

Reviewed
8/22/17
TMA



Received 22 August 2017

David Curry, Superintendent

A Tradition of Excellence Since 1868

August 8, 2017

Honorable Thomas M. Anderson,
Presiding Judge Nevada County Superior
Court
210 Church Street
Nevada City, California 95945

Re: Union Hill School District, Response to Nevada County 2016-2017 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 Union Hill School District hereby submits its formal response to the 2016-2017 Nevada County Grand Jury Report entitled, "Cooperation and Coordination among the School Districts in Nevada County "Can We Talk?"

OVERVIEW OF BOARD'S RESPONSE

In keeping with the District's motto of "A Tradition of Excellence" the Board and the District consider the effectiveness of the District's certificated staff (Teachers, Counselors, Administrators, Coordinators, and Directors) to be of paramount importance in providing excellent educational experiences for the District's students in Transitional Kindergarten through 8th grade. Nevertheless, the Board and District have very carefully and thoroughly considered each and every one of the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations contained in the above-referenced report in order to determine if the Union Hill School District needs to create or modify its existing practices relating to teacher training, collaboration, and articulation, to help ensure that our students are proficient in the Common Core State Standards and will be prepared for high school, college and/or career.

Based on the Board's review of all available evidence relevant to the items identified in the Grand Jury's report, the Board has determined to disagree with the findings identified in the Grand Jury's report. Most recommendations are already being implemented.

BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY'S FINDINGS

FINDINGS:

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 Union Hill School District has established an effective teacher collaboration model. With an agreement between the Union Hill School Board and the Union Hill Teachers Association the District sets aside time roughly every other Friday (fourteen days in 2017-18) to provide explicit time to collaborate. Early release collaboration days are dedicated for teachers to work together to examine and analyze data from assessments and develop a plan for intervention and extension.

Teacher leaders have been identified at each grade level, and these leaders meet on a regular basis as representatives on the Teaching and Learning Committee. Teacher leaders also lead monthly grade level team meetings on the third Wednesday of each month. These meetings serve as additional time for collaboration. The plans and strategies developed during collaborative meetings are articulated to district teachers through consistent written and oral communication during the various weekly meetings held at school sites. Our teacher leaders in English language arts and math provide multi-tiered systems of support to students identified through the collaboration activities.

In addition, the Negotiated Agreement between the Union Hill School District and the Union Hill Teachers Association establishes the teacher evaluation form and lists specific criteria for evaluating teachers in support of the Professional Learning Community best practices including "Reflects on teaching and learning", "Works with colleagues to improve teaching and learning", and "Demonstrates ability to work effectively and professionally with individuals and groups; communicates effectively...".

The effectiveness of our model is demonstrated on the California Dashboard Report, which illustrates an increase in performance on the English and math state assessments. Even with an increase in the number of students with learning challenges we continue to show an increase in performance.

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

Please refer to the explanation provided under "1." above. The Union Hill School District has implemented and supported Professional Learning Communities both of the district's school sites.

In 2015 and 2016 UHSD spent pre-service time in providing teachers with professional development on our continuous improvement cycle. This cycle guides the collaborative improvement of teaching and learning. This professional development specifically incorporated the best practices of Professional Learning Communities. In separate but

BOARD'S RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

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. (F1 and F4)

The recommendation will not be implemented at the present time

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. High functioning PLCs have characteristics in common. Districts who implement PLCs with fidelity will exhibit these characteristics but each community must ask and answer questions that are unique to their situation. The Board sets the vision, mission and strategic planning to improve learning. The work of PLCs supports the strategic plans of the district.

Nevertheless, the Board will direct the District superintendent to communicate with the other district superintendents to determine if there is a need to increase communication and collaboration between the teachers from other school districts.

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. (F1 and F2)

The recommendation is already being implemented

This recommendation is already being implemented as outlined in Finding #1 above. The Board believes that the Union Hill School District has selected teacher leaders that facilitate Professional Learning Communities in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics. The Professional Learning Communities already exist at each school in Union Hill School District.

4. These leaders should establish working relationships with their peers allowing them to freely share their ideas, plans, and the results of their instruction. (F1, F2, and F4)

The recommendation is already being implemented

This recommendation is already being implemented. The Board believes that the teacher leaders in the Union Hill School District have ample opportunities (common prep periods, team meeting time, collaboration time on early release days and professional development days) to establish working relationships with their peers at each grade level, and teacher leaders have time to collaborate on a regular basis with their peers. As the Board responded in Recommendation #1, teacher leaders from the Union Hill School District have opportunities to establish working relationships with

complementary sessions district teachers conducted data analysis from state and local assessments of English and math.

Additionally, our schedule for 2017-18 includes coordinated planning time for our math teachers to work on math applications and to work in tandem with our 7th/8th science teacher to create relevant cross curricular experiences in math and science.

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

Each month the superintendents of the nine school districts, and the Nevada County Superintendent of Schools, meet to collaborate and discuss issues related to educational programs in their districts. The superintendent of the Nevada Joint Union High School District regularly shares information regarding the high school programs and discusses articulation between the feeder programs. Additionally, Nevada County Principals meet for a similar type of collaboration and discussion approximately three times per year. Annually, the high school facilitates a day for 8th grade students to visit the Nevada Union High School campus and provides an opportunity for the 8th graders to visit the classrooms, talk to teachers, and learn about the academic and extracurricular programs at the high school. In the winter of each year, counselors from the high school visit Union Hill Middle School and provide information to students and parents regarding the Nevada Union High School programs. Union Hill is also visited by high school choir, dance, color guard, and agricultural education programs. During these visits high school staff assist the families in enrolling in the high school. High school counselors also give the Union Hill teachers the opportunity to provide recommendations for the placement of their students in the mathematics, science, and language arts courses. The Nevada Union Joint Union High School District also coordinates an annual math placement test to help place incoming freshmen in the most appropriate mathematics course. The principal from Union Hill Middle School and the principal from Nevada Joint Union High School engage in regular conversations regarding programs and curriculum at the two school sites.

Each year, prior to the start of a new school year, the high school conducts 8th grade non-grad conferences to help enroll these students at the high school. In attendance at these meetings are the site administrators and counselors from both Union Hill Middle School and Nevada Union High School. The conferences have been very effective in enrolling students in the proper courses, and provide both academic and social emotional support for at-risk youth.

Although the Board disagrees with the majority of this finding, it does acknowledge that it would be beneficial to increase the level and frequency of communication and articulation between the Union Hill School District and the Nevada Joint Union High School District.

their peers from other school sites during professional development opportunities and articulation meetings coordinated by neighboring school districts and Nevada County Superintendent of Schools.

In support of this recommendation the board will direct the District Superintendent to communicate with the other district superintendents and the Nevada County Superintendent of School to determine if there is a need to increase opportunities for teacher leaders to share ideas, plans, and results of their instruction.

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. (F4)

The recommendation is already being implemented

As is discussed in the Board's Response to Finding #4 above, the Nevada Joint Union High School District has developed an articulation process for incoming ninth grade students and the Union Hill School District is very aware of the expectations for entering ninth grade students.

In support of this recommendation the board will direct the District Superintendent to communicate with the Nevada Joint Union High School superintendent and the other elementary school district superintendents to determine if there is a need to more clearly identify the expectations for the entering ninth grade students.

CONCLUSION

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

Sincerely,



Jason Jones, President Board of Trustees
Union Hill School District

cc: Members of the UHSD Board of Trustees
David B. Curry, UHSD Superintendent
Union Hill School District
10879 Bartlett Drive
Grass Valley, CA 95945