

“A” FOR LAYTONVILLE

A Report on the Laytonville Unified School District

March 22, 2007

Summary

The Laytonville Unified School District (LUSD) consists of an area of 375 square miles, has a wide range of geographic conditions, and consists of many diverse social and economic circumstances.

It is comprised of seven campuses, a pre-school, and an Independent Study program. The district offers a wide variety of programs and activities for the students, and maintains high scholastic standards.

The Grand Jury found two major problems. The gym on the old high school campus, which contains asbestos, must be demolished for the health and safety of the community. Truancy, another major problem, has not had sufficient follow-up by the past District Attorney's Office.

Nonetheless, the Grand Jury found the district doing a commendable job for their students, structures were well maintained, and there was strong support from the school officials and the community.

Background

The LUSD had not been visited by the Grand Jury in ten years. As part of an ongoing survey of school districts within Mendocino County, the Grand Jury completed an oversight of the facilities, staffing, student populations and school/community relations in Laytonville. The LUSD encompasses an elementary/middle-grades school, high school, community school, continuation school, the two outlying schools at Spy Rock and Branscomb, and a building housing a pre-school co-op.

Methods

On three different occasions, the Grand Jury toured the district campuses while indoor and outdoor activities, and classes were in session. Interviews were conducted with district administrators, teachers, and students. Documents reviewed were the district budget, county health inspections, goals of the main administrators interviewed, and the dress code for the district.

Findings

DISTRICT

1. The school district's operating budget for the year of 2006-2007 is within limits of

- the county and state, and grant funding.
2. The district is comprised of 375 square miles, extending north to the Leggett Unified School boundary, south to the junction of State Hwy 162 (Covelo) and Hwy 101, east to the Spy Rock area and west to Branscomb. Currently, the total enrollment of the district is estimated at 445 students. Enrollment is declining due to a lack of affordable housing within the area. Many parents are employed at the Branscomb Mill and must come from further away (Willits, Fort Bragg) due to the housing situation.
 3. Being a rural area, a large portion of the students are bused to and from the local schools. From Spy Rock, after grade 6, the students are bused into town; after grade 4, the students in the Branscomb area come into Laytonville by school bus or driven by parents.
 4. The dress code is strictly enforced. All students must be dressed and groomed in appropriate manner for their learning environment. Any gang attire noticed on any of the students is not allowed and is immediately dealt with. The dress code regarding gang wear is reviewed annually.
 5. Special Ed students attend regular classes; however, separate classrooms are available if they require extra help.
 6. Emergency preparedness is on-going all year: fire drills - two per year at the high school and monthly at the elementary school, and earthquake drills - one per year on all campuses. Annual "Lockdown" drills with response teams are conducted selectively within the district.
 7. Counselors are available at all the schools for the students concerning emotional and academic issues.
 8. Graffiti, gangs, vandalism and drugs are not a major problem on any of the campuses. Throughout all of the campuses, the administrators are in close contact with the students and notice problems soon after they become apparent.
 9. Major goals of the district authorities interviewed are safety (both physical and emotional) and teaching standards for all students in the district. More parent involvement and student attendance for the schools is a major community concern.
 10. The gym on the old high school campus is in a state of collapse and must be demolished for the health and safety of the community.
 - a. Asbestos was installed in the gym. It is critical that it be removed first at an estimated cost of \$30,000. The school district's budget will pay for this project.
 - b. However, the cost of removing the actual structure is estimated at \$300,000, which the district's budget can not support.
 - c. The LUSD has contacted Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE), and other county, state and federal officials for alternative funding for the demolition of the gym.
 - d. Currently all such requests have been denied.
 11. Truancy is a major concern for the district.
 - a. After a student is determined to be truant, two letters are sent to the parents.
 - b. If there is no response at this time, a parent/child conference is requested.
 - c. If there is no improvement, the parents and student(s) are asked to come before a panel of the School Attendance Review Board (SARB); this panel consists of school officials, the Sheriff, a representative from Social Services, a Willits PD

Officer, and representatives from the departments of the County Probation Office and Child Protection Services.

- d. If truancy continues, the case will be referred to the County District Attorney's Office, who in the past, had not responded.

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE-GRADES SCHOOLS

12. Enrollment for the elementary school (grades K-5) is approximately 200; estimated student body for the middle-grades school (grades 6-8) is 52.
13. The two schools are close together, but separated by a general play area that is used by students from both schools. The middle-grades school is designed in a circular layout, which allows for the administrators to have better control of the campus.
14. Seventy percent of the students are receiving reduced-cost meals. Children on this program are from low-income families and are eligible to receive both breakfast and lunch during the school hours.
15. Lunches for the two schools are prepared in the kitchen area of the elementary school. The students from the two schools are served in the elementary multi-purpose/cafeteria room on a rotation schedule. Some of the older students help in the kitchen with serving and simple food preparation.
16. An "Elder Lunch Program" is given once-a-month for the senior members in the community, as there is no senior center in Laytonville. They are invited to come to the campus for lunch with the students and teachers from the elementary/middle-grades school. Lunch is prepared by the Culinary Arts Class from the middle-grades school. The students often present some kind of program (a skit, read a poem, etc.). The seniors may bring some heirlooms or artifacts, tell stories and visit with the students, teachers, and other seniors in the community.
17. The library is staffed by a full-time librarian. For the middle-grades students the librarian provides after school tutoring. When a class has a research project the librarian sets up carts with books pertaining to the project and the carts are then taken to the classroom. Students are encouraged to use the library for studying and research.
18. A sports program is available at the middle-grades school with competitive sports in basketball, volleyball, and girls softball. For grades K-5, an optional program is available through the Sheriff Athletic League (SAL) where they participate in football and baseball.
19. Restrooms are in fairly good condition. Some of the tiles were missing from the floors at the elementary school; the Grand Jury was informed these tiles were going to be replaced this summer. In the same restrooms, the custodian had put up wallpaper trim along the top of the walls for a decorative touch.

HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS

20. The enrollment is approximately 165 students (grades 9-12.)
21. The new campus is three years old, designed in a circular plan which allows for closer contact with the students and the administrators. The old campus is nearby

- housing wood shop, music, the Community School and the Continuation High School.
22. In 2005, the Laytonville High School was designated a "California Distinguished School", a state honor.
 23. Lunches are prepared in the elementary/middle-grades school kitchen and transported to the high school, approximately two blocks away. The high school only has a small "kitchenette" area for heating food and general set up with no preparation area. The students may eat in the gym/multi-purpose area or outside.
 24. There are no lockers, except gym lockers, on the high school campus. For this reason, two sets of text books are loaned to each student; one set to keep at school and the other to be taken home and returned at the end of the school year. Because of the lack of lockers, there is less loitering among the students and fewer problems on the campus.
 25. The library is staffed with a full time librarian. The building also contains the computer lab which is partitioned off from the main library.
 26. There are Advanced Placement (AP) and Honor classes offered in the curriculum. Approximately 50% of the graduating seniors go on to either a two-year or four-year college.
 27. Regional Occupation Program (ROP) classes are offered at LUSD.
 - Wood Shop involving construction of sheds, fences, small buildings. In the summer, juniors and seniors may be hired by local people for various construction projects.
 - In Fine Woodworking students learn the construction of guitars, jewelry boxes, etc.
 - Computer Technology is the first computer class given primarily for freshman, who must take this class as part of the requirement for graduation.
 - Advanced Computer Technology helps the students build career moves. Students in this class have developed a virtual enterprise business, in which they learn to develop a product, along with marketing and financial skills. The phone company they developed, ("Global Mobile"), receives orders which are promptly returned with an explanation that the product does not exist.
 - Graphic Art classes provides students with computer skills to design the high school year book, learn photography enhancing skills, and some fashion design.
 28. An active sports program on campus offers competitive sports in football (junior/varsity), volleyball, baseball, softball and cross-country running.
 29. The state mandated Exit Exam is given to students in the sophomore year. If a student does not pass it the first time, the exam is given again in their junior year. After this they have two more times to take it in their senior year. A passing grade in this exam is required for graduation.
 30. Scholarships in Laytonville have become a large community project. Students apply for scholarships in which they have an interest, and attend an interview with the sponsoring organization. The scholarships are presented during a special ceremony at graduation by representatives from each sponsoring club.
 31. The high school sponsors many extra curricular activities:
 - "Mock Trial" an annual competitive event where the students first compete at the county level, where they frequently win. They may then go to the state level.

- Leadership Class (for 9th-12th grades);
 - Peer Counseling, a support/tutoring program for students that need help;
 - Rock Band, who perform at school and local events;
 - Drama Club, performing plays for the community several times a year;
 - Workability Class to learn life skills;
 - Ski Club.
32. Landscaping Day is a big event on the high school campus. Teachers and students work together twice a year on the campus to plant trees, flowers and generally clean the grounds.
33. "Algebra Academy" is a summer program for students entering the 9th grade. It is a two week program; the students attend classes in algebraic skills, computer technology and take field trips to various college campuses. The emphasis is on graduating from high school and going to college. Students are monitored during the program and for the remainder of high school. The funds for this program are paid for from the district budget and grants.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL

34. The Community School within the Laytonville School District, which is for students expelled from grades six through twelve, allows them to continue their education. Some of the students return to the general classrooms, but some wish to remain at the Community School.
35. There is a small kitchen area in the classroom where the students make and serve breakfast and lunches for their staff and themselves.
36. There is strong support from their teaching staff and school authorities.

CONTINUATION SCHOOL

37. The Continuation School is for high school students (16-18) who may need to work part time or need an alternative learning setting. They attend classes in the morning and work at local businesses in the afternoon.

SPY ROCK SCHOOL

38. Spy Rock School is north east of Laytonville at an elevation of 3100 feet, and consists of two buildings. The main building is organized into academic centers; the second building is used as a multi-purpose room with a small kitchen area where parent volunteers prepare lunches and snacks.
39. The utilities for the school are supplied by PG&E and solar panels are used for supplemental power which were funded from a grant. The buildings are heated with propane. Water from a nearby spring is stored in large tanks located below the school grounds and is pumped up to the school.
40. The staff consists of a full-time accredited teacher and an aide; they both strongly support the school and their students. The student population ranges from 15-20 students, grades K-6, and come from the surrounding area.
41. Outside, the students and teachers developed a garden area for growing many of

their own vegetables for their lunches. The playground has a sandbox area structured in the form of a dragon. The students built it from clay, paint, and other natural materials they collected and processed from the surrounding area.

BRANSCOMB SCHOOL

42. The other outlying school in the district is located in the town of Branscomb, currently the site of a working mill. The school is located in the historical "Women's Clubhouse" and is a log cabin. The room is divided into academic centers, with one of the corners being set up as a library and "quiet area". There is a small kitchen area where lunches and snacks are prepared by volunteers, often parents.
43. The staff consists of a certified teacher and an aide, who are very supportive of the school and the students. The majority of the students come from the surrounding area and are in grades K-4.
44. Outside the students and staff have organized a garden area and had recently set up a greenhouse for growing vegetables during the winter. The greenhouse also houses science projects involving plants.
45. During the Grand Jury's visit, it was noted that a paper cutter was left open, blade up, on one of the tables while only kindergartners and one staff member were present.

PRE-SCHOOL/INDEPENDENT STUDY

46. For pre-school aged children the district has a pre-school program, as well as a parent/pre-school co-op. A building located on the elementary/middle-grades school campus was donated by the district to house these programs. Some participating parents have only pre-school aged children, and others have older siblings who are in the general classrooms.
47. The families with independent study students are encouraged to have their children attend the local schools. Children K-8, attend class one day per week to get assignments and socialization. High school students enrolled in the Laytonville Independent Study Program come in for assignments for one hour per week; many also attend computer and science classes that have lab facilities in the general classrooms.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. alternative funding be obtained from sources other than the Laytonville School District budget for the demolition of the old gym building, a safety hazard to the community. (Finding 10)
2. the District Attorney's Office follow up on the truancy situation. (Finding 11d)
3. the tiles in the Elementary School restrooms be replaced during the summer. (Finding 19)
4. the Branscomb School staff, and all adults present, be diligent with safety practices. (Finding 45)

Comments

The Grand Jury was impressed how the school administrators and staff worked well with the community for the benefit of the students.

Responses Required

Superintendent, Mendocino County Office of Education (Findings 10-11;
Recommendations 1-2)

Superintendent, Laytonville Unified School District (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Board of Supervisors (Finding 10-11; Recommendations 1-2)

County District Attorney (Finding 11d; Recommendation 2)

Principal, Laytonville Elementary/Middle-Grades School (Findings 12-19, 38-47;
Recommendations 3-4)

Principal, Laytonville High School (Findings 20-37; Recommendations 1-2)