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[Bee River High School](#) | [Chickati Lake College High School](#) | [Nevada Union High School](#) | [North Point Academy](#) | [NSJ Tech](#) | [Silver Springs High School](#)

August 9, 2017

The Honorable Thomas M. Anderson
Presiding Judge of the Grand Jury
201 Church Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Re: Nevada Joint Union High School District Response to Nevada County 2016-17 Grand Jury Report, "Cooperation and Coordination among the School Districts in Nevada County, "Can We Talk?"

Honorable Judge Anderson:

Pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Board of Education of the Nevada Joint Union High School District hereby submits its formal response to the 2016-17 Nevada County Grand Jury Report entitled, "Cooperation and Coordination among the School Districts in Nevada County, "Can We Talk."

The Board of Trustees appreciates the Grand Jury's interest in our schools and appreciates the concept that students should come to our schools in 9th grade as prepared as possible to achieve success in their high school academic studies. The Grand Jury Report states, "Some elementary students in the county are better prepared than others for high school due only to the quality of elementary instruction that they have received." While the Board of Trustees appreciates the Grand Jury's position and indeed is challenged by the variation in preparation of our incoming freshman students, we believe that other factors also affect a student's preparation for high school. Some of those factors include the student's health, mental health, attendance, behavior, family life, peer pressure, poverty and homelessness.

The Board of Trustees is also curious that the report considers only the traditional public school districts in Nevada County and neglects to address the same findings to the vast array of independent public charter schools that operate in Nevada County and feed into our high schools. These charter schools include Forest Charter School, Nevada City School of the Arts, Sierra Montessori Academy, Twin Ridges Home School and the Yuba River Charter School. Additionally some students arrive to us from of the private schools in Nevada County including Ananda Living Wisdom, Echo Ridge Christian School, Forest Lake Christian School and Mount Saint Mary's. The variety of educational options in Nevada County is a blessing to our community but does present additional challenges to the Nevada Joint Union High School District in the preparation of our 9th grade students.

FINDINGS

Finding 1 The failure of the school districts within the County to identify teacher leaders and coordinate teacher collaboration and articulation negatively impacts student opportunity.

DISAGREE

The Nevada Joint Union High School District have well developed opportunities through Teachers on Special Assignment, Department Chairs, and the District Curriculum Committee.

The roles and responsibilities of Teachers on Special Assignment are as follows:

- a. Curriculum and Instruction 1.0 FTE – Assists teachers in appropriate instructional strategies, development of formative and summative assessment and collaboration around student results; vets and recommends appropriate instructional resources
- b. Technology Integration 1.4 FTE – Assists teachers with the integration of technology into their classroom instruction, provides appropriate staff development for teachers in a variety of levels of proficiency; vets and recommends appropriate instructional technology
- c. Career Technology Pathways 1.0 FTE – Assists teachers with development of career technical education courses and pathways, serves as a mentor and master teacher to new CTE staff; vets and recommends appropriate curriculum materials and instructional strategies.
- d. Intervention Specialist – 3.7 FTE – Reviews student achievement data for appropriate placement in high school coursework, connects students with resources needed to achieve success in their work, develops and implements intervention programs for students falling behind in their work; vets and recommends instructional materials and strategies and staff development activities
- e. District Librarians – 1.6 FTE – Assists teachers in the selection of appropriate supplementary instructional materials, provides staff development activities supporting media literacy, social justice, supports the “Nevada County Reads and Writes Project” and other literacy activities through author visits, panel discussions and student and staff support; vets and recommends appropriate curriculum materials, instructional strategies and staff development activities.

The roles and responsibilities of Department Chairs are as follows:

- a. Serves to organize and guide department activities, including
 - i. Facilitating investigation and discussion of best practices in curriculum, instruction and assessment;
 - ii. Facilitating department decision making
 - iii. Coordinating collaboration to support department, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Single Plan for School Achievement and Local Control Accountability Plan goals;
 - iv. Participating and sharing in opportunities for mutually agreed upon professional development that informs and supports best instructional practices within the department;
 - v. And, supporting and encouraging department members in their own development as professionals.
- b. Attends Department Chair Meetings and acts as liaison for the department
- c. Must sign purchase orders / requisitions for the department.

The roles and responsibilities of the members of the District Curriculum Committee are as follows:

- a. The District Curriculum Committee (DCC) serves as a forum for curricular concerns throughout the district, including but not limited to the State Department of Education Model Curriculum Standards, The California Common Core Standards, District Courses of

Study, online learning, curriculum alignment, staff development, curriculum practices and methodology, integrated curriculum and small learning community development, testing, evaluation and accountability. It will serve as a vehicle for district-wide articulation of resources such as special projects, site councils, site priorities and district wide priorities.

- b. The voting membership of the DCC is composed of the following: two teachers from Bear River's Site Curriculum Committee and two teachers from Nevada Union's Site Curriculum Committee. One teacher from each of the following sites will represent the certificated teachers from that site: Silver Springs High School, North Point Academy and Ghidotti Early College High School.
- c. Teacher representatives will be elected by the members of the schools' site curriculum committees. In the absence of a curriculum committee, representatives will be elected by the site certificated staff. In addition to teacher membership, there will be one comprehensive school counselor from each of the comprehensive sites and one alternative school counselor who shall be elected by members of the District Guidance Council.
- d. The voting administrative members will include the five site principals. In addition, the Director of Special Education will serve as a voting member.
- e. The non-voting membership of the DCC shall include the district curriculum and instruction administrator who serves as the chair and facilitator of the committee, the district technology director or his/her designee, the district testing coordinator, a representative of the district Board of Trustees and a representative of Career Technical Education.
- f. All curriculum recommendations made by this group shall be forwarded to the Superintendent who shall recommend or not recommend action by the Board.

This summarizes the multitude of teacher leadership opportunities in the Nevada Joint Union High School District and supports our disagreement with Finding 1.

Finding 2 There is an apparent lack of Professional Learning Communities in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics in the nine school districts in the County.

DISAGREE

The Nevada Joint Union High School District faculty, administration and staff continue to develop in skill and expertise relative to Professional Learning Communities.

1. During the 2014-15 school year, the entire faculty of the Nevada Joint Union High School District had a two day on site staff training in the tenets of Professional Learning Communities during districtwide staff development days. The workshop was facilitated by national consultant, Tim Brown, of Solution Tree, Inc.
2. During the 2015 – 16 school year, the entire faculty of the Nevada Joint Union High School District revisited the tenets of Professional Learning Communities during a districtwide staff development day.
3. The PLC model has been a part of the fabric of Bear River High School for many years. As the school has declined in enrollment, new actions and initiatives have taken place to adjust the model for a smaller school. Tenets of Professional Learning Communities include a focus on the questions, "What do we want students to learn?" (essential learning outcomes), "How will we know they have learned it?" (formative assessment) and "How will we respond when they don't

learn?" (intervention). During the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school year, staff at Bear River High School has met in collaboration teams to redefine their processes. Bear River High School has structured time in the school day for student intervention called Bruin Time. On May 31, 2017 California State Superintendent of Instruction, Tom Torlakson, conferred California Gold Ribbon School status on Bear River High School for their Bruin Time intervention program.

4. Since the 2012-13 school year, Nevada Union High School has been systematically updating and improving their staff collaboration model based upon the tenets of Professional Learning Communities. In addition to the on-site PLC trainings mentioned in #1 and #2 above, teams of Nevada Union faculty have attended PLC workshops over the course of the last three years. So far, 32 faculty members have attended and 22 more are scheduled to attend during the 2017-18 school year.
5. Since the 2014-15 school year, our Curriculum Teacher on Special Assignment has been systematically working with faculty at Nevada Union and Bear River on the alignment of course content to the new California Standards and development of interim benchmark assessments using our district adopted testing system, OARS, the On-line Assessment and Reporting System. English served as the pioneers with quarterly assessments which teachers would meet to analyze the data and provide timely interventions before the state test in the spring of each year. We attribute our test score gains between the 2015 testing and the 2016 testing to this ability of teachers to diagnose and fill in holes in student learning; two key tenets of Professional Learning Communities cited in #3 above.

This summarizes the evidence of Professional Learning Communities in the Nevada Joint Union High School District and supports our disagreement with Finding 2.

Finding 4 There is a lack of communication and collaboration between the two comprehensive high schools and their feeder elementary districts concerning expectations for entering ninth graders.

DISAGREE

1. In compliance with SB 359, the California Mathematics Placement Act of 2015, all feeder schools and districts administer the NJUHS math placement test and forward the results to the respective high schools. A series of multiple measures including the math placement test, 8th grade teacher recommendations, 8th grade math grades and 8th grade CAASPP (California Assessment of Student Progress and Proficiency) contribute to 9th grade placement in high school.
2. In English Language Arts, the Teacher on Special Assignment, Intervention Specialist collects data from 8th grade teachers regarding reading levels, writing conventions and writing abilities on a feedback form. This data combined with teacher recommendations, 8th grade ELA grades and 8th grade CAASPP scores assist high school staff in identifying students who will need one of our support classes or programs in 9th grade to scaffold their success in 9th grade English.
3. Bear River math teachers and administrators have met with Magnolia math teachers and administrators multiple times over the past two years to discuss articulation in mathematics.
4. Each year both Nevada Union and Bear River High Schools host an 8th grade visitation day where our rising 9th graders come to campus, enjoy lunch and a campus tour and have the opportunity to visit classes and decide which of our many elective and extracurricular choices they may wish to join. Similarly, each school hosts an 8th grade parent night to engage families in those choices for 8th grade students prior to registration and course selection.

5. Each year, the Director of Educational and Pupil Services is available to meet with students, parents and faculty at middle schools to discuss high school requirements including the math placement test. Seven Hills has taken advantage of this in the past and we are looking forward to expanding to other middle schools.
6. Each year, school counselors visit the middle schools to meet with students and engage them in their course selection for their 9th grade year. Formal registration is completed by parents online using our eSchools student information system or on paper which is turned in to the middle school office and forwarded to the appropriate high school.
7. The Nevada County Superintendents meet monthly and the high school district Superintendent shares expectations and upcoming events. Each year, she provides the feeder district with data on grades earned by their 8th grade graduates in their 9th grade coursework in district schools. Prior to the repeal of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) by the California State Legislature and Governor, she provided each feeder district with data relative to the performance on the CAHSEE of their 8th grade graduates.

While we acknowledge that there may be more opportunities for communication and collaboration in a less geographically vast unified school district, the above summarizes the evidence of communication between Nevada Joint Union High School District schools and our feeder elementary school districts and supports our disagreement with Finding 4.

Finding 5 Having two comprehensive high schools using different mathematics pathways may negatively impact the ability for students to transfer between the schools.

DISAGREE

1. As the grand jury report acknowledges, the State of California has two approved pathways. The Integrated Mathematics Pathway is a three course sequence consisting of Integrated Mathematics 1, Integrated Mathematics 2 and Integrated Mathematics 3. The Traditional Pathway consists of Common Core Algebra 1, Common Core Geometry and Common Core Algebra 2. While the scope and sequence of the two California approved mathematics pathways for grades 9 – 12 are different, the standards are the same and at the end of either sequence, all standards are covered.
2. Math readiness for students beginning grade 9 in either Common Core Algebra 1 or Integrated Mathematics 1 is the same. Preparation with the math standards through the 8th grade adequately prepare students to enter either pathway.
3. Transfers of students between the two comprehensive high schools, Nevada Union High School and Bear River High School are minimal.
4. Faculty at Bear River High School recommended adoption of the Integrated Mathematics sequence for Bear River students a variety of reasons including their proximity to Placer County schools for professional development and collaboration with nearby high schools.
5. Faculty at Nevada Union High School recommended adoption of the Traditional Pathway for a variety of reasons including familiarity of the Nevada Union school community with the traditional sequence of mathematics coursework, availability of companion software for the chosen textbook series and complex real world problems that introduce and conclude each unit of study designed similar to the types of problems students will encounter on the CAASPP mathematics test in grade 11.
6. In California, the State Board of Education adopts instructional materials for grades K – 8 and provides a list approved materials to local schools districts for local districts to select from. All

instructional materials for grades 9 – 12 are locally Board Adopted in California. (Education Code 60440). The Nevada Joint Union High School District Board Policy and Administrative Regulation 6161.1 articulates the expectation of the Board in the selection of instructional materials. The review process shall involve teachers in a substantial manner and shall encourage the participation of parents, community members and administrators who have subject matter competence. Recommendations for instructional materials are made first to the school Site Curriculum Committee and if approved advance to the District Curriculum Committee. The District Curriculum Committee reviews the selection and makes a recommendation to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees. Final decision making authority rests with the Board of Trustees. The Board recognizes the professional opinion of our credentialed, highly qualified faculty and supports the opinions of our teachers in the evaluation and selection of instructional materials.

While it may be convenient for the two comprehensive schools to have selected the same mathematics textbooks, the above summarizes the process of instructional materials selection in the Nevada Joint Union High School District and supports our disagreement with Finding 5.

Finding 6 Having two comprehensive high schools using different mathematics pathways may negatively impact students in the feeder schools in their ability to master the State Standards.

DISAGREE

1. Bear River High School has one large feeder school, Magnolia Intermediate School in the Pleasant Ridge School District. The mathematics pathway is articulated between Magnolia and Bear River.
2. Nevada Union has seven feeder districts which does present a larger challenge. While Nevada Union's selection of the Traditional Pathway has been communicated to the feeder schools, the authority for selection of mathematics instructional materials for each of those districts resides with the State Board of Education and the Boards of Trustees of each individual district.
3. The Nevada Joint Union High School District strongly believes that the best preparation for high school mathematics in either pathway is mastery of the elementary and middle school standards. Students who are competent in the foundational skills and can think, read and write competently in mathematical terms are well prepared for high school mathematics. The Nevada Joint Union High School District strongly encourages each feeder district to endeavor to teach the grade level standards adopted by the State of California for grades K – 8.

While it may be convenient for the entire county to have one mathematics pathway and common instructional materials between the Nevada Joint Union High School District feeder school districts, the above summarizes the opinion of the Nevada Joint Union High School District. We recognize that the selection of mathematics pathway and instructional materials for grades K – 8 rests with the Boards of Trustees of each school district and supports our disagreement with Finding 6.

Finding 7 While the State allows different pathways in the teaching of mathematics, students in the County would be better served by the adoption of a common pathway.

PARTIALLY AGREE

1. The challenges to a common pathway K – 12 with the variety of autonomous school districts county wide have been articulated above.
2. The Nevada Joint Union High School District recognizes the value of common pathways and instructional materials to enhance the ability of schools to share resources, professional development, assessment, intervention programs and collaboration. Common pathways in the content areas has been set as a goal for future planning.
3. In October of 2016, the NJUHSD District Curriculum Committee approved a materials selection process and timeline on a rotating 7 year cycle. While the selection of common instructional materials on a districtwide basis was not a past expectation, the administration and DCC now strongly encourage collaboration between the schools in the NJUHSD on future materials selections. This has been accomplished with the selection of new materials for world language and health education which were adopted by the NJUHSD Board of Trustees at its regularly scheduled meeting of June 28, 2017. Our schedule of textbook adoptions is attached (Exhibit A).
4. The Nevada Joint Union High School District will strongly consider the adoption of common instructional materials in mathematics the next time mathematics comes up for review.

The Nevada Joint Union High School District has been diligently working towards resolution of this finding within the scope of our authority as the stand alone high school district in Nevada County. We partially agree with Finding 7 and our efforts are articulated above.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The superintendents from each district should come together and set communication and collaboration guidelines for teachers including the coordination of time for this communication and collaboration.

Response to Recommendation 1

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. In the Nevada Joint Union High School District, times and conditions of teacher collaboration are codified in the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Nevada Joint Union High School District in Article 12.6.1. The District and Association met and bargained in good faith in the spring of 2017. As part of that negotiation, terms and conditions of collaboration were updated. The association ratified the agreement and the board approved the agreement at their regularly scheduled meeting of June 14, 2017. The agreement represented a two year agreement for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. Negotiations will reopen in the spring of 2019 for the 2019-2020 school year and beyond.

Recommendation 2

The individual school districts should select teachers to act as leaders in the process of forming Professional Learning Communities in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics.

Response to Recommendation 2

This recommendation has been implemented; not as a response to the Grand Jury report but in the ongoing improvement efforts of the Nevada Joint Union High School District. Those actions have been outlined in the responses to Finding 1 and Finding 2 above.

Recommendation 4

These leaders should establish working relationships with their peers allowing them to freely share their ideas, plans and the results of their instruction.

Response to Recommendation 4

This recommendation has been implemented; not as a response to the Grand Jury report but in the ongoing improvement efforts of the Nevada Joint Union High School District. Those actions have been outlined in the response to Finding 1 and Finding 2 above.

Recommendation 5

The Nevada Joint Union High School District should develop a process in collaboration with the elementary districts to more clearly identify the expectations for entering ninth graders.

Response to Recommendation 5

This recommendation has been implemented; not as a response to the Grand Jury report but in the ongoing improvement efforts of the Nevada Joint Union High School District. Those actions have been outlined in the response to Finding 4 above.

Recommendation 6

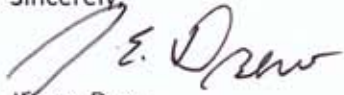
The Nevada Joint Union High School District should adopt one mathematics pathway to be used by both of the comprehensive schools in the district.

Response to Recommendation 6

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable. The mathematics faculty, duly credentialed by the state of California in the area of mathematics, are qualified to evaluate instructional materials, plan lessons with those materials, and assess student learning as a result of those lessons. It is within the purview of NJUHSD faculty to make recommendations for adoption to the District Curriculum Council and then to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees. Mathematics textbooks for both comprehensive school sites have already been purchased. The Nevada Joint Union High School District has already invested \$178,732 in new math textbooks and materials over the past three fiscal years. The schedule of textbook adoption (Exhibit A) shows the District Curriculum Council approved timeline. The recommendation may come under consideration when the adoption cycle begins again, assumedly in the 2020-21 school year or beyond depending upon needs and budget considerations at that time.

The Board will implement the Grand Jury's recommendations to the extent and in the manner set forth above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. E. Drew". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "E".

James Drew

President

Nevada Joint Union High School District Board of Trustees