

TWO INLAND HIGH SCHOOLS

A REPORT ON WILLITS AND UKIAH HIGH SCHOOLS

JUNE 14, 2010

Summary

Education budgets are being slashed creating deficits, forcing school closings, teacher layoffs, increased class sizes, and reduction in elective subjects in most Mendocino County, (County), schools. In spite of this crisis, teachers and administrators of County schools seemed energetic, positive, and committed to providing students with a quality education in the face of growing obstacles.

The following list of concerns came out of the Grand Jury's, (GJ), 2009-2010 site visits and interviews: Program Improvement, (PI), requires proficiency testing of students and requires that a school test 95% of its student body. Ukiah High School, (UHS), excluded special education students from the testing, which lowered the percentage of students tested to below the required 95% and placed the school in the PI. The decrease in the total number of students attending County District schools lowers the amount of funds available.

The significant increase of English as Second Language, (ESL), students in County schools has affected the type of student and parental support needed. The potential reduction of Regional Occupational Programs, (ROP), due to block granting of funding, now part of general funds, may result in unintentional discrimination for non college-bound students. The GJ concludes that resolving the multiple challenges facing our schools, while preparing our young people with the skills they will need in the future, will require parental, community, County, State, and Federal support. The challenges are everyone's, not just the schools'.

Methods

Interviews were conducted with high school Principals, District Superintendents, teachers, staff, and students. Site visits were conducted at 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, and achievement plans were studied. Various forms, new entry packages, school layout, 2009-2010 Action Plans, their Safe School Plan, and budget information were reviewed.

Background

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 Inland High Schools

UHS is the only school in PI. A school in PI has five years to reach a targeted educational goal. Each year, the target level for each sub-group is more difficult to reach. The required goals are: testing 95% of students attending the school, achievement of proficiency on *California High School Exit Exam*, (CAHSEE), and the *Academic Performance Index* target graduation rate of 83%. Several issues factor into the challenge of avoiding or being removed from PI: the increase of non-English speaking students in the ESL program; the lay-offs of teachers, resulting in increased class size; and the requirement that schools test 95% of their students. Meeting that percentage requires testing the school's Special Education and ESL students.

All schools reported declining enrollments. Administrators believe it to be related to the current economy and lack of employment opportunities in the County. The decline does not appear to be related to dropouts or transfers to charter schools. This is particularly significant for WHS and UHS which are dependent on Average Daily Attendance, (ADA), funding.

The Ukiah Unified School District, (UUSD), is experiencing major financial short falls. UUSD's funding sources include: Federal funding, Economic Impact Aid, grants, and Enhancing Education Through Technology, (EETT). The current budget has been reduced by 20%. There are plans to close two elementary schools to address the budget deficit of \$7.5 million. Layoffs, with potential bumping, are anticipated and class sizes will be increased.

Meanwhile, Redevelopment Funds have been made available by the City of Ukiah to reconstruct the administrative offices of the District on its current site. These funds are specifically for construction and cannot be used for other projects or programs. The Superintendent expressed concern about the potential for a negative public image and/or misunderstanding of this reconstruction, especially in the wake of school closings and teacher layoffs.

California schools are currently 47th in the nation in per pupil spending and are expected to go lower. Further cuts to education will make it even more difficult to meet the basic academic needs for students.

Findings – Ukiah High School

1. The main campus was built in 1976 with classrooms without windows. The school covers 65 acres, including a 2.5 acre vineyard. A school bond measure and additional funding have resulted in extensive on-going rebuilding and renovation, not including solar panels to reduce monthly utility costs. Directional signs were insufficient and unclear. The new classrooms are equipped with skylights and are wired for technology. They have huge

- glass doors that are uncovered and, in a lock-down situation, may create a safety hazard.
2. UHS has an enrollment of 1,679 students, with an average class size of 33. It is the largest high school in the County with the highest number of students per class. Enrollment continues to decline, but not as much as in previous years. Students from other districts transfer in for the larger offering of elective subjects.
 3. UHS has three Assistant Principals and public records show 76 teachers.
 4. Parental involvement is good for sports and the Booster Club; less so in academics.
 5. The school is participating in the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program.
 6. UHS Campus has one full time nurse with two aides. Nurse and aides have an office where medications are dispensed.
 7. Funding per pupil averaged \$4,955 in the 2009-2010 year.
 8. UHS utilities average \$30,000 per month.
 9. UHS offers free/reduced cost for meals to 44% of their students. The District offers free/reduced cost for meals to 79% of its students.
 10. UHS struggles with transportation funding, including sports and other activities.
 11. UHS is in their third year of PI; 331 students, (20%), of UHS students are ESL students, 197 students, (12%), are in Special Education programs.
 12. Math Engineering Science Academy, (MESA), is offered.
 13. Graduation rates were down 1.2% last year and 4.7% over the last two years.
 14. The hours of ROP are being reduced and some programs will be eliminated. UHS currently offers the following ROP classes: Auto Shop, Computer Photography, Welding, Journalism/Yearbook, Computer Lab and Web-Designing, Scrubs Class (EMT training), Viticulture, Farming, and Wood Shop; and has an online store for purchasing student crafts. A Fashion class is available when there is sufficient student interest. A self-sustaining environmental program, featuring a *Tilapia* fish farm, will be available next fall.
 15. Grapes from the campus vineyard is made into wine, bottled and sold under the *Wildcat* label by a local vintner. The campus has several olive trees from which olive oil is made.
 16. UHS offers a Young Parent Program, having an approximate enrollment of 10 students. After school programs are also offered.
 17. There is one Information Technology person on-site, and 50% of students have online access.
 18. There are two well equipped gyms. Wall climbing is no longer offered by the Physical Education Department and the room is now used as a storage closet, due to insurance costs.
 19. In order to compete with schools of similar size, UHS teams have to go out-of-County. Parents are asked to donate \$150 per sport per student per year for extra-mural team sport transportation. UHS Booster Club helps provide funds to make the donation for low income students. Low priced insurance is available for \$15 per school year for sports activities.
 20. The school newspaper, *The Ukiahillite*, is edited and composed by students.

21. UHS is a closed campus. Students, except freshmen, may apply for permission to have lunch off campus.
22. The Food Service Manager prepares menus and food for UHS and the other district schools. During the construction of the new cafeteria, food is prepared at Pomolita Middle School. Improvements to the cafeteria were in progress and it was expected to re-open within a week or two. Multiple entrée choices were being served outside under a covered walkway.
23. A police officer serves, part-time, as a Resource Officer on campus. He now is accompanied by Daisy, a drug-sniffing dog. Expulsions, for selling or sharing drugs, are down to one or two since the K-9 team began patrolling the campus. UHS has appropriate safety procedures in place, including a lock-down policy.
24. Past behavioral problems included 60 expulsions for drug trafficking and 51 assault and battery charges. Gang-related problems have decreased.
25. Drug problems have resulted in a *Modified Expulsion Process*. Selling or sharing drugs on campus means immediate expulsion. The drug culture is a major issue. Since the appearance of Daisy, drug use on campus has almost disappeared.
26. Students coming to school smelling of marijuana, but not under the influence, are sprayed with a deodorizing spray and allowed to attend class.
27. When students come to school under the influence of drugs or alcohol, UHS offers a treatment program on campus for *Alcohol and Other Drug Programs*, (AODP). Students are entitled to fourteen sessions of chemical dependency counseling.
28. Dress code excludes anything that may cause disruption in the classroom. Truancy has been a problem and the District is working hard to address attendance issues due to the serious effects it has on the school's funding.
29. South Valley High School, a public alternative school, has its own campus.
30. UHS grounds were littered with trash. There are insufficient trash receptacles, especially since lunch was served outdoors. Chewing gum peppered every walk-way.
31. There is one day maintenance worker and four evening maintenance workers assigned to clean and maintain the school buildings and grounds.
32. Swallows have taken up residence in the gymnasium's exterior eaves, creating an abundance of nests and droppings.
33. During the GJ visit, the school office was being transferred to a new wing. The old office was unusable due to a broken pipe that had flooded the rooms, which were contaminated by mildew and mold. The GJ was told that the office wing needs to be replaced immediately. There is also a plan for re-design and re-construction in two years.

Findings – Willits High School

34. The main WHS campus was built in 1929; classrooms, an auditorium and other facilities have been added and remodeled over the years. The Administration indicated that some buildings need repair and/or replacement.

35. Student enrollment has been declining significantly and the current enrollment is 477 students. The school has 27 certificated and ROP teachers, two Counselors, a Principal and an Assistant Principal.
36. The Principal stated that lack of sufficient funding for building maintenance and repairs as well as dealing with drugs and the drug culture are the greatest challenges.
37. Annual funding per student for 175 days is \$6,399.
38. The Superintendent's greatest success is the improved and varied curriculum, including ROP classes.
39. ROP programs offered at WHS include: Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, Wood Shop, Computer Technology, *Scrubs* (EMT training), and Introduction to Law Enforcement. Several students were tending and feeding goats that are sold for meat.
40. Economically disadvantaged students have increased by 20% over the last 10 years.
41. There is a need for more parental support; the principal is asking the teachers to make more frequent contacts with parents.
42. WHS provides nine progress reports as mailings or on line to parents (in English and Spanish); grade information is available on line every five weeks.
43. Over the last seven years, Latino students have increased from 7% to 25% of the enrolled students. There are 31 students enrolled in ESL.
44. The school offers free/reduced price meals to 52% of their students, while the District serves free/reduced price meals to 72% of their students. These meals include, breakfast, snack, and lunch.
45. Budget cuts may cause elimination of some ROP classes, Art, and/or Music programs. There is concern that future budget cuts may affect physical education programs.
46. WHS, like all County schools, struggles with transportation expenses. The District has cut the transportation budget, reducing bus routes. Parents have to drive farther to new drop-off points in order for their children to take the bus.
47. Grants for capital improvements are not available. There is a proposed \$30 million bond measure to assist in capital improvements, although \$70-\$100 million is the estimated need for funding.
48. Sanhedrin School is the public alternative school in Willits and is located across Highway 101 from WHS.
49. Approximately 33% of graduates qualify to go on to four year colleges and about 5% attend UC Berkeley.
50. Students are offered high school double credits for passing college courses. One student graduated with 22 college credits.
51. There is a program for freshmen to attend a two-week academy, where they take field trips to various colleges, with the goal of increasing interest in attending a four-year college. Approximately 80% of freshmen participate.
52. There is a serious need for more Information Technology, (IT), and equipment at the school.

53. After School Programs, such as tutoring, have not been successful. Students are allowed to recover credits by taking Saturday classes.
54. WHS offers two levels of Special Education resources, (SE), including classes for students with severe emotional needs. There are 31 students in SE.
55. Students are required to maintain a minimum of a 2.0 grade average, with no 'F's, to participate in athletic programs. About 40% of the students are active in WHS sports and athletic programs.
56. Parents of participants in sports are asked to donate \$50 per sport per year. Referee and umpire contracts cost approximately \$30,000 per year. If teams do not bring in money to cover these expenses, they must do fundraising. No athlete is denied participation due to the lack of a donation.
57. WHS has a Booster Club that raises approximately \$30,000 a year.
58. The Booster Club pays for team uniforms and other items requested by the teams.
59. WHS offers several programs, including anti-smoking, in conjunction with AODP and Anger Management. They offer drug and treatment groups.
60. The Food Preparation Manager prepares menus and food for breakfast, snack, and lunch, and has one part-time assistant. The kitchen and cafeteria were clean and well maintained.
61. WHS has a good relationship with law enforcement. The campus has a School Resource Officer.
62. The principal has been aggressive in eliminating gang activity from the campus over the last 10 years. If a student is suspected of being a gang member, the principal meets with parents, and has them sign a contract for behavior and agree not to wear gang colors. Few parents disagree with this policy.
63. The District has one custodial person during the day and 1.8 at night for four schools.
64. WHS has an *Emergency Situations and Action Procedures Manual and Safety Plans*, including lock-downs, flood, earthquake, storm, hazardous materials, bomb threat, fire, severe storm, fallen aircraft, the school's *Emergency Operations Organizational Chart*, and includes specific assignments.
65. WHS has an on-call nurse. An office employee is responsible for providing required medications to students.
66. Postings and directional signs were adequate.

Recommendations – Both High Schools

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. a summer school immersion program be established for ESL students, with the goal of increasing proficiency prior to the beginning of the school year. (Findings 11, 43)

2. on-campus programs to treat drug and alcohol addiction be continued. The number of schools with this program must be increased as funding permits. (Findings 23, 25-27, 59)
3. UHS supplies sufficient trash receptacles for campus garbage. Student involvement in and pride in keeping the campus clean needs to be improved before the new construction becomes as covered with graffiti as the older sections of the campus. (Findings 30-32)
4. UHS develop a program where students remove chewing gum on the walkways of the campus. UHS may want to consider banning chewing gum on the campus and requiring any student breaking the rule to spend an hour after school removing gum from the sidewalks. (Findings 30-31)
5. UHS and WHS include solar panels and other passive energy sources in all future construction plans. (Findings 1, 8, 32-33, 47)
6. all schools install signs to guide visitors to the main office in order to register. (Finding 1)
7. the City of Willits consider a bond act to renovate, repair, or rebuild facilities at the High School. (Findings 34, 36, 47)
8. schools and school districts canvas the communities they serve, requesting that qualified tutoring volunteers come forward to offer their services. (Findings, 45, 53)

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.

GJ members observed student behaviors at both schools which caused concern: at UHS, littering and ignoring trash receptacles; at WHS, ignoring 'No Skateboarding' signs and inappropriate public displays of affection.

One administrator made the important point that our schools spend a good deal of their resources on preparing students for the past needs of our society and we do not invest in teaching skills for the technology of the future. The GJ noted few teachers at UHS focusing on skills that may have future applications, such as digital photography and computer generated wood projects.

The GJ recommends that UHS add solar panels to the rebuilt campus to help reduce energy costs. WHS may choose to include passive energy sources with

new construction or future renovations.

Revenue Limited, or ADA, Districts are paid on the number of students attending school each day and they can receive Federal, State, and Fiscal Stabilization Funds to offset reductions to their revenue limits. Declining enrollment in all the schools has meant smaller budgets; Ukiah Unified did not take this action before the current crisis, making its situation more desperate than others.

Common sense suggests that a student, who is not proficient in English, would have difficulties testing proficiently in math because those tests are also in English. When students fall behind and they are unable to get the support they need, frustration and hopelessness occur, often resulting in truancy, lack of self-esteem, and diminishing motivation. Students and their families need to be reminded that proficiency in two or more languages is a valuable asset that will not 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 for all students.

It is necessary to bring resources together (e.g., parental, County, State, Federal), for public awareness and advocacy for our schools, and move to guarantee a diverse curriculum that will ensure all students have the opportunity for a free and appropriate education that prepares them for productive lives.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Office of Education, Superintendent (All Findings, All Recommendations)

Ukiah Unified School District, Superintendent (Findings 1-33; Recommendations 1-6, 8)

Ukiah High School, Principal (Findings 1-33; Recommendations 1-6, 8)

Willits Unified School District, Superintendent (Findings 34-66; Recommendations 1-2, 5, 7-8)

Willits High School, Principal (Findings 34-66; Recommendations 1-2, 5, 7-8)