using public tax dollars. The charter school movement is far larger than just Mendocino County and the same issues exist nationally.

Most people believe that our local charter schools are either part of WUSD or at least directly controlled by WUSD. The truth is these charters have their own school

board, hire all their own people and make all of their own educational decisions for their schools.

Recommendations R2-R4

R2 – Schools should offer parents and guardians training on the tools available to evaluate and compare schools within the districts, e.g., SARC and API. Offering this allows the students to enroll in the school which is best aligned with their needs
WUSD provides all required documents for parents to review on our websites. I would love to know the secret to have a meeting where all parents attend and I could showcase WUSD; tell them what we do and why. I am proud of the work we do and would love to share it with parents, allow them to ask questions and make informed decisions for their students. It is important to remember that public schools cannot set limits on class size or send students to the charter school if the traditional public school is not working for them. However, charter schools can set limits and drop students sending them back to public schools at their choosing. WUSD and the charter schools do try to work cooperatively with each other.

R3 – Post a link to the school, district and state SARC and API scores on the school’s website.

WUSD already has links to documents on the district website. Perhaps the micromanagement from Sacramento should require a parent to attend a meeting prior to the start of each school year, or at least if they are new to the school. WUSD would be excited to hold a meeting, prior to school where all the parents attend. In the middle school and high school parent meetings are not well attended. In order to bridge the communication gap WUSD will soon be providing an app for smart phones alongside our new district and school websites.

R4 – Build a space on the MCOE website for teachers at any school in Mendocino County to publish tips and suggestions to improve classroom experience, e.g., behavior and teaching methodologies.

It is important to remember that in California some county office are very small and some are huge and just like schools the larger the county office the more resources they have. All educational data tells us that the single most important factor in any classroom is the teacher. California needs to provide our best and brightest with incentives to teach such as significant loan forgiveness and make the process to become a teacher less cumbersome and expensive. The state also needs to get inline with other states to draw quality people from outside the state as well. Attracting quality staff also involves providing affordable housing. I know that all of the public schools in our county work together and share ideas and programs with each other on a regular basis.