

NEVADA UNION HIGH SCHOOL TELECOMMUNICATIONS PARTNERSHIP ACADEMY

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury received a complaint alleging violations of the California Education Code (Ed Code) by the Nevada Union High School Telecommunications Partnership Academy (Academy), to wit:

- Ninth grade teachers and counselors were not allowed to select Academy students, as allegedly required by Ed Code.
- Academy students did not receive mentors.
- Academy teachers fraudulently reported mentorship hours in the Annual Report.
- Academy students did not receive internships during the junior year.
- Academy teachers had improper allocation of extra planning periods.
- Academy teachers had improper allocation of stipends.

BACKGROUND

A Partnership Academy is a voluntary three-year “school within a school” program for students in grades 10-12 which is designed to create a close family-like environment, integrate academic and career technical education, and establish a partnership between school and local labor markets. At least half of each new 10th grade class must meet three out of four criteria of Ed Code §54690 (a) or one out of four criteria of Ed Code §54691 (d)(1) to determine student eligibility including: irregular attendance, past record of underachievement, low motivation or disinterest in the regular academic program, and economic disadvantage. The remainder of the students may be from the general student population. Other key features of the Partnership Academy Program include a common planning period for Academy teachers, a mentor program, and an internship program.

In 1996, Nevada Union High School (NUHS) applied for and received a grant from the California Department of Education (CDE) to establish a Partnership Academy in Telecommunication Arts. Each year, the Partnership Academy must re-apply for grant funds based on an evaluation report that shows the Partnership Academy has met state requirements based on student performance and program guidelines. State grants must be matched 100 percent by both the school district and business partners in the form of direct and in-kind support.

PROCEDURE FOLLOWED

The Grand Jury reviewed the rules and requirements of the Ed Code, as it affects the establishment and operation of partnership academies.

The Grand Jury interviewed school and district personnel and complainants, reviewed appropriate public documents and evaluated other evidence provided by the complainants.

In addition, the Grand Jury reviewed the original grant proposal submitted to the CDE to secure its funding and the most recent annual report of the Academy to the CDE.

FINDINGS

1. The Academy was properly established in 1996 based on extant perceptions of the local labor market and local sponsors in the telecommunications industry.
2. Nevada Joint Union High School District (NJUHSD) does not have a district policy that governs and defines Partnership Academies within the district.
3. The Academy submits an annual report to the CDE, which has been reviewed and approved by the site principal and the district coordinator. Funding from the CDE for the previous year is based on acceptance of the annual report.
4. The Academy has passed multiple on-site inspections and written reviews by the CDE.
5. The Academy has maintained a close and responsive relationship with the CDE program coordinator.
6. The Ed Code states: “The staff of each academy shall select students ...” Ed Code §54695 (c).
7. The Ed Code states: “The ninth grade teachers and counselors ... shall identify students eligible to participate in an academy.” Ed Code §54695 (a).
8. It has been difficult to obtain appropriate mentors, with appropriate safeguards for student safety. The Academy has responded with a format that could best be described as “career day” presentations. Academy staff is actively seeking more mentors, but local telecommunications industry resources have significantly declined since the original charter.
9. Academy staff factually reported actual mentor hours (45) provided during the 2005-2006 school year. When interviewed, complainants admitted they had not read the annual report.

10. The 2005-2006 annual report disclosed three students received telecommunications internships, and 34 were employed in paid jobs or other work experience, an authorized variance under Ed Code §54692(b) (5).
11. Ed Code §54692 (b)(5)(f) states: “Whenever practical, the (common) planning period should be in addition to the normal planning period for full-time teachers, and be supported as a part of the district’s matching funds.” Provision of an extra planning period is an itemized milestone for compliance in the annual report.
12. Stipends for Academy teachers were determined by a logical derivation from standard comparable stipends; were approved by the site principal, district Personnel and Business Divisions; and finally ratified by NJUHSD Board of Trustees in open session on September 20, 2006. In addition, the stipends were awarded in lieu of statutory and authorized planning periods in order to save grant funds.
13. Complainants’ issues have been raised before, and answered by, successive site principals, district personnel, NJUHSD Board of Trustees, and CDE.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Alleged violation (Ninth grade teachers and counselors were not allowed to select Academy students, as allegedly required by Ed Code) is unfounded. The Ed Code specifies that the academy staff selects academy students.
2. Alleged violation (Academy students did not receive mentors) is partially correct. Traditional one-on-one mentorship has been lacking; however, with the approbation of CDE, the Academy has substituted “career-day-like” presentations.
3. Alleged violation (Academy teachers fraudulently reported mentorship hours in the Annual Report) is unfounded. Academy staff reported actual mentor hours.
4. Alleged violation (Academy students did not receive internships) is partially correct. Three students received paid telecommunications internships. Thirty-four others were employed in paid jobs or other work experience, as authorized by the Ed Code.
5. Alleged violation (Academy teachers had improper allocation of extra planning periods) is unfounded. The Ed Code strongly recommends an extra (common) planning period for Academy teachers.
6. Alleged violation (Academy teachers had improper allocation of stipends) is unfounded. Proper procedures were followed in deriving and allocating stipends to Academy teachers in lieu of the extra planning period to save grant funds.

7. Complainants knew, or should have known, that they incorrectly cited the Ed Code; made unsubstantiated and inaccurate charges of fraud and financial misconduct; and misstated the purpose and procedures of the Partnership Academy.
8. The Grand Jury concludes that the complainants' relentless pursuit of the alleged infractions of the Partnership Academy is based upon misinformation and driven by personal agendas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Nevada Union High School should consider adding additional Partnership Academies to focus on alternate career fields.
2. Nevada Joint Union High School District should promulgate a district policy directive on Partnership Academies to include, but not necessarily be limited to:
 - a. A clear, concise mission statement
 - b. Procedures to identify all eligible "at risk" (Ed Code §§54690 and 54691) students
 - c. Procedures to select individual students
 - d. A protocol to achieve academy balance between "at risk and general student populations"
 - e. Expectations of student performance and participation
 - f. Protocols for waivers and exceptions
 - g. Standards for appropriate mentor interactions
 - h. A process for on-site cooperation among Academy staff, counselors, department heads, and ninth grade teachers

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Principal NUHS July 23, 2007
Superintendent NJUHSD August 20, 2007



NEVADA JOINT UNION
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Margaret H. Deetz, Superintendent

June 28, 2007

The Honorable Robert L. Tamietti
Presiding Judge of the Nevada County Superior Court
201 Church Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Dear Honorable Judge Tamietti:

The Nevada Joint Union High School District agrees with the findings of the Nevada County Civil Grand Jury findings regarding allegations made against the Nevada Union High School Telecommunications Partnership Academy.

The recommendations have not yet been implemented. However, in response to these recommendations the following documents have been drafted:

1. California Partnership Academy Policy
2. California Partnership Academy Administrative Regulation

The first reading of these policies by the Nevada Joint Union High School District Governing Board is scheduled for July 25, 2007. The second and final reading is scheduled for August 15, 2007. The Nevada Joint Union High School District will forward you a final copy upon board adoption.

Training for academy staff and administration regarding these policies will be held in September 2007. It will be the responsibility of the District Coordinator of Categorical Programs to monitor the adherence to these policies.

Thank you for the time and effort spent in investigating these allegations. Your findings and recommendations have been reviewed and addressed. As a result, our academy programs will better serve the students of Nevada County.

Sincerely,

Margaret H. Deetz
SUPERINTENDENT

POLICY

Instruction

CALIFORNIA PARTNERSHIP ACADEMIES

The Governing Board of the Nevada Joint Union High School District firmly supports smaller learning communities designed to engage students, personalize their learning, and promote strong relationships between students and teachers. The Partnership Academy model combines rigorous academics with a career focus. Partnership Academies are proven to have a dramatic positive impact on students who participate. Research shows that students stay engaged in school when they are connected with caring adults and when they can see the real-world relevance of the skills they are learning. (*addresses recommendation 1 & 2a*)

Academies incorporate many features of the high school reform movement that includes creating a close family-like atmosphere, integrating academic and career technical education, and establishing viable business partnerships. Emphasis is also placed on student achievement and positive postsecondary outcomes.

The Board further recognizes that the key components of the Academy model are:

- **Curriculum** focused on a career theme and coordinated with related academic classes;
- **A voluntary student** selection process that identifies interested ninth graders;
- **A team of teachers** who work together to plan and implement the program;
- A variety of **motivational activities** with private sector involvement to encourage academic and occupational preparation, such as a mentor and internship program, enhanced curriculum, classroom speakers, field trips, and postsecondary options.

Upon availability of State funding, the Nevada Joint Union High School District will apply for Academy funding for programs that:

- have a career focus in one of the 15 industry sectors established for Career Technical Education by CDE
- have a career focus based on an analysis of the local labor market with special consideration of fields that are growing and healthy, offer jobs with career ladders, and have business partners willing to support the program.
- are developed in collaboration with representatives from three academic curricular areas, one CTE teacher, an administrative representative, a counseling representative, and business partner representatives.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION

DRAFT

Instruction

CALIFORNIA PARTNERSHIP ACADEMIES

SELECTION OF CURRICULUM & CAREER FOCUS

School sites wishing to apply for a California Partnership Academy Grant must:

1. Select a career focus in one of the 15 industry sectors established for Career Technical Education by CDE
2. Select a career focus based on an analysis of the local labor market with special consideration of fields that are growing and healthy, offer jobs with career ladders, and have business partners willing to support the program.
3. Develop the application in collaboration with representatives from three academic curricular areas, one CTE teacher, an administrative representative, a counseling representative, and business partner representatives.

STAFFING

1. Participating teachers must be willing to work with at-risk students
2. Participating teachers must have a common prep
3. Participating teachers must meet regularly to:
 - a. Plan program activities and curriculum
 - b. Coordinator with business representatives
 - c. Meet with parents
 - d. Discuss student progress

Whenever practical, the planning period should be in addition to the normal planning period for full-time teachers.

STUDENT SELECTION (*addresses recommendation 2b*)

At Risk Criteria: Student Eligibility for CPA

For selection purposes, "at-risk" students means students enrolled in high school who are at risk of dropping out of school, as indicated by at least three of the following criteria:

1. Past record of irregular attendance.
 - a. Student attendance rate is less than the school site attendance rate and/or the student is identified as truant pursuant to UMIRS regulations
2. Past record of underachievement in which the student is at least one year behind the coursework for the respective grade level.
 - a. As measured by course placement, CST results, and/or credit attainment
3. Past record of low motivation or a disinterest in the regular school program.
 - a. As measured by low GPA, irregular attendance, and/or evaluation by 9th grade language arts teacher
4. Disadvantaged economically.

- a. If willingly' shared by parent – qualification for free & reduced lunch program

An academy that is unable to enroll enough at-risk students, as defined above, to constitute one-half of the participating students may enroll non-at-risk students that meet any of the following criteria:

1. Scoring far below or below basic in mathematics or English language arts on the California Standards Test
2. Maintaining a grade point average of 2.2 or below, or the equivalent of a C-
3. Meeting any three of the four criteria set forth in subdivision (d) of Section 54690
4. Fulfilling any of the actions described in paragraphs (1), (2), or (3) of subdivision (c).

Non-at-risk students enrolled may not exceed one-half of the students enrolled in an academy.

RECRUITMENT & SELECTION (*addresses recommendations 2c, 2d & 2 h*)

Ninth grade teachers and counselors in academy schools shall identify students who are interested in participating in an academy program and would benefit from the school-within-a-school model.

Academy teachers and counselors will make presentations to prospective 8th and 9th grade students and their parents.

Academy staff shall select students from among those who have expressed an interest in the academy and whose parents or guardians have approved the student's participation.

Individual student selection is the responsibility of the Partnership staff. Partnership staff, in conjunction with a site counselor and site administrator shall meet formally for this purpose. Partnership academy staff shall maintain records of the selection process for five years that include:

1. agenda of selection meeting
2. minutes of selection meeting
3. copies all student applications
4. criteria for selection
5. student approved enrollment summary disaggregated by grade level, gender, ethnicity, and at-risk criteria
6. Enrollment waiting list

Student notification cannot be sent until the academy composition has been signed off by the selection team.

WAIVERS AND EXCEPTIONS (*addresses recommendation 2f*)

Waivers and exceptions to academy enrollment criteria must be documented and approved on a case-by-case basis. Approval of the waiver or exception shall be approved by the District Coordinator of Categorical Programs. Students granted a waiver or exception shall be omitted from the annual report. Record of an individual student's waivers/exception shall be maintained in their individual student file and documented via meeting minutes and IEP (if applicable). A copy of the documentation shall be sent to the district office as supporting documentation for the Annual Report.

Waivers and exceptions do not apply to at-risk criteria.

MATCHING REQUIREMENTS

The school site, in collaboration with the district office, must document an amount equal to a 100 percent match of all funds received in the form of direct and in-kind support provided by the district. Examples of possible matching expenditure are as follows:

- Reduced class size
- Substitute pay
- Administrator time
- Rent for office space
- Any expenditure of time, funds or other resources that are attributable to the support of the academy.

The school site must document an amount equal to a 100 percent match of all funds in the form of direct and in-kind support provided by participating companies or other private sector organizations.

USE OF STATE FUNDS

Funds provided by the partnership academies program shall be used only for the development, operation, and support of partnership academies. Funds must supplement, not supplant the existing educational program.

SCHEDULING

Each academy will be established as a "school within a school." Academy teachers shall work as a team in planning, teaching, and troubleshooting program activities. Classes in the academy program shall be limited to academy students. (Exhibit B)

Each academy student shall be provided with the following:

- Instruction in at least three academic subjects each regular school term that prepares the student for a regular high school diploma. These subjects should contribute to an understanding of the occupational field of the academy.
- A "laboratory class" related to the academy's occupational field.

- A class schedule that limits the attendance to the classes required in paragraphs (1) and (2) to pupils of the academy. Whenever possible, these classes should be block scheduled in a cluster to provide flexibility to academy teachers. During the 12th grade the number of academic classes may vary.
- Additional motivational activities with private sector involvement to encourage academic and occupational preparation.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Each academy shall establish an advisory committee consisting of individuals involved in academy operations, including school district and school administrators, lead teachers, and representatives of the private sector. The advisory committee shall meet at least twice annually. Meeting agendas, minutes, and other supporting documents must be maintained for five years.

MENTORS (*addresses recommendation 2g*)

During the 11th grade year, each partnership student will meet with an assigned mentor from the business community at least three times throughout the year. To the extent possible, the student shall meet with the same mentor each time. Visits with mentors shall occur in the classroom. Also, communication with mentors via email shall also be encouraged.

In the absence of qualified mentors and when funds permit, on-line mentor programs will be incorporated into the program.

INTERNSHIPS

During the summer following the 11th grade year, academy students shall participate in an internship or paid job related to the academy's occupational field or work experience to improve employment skills. Evidence of the student's participation in these activities shall be maintained in the student file for five years. A student that must attend summer school for purposes of completing graduation requirements is exempt from this requirement. A summary of student participation shall be presented and discussed at an advisory committee meeting.

PROGRAM EVALUATION (*addresses recommendation 2e*)

Academy students are expected to meet the following goals:

1. Minimum of an 80 percent attendance rate
2. Attainment of 90 percent of credit requirements
3. Improved GPA
4. Improved discipline record
5. Successful, on-time, graduation

Annual evaluations should consistently reflect improved student performance on attendance, credits, grade point averages, and graduation rates.

NEVADA UNION HIGH SCHOOL

"National School of Excellence"



Marty Mathiesen, Principal

September 24, 2007

The Honorable Robert L. Tamietti
Presiding Judge
Nevada County Civil Grand Jury
201 Church Street, Suite 6
Nevada City, CA 95959

Dear Judge Tamietti:

As principal of Nevada Union High School I wholly concur with the findings of the grand jury report on the subject of the Nevada Union High School Telecommunications Partnership Academy.

In response to the grand jury recommendations the following policies and regulations were submitted to the Nevada Joint Union High School District Governing Board for approval:

1. California Partnership Academy Policy
2. California Partnership Academy Administrative Regulation

The first reading of these policies by the Nevada Joint Union High School District Governing Board occurred on July 25, 2007. The second and final reading occurred on August 15, 2007. The Nevada Joint Union High School District will forward you a final copy upon board adoption.

Training for academy staff and administration regarding these policies will be held in October 2007. It will be the responsibility of the District Coordinator of Categorical Programs to monitor the adherence to these policies.

Additionally, Nevada Union High School now has two counselors designated specifically for smaller learning communities, one of which is assigned to the Telecommunications Partnership Academy.

Nevada Union High School will recruit interested teachers for the purposes of applying for funding of a Partnership Academy in the area of Health Careers.

Your findings and recommendations have been reviewed and addressed by site administration. As the principal of Nevada Union High School, I am committed to my support of the Partnership Program on my school site.

Sincerely,


Marty Mathiesen
PRINCIPAL

"A California Distinguished School"

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