

HOOPS...NOW!

Fort Bragg Unified School District Alternative Schools

June 9, 2008

Summary

The 2007-08 Grand Jury continued a review of the Fort Bragg Unified School District (FBUSD) Alternative Schools that began in 2006.¹ Students in these schools are referred because of the need for a more structured learning environment; most have been suspended or expelled from the mainstream school campuses; many are on probation.

Mendocino County Juvenile Court policy is to place probationary youth in the least restrictive intervention program, with the most restrictive being full-time residence in Juvenile Hall. This policy results in youth with serious behavioral issues including substance abuse and gang affiliations, being returned to their home communities. Local school districts are required by law to provide appropriate public education to all students until the age of 18.

FBUSD operates an adult education program and three alternative schools for youth from the entire Mendocino coast:

- Shelter Cove Community Day School (Grades 6-8; 360 instructional minutes/day)
- Lighthouse Community Day School (Grades 9-12; 360 instructional minutes/day)
- Noyo Continuation High School (Ages 16-18; 180 instructional minutes/day)

All three schools provide highly structured, individualized instruction and limited support services that emphasize positive student behavior and academic progress toward a high school degree or equivalency certificate. A low student/teacher ratio permits extra support for students whose life experiences and behavior place them at serious risk of academic and/or societal failure.

The 2007-08 Grand Jury found facilities and classrooms to be clean, well organized and free of debris or graffiti. Landscape maintenance at the Lighthouse/Noyo site was not at the level observed at the District's main campuses. Two sports courts, bond-funded four years ago, have yet to be constructed.

Campus security remains a concern, particularly in view of documented student behavioral problems, gang affiliations and substance abuse. The staff relies on 911 to summon assistance in the event of an emergency. Exterior video surveillance is planned, but not yet in place. Classrooms are not equipped with

¹ The 2006-07 Report on Lighthouse School and the FBUSD response are posted at: www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury/

interior safety locks, and some rooms lack window coverings that would shield occupants from view in the event of an emergency. Required emergency drills focus on fire and earthquake readiness; lockdown drills have not been a priority.

During 2007-08, the alternative schools operated under experienced interim leadership while seeking a new principal. Staff morale was markedly improved compared to the previous year, despite reports that the student population was even more challenging. The challenges and stress of working with these students was mentioned repeatedly as a factor in the high turnover of leadership, teachers and aides.

Teaching students with a wide range of academic, behavioral and social issues requires skills that are not routinely taught in regular teacher education programs. The District acknowledges that *...the amount of time and training available are inadequate for the demands of the job.*² The small size and physical isolation of the Fort Bragg programs make it extremely difficult to provide an effective professional support network for both the students and teachers and for staff to access on-going skill development.

Methods

The Grand Jury reviewed documents, conducted two site visits to the Fort Bragg Alternative Schools and interviewed FBUSD administrators and teachers. Jurors also reviewed documents and conducted a site visit and interviews to understand the alternative school programs provided by the Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE). Additional interviews were conducted with staff of Juvenile Probation and the County's Alcohol and Other Drug Programs (AODP).

Background

Fort Bragg Unified School District serves approximately 1,934 students at one comprehensive high school, one middle school, three elementary schools and three alternative schools. Fifty-seven percent of the students are non-Hispanic Whites and 34% are Hispanic/Latino. All other groups combined constitute 9% of the population. Twenty-percent of the students are English Language Learners. Approximately 50 students are served by Fort Bragg's three alternative schools.

The Mission Statement of the Fort Bragg Unified School District Alternative Schools is:

...to provide quality individualized education so that each student will become fluent in basic skills and core content knowledge, develop adequate social skills and earn a diploma or equivalent.

² This quotation was excerpted from the *FBUSD Single Plan for Student Achievement 2007-2008*, that was approved by FBUSD Board on December 11, 2007.

Alternative schools are designed to provide an educational placement for high-risk students, as required by law until the age of 18. They serve students whose behavior places them at serious risk of school and/or societal failure. Alternative schools must meet the same state standards for curriculum, instruction and student performance as traditional schools, but they pursue these objectives by offering a more structured setting and highly individualized support and instruction. Primary goals are to foster positive behavior, student engagement and academic achievement through a lower student/teacher ratio, and by thoroughly understanding the students' needs, interests and learning styles.

MCOE administered the alternative schools in Fort Bragg until 2000. At that time, FBUSD secured funding through the Necessary Small Schools to fund, manage and maintain their own alternative programs. The change in jurisdiction from MCOE to FBUSD improved administrative oversight but resulted in fewer support services for students and teachers.

FBUSD operates an adult education program and three Alternative Schools: Lighthouse Community Day School (grades 9-12); Shelter Cove Community Day School (grades 6-8); and Noyo Continuation School (ages 16-18).

Historically, the coastal City of Fort Bragg has depended on lumber and fishing for its economic well being. Both industries are in decline with tourism becoming the mainstay of the economy. A decline in employment opportunities, with an increase in service industry jobs, is contributing to pervasive problems related to poverty, substance abuse and gang activity. The lives of many students and their families are impacted by these changes. One FBUSD report states that:³

- parental participation on Alternative School committees and activities is very low;
- 90% of FBUSD Alternative Schools students are regular users of alcohol and/or other drugs;
- an increasing number of students in all three alternative schools claim gang affiliation;
- in 2006-07, 39% of Shelter Cove students were on juvenile probation;
- during the same period, 85% of Lighthouse students were on juvenile probation and 57.5% of these students spent some period of time in Juvenile Hall.

FBUSD is responding to these challenges with a combination of early intervention and community engagement.

- The District is playing a lead role in a consortium of community organizations that promotes community awareness concerning gang affiliations and violence.
- To counteract the influence of gangs, the primary anti-gang focus for the District is on early prevention and interventions at the elementary and middle schools.

³ Excerpted from the FBUSD Single Plan for Student Achievement 2007-2008, approved by FBUSD Board on December 11, 2007.

The fifth grade curriculum includes the *GRIP Program (Gang Resistance is Paramount)*.

- FBUSD recently established a weekly class, with CalSAFE funding, to serve pregnant minors and young parents.
- The District SARB (Student Attendance Review Board) meets monthly to review truancy cases with support of the Mendocino County District Attorney. The focus is on elementary and middle school students and their parents.
- Community outreach has resulted in support by numerous businesses and organizations.

Fort Bragg's Alternative Schools play an important role in the District's overall strategy to meet the challenges it faces.

Findings

General Findings about Fort Bragg Alternative Schools

1. Alternative Schools are designed to provide structured, highly individualized educational placements for at-risk students, as is required by law until the age of 18.
2. Alternative School students demonstrate a wide range of academic development. Their behavior places them at serious risk of school and/or societal failure.
3. A student may be assigned to Community Day School or Continuation School if he or she:
 - is expelled from middle or high school
 - is probation-referred
 - is referred by School Attendance Review Board (SARB) or by a district-level referral process
 - is self-referred (voluntary enrollment).
4. The Fort Bragg Alternative Schools Office, Lighthouse (two classrooms), Noyo (two classrooms), the Fitness Room, and Shelter Cove (one classroom) are housed in well maintained modular units located in eastern Fort Bragg. All units are handicapped accessible. Evacuation plans and the Williams Act Complaint Policy are posted and fire extinguishers were observed in the classrooms.
5. Classrooms are equipped with hard-wired telephones. Cell phones are assigned to teachers for classes using the Lighthouse/Noyo fitness room.
6. Lighthouse and Noyo are on a closed campus roughly two blocks away from the Shelter Cove classroom which is next to the District offices. At the time of the site visits, grounds were free of trash or graffiti, however, landscape maintenance at Lighthouse/Noyo was not at the level observed at other FBUSD sites. The perimeter strip between the parking lot and the street was not weeded and mowing of the field between the alternative schools and the main high school stopped several yards from the alternative school buildings.

7. All classrooms appeared well organized, student oriented, and had current state adopted core curriculum books and materials.
8. Technology was evident in every instructional classroom, with an ample number of computers and printers. Students have monitored access to the Internet to help them develop computer literacy.
9. All of the students receive free meals provided on site.
10. A stringently enforced code prohibits gang attire and colors, drug-related messages and other clothing or accessories likely to interfere with a positive campus atmosphere.
11. Juvenile Court policy is to place probationary youth in the “least restrictive intervention program,” with the most restrictive being full-time residence in Juvenile Hall. This policy results in youth with serious behavioral issues being returned to their local school districts, which are required by law to serve them.
12. Court designated schools serve probationary and incarcerated youth in Mendocino County. Some serve only incarcerated or probationary youth, others, like Lighthouse Community Day School also serve some students who are not referred by the courts but who require the more structured learning environment.
13. One Deputy Probation Officer, Juvenile Division, is assigned to provide court supervision for all probationary youth on the entire Mendocino County coast.
14. The Deputy Probation Officer interacts with probationary students on a regular basis. The Officer is the liaison between the Juvenile Court and the students.
15. One gang specialist works out of Willits to cover both the north county and coastal areas.
16. School attendance is a condition of probation. Truancy can result in a youth being placed in Juvenile Hall.
17. When a student re-enters the class after being in Juvenile Hall, it can create a significant disruption in the atmosphere of the classroom.
18. In the event of a serious problem the Fort Bragg Police or Mendocino Sheriff's Department is contacted; response time was described as “adequate.”
19. A grant-funded School Resource Officer (SRO) serves as a community liaison between the schools and the Fort Bragg Police Department. His role is to promote positive community relations.
20. A single site administrator is responsible for all three Fort Bragg Alternative Schools and the Adult School.
21. High turn over in administrative personnel over the last several years has made a lack of consistent, effective leadership an issue with the staff.
22. Being bilingual has helped the current principal to establish rapport with parents. This principal was formerly at the middle school and has established relationships with many of the alternative school students.
23. The staff members who were interviewed are all experienced and are teaching in their areas of certification. They actively engage their students in pursuing educational goals that are aligned with State standards.

24. *“...Teaching students with behavioral and social issues requires a specific group of skills that are not routinely taught in regular teacher education programs. The amount of time and training available are inadequate for the demands of the job. Assistance is needed to train and support teachers dealing with mentally and emotionally demanding students (sic).”*⁴
25. Five Professional Development Days are scheduled annually.⁵
26. FBUSD middle and high school teachers teach five periods per day and have one conference/prep period. At Lighthouse and Shelter Cove, the instructional day is six full periods (360 minutes) plus breaks and lunch time. Hence, teachers at the alternative schools have no conference/prep period comparable to their peers at the middle and comprehensive high schools.
27. All district instructional aides must hold an associate of arts degree and/or pass a proficiency test.
28. An administrative policy clearly states that an instructional aide may not be left alone in the classroom with students.
29. It is extremely difficult to recruit qualified bilingual aides in the Fort Bragg area. The current alternative school aides are not bilingual.
30. No nurse or nurse’s aide is assigned to this campus. When an accident occurs, the office determines whether or not a 911 call should be made and contacts the family. In some cases, the secretary/administrative designee will transport the student home to a parent.
31. The entire staff assumes the role of a counselor when students are in need of a caring concerned adult.
32. Students are under strict supervision. A “5-level system” is in place at all the sites through which students earn freedom and privileges. They advance from “Tin” to “Gold” by improving attendance, academics and behavioral performance. Each level has incentives for the students such as snacks, treats and possible field trips.
33. The District SARB meets monthly to review truancy cases. The focus is on elementary and middle school students and their parents. As a result, average daily attendance has improved significantly at these sites.
34. Cultural, language and economic barriers make it difficult to engage parents in school site councils, committees and activities.
35. Discipline backup is provided to classroom teachers by the alternative schools’ principal and the office secretary, a credentialed teacher who is also the administrative designee when the principal is off campus.
36. A majority of the principal’s time is spent on discipline.
37. Isolated incidents of gang violence have occurred on campus.
38. Juveniles with proven gang affiliations are required to register at the Fort Bragg Police Department.
39. FBUSD has played a lead role in fostering community awareness concerning gang affiliations and violence. The District works closely with Fort Bragg

⁴ Excerpted from the FBUSD Single Plan for Student Achievement 2007-2008, approved by FBUSD Board on December 11, 2007.

⁵ “Professional Development Days” are contracted as paid days to be used for teacher professional development.

- Police Department, the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department and a wide range of community based organizations to curtail the incursion of gangs.
40. The primary anti-gang focus for the district is on early prevention and interventions at the elementary and middle schools rather than at the comprehensive high school and alternative schools. To counteract gang exposure, the fifth grade curriculum includes the *GRIP Program (Gang Resistance is Paramount)*.
 41. FBUSD recently established a weekly class, with CalSAFE funding, to serve pregnant minors and young parents. The emphasis is on helping them access a variety of community based resources.
 42. Staff stated that they are not afraid of a serious crisis on campus, but they acknowledge that the potential exists for one to occur.

Findings about Shelter Cove Community Day School

43. Shelter Cove Community Day School (grades 6-8) serves middle school students who have behavioral and attendance problems that interfere with academic performance. The maximum capacity is 12 students in a single self-contained classroom.
44. Shelter Cove students have been suspended or expelled, identified as habitual truants, are on juvenile probation, or are otherwise referred.
45. One credentialed teacher and a full-time instructional aide provide individualized, self-paced instruction to 11 students.
46. Shelter Cove's goal is for students to complete middle school and transfer to the comprehensive high school program or to the self-contained transitional classroom for ninth graders at Fort Bragg High School. At the age of 16, they have the option of attending Noyo Continuation School to earn a diploma or high school equivalent.
47. The classroom focus is on positive behavior and individualized instruction that is aligned with California State standards.
48. Gender balance is currently equal, which encourages positive behavior.
49. Four of the students are on probation. A Deputy Probation Officer, Juvenile Division, regularly visits these students.
50. Big Brother and Big Sisters administers a grant that pays for unique afternoon classes four days a week in cooking, art, gardening and health. Students walk to the Noyo Food Forest for gardening activities, and to St. Michael's Church for cooking and art classes. Mendocino Sports Club has made its facilities available, at no cost, for weekly workouts.
51. These community supported afternoon classes enrich student learning and provide incentives to complete required academic work in the morning.
52. The school site provides no recreational facilities for these active youth who desperately need outdoor activities. A half basketball court for Shelter Cove is included in the FBUSD 2007-08 facilities plan but has not yet been built.
53. Redwood Elementary School, which is located about a block away, is unwilling to share its playground with these older students. Likewise, the Shelter Cove teacher prefers to separate the middle school students from the youth who attend Lighthouse.

- 54. Fire drills are coordinated with the Redwood Elementary School.
- 55. The School Resource Officer visits the classroom once a week.
- 56. The District contracts with the Youth Project to provide a crisis intervention paraprofessional who meets individually with Shelter Cove students on a weekly basis to provide social/emotional support. This Youth Worker is supervised by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

Findings about Lighthouse Community Day School

- 57. Lighthouse Community Day School (grades 9-12) provides educational services to students who have been expelled or suspended from their comprehensive high school, are on probation, are wards of the court or are under the protection of the court because of neglect or abuse. Required instructional time is 360 minutes per day plus breaks and lunch; there are no minimum days to allow for teacher development.
- 58. The maximum capacity is 24 students in two classrooms with a fitness room that is shared with Noyo Continuation High School. A basketball/sports court for Lighthouse and Noyo is included in the FBUSD 2007-08 facilities plan but has not yet been built.
- 59. Current enrollment is 13 but only about half of the students are present on a typical day. Absences occur for a variety of reasons, including placement in Juvenile Hall.
- 60. All students in the current class are on probation. Truancy is a violation of probation and can cause a student to be placed in Juvenile Hall. When students go back and forth between Juvenile Hall and their local school this disrupts their own learning and the classroom environment.
- 61. Lighthouse is staffed by two credentialed teachers and a classified aide who is present during the instructional day. Students are sometimes combined in a single class. At other times, they are divided by grade level into two groups.
- 62. The FBUSD Resource Specialist provides additional instructional support to one student who is on an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP).
- 63. A supervised Youth Worker from the Youth Project sees the students as a group one day a week for approximately 30-40 minutes.
- 64. Behavioral improvement and regular attendance are top priorities. Core subjects are taught in the morning and electives in the afternoon with an emphasis on fostering student engagement with the curriculum.
- 65. Some students attend Regional Occupations Programs (ROP) at Fort Bragg High School.
- 66. Lighthouse students must have written permission from their principal and from the Fort Bragg High School principal to attend sports events or other high school activities.
- 67. The budget for Lighthouse was described as sufficient to meet the students' instructional needs.
- 68. The School Resource Officer is rarely on this campus.
- 69. Most students are bilingual but many parents are not. The ability to speak Spanish is useful in communicating both with students and with their parents.

70. Most staff who were interviewed stated that the students in Lighthouse this year have been more challenging than in previous years. Twelve of thirteen current students identify either with the Norteños or Súrtenos; gang affiliation (and 'wannabes') is an increasing problem on-campus and in the Fort Bragg Community.

Findings about Noyo Continuation High School

71. Noyo Continuation High School (Noyo) serves students 16-18 years of age who fall behind on high school credits, need a more structured learning environment, or who have jobs or other responsibilities that interfere with traditional high school schedules. Students attend four and one-half hours per day. Noyo has two classrooms, with a maximum enrollment of thirty students and shares a fitness room with Lighthouse School.
72. The 27 students currently enrolled at Noyo are working on accruing the necessary credits and passing scores on the California High School Exit Exam in order to graduate.
73. Noyo students tend to stay because of the individual attention, small class size, flexible scheduling and the "feeling of a family unit."
74. Two fully credentialed teachers share the teaching responsibilities. One teaches U.S. History, English, Government, Science and Fine Arts; the other teaches Economics, Math, PE, World History and Technology. Instruction is highly individualized and self-paced.
75. All seniors are required to develop a Career Portfolio as their senior project. It must include a resume, letters of recommendation, job experiences, and sample job applications in areas of interest. Students share their portfolios in a PowerPoint presentation to the class as part of their final exam.
76. In 2006-07, eight of the students were employed and received credit for work experience that was monitored by a work experience coordinator. At the time of the Grand Jury's site visit in 2008, one Noyo student was earning work experience credit.

What is Missing at the Alternative Schools?

77. Students and teachers in north county and coastal Continuation and Community Day Schools receive significantly fewer resources from County agencies than those who live in the Ukiah Valley. Teachers lack the stable leadership and peer support available to their inland colleagues.
78. In response to Grand Jury questioning, some alternative school personnel reported a lack of support from the Fort Bragg District Office; others described the support as satisfactory.
79. A single Juvenile Probation Officer is responsible for the entire coast.
80. An AODP (Alcohol and Other Drugs) program that was offered at Shelter Cove was discontinued due to loss of funding. Willits and Fort Bragg share an Intervention Specialist who has recently established a weekly "Men's Group" for Lighthouse and Noyo students and individual counseling for one

Shelter Cove student. The site administrator strongly supports maintaining and expanding these services.

81. The professional mental health, alcohol and drug counseling services offered in Ukiah, are largely inaccessible to students on the coast.
82. A school bond that was passed approximately four years ago allocated funds for a basketball/sport court on the Lighthouse School grounds and a half basketball court at the Shelter Cove site. At the time of the Grand Jury site visit, the District had not yet developed these sorely needed facilities.
83. A high student turnover rate, irregular attendance, family resistance, and district resources all contribute to difficulty in arranging for educational and/or psychological evaluation of alternative school students.
84. Despite serving probationary youth, FBUSD Alternative Schools have no special security measures. They rely on calling 911.
85. Perimeter cameras are installed at Fort Bragg High School, but have not yet been installed at any of the Alternative Schools. Lighthouse and Noyo hold two emergency drills each year and Shelter Cove Middle School holds monthly emergency drills as required by law, with an emphasis on fire and earthquake drills. Lockdown drills have not been a priority. Classrooms are not equipped with inside safety locks. Some windows lack coverings that would shield students from view in the case of an emergency.

Findings about Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE)

86. MCOE operates a range of programs to serve students in need of alternative education. These include:
 - Court Schools
 - Community Schools
 - County Community Day Schools
 - Independent Study
 - A CalSAFE Program at Ukiah High School for pregnant and parenting teens and their children
87. MCOE programs serve approximately 250 alternative school students at any one time and more than 500 over the course of a year at 13 sites, primarily in the Ukiah Valley. MCOE provides no alternative education programs on the coast and minimal services in Willits.
88. An MCOE Resource Specialist works full-time in the MCOE alternative education classrooms with Special Education students who are on IEPs.
89. All teachers are fully credentialed and working in their area of certification. They also have either CLAD or the SDIAE certification to work with English Language Learners.⁶
90. All MCOE paraprofessionals who serve as classroom instructional aides hold associate of arts degrees or have passed proficiency tests. Several are bilingual.

⁶ Information on Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certification or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) certification is readily available on several websites.

91. The staff meets weekly with counselors, probation officers, therapists and others to discuss students, discipline and academic progress.
92. Due to the high adult-student ratio at the sites, there are few gang related problems or other violent incidents.
93. State of the art video conferencing and high speed networking is available at MCOE for networking with teachers throughout the County.
94. Collaboration between Mendocino County Health Services, the Sheriff Department, Nuestra Casa, Youth Project, AODP and Juvenile Probation results in numerous services to the students in the MCOE Alternative Schools in Ukiah. Most of these services are not offered in district operated community day schools in other parts of the County.
95. Juveniles who reside out of the Ukiah Valley area are eligible to attend many of the MCOE programs, but due to transportation and time factors they are essentially inaccessible.
96. Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency operates AODP. Services for juveniles are funded by grants. No County funds are specifically earmarked for AODP youth programs.
97. Most AODP grants focus on the County's more populated areas, particularly the Ukiah Valley. Some grants are written collaboratively with schools or other agencies. This is rarely the case in north Mendocino County and coastal communities.
98. AODP staff members provide small group and individual counseling for juveniles. Services include prevention, intervention and treatment. Five staff members are assigned to programs in Ukiah and one to Anderson Valley. Willits and Fort Bragg share an Intervention Specialist.
99. The MCOE Superintendent expressed a desire for all superintendents in the County to engage with MCOE in developing and expanding resources for district-operated alternative school programs.
100. FBUSD and other local school districts are co-signers with MCOE to the June 30, 2006 Triennial Plan to provide coordinated services to expelled youth.⁷ The Plan recognizes the gaps that exist in service availability to small rural school districts and proposes strategies to address the gaps at the district, regional and county level. The current Triennial Plan is up for review and revision by June 30, 2009.
101. The district of residence is required by law to develop a rehabilitation and educational plan for any student whose behavior has resulted in expulsion or who is simply in need of an educational alternative. MCOE may assist in implementation of this plan.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. MCOE and FBUSD redefine MCOE's role in the updated Triennial Plan to ensure that FBUSD and other remote districts have access to support

⁷ The Triennial Plan is mandated by Education Code 48926 to ensure that student needs are addressed.

services, such as counseling, clean and sober classes, young parents programs and professional development for alternative school staff. (Findings 24-25, 31, 41, 77, 81, 87, 94, 95, 99-101)

2. MCOE provide leadership for a professional learning community comprising all of those working in alternative education in Mendocino County, and hold at least one professional development gathering each semester and at least quarterly teleconferencing sessions. (Findings 24-25, 70, 74, 77, 86-87, 91, 93-94, 99-101)
3. FBUSD provide the alternative school teachers with a prep period during each instructional day that is comparable to the prep periods provided for teachers at the middle school and comprehensive high school. (Findings 26 and 57)
4. FBUSD construct the promised, previously funded sports courts (Hoops...NOW!) on the alternative school campuses and develop an appropriate fitness facility for Shelter Cove students. (Findings 52-53, 58 and 82)
5. FBUSD install perimeter security cameras, classroom interior safety locks and window coverings in all alternative school classrooms. Hold lockdown drills on a regular basis. (Findings 11-12, 17, 35, 37, 54, 70, 84-85)
6. FBUSD administrators, Sheriff Deputies, Probation, SRO and other Fort Bragg Police Officers, Youth Workers and others who visit the alternative campuses make a concerted effort to increase the adult presence on campus and, especially, their visibility and informal interactions with students. (Findings 12-15, 18-19, 35-36, 49, 55-56, 63, 68, 70, 77-79, 92)
7. FBUSD Groundskeepers regularly maintain the alternative school campuses landscaping to ensure a welcoming appearance comparable with other FBUSD sites. (Finding 6)
8. Mendocino County Board of Supervisors review AODP and mental health funding and consider designating funds specifically for services to youth in north county and on the coast. (Findings 80-81, 94-98)

Comments

Working with At Risk adolescents is intrinsically challenging. In alternative schools, teachers must cover a wide range of subjects at varied learning levels while also responding to their students' serious behavioral issues. This results in an intense working environment and vulnerability to burnout.

Gang activity in Fort Bragg has escalated behavioral issues and substance abuse among FBUSD students. FBUSD is to be commended for its early prevention and intervention programs and its community collaboration to control and offset gang influences. Security measures at the alternative school sites would complement these prevention and intervention efforts.

Mitigating the risk of burnout is a high priority. The prevailing sense of isolation can be addressed, in part, through professional development and by enhancing the adult presence on the alternative school campuses. Timely completion of the promised sports courts would be one positive step. Another would be for MCOE to establish the recommended learning community for alternative school educators throughout the County, using a combination of face-to-face contact and teleconferencing. District leadership and community involvement, as in the exemplary partnership between Shelter Cove and Big Brothers/Big Sisters, are invaluable to alternative school staff and their students.

Jurors were impressed with the skill and dedication of the staff at both MCOE and Fort Bragg alternative schools, and with the observed camaraderie between students and staff. Bilingual, culturally sensitive staff members are particularly important in this setting. Staff morale at Fort Bragg was noticeably improved over last year, underscoring the impact of positive leadership.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Office of Education Superintendent (Findings 86-101; Recommendations 1 and 2)

Fort Bragg Unified School District Superintendent (Findings 1-85; Recommendations 1-7)

FBUSD Alternative Schools Principal (Findings 1-85; Recommendations 1-7)

FBUSD School Board (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (Findings 80-81, 94-98; Recommendation 8)

The Grand Jury Report Process

The role of the Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury is to oversee and shed light on local and County government. Jurors conduct oversight inquiries and investigate matters of public interest. Any individual can file a complaint with the Grand Jury using forms available online at www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury.

A Grand Jury inquiry begins when a topic is approved by a minimum of 12 of the 19 seated Jurors. A committee then undertakes extensive research and drafts the report.

Findings are verified against documents and interview notes and are reviewed for accuracy with key individuals in the agency of interest. The draft is then reviewed by an internal Edit committee and must receive approval by the Full Panel. It is then sent to County Counsel and to the Presiding Judge for final review before public release.

Members of the 2007/2008 Grand Jury

Bob Coppock
Brad Hunter
Kathy Johnson
Nancy Kleiber
Lois Lockart
Chas Moser
George Pacheco
Lillian Pacini
Carolyn Pavlovic
Barbara Reed
Wendy Roberts
James Schweig
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Bill Stambaugh
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Partial Year

Thomas Clay, Al Pierce, Brent Rusert, Pamela Shilling, Thelma Thompson



The cover photo for this report was taken at Point Cabrillo Light Station Historic Park by Donald F. Roberts. This report was produced with the generous assistance of Tony and Maureen Eppstein. Information on Point Cabrillo State Historic Park and the Lighthouse Inn is available at www.pointcabrillo.org

