File No. 090920 Committee Item No. 1
Board Item No.

COMMITTEE/BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Committee: Government Audit and Oversight **Date** November 12, 2009

Board of Supervisors Meeting **Date**

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☒	☐	"TRUANTS CAN BE 'JOYFUL LEARNERS,' TOO: Unless Racism, Classism and/or Systemic Ineffectiveness Prevent Future Progress"
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Completed by: Alisa Somera **Date** November 6, 2009
Completed by: **Date**

An asterisked item represents the cover sheet to a document that exceeds 25 pages.
The complete document can be found in the file and the online version.

TRUANTS CAN BE "JOYFUL LEARNERS," TOO:

Unless Racism, Classism and/or Systemic Ineffectiveness Prevent Future Progress

If nothing changes, about **20%** of our children will continue to drop out of school. Our Black children will continue to be at risk of dropping out at twice the rate of their peers. The waste of human potential that will result is staggering and predictable. The hundreds of millions of dollars that the school district will never receive and that the city will spend because of truancy/dropout rates is staggering and predictable. The resulting increase in crime, welfare expenditures and lost wages that we all will experience is staggering and predictable.

It is time for the Board of Supervisors to join the Mayor and the District Attorney in recognizing its role in taking on one major aspect of this issue: truancy. The San Francisco Unified School District is hampered by structural issues so basal that attempts to take a different approach in addressing truancy would amount to only incremental adjustments. Real change, if it will happen, must come from the City becoming more involved.

The Purpose of the Civil Grand Jury

The Civil Grand Jury is a government watchdog made up of volunteers who serve for one year. The Civil Grand Jury reports with findings and recommendations resulting from its investigations. The investigated agencies, departments or officials are required by the California Penal Code to respond publicly within at most 90 days.

The nineteen members of the Civil Grand Jury are selected at random from a pool of thirty prospective jurors. San Francisco residents are invited to apply.

More information can be found at:http://www.sfgov.org/site/courts_page.asp?id=3680, or by contacting the Civil Grand Jury at 400 McAllister Street, Room 008, San Francisco, CA 94102

State Law Requirement

Pursuant to state law, reports of the Civil Grand Jury do not identify the names or provide identifying information about individuals who spoke to the Civil Grand Jury.

Departments and agencies identified in the report must respond to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within the number of days specified, with a copy sent to the Board of Supervisors. For each finding of the Civil Grand Jury, the response must either (1) agree with the finding, (2) disagree with it, wholly or partially, and explain why. Further, as to each recommendation made by the Civil Grand Jury, the responding party must report either that (1) the recommendation has been implemented, with a summary explanation of how it was implemented; (2) the recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for the implementation; (3) the recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation of the scope of that analysis and a time frame for the officer or agency head to be prepared to discuss it (less than six months from the release of the report); or (4) that recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable, with an explanation of why that is. (California Penal Code, sections 933, 933.05).

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a pre-requisite. . . . [E]very American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country – and this country needs and values the talents of every American.

Remarks of President Barack Obama –
As Prepared for Delivery
Address to Joint Session of Congress
Tuesday, February 24th, 2009

The Scope and Severity of the Problem

Truancy[1] persists[2] within the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) at unacceptable levels.[3] The effects are devastating.[4] The tools to fix San Francisco's truancy problems are available[5] but six years after the last Civil Grand Jury report on this subject[6], SFUSD slowly has taken only tentative steps toward changing the status quo.[7]

Excessive truancy leads to a high dropout rate. In SFUSD, 18% of our children are dropping out of school.[8] Almost every fifth child. The dropout rate for Black children is twice that of their counterparts. In most any other enterprise, losing one fifth of the materials before completing the product would warrant fundamental change in the way the materials are handled. Where the materials are nothing less than the hearts, minds and lives of our children, this incomprehensible dropout rate does not generate the sort of institutional change or public outrage it deserves– and truancy persists.

On the surface, the problem appears to be that reducing truancy rates is complex[9] and expensive.[10] On the surface, SFUSD appears to be working with unimpressive but acceptable diligence.[11] On the surface, SFUSD appears to be working with other agencies within acceptable parameters of cooperation.[12] On the surface, it even appears some recent progress has been made.[13]

Under the surface is undisputable evidence of fundamental problems. The problem is not just that

- SFUSD commits insufficient resources of its own to truancy reduction[14];
- reports of progress rely on questionable evidence[15] and, in any event, attribute the progress to persons outside of SFUSD[16];
- SFUSD's administration appears negligent by

    A. refusing to establish (or adequately publish) a truancy policy;
    B. failing to appoint a person who will be responsible and held accountable to reduce truancy;
    C. keeping truancy efforts so decentralized that various components working on the issue are incapable of coordinating efforts and are often unaware what other components are doing;
    D. failing to develop, maintain, interpret and share reliable statistics regarding the reasons for truancy, the demographics of the problem, the interventions undertaken by SFUSD and the outcomes of such interventions (*see* Appendix 2, "Data Collection and Truancy at the San Francisco Unified School District");
    E. failing to sufficiently monitor and evaluate programs that have been instituted before dismantling or replacing them with new programs;
    F. failing decisively to address elementary school truancy so as to address the problem (1) before the causes are intransigent and (2) when

interventions can be more proactive, more effective and less expensive; and

G. failing to consider truancy reduction sufficiently important to warrant specific objectives and measures in SFUSD's Strategic Plan.[17]

More troubling than all this is the general sense that the numbers are, by and large, acceptable. There is no imperative and no sense of urgency to change the results immediately and dramatically. Recent reports of some progress in some grades as a result of the District Attorney's program have not triggered San Franciscans to ask basic questions such as: "How much truancy is too much?" and "How could we have been allowing so many kids to be truant and, ultimately, to drop out?"

Delving Into the Causes

Since the Jury addressed truancy in 2002, SFUSD has made changes in the way it handles the issue. It has not, however, attempted to address some of the root causes of truancy and it has not identified the institutional problems that prevent SFUSD from being effective in addressing the most prevalent symptoms. The truancy rate is the same now as it was in 2002.

SFUSD is steeped in a culture of territorialism. That culture converts its employees' efforts into negative institutional responses. To persons within SFUSD, each department operates as an insular unit making it difficult to obtain and share basic information, ideas and resources. To persons outside SFUSD, it appears the school district is actively obstructing the efforts of the District Attorney[18]; the Mayor[19]; the Department of Children, Youth and Families[20] (DCYF); and others[21], including this Grand Jury.[22] The consistency with which SFUSD's "partners" remarked about the difficulties they have dealing with the insular bureaucracy was impressive. The most common refrain is that SFUSD is unnecessarily protective with its money, access, and information. Even working with the District on common goals can quickly resemble struggling against a Byzantine bureaucracy.

Further observations expose troubling systemic issues. Members of the Board of Education quietly acknowledge they do not have control of the administration. Board members explain they have no independent staff and therefore must rely entirely upon district administrators for everything from information to action. Board members are unpaid and part time. The result is that Board members cannot risk stepping on the toes of administrators for fear of jeopardizing their access to critical information and cooperation.

This, in and of itself, would not be a serious problem except that many of the administrators clearly have forgotten they serve the elected Board. In the words of one Board member, "we have to pick our battles [with administrators]" lest the Board member be rendered entirely impotent. Add to this the potential for Board members to use staff against each other on wedge issues and the result is a powerful disincentive to risk disagreements with administrators– at least with respect to non-critical issues. The amount of energy and political capital necessary for a Board member to accomplish even small changes limits the number of battles any Board member is willing to wage.[23]

But the problem goes even deeper than that. A majority of the Board of Education has not recognized truancy reduction as an important battle worth waging. A majority of the Board has not committed themselves– their own political capital– to making the structural and personnel changes necessary to accomplish an effective change in policy with swift results.[24] In fact, most Board members have unapologetically made clear their belief that the City, and not the Board of Education, must take the primary role in truancy reduction.[25] This approach is rooted in their beliefs that 1) only the City agencies have access to the information that might expose the underlying causes for a student's truancy and 2) only the City has the money to pay for implementation of most proposed solutions.

SFUSD therefore will not internally generate the urgency or sense of imperative to change the status quo. To SFUSD, the true problem lies with forces outside its own jurisdiction. The administrators are unable to share their knowledge and resources in effective ways (internally or with outside agencies) without risking losing their political relevance. There is no incentive for the leadership to transfer resources or point out failures, ineptitude and inefficiencies. In the absence of public outrage and pressure, it will remain SFUSD's position that there is no truancy crisis at all, only a manageable problem.

Insufficient Help from the Supervisors

The Board of Supervisors is complicit in the decision to allow the truancy crisis to fester. Specifically, the Supervisors have not recognized why, to what extent and in what respects truancy is their own problem.[26] And so the failure of SFUSD to make any significant changes remains unchallenged by the Board.

There are reasons the Supervisors should be involved. On the short list is the following: First, the welfare of the students and their families who are citizens of San Francisco. Second, truancy effects the City's budget. Third, some of the underlying causes of truancy can only be addressed by engaging in outreach that only the City can authorize, organize, fund and staff. Fourth, dealing with truancy early is far more cost-effective than dealing with the consequences later. Fifth, if the Supervisors do not aggressively deal with the problem, no one else will.

Still, the Board has failed to accept a significant role in addressing truancy reduction, even in the areas where SFUSD has abdicated its role.[27] When interviewed, some Board members did so unwittingly:

- Most Supervisors were unaware school board members believed they handed over to the City responsibility for reducing truancy.[28] The result is that the Board of Education and the Board of Supervisors each point their fingers at the other while explaining that truancy is "not our problem."

- The Supervisors generally are unaware of the amount of money they themselves authorize for key SFUSD personnel to combat truancy, the amount the Supervisors authorize for SFUSD's truancy programs and the extent to which

truancy reduction efforts rely on City services.[29] Thus, the City does not demand accountability for its own expenditures– allowing ineffective personnel and programs to survive.

- The Supervisors generally were not aware that elementary school truancy is as severe as high school truancy, that failing to deal with truancy in elementary school is allowing complex and intractable problems to develop and that the effect of failing to reduce elementary school truancy is to create severe problems that will cost the City millions more dollars in the future.

Some Supervisors reject on philosophical grounds the notion that they must take a leading role in truancy reduction– even after familiarizing themselves with SFUSD's track record and acknowledging SFUSD likely will not change. For these Supervisors, it is not persuasive that 1) the City already is paying millions of dollars per year for truancy programs without any accountability, 2) effective truancy reduction could not be achieved without City agencies whether or not SFUSD continues to abdicate its role, 3) the Mayor, the District Attorney, DCYF and numerous non-governmental organizations already have stepped up to the plate in combating truancy and 4) as severe as the immediate consequences are, the long-term consequences of truancy, especially elementary school truancy, are significantly much greater than would be dealing with the problem today.

The sheer amount of lost human potential should be enough to motivate the Board of Supervisors to take a more aggressive role in addressing truancy. Alternatively, the lost human potential, at a minimum, should goad the Board to use its influence to demand better results from SFUSD. It is clear, however, that the loss of human potential, and of our youth, is not enough. Thus, the Jury points to the amount of money being thrown away without any accountability, the economics behind dealing with truancy early and the fact that, as a practical matter, only the City has the ability to address truancy particularly in light of the SFUSD's abdication, as arguments in support of the principle that the Supervisors should become more involved with this problem.

Restatement of the Problem

SFUSD's culture of territorialism when combined with the overall lack of other government commitment yields devastating results for truancy rates, dropout rates, crime rates and San Francisco's welfare. Truancy and dropout statistics are not properly obtained, validated, analyzed and distributed. The Board of Supervisors and SFUSD rely on the same questionable evidence of progress without inquiring into the collection, monitoring and validating of numbers. Until the next reorganization of SFUSD staff, only the Superintendent of Schools– who is busy with other projects– appears to have the ability both to direct efforts to obtain valid data and to make use of the data collected. Interventions are not timely. Staff cannot be assigned relevant tasks for which they are held accountable. A cohesive strategy under a single budgetary line item cannot be established, maintained and adjusted as the policy failures and successes are realized. The Board of Supervisors continues to view the problem as one of education and, therefore, not within their jurisdiction. The Supervisors will not consider the implications of truancy reduction on crime reduction, work force enhancement and

accountability for its substantial expenditures. SFUSD continues to receive City funds with no incentive to hold persons accountable. In sum, truancy cannot be attacked in a strategic and meaningful way.[30] According to SFUSD and the Board of Supervisors, the results must be deemed acceptable and, absent leadership from them, our resources will continue to be used in the same wasteful way.

Where is the outrage?!

As further evidence the system simply is not working:

- Of the thousands of habitual and chronic truants, only one student made it all the way through SFUSD's process and was referred to the District Attorney before the last months of the school year. A frantic push to hold Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) hearings at the end of the year produced another 17 referrals as the school year ended. SARBs at the end of the year are not effective and, if it were, the student already has lost an entire year of education.[31]

- Numerous schools view referral to the District Attorney as too punitive and therefore do not process truancy information. Thus, the schools refuse to follow the law and/or district policy.

- The SARBs are underutilized at the beginning of the year and overwhelmed when the referrals finally reach them.

- No one can say how effective the various levels of interventions (from Student Success Teams to Student Attendance Review Teams) have been since those records are neither compiled nor analyzed.

- No one knows the percentage of students that are not counted as truant because they (or someone in their family) provided a note suggesting the absence is "excused."

- For the past two years SFUSD's own analysts have had to retrieve attendance data from the state, rather than internally; a comparison between SFUSD documents and statistics on the state website suggests there are serious concerns regarding the accuracy of the dropout status of hundreds of students.

Why Is This Permitted to Persist?

The reasons no voices have appeared to decry our institutions' failures– even with the amount at stake– are not clear. Only four reasons have come to light when the Jury inquired into how the government possibly could be so completely dysfunctional:

- First, some members of the Board of Supervisors have stated that the answer lies in some combination of racism and classism.[32]

- Second, some persons have suggested that SFUSD, as an institution, believes it is better off without the students attending class; some teachers and/or parents would rather not risk classroom disruptions and some schools would rather not risk lower standardized testing scores.[33]

- Third, some SFUSD personnel[34] claim the issues around truancy would be resolved if sufficient money were allocated to the problem.[35]

- Fourth, there is some evidence the inaction is the result of a combination of (1) the weak structure of the Board of Education (as discussed above) (2) the fact that none of the members of the Board of Education feel particularly accountable to the communities that are most affected by truancy, i.e., the Black and Hispanic communities and (3) the public is not knowledgeable enough to generate the sort of outrage that would provide incentive for a member of the Board of Supervisors or the Board of Education to become willing, able and knowledgeable enough to take on the issue.

Whatever the cause, the result is clear. SFUSD is poised to argue truancy is being reduced, no one else understands the problem, additional programs are on the way, the Strategic Plan will make "Joyful Learners" of all, and we should just trust them and wait for further information next year. We will continue to receive these assurances notwithstanding the absence of reliable information-gathering, the obvious inadequacy of the statistics used to demonstrate progress, the absence of anyone to hold accountable without real change and the fact that evidence of a working system is amply refuted by a simple stroll down the street corners and alleyways where truants openly and commonly hang out.

Meanwhile, the Board of Supervisors remains convinced it can do no more than fund a program or two in hopes of saving a few children. The Board of Supervisors will continue to deny that only it can marshal the resources, direct the personnel and demand accountability for results when parents and then the SFUSD fail to meet their obligations. This refusal to step in will occur despite the fact that year after year, the school district fails to use its resources to adequately address truancy and only the Board of Supervisors has the means of picking up the pieces before the problems become dramatically more expensive, complex and intractable.

At bottom, whether because of racism, classism, systemic problems or simply gross negligence, the evidence strongly suggests San Francisco will retain an underperforming government that will do no better for the next generation of youth than it did for the last. If change is to come, it will come from a decision by members of the Board of Supervisors to address the problem with significantly more urgency. Alternatively, the Board of Education must begin to take steps toward resolving some of its institutional shortcomings so that truancy can be dealt with more effectively in the future.

Findings

1. Excessive truancy causes many problems for the City including, less money for the school district, less literacy and more dropouts– which means more crime, lower wages (and thus, fewer tax revenues), and a host of serious societal problems.

2. SFUSD employs talented persons whose interests, for whatever reason(s), do not lie in marshaling the district's resources to ensure that every child gets to school.

3. Collection of reliable data and proper distribution of such data is a prerequisite for understanding the true nature and extent of the truancy crisis. SFUSD is not collecting nor distributing to appropriate SFUSD personnel and outside agencies data from which it can be determined the reasons for truancy, the demographic information, the interventions attempted and the outcomes of such interventions. Using aggregate data does not violate student privacy.

4. Parents primarily are responsible to get their kids to school. When parents fail to do so, the school district, with the assistance of other agencies, has the ability and the responsibility to take corrective action. SFUSD is not using the tools available to it and is not providing in a timely fashion to other agencies the information necessary for them to intervene.

5. Despite the efforts of the Mayor, the District Attorney and the Superintendent of Schools, neither the Board of Supervisors nor the Board of Education have determined which of them will take the lead in creating and implementing a truancy reduction policy.

Finding		1	2	3	4	5
Response	Board of Supervisors	X	X	X	X	X

Recommendations

The Board of Supervisors should:

1. Resolve the stakes are high enough and the evidence strong enough to warrant greater involvement by the Board of Supervisors in the fight against truancy.

2. Require performance measurement data on a semester basis from the City-funded positions: Learning Support Professionals and the Stay-in-School Coordinator.

3. Use its considerable influence, including its power of the purse, to encourage SFUSD to:

   A. Create a truancy policy– preferably one that provides there is a zero tolerance for chronic truancy in the elementary grades.
   B. Appoint a person at a managerial level whose sole responsibility it will be to enforce attendance laws and coordinate all efforts for truancy.
   C. Develop and implement a plan to correct truancy earlier in the year. This should include augmenting the computer system (including the Truancy Module or School Loop or whatever comes next) to find out who is truant early in the year, contacting parents earlier in the year, getting feedback from teachers earlier in the year, streamlining the process from SST to SARB, and making more and earlier referrals to the District Attorney.
   D. Develop, maintain, interpret and share reliable statistics regarding the reasons for truancy, the demographics of the problem, the interventions undertaken by the district and the outcomes of such interventions. Use these data.

4. Direct the Joint City and School District Select Committee to ensure Recommendation Numbers 2 and 3 (above) are implemented.

Recommendation		1	2	3(A)	3(B)	3(C)	3(D)	4
Response	Board of Supervisors	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Endnotes

1. Three categories of truants should be defined. First, Education Code § 48260 defines **truant** as "one who is absent from full day or continuation school without valid excuse for three days in one school year or tardy or absent without valid excuse for more than any 30-minute period during the school day on three occasions in one school year or any combination thereof." A minor who meets either criterion must be reported to the school district. Second, Education Code § 48262 allows for a student to be declared an **habitual truant** if two conditions are met: (1) the child must first have been reported by the district as a truant three or more times within a school year and (2) the school district must have made a conscientious effort to hold a conference with a parent and the student after the required truancy letters have been sent. SFUSD defines habitual truant as any student that has 10-19 unexcused absences in a single school year. Third, SFUSD defines **chronic truant** as a student with 20 or more unexcused absences in a single school year.

Additionally, SFUSD personnel who work with truancy issues are careful to point out the following when discussing truancy:

A. SFUSD does not use "truancy rates." The term is commonly used in the press but is not a statistic SFUSD uses to measure student attendance or school performance. Instead, SFUSD uses attendance rates (which does not account reasons of absences) or seat time combined with other data to determine the extent of truancy problems.

B. Legally, truancy requires that a student's absence be unexcused. This often depends on no more than whether the student or the parent is capable of providing documentation. For this reason reported "truancy rates" are probably understated.

C. Truancies can only be measured to the extent that teachers and schools record them. Teachers do not always accurately record truancies (either because they make mistakes, or because they are hoping to protect the students or because they do not want the student to return to class).

D. SFUSD personnel acknowledge that some schools have been reluctant to record all truancies because they fear the District Attorney's policies are too punative. Schools that do not enforce attendance rules will only be corrected to the extent that either (a) the state audits them or (b) they receive adequate oversight from other sources (typically, from assistant superintendents).

2. The 2008-2009 Grand Jury's investigation began as a review of the progress the SFUSD made since the 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury investigated truancy. *See* 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury, *Tolerating Truancy- Inviting Failure: The San Francisco Unified School District Fails To Enforce School Attendance* (released June 11, 2003) (Attached as Appendix A). The investigation evolved into an examination of the institutional dysfunction on the part of the SFUSD and the City and County of San Francisco that has prevented additional progress on this crucial issue.

In 2003, the Grand Jury found the SFUSD was not in compliance with state truancy laws. The 2003 Report also included findings that excessive truancy contributed to an unreasonable drop-out rate and a loss of more than $10,000,000 per year in state funding. The 2003 Jury's principal recommendation was that the SFUSD should take specific steps toward streamlining the process for enforcing truancy laws.

In 2004, the Grand Jury reported that SFUSD's Pupil Services Department reported that a process "will be implemented shortly to ensure that the District will mail its truancy notices on time and thereby reduce its truancy rate . . .."

In 2005, the Grand Jury concluded SFUSD "conducted a comprehensive overhaul in its process of monitoring and addressing truancy in San Francisco." The Jury reported no information on the results of this overhaul.

In 2006, the Grand Jury noted the 2005 Jury's conclusion and stated, "SFUSD is doing its role in combating what is a serious national problem– truancy. An investigation at this time is unwarranted. An investigation into declining enrollment in the SFUSD may be a matter of interest for a future [Civil Grand Jury]."

In 2009, SFUSD's end of the year report states that high school truancy numbers remain seriously high with 9th grade constituting 21% of all habitual and chronic truants in district.

3. According to SFUSD documents, "high school truancy numbers remain seriously high." According to State of California data, five SFUSD elementary schools have a truancy rate of greater than 75%.

4. Truancy is the most powerful predictor of delinquent behavior. Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest achievement scores and highest dropout rates. Regardless of grade or age, truancy has been linked to criminal activity, unemployment, substance use and mental health issues. It has been reported that the State of California projects the future need for prison space in part on the basis of third grade reading levels. While these reports are questionable, the statistics demonstrate that the correlation is not a mathematically unfair one to make.

In addition:

- Nationwide, 75% of all truants will eventually drop out of school. Dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be incarcerated in their lifetime.
- Nationwide, students with highest truancy rates have lowest achievement rates.
- 75% of nation's incarcerated individuals were habitual truants.
- The San Francisco District Attorney reports that over 50% of detainees in San Francisco jails are functionally illiterate.
- The San Francisco District Attorney's data demonstrates that from 2003-2007, 94% of

San Francisco's homicide victims under 25 were high school drop outs.

- Data indicates that increase of 10 percentage points in graduation rates would cut murders and assaults by 20 percent.

5. There are two kinds of truancy: elementary school truancy and non-elementary school truancy. For both, SFUSD personnel already point out that SFUSD is lacking in outreach programs to address truancy in the neighborhoods where the underlying problems exist. Thus, part of the answer lies in outreach to families before truancy becomes a problem.

In addition, examples of what to do next exist:

- In Houston, a successful program focuses on "recogniz[ing] the early signs of trouble and to develop[ing] proactive interventions." District officials there report that empowering youth and families is a critical part of this process. A combination of early intervention, family involvement, cooperation with the court, and frequent referrals to outside services are essential to a successful program. "When schools take proactive measures and police become involved, much good work can be done to curb truancy."

- In Los Angeles, a successful program focuses on 1) improving student attendance; 2) expanding educational options and alternatives; 3) ensuring student learning at all levels and within all sub-groups; 4) creating personalized, safe and healthy school environments; and 5) developing a comprehensive, district-wide student data tracking system.

- In Jacksonville, Florida, credit for turning around high truancy rates goes to a comprehensive truancy intervention program consisting of 1) meetings between school staff and parents to address a child's unexcused absences, 2) calling an Attendance Intervention Team (AIT) (much like SFUSD's Student Success Team); a non-judicial hearing held at the State Attorney's Office for parents and students, referral to the Truancy Arbitration Program (TAP); the creation of four truancy centers located across the city; and a diverse group of community stakeholders which was formed to increase public awareness.

- In Chicago, truancy was significantly reduced using an On Track Indicator that allows teachers and principals to see within 24 hours each student that receives a failing grade or 10 absences.

6. *See* Appendix 1.

7. In 2003, the Jury recommended that SFUSD commence truancy accounting which should include creating a computerized database. In May of 2004, SFUSD reported that it "replaced or updated equipment" and was able to provide information through the database. In 2006, SFUSD acknowledged the inadequacy of the computer system and began implementation of a new "Truancy Module." Now, SFUSD is in its second year of the "Truancy

Module." SFUSD has asserted that at least one person in each school is trained to use the system. Later, it became clear that 9 schools do not have trained staff. SFUSD also acknowledges the module is "sometimes ineffective." The module has poor hardware and there is poor understanding how best to use the program at any particular school site. Accordingly, SFUSD plans to conduct a survey next year. Meanwhile, just as this system gets off the ground, however, SFUSD also is planning to implement a new program modeled after the Chicago program allowing school administrators to know when a student reaches 10 or more absences. SFUSD also may roll out versions of "School Loop," "Data Director, or "On Track Indicator," programs that may change again the way that the district uses the Truancy Module.

In 2003, the Jury recommended that SFUSD hire a person to be in charge of attendance. In June 2005, SFUSD reported that it "Now has a Supervisor of Attendance (SOA) whose responsibility is to supervise and coordinate attendance enforcement. The SOA was never able to devote himself full time to attendance. Instead this was one of several titles given to one person. The Grand Jury was unable to receive from his office answers to some of the most basic questions involving truancy reduction. It has been reported that the SOA's contract expired and has not been renewed. Thus, it appears the position is vacant and it is not clear who, if anyone, will take on the responsibilities or if the person will be able to do so full time.

In 2003, the Jury recommended that SFUSD ensure that truancy notices get mailed in a timely fashion. The Jury emphasized the importance of having parents involved early in the process and the fact that notices allow SFUSD to collect money from the State of California. In June 2005, SFUSD reported that it is "aggressively seeking reimbursement from the State for Truancy notices sent to students." This Jury discovered that the performance of the schools in getting out the notices was extremely uneven. In some schools, most notices were sent in April. The school district reported that not all the schools had sufficient personnel trained in how to use the Truancy Module to ensure timely mailing of notices. This problem, the district reported, would be fixed over time.

In 2003, the Jury recommended that SFUSD make better use of School Attendance Review Teams (SART) and School Resource Officers (SROs). SARTs are school-based teams put together to address truancy issues at the school level. This year the Jury inquired as to the success rates of success of SARTs and which tools used by SARTs were most effective. SFUSD acknowledged that no statistics have been compiled so it is not clear how well the SARTs are doing. SROs are San Francisco Police Officers assigned to schools. Since 2003, it was clear that SROs need clear instructions regarding what to do when encountering a truant student. There currently is no program addressing how SROs should process a truant student.

In 2003, the Jury recommended that the SFUSD create a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB). In August 2003, SFUSD reported that it was on its way to establishing a SARB and that in the Fall of 2003, SFUSD would be considering who the members should be. By 2005, a SARB was in existence. Six referrals were made to the District Attorney in 2007. The first SARB meeting was held October 17, 2008. Through May of the 2008-2009 school year, one referral was made to the District Attorney. About 17 more referrals were made in June at the end of the school year.

8. The data for districts in the State of California is available at sfgate.com/ZEFD.

9. Most analyses of the problem begin with the acknowledgment that truancy is a national problem and that a reasonable response to district-wide truancy will include consideration of addressing complex underlying causes. The Stay-in-School Coalition was formed because there was a consensus that chronic absenteeism and habitual and chronic truancy are community problems. The underlying causes of truancy were discussed in SFUSD's August 2003 Stay In School Coalition's Truancy Report.

10. Most administrators at SFUSD argue that they simply do not have the staff to follow up on reports of missing students. Accordingly, they rely on automated telephone calls, computerized letter-writing and an eventual referral after the record establishes a student should be pronounced an habitual truant. Although SFUSD counts nine groups as those working with truant students (school counselors, learning support professionals, student advisors, attendance liaisons, parent liaisons, translators, nurses, after-school programs staff and wellness center staff) these personnel do not have sufficient opportunity to identify and address the problem until truancy becomes too serious.

SFUSD does not have a single department of truancy. SFUSD suggests the following funds should be considered "targeted" to reduce truancy, although it is not clear which funds are paid by the district:

SFUSD Targeted Resources

Attendance Liaisons	$250,000
Drop out office	$410,000
SB 65 Comprehensive Support and Attendance Programs at 15 schools	$782,000
Secure Our School Program at 4 Schools	$100,000
District Attorney Truancy Mediation Workshops	$5,000
CBO/SFUSD Training Materials and Workshops	$20,000
Coordinated Services Teams at each School (as % of time devoted to attendance)	$20,000-25,000 per school

11. The District Superintendent's 2007 "Attendance Letter" states "The District's Stay in School Coalition has worked with city departments and community based agencies to successfully increase the overall attendance rate for the last two years. This year the Student Assistance Program (SAP) Teams and the School Attendance Review (SART) teams will be stepping up their efforts to work with you to ensure that students are in school, on time, every day."

12. The key city "players" are the District Attorney's office, the Human Services Agency (especially the Child Protective Services and CalWORKs divisions), the San Francisco Police Department's School Resource Officer program, the Health Department's Community Behavioral Services, the Juvenile Probation Department, and the Mayor's Office Initiative, which includes Communities of Opportunity and the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families,(who fund interrelated truancy prevention, case management and violence prevention agencies and coalitions).

13. *See* Tucker, Jill, San Francisco Chronicle, *Pressuring parents helps S.F. slash truancy 23%*, June 8, 2009, pg A1., available at http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/06/08/MN911832BT.DTL. Recent statistics also make clear that 75% of the school sites have shown a .01 to 3.0 percentage increase in average daily attendance rates over the past three years. Also, the number of SARB hearings in elementary schools increased from 34 in the 2007-2008 school year to 110 in the 2008-2009 school year.

14. As noted in footnote 10 above, even SFUSD's Stay In School Coordinator is paid for by the City. Additional funds for truancy efforts that occur in SFUSD schools come from other agencies including The Department for Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF):

DCYF Targeted Resources

Stay in School Coordinator and Elementary Truancy Project	$370,000
Secure Our Schools Match	$250,000
CBO Case Management with Main Emphasis truancy	$350,000
Violence Prevention in Schools	$500,000

In addition, the District Attorney maintains a hotline for reporting truants ($20,000), DCYF pays SFUSD teachers to provide instruction in a truancy center and community-based organizations provide additional resources.

15. SFUSD's collection of truancy data has several problems. First, teachers still are using paper forms to record absences. These "strips" are later input by separate personnel into the computer system. In the best of possible worlds, mistakes will be made.

Second, it has been reported, and interviews with the administration confirm, that attendance is not taken with uniform care in all schools. In several schools, sometime around January teachers attempt to comply by getting old attendance slips in. They do so in order to meet State of California requirements and to avoid problems with possible audits. This too will cause problems.

Third, for the past two years, SFUSD has been using a "Truancy Module" to pull out of the computer system the data related to truancy. This new system is not subject to sufficient monitoring or validity checks. For example, the Information Technology personnel do not verify the data with information from either truancy personnel (who should be able to test the data against the real world) nor the Research, Planning and Accountability personnel (who should be able to monitor and test for validity). Neither the information technology staff nor the truancy staff have enough information to determine whether the data collected is making sense.

Fourth, SFUSD personnel acknowledge that certain teachers and certain schools are reluctant to report truancies because they believe the new efforts by the District Attorney are too punitive. These persons generally do not realize that the end result of the District Attorney's efforts is to provide more attention and services to the student and family.

Fifth, a SFUSD printout of the number of truancies by April 13, 2009, suggested that the truancy rates of most schools did not drop as of that date. It is not clear as of the publishing of this report what accounts for the alleged 23% reduction in elementary school truancy in the months April through June.

16. *See* "San Francisco Team Needed To Fight Truancy," Chronicle Editorials, September 15, 2008, praising Mayor Gavin Newsom for taking the fight against truancy to the doorsteps of unsuspecting parents; Tucker, Jill, San Francisco Chronicle, *Pressuring parents helps S.F. slash truancy 23%*, June 8, 2009, pg A1., available at http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/06/ 08/MN911832BT.DTL., noting District Attorney Kamala Harris took on the issue and stated she will get families counseling through the court system.

17. SFUSD's 2008-2012 Strategic Plan "Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Education Every Child Now" adopted May 27, 2008 makes only two truancy-related references:

- Under "Goal 2: Student Achievement- Engage high achieving and joyful learners" is "Objective 2.1 Ensuring Authentic Learning for Every Child." In this section, one measure "Number and percentage of students who drop out of school between grades 6-12."

- Under "Goal 3: Accountability– Keep our promises to students and families" no measure identifies support services' interventions and outcomes as a way to evaluate and validate data on truancy reduction. In fact, the majority of measures are subjective, e.g. rating through surveys, not based on objective data. That is not true performance measurement. (*See* 2008-2009 Civil Grand Jury Report on performance measurement in the City.)

Also telling is the fact that SFUSD does not include truancy personnel as part of the persons who will be held accountable to numeric standards. Under "Percentage of 'stayers' and 'leavers' by ethnicity," the plan states that "SFUSD is designing and implementing a comprehensive system of performance management . . . so that all staff know and understand their role in supporting student achievement." There is no mention of the support service staff– counselors, learning support professionals, student advisors, outreach consultants and child welfare and attendance liaisons– in the Strategic Plan's scorecard, milestones or glossary sections. California, SFUSD and the City fund these positions to partially address the truancy issue.

18. There were over 5000 chronic and habitual truants in SFUSD last year. Through May, SFUSD was reporting only one resulted in a referral to the District Attorney. As noted above in footnote 7, a last-minute push resulted in 110 SARB hearings and an additional 16 referrals to the District Attorney at the end of the year. It is not clear when the referrals were made.

19. The Mayor has attempted to be involved with "Operation Stealth," a program in which he knocked on the doors of families with truant children.

20. DCYF attempted to work with the schools by giving them $200,000 for work with middle schools. The project was rejected because it might have been duplicative. Ninth graders account for 21% of the truancy of the district.

21. The Jury interviewed over 40 witnesses. Most confirmed that the school district was territorial and hostile to offers of help. The Jury actually received requests that witnesses not be named for fear of having access to schools, children or information put at risk. One witness said explicitly that because that organization's efforts required access to students, it did not want to be seen as "bit[ing] the hand that feeds them."

22. In contrast to the experience the Jury had with numerous City agencies, the school district did not comply with requests for information, often did not make witnesses available unless multiple requests were made, and responded with such a lack of diligence that subpoenas had to be threatened or issued. It was the Jury's distinct impression that certain witnesses sought to delay responses in hopes that they would not be forced to respond before the term of the Jury expired. In such cases, the dilatory responses were part of a deliberate attempt to withhold information.

Some tension with the Jury, an investigative body, might be expected. More remarkable was the consistency of complaints by SFUSD's partners.

23. An example of the power available to administrators involves a Board inquiry into the number of safety-related incidents at SFUSD schools. The Jury obtained a copy of a report that set out the numbers of incidents in each school. When the Jury reviewed the actual documents upon which the report was compiled, it was clear there were more incidents than appeared in the report. Without loyal staff to check, there would be no way for a Board member to obtain this information and question the integrity of the report.

24. Instead, the Board members have taken an approach that is more palatable to the staff. This is best characterized as a "go slow" approach and slow change. While the public is

encouraged to wait for the next reorganization, the next program and the next set of statistics, the overall approach portends only minor or cosmetic adjustments and a continued lack of true accountability for truancy reduction.

This also results in poor policy development and analysis. For example, there is no administrator developing the statistics and reports to demonstrate the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of each program. Thus, while the vast majority of families who are referred by the SARB to the District Attorney end up, in the long run, simply receiving services and dramatically improving attendance, the Board of Education still is left with the impression that "prosecuting parents makes no sense" and "every dollar spent on making the schools more attractive is a dollar spent on truancy reduction."

25. One member of the Board of Education explains that "once you get the student through the door, we will teach them."

26. In interviews, the Supervisors point out that they are not, in the first instance, the body responsible to ensure truancy laws are enforced. Supervisors claim they lack the expertise and the jurisdictional mandate to address school-related issues such as truancy.

27. With one exception, no Supervisor embraced the idea of getting the Board further involved with truancy issues. Two Supervisors seemed tentatively open-minded, but warned that only a very limited amount of involvement would be appropriate. One Supervisor failed to make time to meet with the Grand Jury on this subject.

28. The Supervisors should have realized this from years of school board ineffectiveness, communications through the joint committee (in which both members of the Board of Education and the Board of Supervisors sit) and budgets from the Board for programs such as CARE which should carry with them some understanding of the district's commitment to the issue.

29. The City pays the salary of the Stay in School Coordinator, Learning Support Professionals, Beacon Centers and even the teachers to teach in the CARE program. Only the Supervisors can develop a coherent strategy by which to marshal the City's services, including the police, MUNI, DCYF, and others to mount a coordinated attack on truancy.

30. Still, the SFUSD will continue planning new initiatives including: School Loop, Data Director and the On Track Indicator. SFUSD apparently is planning a reorganization of certain staff who now should be exercising supervision over some truancy programs. In addition to these changes, during the last two years, the State of California has required SFUSD to use a new student identification system for state-wide tracking. As usual, there will be a sufficient amount of moving parts to demonstrate something is being done.

31. These hearings, however, occurred too late to allow the students any time to improve their attendance. Further, according to SFUSD, the standard SARB hearing would result in a contract for improvement that must occur within 30 days. It is unclear how many of the SARBs occurred while there still was thirty days left in the school year.

32. One Supervisor points to the statistics and notes that an overwhelming number of persons who are truant are Black and Hispanic. The supervisor asked the jurors to "just say the word, 'racism.' There, you feel better?" Similarly, in the SFUSD Strategic Plan section entitled Solution- Addressing the Root Causes, "the effects of persistent racism, classism and language bias are exacerbated by growing education inequalities leading to worsening economic conditions for some families and poorer family health." It is not unreasonable to conclude SFUSD acknowledges racism, classism and language bias continue to play a role.

Another member of the Board of Supervisors stated, "If you look at it, they just don't care about the kids, no matter what race they are. It is a class issue." This sentiment was echoed by other members of the Board of Supervisors.

33. This argument theorizes that institutional pressure comes from many places and in different ways– take for example a teacher who delays reporting in order to avoid disruptions in class, a second teacher who does not want to involve the parents of a troubled student and a school that wants to protect its API scores. This theory does not appear to account for the decisions of administrators and the apparent lack of action by seemingly distant administrators.

34. Most provided no answer at all, saying, "We need to do better" and "I don't know how we could improve."

35. This explanation, however, tends to ignore the fact that so many aspects of the dysfunction are non-monetary.

APPENDIX 1

A Report of the 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury
For the City and County of San Francisco

TOLERATING TRUANCY – INVITING FAILURE:

THE SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT FAILS TO ENFORCE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Released June 11, 2003

Reports of the Civil Grand Jury do not identify the individuals interviewed, pursuant to California Penal Code sec. 929. The California Legislature intended this provision to encourage full candor and cooperation by City and County personnel.

Parties identified in the report must respond to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within the number of days specified, with a copy sent to the Board of Supervisors. As to each finding of the Grand Jury, the response must either (1) agree with the finding, or (2) disagree with it, wholly or partially, and explain why. Further, as to each recommendation made by the Grand Jury, the responding party must report either (1) that the recommendation has been implemented, with a summary explanation of how it was; (2) the recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation; (3) the recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation of the scope of that analysis and a timeframe for the officer or agency head to be prepared to discuss it (less than six months from the release of this Report); or (4) the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable, with an explanation of why that is. (Cal. Penal Code, secs. 933, 933.05.)

TOLERATING TRUANCY–INVITING FAILURE: THE SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT FAILS TO ENFORCE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Summary of Recommendations

1. SFUSD should create the structure and policies necessary to enforce attendance laws.
2. SFUSD should commence prompt and consistent enforcement of attendance laws, including more systematic use of truancy notices, conferences, and the appropriate cooperation with the District Attorney when necessary.
3. SFUSD should create or expand truancy prevention programs, including School Resource Officers and award programs.

GLOSSARY

ADA – Average Daily Attendance
SARB – School Attendance Review Board
SFUSD – San Francisco Unified School District

OVERVIEW

The 2002-2003 Grand Jury investigated truancy in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD or District) and found that, for the last 25 years, compulsory attendance laws have not been promptly, consistently, and adequately enforced in San Francisco. Currently, of the approximately 18,000 high school students, 5,000 students miss at least one in five school days. A majority of those students are more than two grade levels behind in academic achievement.[1] Of 13,000 middle school students, approximately 1,000 miss at least one in five school days. Of 30,000 elementary students, some 765 miss one in five days of school. In addition to the 5,000 high school students who are absent each day, another 5,000 or more are tardy or cut class. In the past, such students were given a high school diploma with minimal regard to their academic achievement. New state academic requirement will make it much more difficult for habitual truants to achieve the reading and math skills necessary to earn a high school diploma. Unless SFUSD undertakes consistent and rigorous enforcement of the state compulsory attendance law, we can anticipate that the number students who receive a high school diploma in San Francisco will decrease markedly.

SFUSD has an obligation to its students, and to the City of San Francisco, to enable students to obtain a high school diploma or GED. A high school diploma is a key to the future success of young adults. Nonetheless, instead of enforcing attendance, SFUSD drops long time truants from enrollment, thereby denying the students the education they need to succeed in life. Failure to earn a high school diploma has been

[1] 2,000 of those miss more than half the school days.

shown to have a close correlation to future criminal conduct.[2] 98% of the inmates in the state's prison system reportedly do not have a high school diploma. Keeping at-risk students in school and helping them to earn their high school diploma is cost-effective crime prevention.

The Grand Jury found that the SFUSD currently lacks the ability to enforce effectively the state compulsory attendance law. Inadequate record keeping and failure to acquire truancy tracking software or to adapt the district's present software to create the necessary data base contribute to this problem as does the district's failure to grant its Supervisor of Attendance enforcement authority. The District does not initiate enforcement promptly with the result that truants miss many days of school before efforts to return them to the classroom begin. The District excuses absences for reasons not specified in the compulsory education law. It does not make use of enforcement programs authorized by the Education Code, and does not have protocols for engaging the San Francisco District Attorney and/or the Probation Officer in the enforcement process.

The Grand Jury found that the consequences of the District's failure to adequately enforce compulsory education laws fall most heavily on students who are already at a socio-economic disadvantage. Less than one-third of high school students in some large ethnic groups attend school more than 90% of the time, as compared with 94% to 96% attendance rates achieved by comparable districts that actively enforce compulsory attendance laws.

As a result of its failure to enforce compulsory attendance and to comply with Education Code guidelines and requirements, SFUSD is foregoing as much as $10,000,000 annually in state revenues that are based on attendance figures, as well as substantial sums that would be paid by the state to reimburse the district for enforcement expenses.

The Grand Jury recommends that the SFUSD appoint a Supervisor of Attendance with all of the duties and authority specified in the state compulsory attendance law. It should immediately establish a computerized data-base that enables it to identify truants at the time of the first and each subsequent truancy and thereby to promptly commence enforcement of school attendance. Attendance personnel in all SFUSD schools should be instructed on the data to be collected and transmitted to the District office. The District should conform truancy notices sent to parents to the requirements of the Education Code and send those notices promptly upon each identification of a student as a truant. The District should create a non-punitive mediation program under the auspices of the District Attorney or the Probation Officer, and create one or more School Attendance Review Boards (SARBs) to deal with intractable truancy. It should give those SARB or SARBs and the attendance supervisor the authority to use all of the programs available under the state compulsory education laws, including, if necessary, referral of parents or guardians[3]

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[2] Proportionally, the ethnicity of truants, dropouts and non-graduating seniors is approximately the same as that of juvenile delinquents and inmates.

[3] Unless otherwise specified, all references to "parent" herein are to both parent and guardian.

to the District Attorney or Probation Officer if the parents do not participate in truancy prevention programs and use their best efforts to maintain regular school attendance.

BACKGROUND

The California Education Code imposes on local school districts the obligation to enforce the state compulsory education law. That law mandates that, with few exceptions, all children between the ages of 6 and 18 years attend school full time. The law also provides a series of progressively more coercive steps that may, and in some cases must, be followed to combat truancy.

A district Board of Education must appoint a lawfully certified supervisor of attendance. The Board may prescribe the duties of the supervisor of attendance, but those duties must include, among other things, the duties related to compulsory full-time education, truancy, and those programs required of attendance supervisors by the Education Code. (Sec. 48240.)

A child who is subject to compulsory full-time education is a truant if the child "is absent from school without valid excuse three full days in one school year or tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during the school day with without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof." (Sec. 48260.) The truancy must be reported to the district's attendance supervisor or to the superintendent of the district, but districts may continue to use the method of attendance accounting in effect under prior law and need not use period-by-period attendance accounting. A child who has been reported as a truant and who is again absent without valid excuse for one or more days or tardy on one or more days, must be reported again to attendance supervisor or district superintendent. (Sec. 48261.) A child is an "habitual truant" if the child has been reported as a truant three or more times per school year if the school district has made a conscientious effort to hold a conference with a parent and the student after the required truancy letters have been sent. (Sec. 48262.)[4]

The first time a truancy report is required, the student may be given a written warning by a peace officer. The second time a truancy report is required the student may be assigned to after school or weekend study. If the student does not successfully complete that program, the student must be classified as an habitual truant if a third truancy report is required. The student may then be referred to and required to attend an attendance review board or a truancy mediation program. If no mediation program has been established the student may be required to attend a comparable program that the supervisor of attendance deems acceptable. If the student does not successfully complete the program, and a fourth truancy report is required in the same school year, the student comes within the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court, which may adjudge the student to be a ward of the court. (Sec. 48264.5.) The court may order the parent to deliver the student to school at the beginning of the school day. (Sec. 48268.)[5]

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[4] Unless otherwise specified, all references to code sections are to the Education Code.

[5] The Juvenile Court also may order the student to: perform community service, pay a fine not more than $100.00, which may be made the joint responsibility of the student and the parent, and or attend a truancy

A county may establish a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) (sec. 48321), whose purpose is to provide "intensive guidance and coordinated community services. . . to meet the special needs of pupils with school attendance problems or school behavior problems" (Sec. 48320.) A SARB must include a parent, a school district representative, a representative of the probation and welfare departments, and representative of the superintendent of schools, law enforcement, community based youth service centers, school guidance personnel, child welfare and attendance personnel, and of the school or county health care personnel. (Sec. 48321.) When a truant has been referred to it, a SARB has the power of subpoena to compel attendance before the SARB of the truant, the truant's parent, the referring authority, and any other person with information about the matter.

When a student has been identified as a truant, the district must notify the parent by sending a truancy letter, the content of which is specified in section 48260.5. If there is no SARB, the district may notify the District Attorney or the Probation officer, if those officials have agreed to participate in a truancy mediation program, of the name of each truant and the address of the truant's parent. It may also notify those officials whether the student is still classified as truant after the parent has received notice. The District Attorney or Probation Officer may then give notice to the parent that he or she is subject to prosecution for failure to compel attendance. The District Attorney or Probation Officer may also request the parent and child to attend a meeting in the official's office to discuss the possible legal consequences of the truancy. (Sec. 48260.6.)

If a SARB has been created, an habitual truant or a child whose attendance at school is irregular maybe referred to that board. The parent is notified that both the student and the parent will be required to meet with the board to consider the proper disposition of the matter. The board may direct the student or the parents or both to use those community services that the board has determined are available to resolve the problem and may require evidence of participation in that service. If the board determines that community services are inadequate or the student and parent have failed to participate, the SARB may notify the District Attorney or Probation Officer, if they are participating in a truancy mediation program. If that program is not available, the SARB may direct the superintendent of schools to make, and the superintendent must then make, a request that a petition be filed in the juvenile court on behalf of the child. If no SARB has been established, the district itself may follow these steps. (Sec. 48263.)

INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Members of the Civil Grand Jury interviewed these parties or representatives of them:

- San Francisco Unified School District personnel (including administrators at all levels, teachers, and social workers)
- Students and parents

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prevention program. In some cases, the student's driving privileges may be suspended or revoked. (Sec. 48267.).

- San Francisco Police Department
- BEACON Centers
- Interagency Action Committee
- California Department of Education
- Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office
- Administrators and Attendance Staff of Santa Clara County Schools
- Professors at San Francisco State University and City College of San Francisco
- Office of the City Attorney
- Judges of the San Francisco Superior Court
- United Educators of San Francisco
- Delinquency Prevention Commission

Members of the Civil Grand Jury reviewed:

- SFUSD budget
- SFUSD Student and Parent/Guardian Handbook
- SRO Handbook
- California Student Attendance Review Board Handbook
- All relevant California statutes
- Santa Clara County publications ('Truancy Program, School Year '98-'99 Evaluation,' 'District Attorney Mediation Program, September 2002,' and 'District Attorney Truancy Referral Program, September 2002')
- SFUSD and California Department of Education Websites

FACTS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SFUSD DOES NOT HAVE THE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES NECESSARY TO ENFORCE ATTENDANCE LAWS

FACTS

- Notwithstanding state law and Board of Education policy, both of which require the District to enforce compulsory attendance laws, SFUSD has not consistently enforced them for more than two decades.

- SFUSD schools collect attendance-related data and are able to provide the District with all data necessary for enforcement of the compulsory attendance law.

- Enforcement of compulsory education would increase state funding by as much as $10,000,000 per year if it increased average daily attendance by 2,200 students.[6] The

[6] SFUSD stated that it could not estimate the daily average enrollment or absenteeism because of software problems and fluctuations in enrollment during the year. The CGJ estimates approximately 5,000 students are absent on an average day, approximately 92% attendance based upon available SFUSD attendance reports. (93.75% is the average attendance of the other nine largest school districts in California, all of which have some level of attendance enforcement.) The resulting estimate of $10,000,000 in additional State funding based upon SFUSD's ability to reduce daily absenteeism by about 2,200 students over four

California Department of Education considers a 1% increase per year in Average Daily Attendance (ADA) to be a feasible goal for the District.[7] In SFUSD a 1% increase would represent an additional 600 students a day and yield an additional $2,750,000 per year at the annual rate of $4,580 per student based on ADA.

- The California Department of Education has found a correlation between truancy and low academic achievement, behavioral problems, class disruption, dropping out of school, not graduating, joblessness and crime. "Truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior...More than 80% of all [prison] inmates were dropouts....Only 2% of adults entering prisons had a [high school] diploma or GED."[8]

- The reason stated by past District administrations for not enforcing truancy laws has been that enforcement criminalizes and harasses members of specific ethnic groups.[9]

- Less than half of the students in five of the eight large San Francisco high schools attend school more than 90% of the time; only one-quarter to one-third of the high school students of some large ethnic groups attend school more than 90% of the time. Of these groups, approximately one-half attend school less than 80% of the time. In other school districts, high schools with a higher percentage of students from these groups achieve 94 to 96 percent average daily attendance through consistent attendance enforcement.[10]

- SFUSD has a position entitled "Supervisor of Attendance," but that employee is given only accounting responsibilities. The District has appointed no person with attendance enforcement duties specified by law.

- State law provides for the District to intervene with mediation, a School Attendance Review Board hearing or a court referral after the third and fourth truancies. Instructions sent to schools by SFUSD Pupil Services requires reporting after 15 consecutive absences, but the student policy handbook says to report after 10 consecutive absences.

- The California Department of Education specifies truancy record keeping requirements.[11] The District does not provide school personnel with uniform

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years (about one percent per year as other districts have done) and attain a 95.5% attendance level comparable to school districts with consistent attendance enforcement.

[7] Average Daily Attendance (ADA) is the total of the number students in attendance during each day of the school year divided by the number of school days (180). This forms the primary basis for State funding of public school districts. For purposes of ADA, a district is credited for a student day if the student is physically present for any part of the school day. Whether an absence is excused or not and the extent of tardiness are not taken into account. (Educ. Code sec. 48205(d).)

[8] CA Dept. of Educ. SARB Report 1/10/03, p. 5.

[9] Also stated by current administrative personnel and Board of Education members.

[10] For example, the 10 high schools in Eastside Union High School District in Santa Clara County; Paramount High School in Los Angeles County; SFUSD attendance reports 2001-2002.

[11] SARB handbook, p.24.

procedures and instructions to meet these requirements. Members of the Grand Jury observed different procedures used in every school visited. School personnel knew the time tardy children arrived at school, however they are not required – nor is there a space on the district form – to report the time of tardiness to the district offices. Personnel believe that not all tardiness is sufficiently serious to report at all. Grand Jurors observed the omission of information and that little or none of this information is placed in student files.

- SFUSD attendance personnel in the schools collect the information necessary to track, record, report and notice truancy; however, they have been given either incorrect or no instruction as to what constitutes a truancy, when a student becomes a truant or habitual truant, or the legal requirements for record keeping, truancy notice to students and parents, and reports to the district.

- Some schools overlook many incidents of tardiness, even though State law provides that after the first truancy schools are to report every additional tardiness for any length of time to the District as a truancy.[12]

- The existing District software system tracks absences and tardiness but fails to distinguish first truancy tardiness (of more than 30 minutes) or to record the duration of tardiness or when a student becomes a habitual truant. Some SFUSD personnel who are experienced with the District's existing computerized information system estimate that adapting the District's information system to track attendance requires a new software system at a cost of approximately $5 million; others estimate that it would require only $500,000 to upgrade the existing system; and still others estimate that it could be accomplished with the existing system simply and before the start of the next school year.[13] District personnel are also aware of inexpensive truancy tracking software that is available.

- The District can be exempt under Section 48260(b) from current state truancy reporting requirements.

- Illness, doctors' appointments and attendance at a relative's funeral are among the few allowable excuses for school absence under law.[14] Some District schools improperly excuse absences for "emergencies," "car breakdowns" and other reasons. SFUSD has one of the highest percentages of excused absences in the state.

FINDINGS

1. The San Francisco Board of Education has not complied with Section 48240, which mandates that it appoint a Supervisor of Attendance and vest that person with

[12] Educ. Code secs. 48260, 48261.
[13] The Civil Grand Jury has been informed that the district is only considering a new software system and not the upgrading of the existing system, and that this could cause attendance tracking necessary to truancy enforcement to be delayed for years.
[14] Educ. Code sec. 48205(a).

compulsory full-time education and truancy related duties.

2. A Supervisor of Attendance is needed to supervise attendance tracking, record keeping, truancy mediation, SARBs, and district attorney referrals as necessary to enforce compulsory education laws.

3. SFUSD is unable, with its present attendance accounting procedures, to comply with state law governing truancy reporting and enforcement of compulsory education.

4. Attendance enforcement requires compliance with current truancy accounting that complies with state law.

5. Attendance monitoring personnel are not adequately instructed and often do not know when a truancy occurs and how to perform necessary record keeping; however, since they have sufficient data collection in place and other required procedures and forms are available, with proper instruction they could start required record keeping and truancy notices in the coming school year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1a. SFUSD should appoint a Supervisor of Attendance to supervise and coordinate attendance enforcement.

1b. SFUSD should commence all required truancy accounting and record keeping at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. It should change its present accounting system where necessary to enable the Supervisor of Attendance to identify promptly any student upon the first and subsequent truancies.

1c. Personnel responsible for attendance accounting at each District school should be instructed on the truancy reporting elements required by the state and the Board of Education and the necessity for promptly transmitting truancy data to the Attendance Supervisor.

1d. Using the above data, SFUSD should create computerized data base of student information from which the Supervisor of Attendance can determine and report on: (1) the dates, lengths and number of truancies; (2) dates, length and number of irregular attendance days (tardiness [lateness and class cuts] of students who are not truants); (3) total instructional days and partial days missed due to truancy; (4) total instructional days and partial days missed due to all excused and unexcused causes; and (5) all of the above information summarized by classes, schools and grade levels for the entire district.[15]

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Board of Education – 60 days

[15] Software to do this and more is immediately and inexpensively available from Charron Barney Educational Advanced Management Services of San Jose, California.

2. SFUSD SHOULD BEGIN ENFORCING ATTENDANCE IN COMPLIANCE WITH STATE LAW AND BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY

FACT

- State law specifies the content, manner of delivery, and time at which truancy notices are to given the student and to the student's parent.[16] District schools do not follow a uniform truancy notice procedure. Required content is often missing. Schools often send notices reciting ten to twenty incidents of truancy instead of sending a notice upon the student's first truancy. Schools rarely obtain acknowledgement of receipt of truancy letters.[17] School districts with high attendance rates send prompt notices addressing truancies.

- SFUSD is entitled to State reimbursement in the amount of $12.90 for every first and third truancy notice it sends. These notices could be sent to more than 17,000 SFUSD students who could be designated as habitual truants. The District annually collects less than $10,000 of more than $400,000 to which it could be entitled.

- SFUSD utilizes Student Success Teams (SSTs) at all schools and School Attendance Review Teams (SARTs) at middle and high schools. Both conduct parent and student conferences to address truancy and related matters at the school level before district intervention. SSTs and SARTs are designed to include the teacher, an administrator, a counselor, a police officer and representatives from several disciplines (such as social workers, probation officers and mental health professionals) to address the student's truancy problems. Often, the specialized representatives are not available. The SSTs and SARTs reach an agreement with the student and parent concerning specific measures to resolve their truancy and other problems. SARTs, which handle only cases involving truancy, reduce the caseload of SSTs, which also handle other matters.

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[16] Educ. Code sec. 48260.5 requires the first truancy notice to state: "(a) That the pupil is truant. (b) That the parent or guardian is obligated to compel the attendance of the pupil at school. (c) That parents or guardians who fail to meet this obligation may be guilty of an infraction and subject to prosecution...(d) That alternative educational programs are available in the district. (e) That the parent or guardian has the right to meet with appropriate school personnel to discuss solutions to the pupil's truancy. (f) That the pupil may be subject to prosecution under Section 48264. (g) That the pupil may be subject to suspension, restriction, or delay of the pupil's driving privilege pursuant to Section 13202.7 of the Vehicle Code. (h) That is recommended that the parent or guardian accompany the pupil to school and attend classes with the pupil for one day." For sample notices, see SARB handbook, Ch. 6.

[17] Notices sent by first class mail without acknowledgement comply with state law; CDE recommends as the best practice, and many districts, SARBs and District Attorneys require, at least an acknowledgement of the first (declaration of truancy), third (request for student-parent conference) and fourth (declaration of habitual truancy and District intervention) truancies notices by return signature, postal return receipt or by school personnel telephone confirmation.

- SSTs and SARTs vary widely in makeup, procedure and results in different schools. Although many parents and students cooperate without truancy enforcement in place, there is no direct consequence for those who refuse to attend the conferences.[18]

- In other school districts, SSTs and SARTs meet immediately following the third truancy as recommended by the California Department of Education. In SFUSD, because truancy notices are not sent promptly and often not until there have been ten to twenty truancies, these conferences are not held until a student has been absent without excuse many times.

- The State reimburses the costs of SST or SART conferences following the third truancy. The District has not applied for this reimbursement, which could amount to several hundred thousand dollars.

- The Education Code authorizes the use of SARBs for non-punitive truancy intervention. SARBs are convened by school districts only after a school-parent conference has been held (or a conscientious effort to hold one), and usually after a district-level mediation has failed. They usually consist of one parent and seven to nine professionals, who are provided without cost by city and county departments. They include (but are not limited to) school counselors, probation, police, welfare, health and child welfare and attendance personnel. The SARB meets with the parent and student to determine causes of truancy and related problems, and then contracts with the family to engage in one or more of a range of public and private community services. A SARB representative monitors each contract for compliance.[19]

- SFUSD has not implemented Board of Education policy to use SARBs for truancy law enforcement.[20] In addition, SARBs can be an effective non-punitive agency for irregular attendance (frequent but not truant tardiness), insubordination or disruptive behavior.[21] SARBs have authority for court referral if necessary.[22]

- In districts the size of SFUSD, at least four SARBs are employed to handle the caseload.

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[18] Although nearly all interviewed also expressed the need for truancy law enforcement, many principals and administrators believe that a newly implemented District truancy prevention policy unfairly judges them by attendance and test scores when the District is not taking reasonable measures to help bring students into the classroom and to help assure their reasonable behavior and cooperation.

[19] Educ. Code secs. 48320, 48321, 48325; SARB Handbook ; CA Dept. of Educ. Report (1/10/03) p.1 states, "The purpose of the SARB is not only to improve academic performance but to reduce the dropout rate and divert students with school attendance or behavior problems from the juvenile justice system. SARBs also propose and promote strategies to increase the holding power of the public schools and to maximize the use of all community resources. Although the goal of a SARB is to keep students in school and provide them with a meaningful educational experience, SARBs do have the power, when necessary, to refer students and their parents or guardians to the local district attorney."

[20] SFUSD Student and Parent Handbook, p.19.

[21] Educ. Code sec. 48263.

[22] Educ. Code secs. 48263, 48291.

FINDINGS

1. Because truancy notices are not sent promptly and in the required form to parents, SFUSD misses an opportunity to involve parents early in the truancy cycle and the ability to collect state funding.

2. SFUSD could make timely and more beneficial use of truancy SSTs and SARTs.

3. San Francisco students would benefit from SARB programs as described by the state Department of Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2a. SFUSD should send truancy notices having the content specified by state law and should send them promptly.

2b. SFUSD should seek state reimbursement for truancy notices.

2c. SFUSD should require either the Student Success or School Attendance Review Team to schedule a truancy conference with the parent and student immediately upon the third truancy.

2d. SFUSD should seek state reimbursement for SSTs and SARTs.

2e. SFUSD should establish a School Attendance Review Board program as described by the state SARB.

REQUIRED RESPONSES
Board of Education – 60 days
SFUSD – 60 days

3. SFUSD SHOULD INSTITUTE TRUANCY MEDIATION THOUGH THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE OR THE CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER.

FACTS

- In many California counties, if other school efforts, including a parent conference, have been unsuccessful, truancy mediation with parent and student participation under the aegis of the county District Attorney is scheduled in conjunction with the designation of habitual truancy in a fourth truancy notice. The District Attorney then asks the parent to appear with the student at a mediation session with 25 to 30 other families. There, an assistant district attorney leads a panel of representatives from counseling and drug and alcohol programs and parent referral agencies, police, and a health clerk or nurse. The students and parents learn about community services available to meet their legal obligations and the legal consequences of continued

truancy. School personnel are also present to answer questions, meet with students and parents after the meeting to discuss individual student issues, and agree to a monitored action plan to assure regular attendance.[23] A non-punitive mediation program of this type has increased attendance in Santa Clara County school districts.[24]

- SFUSD's Interagency Action Committee – Coordination of Services Team (IAC) consists of seven District staff and representatives from the Departments of Public Health, Mental Health Services, Human Services, Police, Juvenile Probation and Children, Youth and Their Families. The IAC meets weekly to review the District's most difficult student and family situations which often include truancy. The IAC plans strategies for individual cases and recommends approaches to recurring problems. This year the IAC unanimously recommended that the District adopt a truancy mediation program similar to the one operated in Santa Clara County.

- A truancy mediation program offering non-punitive group intervention for 25 to 30 families eliminates the need for many individual case hearings before School Attendance Review Boards.

- The SFUSD does not ask the San Francisco District Attorney's office nor the Chief Probation Officer to participate in a non-punitive truancy mediation program.

FINDING

1. A non-punitive truancy mediation program under the direction of the District Attorney's office would encourage school attendance and eliminate the need for many SST and SART hearings.

RECOMMENDATION

3. SFUSD should work with the District Attorney's office or the Chief Probation Officer to establish a non-punitive truancy mediation program.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Board of Education – 60 days
SFUSD – 60 days
District Attorney – 60 days
Chief Probation Officer – 60 days
Juvenile Probation Commission – 60 days

[23] Educ. Code sec. 48263; See Santa Clara District Attorney Mediation (2002).
[24] Santa Clara Truancy Program 98/99 Evaluation

4. SFUSD SHOULD REFER TRUANTS TO THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY WHEN NON-PUNITIVE TRUANCY PREVENTION FAILS.

FACTS

- Board of Education policy[25] requiring referral of intractable truancy cases to the District Attorney or Probation Officer and the courts is not being implemented in accordance with state law.

- SFUSD has not referred truant middle and high school students and their parents to the District Attorney's office for juvenile court intervention when those truants refuse to attend school.

- The Santa Clara County District Attorney in a five-year period filed 53 charges against parents of elementary-aged children resulting in fines (half of which were suspended and then excused following good attendance), and four cases were prosecuted for child neglect. The Juvenile Court in Santa Clara County imposed one or more of the statutorily authorized sanctions more than 300 times in each of the last two years in the Eastside Union High School District, in which attendance increased to almost 95%.

- The authority of school districts through the Supervisor of Attendance or a SARB to refer cases to districts attorneys for court prosecution is provided in the Education Code.[26] When a referral is made, a district attorney must prosecute or explain in writing the reasons for a failure to do so. To the knowledge of state SARB personnel, every SARB referral to a district attorney has been prosecuted.

- SFUSD has dropped students from enrollment in violation of truancy and expulsion laws when parents refuse to bring elementary school children to school, instead of attempting to compel attendance by referral to the District Attorney or Probation Officer for court intervention.

FINDINGS

1. Filing charges in extreme cases by the District Attorney or Probation Officer would put parents and students on notice that they cannot violate compulsory education laws without consequences.

2. The prosecution of truancy laws would add little to the District Attorney's workload, while reducing truancy.

3. Dropping truant students from enrollment, instead of compelling attendance, denies the student the benefit of the education to which he or she is entitled.

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[25] SFUSD Student and Parent Handbook, p.19.
[26] Educ. Code secs. 48263, 48291.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4a. The Board of Education should authorize the Supervisor of Attendance or SARBs, when established, to initiate superior or juvenile court referrals to the District Attorney or Probation Officer when non-punitive interventions, including parent conference, non-punitive mediation, and SARB intervention, have failed.[27]

4b. SFUSD should not remove any student from enrollment before determining that the student does not reside in San Francisco or that the student is receiving instruction as required by law.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Board of Education – 60 days
SFUSD – 60 days
District Attorney – 60 days
Probation Officer – 60 days

5. SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS ARE IMPORTANT TO TRUANCY PREVENTION.

FACTS

- There are 26 full-time and six part-time City police officers serving as School Resource Officers (SROs) in middle and high schools. The SROs' mission is to provide a safe environment, free of violence, drugs and alcohol; to help teachers, staff and youth prevent and solve problems; and to foster positive relationships between youth and the police. Some students have their first positive interactions with law enforcement in the person of the SRO. For all middle schools to participate in the SRO program, additional police officers are required.

- Principals, attendance officers and teachers have reported that the SRO program has improved attendance. Programs in which habitual truants are placed in a homeroom with the SRO and appropriate staff as a team have improved attendance of the habitual truants.

- State education law authorizes an SRO personally to deliver a written warning to a pupil upon the first truancy.[28]

FINDING

1. The School Resource Officer program has proven successful in truancy prevention directly, and indirectly by improving school safety and student cooperativeness. Such programs have been more effective with increased SRO responsibility.

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[27] DA referral procedures are contained in the SARB Handbook.

[28] Educ. Code sec. 48264.5(a).

RECOMMENDATION

5. SFPD and SFUSD should increase, not curtail, the number of SROs to serve all middle schools. SRO responsibility should include (1) serving as part of a homeroom team for habitual truants, and (2) having SROs deliver the first written warning for the truant to take home and be signed by a parent or guardian.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Board of Education – 60 days
SFUSD – 60 days
San Francisco Police Department – 60 days
Board of Supervisors – 90 days

6. SFUSD SHOULD IMPROVE ATTENDANCE INCENTIVES THAT REDUCE TRUANCY.

FACTS

- Attendance incentives have been demonstrated to be more cost-effective than attendance enforcement. The California Department of Education considers attendance incentives an important component of truancy prevention.

- Schools with School Resource Officers (SROs), who are assigned to schools in the SFUSD by the San Francisco Police Department and participate in award programs, have encouraged attendance, particularly when awards are given to former truants.

FINDING

1. Attendance incentives can effectively complement attendance enforcement.

RECOMMENDATION

6. SFUSD should establish attendance award programs in all schools.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Board of Education – 60 days
SFUSD – 60 days

The Members of the 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury
For the City and County of San Francisco

Jane R. Brady

William J. Bush

Jess Centeno

Henry Cohen

Clement D. DeAmicis

Rosemary DeGregorio

Patricia Glynn

Susan Hirsch

Ross W. Hoffman

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APPENDIX 2

SFUSD's Collection of Truancy-Related Data

The 2008-09 Civil Grand Jury (Jury) investigated the San Francisco Unified School District's (SFUSD) collection of data related to its efforts to reduce truancy. Certain data was not properly collected, maintained and circulated. This included data related to the reasons for truancy, the interventions being used and the outcomes of those interventions. The Jury concludes (1) SFUSD is not carefully collecting data related to truancy, even if it thinks it is and (2) careful collection of data is a prerequisite for SFUSD becoming serious about resolving the current truancy crisis in San Francisco.[1]

SFUSD's Response to the Jury's Inquiry

The Jury approached multiple administrators and staff and inquired about the availability of detailed data. In general, SFUSD had little difficulty providing data of raw numbers on truancy for the Jury. The Jury also sought basic information regarding the causes of truancy within SFUSD and how effective SFUSD's interventions have been. The Jury found that some information is not being collected, that any claim that the information is being collected is flawed and that any data, if it were collected, is not being shared with the professionals expected to act on it.

The Jury sought information regarding the school, age, grade, ethnicity, zip code, number of days truant and reason/cause given for truancy. The Jury also sought information regarding each intervention including the date, recommendations and outcomes. Because the Jury specifically sought to understand the effectiveness of each intervention technique, the Jury sought data on outcomes of Student Assistance Programs (SAP), Student Success Teams (SST), Student Attendance Review Teams (SART), truancy letters and conferences, Student Attendance Review Boards (SARB) and referrals to the District Attorney. Without this information, evaluation and validation of SFUSD's truancy approach would appear to be impossible.

SFUSD's response at first was to acknowledge it did not have the data requested. Then, some administrators told us they had some of the data but could not share it because to do so would reveal legally protected confidential information regarding individual students. Inasmuch as the Jury was requesting aggregate data, not information on specific students, this was not a reasonable response.

In any event, it became clear that even if some of the statistics did exist, key personnel did not review such data as a matter of course. For example, when the Jury asked for data related to School Attendance Review Board (SARB) hearings, the

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[1] In addition to the data collection related to intervention, the Jury noted serious concerns regarding the integrity of the data in the now-two-year-old Truancy Module. Specifically, data from the Truancy Module was not subject to proper monitoring and validity checks. The Jury concluded it is reasonable to question whether recent reports of a decrease in elementary school truancy are based upon trustworthy data.

number of SARB referrals from school sites had to be tallied by a secretary. Further, SFUSD was unable until much later to provide on the number of SARB hearings. SFUSD still has not released information regarding the outcomes of SARB hearings. Key personnel thought it would be a good idea to begin tracking the results of interventions.

The Jury's Further Investigation

The Jury eventually concluded it must survey the staff that works directly with students. The Jury hoped to learn about the staff's first-hand experiences in SFUSD's efforts to track and reduce truancy.

One survey was sent in March to support staff (38 student advisors, 68 learning support professionals, 6 Child Welfare and Attendance Liaisons and 14 Outreach Consultants). In May, the 120 head counselors and counselors returned the same survey.[2] The results of the surveys reveal troubling limitations to any data that ultimately might be presented by SFUSD. Specifically, much of the staff does not keep accurate records of interventions.

For example, one question on the survey asked "Are you required to keep documentation through a spread sheet or other data-collecting means the number of students and the types of activities you are doing in regard to their attendance issues for the following programs?" In response, a large number of the support staff and counselors responded, "No." The chart below provides the percentage of staff that responded "No" to the question:

Program	Support Staff	Counselors
SAP	30%	32%
SST	23%	33%
SART	33%	42%
Letters	18%	21%
Conferences	17%	31%
SARB	20%	26%

Only nine counselors of those answering the survey were able to give exact numbers of their students with truancy problems. The remaining counselors provided numbers that appeared to be estimates, e.g. 100, 50, etc. How could data that SFUSD might produce, as a response to the Jury's Report, be believed if such a significant number of staff are not required to keep documentation, e.g. demographics on their students, interventions and the outcomes?

There was further evidence of poor data collection in reviewing the response to survey questions on interventions and outcomes. Counselors used such words as

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[2] The survey was not scientific. Even as an informal poll, the results are useful. A full forty percent returned the March survey and thirty-nine percent returned the May survey. The information provided by those who responded is invaluable to understand how SFUSD's interventions are actually conducted.

"unaware," "approximately," "don't know," "a lot," and "few to none" when presenting evidence regarding the interventions they conducted and the results.

Several other statistics were revealed in the survey:

Question Topic	Support Staff	Counselors
Time devoted to attendance issues of their students		
Less than 25%	51%	19%
Between 25%-50%	20%	51%
Effectiveness of their school site's truancy system		
Yes	60%	28%
No	40%	72%
No notification of their students' absences	33%	28%

The Jury's Conclusions

It is not clear why this information is not available. It may be that SFUSD has no system to collect it. As noted above, SFUSD may assert it keeps statistics regarding interventions; if so, it will have to explain why such a significant number of staff are not reporting their own interventions. Clearly, SFUSD has no understanding of its importance.

In any event, the survey provides an indication of poor staff supervision and a failure to hold staff accountable. Further, it is reasonable to question whether the effectiveness of efforts to address truancy (including whether the recent decrease in elementary school truancy, if it happened) is the result of effective staff activities (e.g. truancy letters or conferences), the threat of a referral to the District Attorney, targeted interventions, or some other reason(s).

SFUSD should address truancy in the Strategic Plan. The cover page of "Beyond the Talk..." states "The Strategic Plan is a dynamic document that will be revisited, updated and revised periodically." Truancy as a major problem in San Francisco and it is appropriate to add truancy-reduction goals and objectives to the Board of Education Scorecard and to the milestones for the Board of Education, Central Office and each school site.

SFUSD also should publicly recognize the role support services and counseling staff have in reaching its goals of access and equity, student achievement and accountability. The Jury hopes that the rumors it has heard (but not shared by administrators during interviews or e-mails) about the reorganization of pupil services and the development of a new data system will result in revisions that identify student support services staff as essential team members.

In sum, the Jury strongly encourages SFUSD and the Board of Education to devise a plan for keeping better statistics regarding truancy. Such statistics are a prerequisite to understanding the nature and extent of the truancy problem and the effectiveness of planned solutions.