

# MENDOCINO COUNTY SMALL COASTAL HIGH SCHOOLS

## A REPORT ON MENDOCINO AND POINT ARENA HIGH SCHOOLS

JUNE 14, 2010

### **Summary**

In 2009-2010, the Grand Jury, (GJ), visited four Mendocino County, (County), High Schools, two inland and two on the Mendocino Coast. The coastal high schools serve a large geographical area with a limited number of students. These two coastal high schools are funded through *Basic Aid*. *Basic Aid* occurs when the property taxes collected exceed the funding that would occur from average daily attendance, (ADA). Both schools have a higher per student annual cost and have fewer than 25 students in most classes. This spring, both school districts learned their funding had been cut due to a reduction in assessed property values. Both districts' budgets were reduced by approximately \$300,000, and the Point Arena High School budget loss was \$120,000.

The GJ found five issues facing all high schools in the County with varying degrees of severity:

- a growing number of students showing signs of drug dependency,
- a decrease in the total number of students attending County School Districts,
- a significant increase in English as Second Language, (ESL), students in County schools,
- a potential reduction in Regional Occupational Programs, (ROP), due to block granting of funds, now part of general funds,
- concerns about Program Improvement, (PI), requirements for school districts.

The GJ concludes that resolving these multiple challenges facing our schools will require parental, community, County, State and Federal support. The challenges are everyone's, not just the schools'.

### **Method**

The 2009-2010 GJ performed site visits to four Mendocino County high schools: Mendocino High School, (MHS), Point Arena High School, (PAHS), Ukiah High School, (UHS), and Willits High School, (WHS). This report focuses on two coastal High Schools.

Interviews were conducted with high school principals, district superintendents, teachers, staff, and students. Site visits were conducted on each high school campus. School Accountability Report Cards, (SARCs), and Western Association of Schools and Colleges, (WASC), reports and documentation of school policies on expulsions, suspensions, discipline policies, achievement plans, various forms, new entry packages, and school layout were examined, as were the 2009-2010 Action Plans, Safe School Plan, and budget information.

One member of the GJ was recused from this report due to a conflict of interest.

### **Background**

The 2009-2010 GJ performed site visits to four County high schools: Mendocino High School, (MHS), Point Arena High School, (PAHS), Ukiah High School, (UHS), and Willits High School, (WHS).

For comparison purposes, this report focuses on PAHS and MHS, two of the three high schools on the Mendocino Coast.

These schools serve a huge geographic area with a limited number of students. The MHS district serves 500 students K-12. The current high school population is 200, and PAHS is 159. Both have experienced a drop in registration compared to prior years. PAHS has shown a dramatic growth in students who are *English as Second Language*, (ESL), learners. MHS has out of district students transferring into the district. Both schools are able to offer classes with less than 25 students.

Funding for these schools is *Basic Aid*. They are not funded under annual daily attendance, (ADA). Coastal schools serve areas with generally expensive properties and few children. They receive funding based on the property taxes collected. Both schools have a student cost that is higher than other school districts. State cuts to education have not impacted these schools as much as a decrease in property values. Both schools have a satellite program for special education and students that need specialized programs. Truancy is less an issue at basic aid school districts. Cutting classes is more of a problem. When students leave campus, they miss out on the subjects being taught, but the school does not lose funding. The schools are located close to the center of their villages. MHS has an open campus, most students have lunch in town, not at school; some do not return and miss classes.

Neither school is in PI; both met the criteria for the Adequate Yearly Progress, (AYP), and the Academic Performance Index, (API). They are WASC accredited. PAHS was saved from PI by one student taking a makeup exam.

### **Findings – Mendocino High School**

1. The MHS campus began construction in 1893, consisting of several buildings. The main building is on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Other buildings are built into the hillside or at the bottom of the hill. The campus appears to be a challenge for students with physical limitations. There is an elevator, which appeared to be unclean, available to reach some of the buildings on the lower level.
2. This is a *Basic Aid* district with approximately 200 high school students. Expenditures per pupil are \$12,707 per year. The Superintendent was notified recently, by the County Tax Assessor's Office, that the District was losing \$300,000 in funding.

3. In 2009, one teacher was laid-off due to financial cut backs. The recent cuts have resulted in closing a rural elementary school with a small student body. The Principal hoped future needs for reduction in staff would be met through attrition. The percentage of students who transfer in from outside the district is between 15% to 20%.
4. Students provided with reduced cost or free meals are between 15% to 20%. Only 1% of students require ESL. In addition there are two exchange students from Europe.
5. Mendocino Community Network, (MCN), is an internet service provider, located on the campus. It received a NASA grant for information technology. MCN provided a much needed phone system to the school. This year they promised the district \$40,000 toward the general fund.
6. The declining enrollment and the ability to offer a comprehensive curriculum for a small number of students is a challenge for the school. Another challenge is the high cost of maintenance for a school buffeted by winds and rain off the sea.
7. MHS met criteria for AYP and API. The percentage of MHS graduates who continue on to college or trade school is 80%.
8. Regional Occupation Program, (ROP), classes offered include: Wood Shop, Photography, Computer Technology (Graphics and Animation, and Desktop Publishing), Horticulture, and Work Experience. In addition, there is a computer programming class funded under a grant.
9. Special Education classes are offered on the MHS campus. Approximately 15% of the students are in Special Education.
10. MHS has an active Booster Club, with excellent participation in school events. Parents support academic achievement as well as sports. Parents are asked to donate \$85 for their child's participation in a sport.
11. Lunch was poorly attended. The cafeteria is not used to serve food. On the recommendations of a community committee, the lunch menus were changed to make the diet healthier and to attract more students. On the suggestion of the committee, lunch is to be served in the hallway. On the day of the site visit, lunch consisted of one entrée. It was raining and there was no place to sit down to eat. Some students ate their lunches in their classrooms. Food purveyors serve a special student lunch in town.
12. MHS has adequate safety procedures, including lock down, fire, and emergency evacuation. Relationship with local law enforcement is good.
13. Cell phones and Internet technology equipment, (IT), are required to be off during class.
14. Discussions on *cyber-bullying* have taken place with zero-tolerance for gang activity, bullying, or discrimination of any kind.
15. The 2007-2008 SARCs indicated a 0.00 Expulsion Rate and a 0.149 Suspension Rate.

### ***Findings – Point Arena High School***

16. The District covers the area from Manchester to Stewarts Point and inland, as far as the Kashi Reservation. The area south of Gualala is in Sonoma County,

- including Sea Ranch. The High School District serves five small K-8 school districts: the Horicon District in Sonoma County, the Kashi Reservation, Manchester District, Arena United, and Point Arena.
17. Expenditures per pupil are \$20,724 (\$5,182 from restricted sources and \$15,542 from unrestricted sources) per year.
  18. The GJ had difficulty locating the school office due the absence of signage.
  19. While other districts had to lay off teachers, this District has been able to selectively recruit teachers. The recent need for cutting costs have not required cutting staff or programs.
  20. The District has a good relationship with Point Arena Charter School and provides \$40,000 in funding, as well as the use of some facilities and grounds.
  21. The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced cost meals is 70%. Breakfast, lunch, and after school snacks are provided.
  22. The school received a positive WASC report.
  23. In 2007, PAHS received the Academic School Achievement Award. In 2009, PAHS had a graduation rate of 97%. A high percentage of students continue on to college or trade schools. Keeping out of PI has been considered a school success.
  24. The school was in danger of PI for one day, until one student took a make-up test.
  25. District demographics have been changing rapidly. ESL students went from 18% to 45% in one year. This presents difficulties in getting these students through the State testing process successfully. There are four bi-lingual aides.
  26. PAHS has approximately 15 Special Education students. They utilize a *Blended Model* for both Special Education students and gifted students. There is one resource room serving both purposes.
  27. Special Education students require Individualized Education Plans, (IEPs). Students with IEPs may be eligible to participate in learning food preparation skills in a special program.
  28. After school programs for tutoring are limited. PAHS offers a career center to assist students in locating jobs.
  29. ROP classes offered include: Automotive, Woodworking, Computer Technology, Landscaping, and Horticulture. Students suggested the computer software and hardware need updating. Computer monitors were older, large and heavy.
  30. There is a new gymnasium, a new office, a remodeled cafeteria/lunchroom, and a new library. The Librarian indicated the library is in need of new books and resource materials.
  31. Transportation challenges are significant; the District covers 400-500 square miles. There have been huge cuts in transportation; the School Board continues to finance the costs. PAHS has four vans, two SUVs, and four buses, one of which is not in operation due to the lack of a driver.
  32. Stewarts Point is the pick-up location for the two students coming from the Kashi Reservation. They board a van at 5:30 AM, in order to arrive at school by 8:05 AM.
  33. Juniors and seniors are permitted to leave the campus for lunch or educational programs in town.
  34. The Booster Club is active and provides significant financial support, including \$20,000 for academics, \$20,000 for sports, and \$1,000 for the Principal to use at his discretion, for such things as assisting low-income students with costs related to

- sports and transportation. Parents are asked to donate \$30 per student for transportation charges for sports. Sporting events are highly attended and actively supported by the community. Continuation students are not allowed to participate in sports.
35. There is a private duty Security Officer. He displays good rapport with staff and students as he walks the campus. He believes his presence is a deterrent to drug and alcohol use on campus.
  36. There is zero tolerance for gang activity. Gang clothing is banned. A few students have expressed interest in gang membership. Currently, there is not a major problem with gangs. Marijuana is the major substance abuse problem with students.
  37. Student attendance is 93%; the school's goal is 98%. Since PAHS is *Basic Aid* and not ADA, this does not affect the budget, however, the Principal recently received notification that District funding was being cut by \$120,000 due to changes in property tax assessments.
  38. PAHS had 15 Child Protective Service, (CPS), referrals in 2009.
  39. The relationship with law enforcement is good considering the response time for the arrival of a Deputy Sheriff. The Security Officer and Principal are required to deal with problems that may arise.
  40. Cell phones and IT equipment are required to be off in class.
  41. PAHS shares a nurse with the elementary school. The Shop Teacher, who is an Emergency Medical Technician, (EMT), provides emergency medical aid. Medications are administered in the office.
  42. Food and menus are prepared in the remodeled cafeteria by the Food Preparation Manager. The cafeteria is small; choices of entrees were offered, along with a salad bar. The odor of propane gas was noticeable in the kitchen area.
  43. The GJ noted an unlocked circuit breaker panel box in the cafeteria.

### ***Recommendations – Both Schools***

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. Mendocino High School finds a better way of serving lunch. Improving the offerings and location might make eating lunch at school more attractive. (Finding 11)
2. Mendocino High School improve the appearance of the elevator. (Finding 1)
3. Point Arena High School implement a summer school immersion program for ESL students to accelerate their ability to function In English. (Findings 17, 24-25)
4. Point Arena High School post bi-lingual directional signs to the school's main office. Ensure that postings are clear, visible, and sufficient to guide visitors. (Finding 18)
5. a campus program to treat drug and alcohol problems be initiated at coastal schools. (Findings 35-36, 38)

6. Point Arena High School update the computer hardware and software for the computer lab. (Findings 8, 29-30)
7. Point Arena High School request donation of books and resource materials for the school library with a series of articles in the local newspapers. (Finding 30)
8. Point Arena High School ensure that all circuit breaker panels are closed and locked. (Finding 43)
9. Point Arena High School have a gas company inspector determine if the stove is properly vented. (Finding 42)

***Discussion:***

The administrative staff and teachers interviewed appeared committed, energetic, and caring. Teachers expressed concern about job viability and how the State budget cuts would affect them, their class sizes, and their ability to provide an appropriate education for the students.

A *Basic Aid* district is one in which the District's per-pupil property tax revenue exceeds its per-pupil revenue limit. For these districts, the State does not provide any general purpose funding; they receive all their funding from local property taxes. A *Basic Aid* district has no control over the revenues it receives from property tax. Property tax collections can vary from year to year, with re-assessments that can fluctuate up or down with the market. Unlike Revenue Limited, or ADA districts, *Basic Aid* districts do not receive funding based upon district enrollment.

A student, who is not proficient in English, will have difficulties testing proficiently in all subjects including math. When students fall behind and they are unable to get the support they need, frustration and hopelessness may occur, often resulting in truancy, lack of self-esteem, and diminishing motivation. Students and their families need to be reminded that the ability to be proficient in two or more languages is a valuable asset and will not necessarily alienate children from their roots.

The GJ is concerned with the ongoing reduction of ROP classes. ROP classes are important to a well-rounded education and skills for all students.

***Required Responses***

Mendocino County Office of Education, Superintendent (Findings 8-9, 12, 15-16, 19, 26, 29; Recommendations 3, 5-6)

Mendocino County Office of Education, Deputy Superintendent of Schools (Findings 8-9, 12, 15, 17-18, 26, 29; Recommendations 3, 5-6)

Mendocino Unified School District, Superintendent (Findings 1-15; Recommendations

1-2)

Mendocino High School, Principal (Findings 1-15; Recommendations 1-2)

Point Arena Unified School District, Superintendent (Findings 16-43;  
Recommendations 3-9)

Point Arena High School, Principal (Findings 16-43; Recommendations 3-9)