

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY:

**A REPORT ON THE LIGHTHOUSE SCHOOL AND THE
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS CAMPUS IN FORT BRAGG
(May 24, 2007)**

We, Steve Lund, Superintendent; Mike Presley, Principal, Alternative Education Program; Lura Damiano, Director, Special Education; and Donna Miller, Counselor of the Fort Bragg Unified School District, respectfully disagree with the opening statement “The Grand Jury found a serious lack of security measures for the alternative schools campus.” It appears that the Grand Jury’s conclusion is based on the absence of certain equipment or personnel, and not based on the statistics or factual data indicating a need for such a finding or the recommended equipment/personnel to address security.

We base our response on the following facts:

We have not had a serious fight on campus in the last four years. Further, our data demonstrates that over the course of the past four years, there has only been one incidence of physical violence, on May 24, 2006. This conflict involved hair pulling of one female student by another female student. It did not result in serious injury to either party, and no medical attention was necessary.

Our suspension statistics* for the past two years are as follows:

School	Year	Total Suspensions	Fights or Threats**	Weapon
Noyo	06-07	32	3	0
	05-06	46	4	0
Lighthouse	06-07	55	3	0
	05-06	107	15	1
Shelter C.	06-07	38	1	0
	05-06	43	11	0
*Source: Uniform Management Information Reporting System, June '06 & '07				
** Only one of these 37 suspensions involved a fight. 36 were threats.				

The suspension data for the most recent two year period demonstrates a reduction in overall suspensions of 30% at Noyo, 48.5% at Lighthouse and 11.6% at Shelter Cove. Suspensions related to safety have been reduced by 25% at Noyo, 81% at Lighthouse, and 90% at Shelter Cove. The actual number of disciplinary measures related to safety is almost nonexistent when one considers that those students who present the most

challenging behavioral profiles are those that are enrolled in our alternative education programs. To begin the 2007-08 school year, 100% of our community day school students are on probation, meaning that they have been arrested for committing crimes in our community.

Fort Bragg Unified School District has never had a disciplinary measure or student classified as “persistently dangerous” by the California Department of Education, though other districts in Mendocino County have (05-06; no data regarding other counties is available for 06-07 at this time). In addition, it should be noted that the Fort Bragg Unified School District has never been classified as a persistently dangerous district.

Additional data from the California Healthy Kids Survey, administered to students in our Alternative Education classes biennially, and most recently in December of 2006, shows a dramatic increase in positive student responses, including the students’ feelings of well being, safety, and respect for teachers over the prior administration in November of 2004. The majority of the students feel safe, report caring relationships between staff and students, and also report that teachers have high expectations of them. In addition, students report a drop in gang membership, violent behaviors at school and other anti-social activities such as use of alcohol and tobacco.

Alternative Education	Year	Do you feel safe at school?	Do you belong to a gang?	Have you been assaulted at school?	Have you been in a fight at school?	In the past 12 months, have you carried any weapon to school?
	06-07	94%	13%	3%	13%	36%
	04-05	86%	56%	5%	19%	52%

Our Community Day Schools are designed, by definition, to educate those students who have been expelled from the comprehensive schools or, have been referred through probation and/or our School Attendance Review Board (SARB) which recommends intervention or placement of students for both attendance and behavioral concerns. Therefore, it is expected that students enrolled in our Community Day School Programs (CDS) likely will be a challenging group, and for this we are well prepared.

The Uniform Management Information Reporting System and the California Healthy Kids Survey are the two sources of data required by the California Department of Education to determine the safety of our schools, so they are given a great degree of weight in our statewide accountability system. Our present security measures, as the actual data shows, are effective in providing students and staff with a safe educational environment. The crimes that some of these students have committed have never been on campus during school hours. Some of the off-campus, community crimes are dangerous and serious, and in other counties might result in incarceration. In our county these

students are often not incarcerated for months pending their hearings or other legal proceedings and depending upon the space available at Juvenile Hall. Often they are released and placed back in community within a very short period of time, during which we are required by law to provide an educational program and placement. FBUSD does not have the authority to decide placement/sentencing based upon the particular criminal acts a student commits outside of school; this is a judicial responsibility. Given this, the factual data demonstrates that we manage the behavior of these individuals very well while they are at school.

Response to Findings:

We as a group agree with the findings numbered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, and 22.

We as a group disagree with Findings:

10. Early intervention, as was reported to the Grand Jury during their visit, begins in Preschool. Early Behavioral intervention is planned, structured and provided at all of our district schools beginning at Redwood Elementary and continuing through Dana Gray, FBMS and FBHS. Fort Bragg Unified School District has been the leader in Mendocino County and indeed ahead of many districts throughout the state in its early intervention practices.

In 2003, Dale Myers was recruited to train staff at Redwood Elementary School in the “Building Effective Schools Together” (BEST) program. This is a school-wide preventative behavioral program. This program has evolved into the current behavior support team which meets weekly to review all current cases of concern and to plan interventions. Based on the tenets of the BEST program, in an effort to promote the success of all students and beginning at Redwood Elementary School, a comprehensive program to prevent behavioral difficulties has been in place. Beginning in the first semester of kindergarten and continuing through the second grade, all students are presented a research validated social skills curriculum (Second Step) that teaches conflict resolution and interpersonal relationship competencies. Teachers are also regularly in-serviced regarding the identification, referral and intervention for students who demonstrate social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. Those referrals are weekly reviewed by the schools’ Behavior Support Team (BST) which is comprised of the principal, school counselor, school psychologist and support teacher on special assignment. Referrals are channeled towards various interventions based on BST evaluations, which may include a student study team conference, parent teacher conference, and comprehensive behavior consultation and programming, school based counseling, as well as referral to special education or community agencies and resources.

Finally, educational research indicates that the best prevention for behavior and social problems is academic success. To this end, beginning at Redwood Elementary School, students are regularly screened to assess academic progress, and students with needs are expedited into a hierarchical system of intensive, structured academic interventions.

11. The finding indicates that it is due to “a high degree of cultural tension” that students at Lighthouse School find it very difficult to take advantage of the ROP classes offered. This finding is an opinion, and has no basis in fact. Every Lighthouse student is given the same opportunity to participate in the ROP classes as every other student within the grade levels served by ROP. There have been many students from Lighthouse that have successfully completed ROP classes. Students from Lighthouse are held to the same standards of appropriate conduct as students from Noyo High School and Fort Bragg High School. If they do not succeed in the ROP program it is because they have violated the code of conduct. There have only been a small number that have been denied admission to the ROP program, and only due to gang-related safety issues. The Lighthouse setting is designed to accommodate these students, and the ROP facility is not. As the Fort Bragg Police Department will attest to, gang-related issues are not based in cultural differences; cultural tension is not a factor.

In addition to the ROP program, Lighthouse has recently started a pilot program for career exploration, which was underway during the Grand Jury’s visit. For example, one of the Lighthouse students was sponsored by the electrician and carpenters union to spend two weeks this last summer in San Francisco, living with a construction foreman for job shadowing. This experience was very successful, and Lighthouse is looking forward to expanding this program in the coming year.

Another example is the paid internships that two Noyo students had working in the Community Learning Garden over this past summer.

18. In addition to a credentialed school counselor serving alternative education three days per week, there are counselors from Mendocino County Youth Project for up to 10 hours per week, and therapists from the Mendocino County Mental Health Agency serving students on an individual basis. Both elementary schools have a counselor or a psychologist on campus every day of the week. At the Middle and High Schools, there are four full-time credentialed school counselors, one full-time contract licensed therapist, approximately 40 hours of contract counseling services provided through Mendocino County Youth Project and approximately 20 hours per week of therapy provided through the County Mental Health Agency. The counseling staffing levels for our district far exceed the State average. Including only the credentialed school counselors, our district student counselor ratio is 236 students to 1 counselor, and the State average is 815. Add to that the services provided by the other agencies and contract therapists noted above, and the ratio becomes much smaller.

20. Our alternative school principal is involved with new staff training on a weekly basis. In addition to the monthly staff development that is conducted by the principal for all staff in the alternative education program, he spends one hour per week training new staff throughout the year. The training consists of a structured program, complete with goals and objectives.

In addition, FBUSD currently requires all beginning teachers to participate in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program. We also provide ongoing funding, information and incentives to staff to participate in a variety of appropriate training opportunities.

Our isolated location is often a barrier. We work to overcome this by now offering on-line classes through Oregon State University. For the alternative education programs, the principal has planned staff development through this mechanism in the areas of differentiated instruction and in behavior management/modification for the 2007-08 school year.

Response to Recommendations

1. There is currently one teacher and one aide per class budgeted for these classes. That is generally a ratio of five students per staff member in the CDS classes. In addition, on most days we have ancillary staff in the classrooms or working individually with students taken from the classrooms at scheduled times, such as counselors from FBUSD, Mendocino County Youth Project, Alcohol and Other Drug Programs, Mendocino County Mental Health Agency, as well as our local probation officer. This further lowers the student to staff ratio.

2. Early intervention, as was reported to the Grand Jury during their visit, begins in Preschool. Early Behavioral intervention is planned, structured and provided at all of our district schools beginning at Redwood Elementary and continuing through Dana Gray, FBMS and FBHS. Fort Bragg Unified School District has been the leader in Mendocino County and indeed ahead of many districts throughout the state in its early intervention practices.

In 2003, Dale Myers was recruited to train staff at Redwood Elementary School in the “Building Effective Schools Together” (BEST) program. This is a school-wide preventative behavioral program. This program has evolved into the current behavior support team which meets weekly to review all current cases of concern and to plan interventions. Based on the tenets of the BEST program, in an effort to promote the success of all students and beginning at Redwood Elementary School, a comprehensive program to prevent behavioral difficulties has been in place. Beginning in the first semester of kindergarten and continuing through the second grade, all students are presented a research validated social skills curriculum (Second Step) that teaches conflict resolution and interpersonal relationship competencies. Teachers are also regularly in-serviced regarding the identification, referral and intervention for students who demonstrate social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. Those referrals are weekly reviewed by the schools’ Behavior Support Team (BST) which is comprised of the principal, school counselor, school psychologist and support teacher on special assignment. Referrals are channeled towards various interventions based on BST evaluations, which may include a student study team conference, parent teacher conference, and comprehensive behavior consultation and programming, school based counseling, as well as referral to special education or community agencies and resources.

Finally, educational research indicates that the best prevention for behavior and social problems is academic success. To this end, beginning at Redwood Elementary School, students are regularly screened to assess academic progress, and students with needs are expedited into a hierarchical system of intensive, structured academic interventions.

3. We will continue to provide the opportunity for eligible students to participate in the ROP program. Students are required to meet expected attendance and behavior standards to be considered for placement in these classes.

In addition to the ROP program, Lighthouse has recently started a pilot program for career exploration, which was underway during the Grand Jury's visit. For example, one of the Lighthouse students was sponsored by the electrician and carpenters union to spend two weeks this last summer in San Francisco, living with a construction foreman for job shadowing. This experience was very successful, and Lighthouse is looking forward to expanding this program in the coming year.

Another example is the paid internships that two Noyo students had working in the Community Learning Garden over this past summer.

The "Real Game" curriculum is being implemented in this 2007-08 school year, providing a comprehensive career awareness experience through a variety of engaging simulation activities.

4. We are always working to obtain additional funding for student education and work experience opportunities. In addition to the ROP program, Lighthouse has recently started a pilot program for career exploration, which was underway during the Grand Jury's visit. For example, one of the Lighthouse students was sponsored by the electrician and carpenters union to spend two weeks this last summer in San Francisco, living with a construction foreman for job shadowing. This experience was very successful, and Lighthouse is looking forward to expanding this program in the coming year.

Another example is the paid internships that two Noyo students had working in the Community Learning Garden over this past summer.

5. We have worked collaboratively in a lead role with the Fort Bragg Police Department and a wide variety of community agencies and have submitted competitive statewide grant applications over the past two years for this purpose. These grants were highly competitive, and have been awarded to districts that demonstrated a much higher degree of need than Fort Bragg Unified School District. However, we are pleased to report that our latest collaborative with "Big Brothers and Big Sisters" has been successful with a grant award and funding for the next three years to establish a school resource officer position in our District. The Fort Bragg Police Department has already filled this position, and the two officers sharing the position have already completed the week long SRO training in southern California. They will begin to serve our schools at the start of school this fall. It should be noted that our desire to go above and beyond the requirements of Education Code by hiring a campus police officer is not for added security. The purpose of the police officer is to add an element of positive role modeling, assist with student support programs and develop positive mentoring relationships with our students. In spite of our funding shortfalls, had the data indicated a serious need for a school safety officer to be present on campus for security measures, the district would have taken steps to provide this additional personnel rather than waiting for one of the competitive grants to be awarded.

6. We are currently selecting the best locations for video surveillance equipment on the Alternative Education campus, an addition to our campuses that was planned and budgeted in our facilities master plan well before the Grand Jury review. The need for the equipment was identified not to provide additional security during school hours, but in order to prevent vandalism during non-school hours (evenings and weekends), and to allow staff to be freed up from their current practice of escorting particular students to restrooms (an effective security measure). We hope to have the system installed by December 2007. We do not have any plans to install video monitoring inside classrooms at this point, as this is a practice that is not recommended by any educational organization, as it breeds an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion. These classrooms are not detention centers. They are educational environments where we work to create and maintain mutually respectful and caring relationships.

7. All of our vacancy announcements include the appeal for bilingual teachers and aides with the statement that “bilingual skills are desirable and will enhance qualifications”. If we attempted to restrict applicants to only those with bilingual skills, we would have very few, if any, applicants. These skills are very desirable and in short supply in almost every area of employment throughout the state.

8. Our alternative school principal is involved with new staff training on a weekly basis. In addition to the monthly staff development that is conducted by the principal for all staff in the alternative education program, he spends one hour per week training new staff throughout the year. The training consists of a structured program, complete with goals and objectives.

In addition, FBUSD currently requires all beginning teachers to participate in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program. We also provide ongoing funding, information and incentives to staff to participate in a variety of appropriate training opportunities.

Our isolated location is often a barrier. We work to overcome this by now offering on-line classes through Oregon State University. For the alternative education programs, the principal has planned staff development through this mechanism in the areas of differentiated instruction and in behavior management/modification for the 2007-08 school year.

9. We are legally required to work through the collective bargaining process for all issues related to compensation. We have frequently raised the concept of differential pay with both of our union negotiating teams. We recently provided increased compensation to both teachers and aides (classified) that significantly improved our salary pay scales. It should also be recognized that we, along with over 50% of the school districts in the state are declining in enrollment. Since a majority of our funding is related to enrollment, we are challenged just to maintain the status quo, let alone singling out specific assignments or positions for higher levels of compensation. It should also be recognized that California continues to be far below the national average in per capita funding for schools and students.

10. This recommendation should be addressed to the District Attorney's Office. We have exerted every effort to work with the District Attorney's office for several years, with the support of the Mendocino County Office of Education and other districts in the county. It is our hope and expectation that with the recent change in leadership, the District Attorney's office will make the issue of a county SARB response a priority.

This concludes our response to the 2006-2007 Mendocino Civil Grand Jury Report dated May 24, 2007 and received on June 14, 2007. We feel the information provided in the response provides a full and factual response to all findings and recommendations as required by law. Please feel free to contact us if additional information or clarification is needed.

All Findings and Recommendations

Steven Lund, Superintendent

August 20, 2007

All Findings and Recommendations

Lura Damiano, Director of Special Education

August 20, 2007

All Findings and Recommendations

Mike Presley, Principal Alternative Education Programs

August 20, 2007

Findings 10, 18 and Recommendation 2

Donna Miller, Counselor

August 20, 2007