

Reef - Sunset Unified School District

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David East, Ed.D., Superintendent

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Enrique Jimenez, Claudia Cazares, Chris Collins, Lupe Chavez, Lilia Rizo

September 12, 2018

The Honorable Donna Tarter, Presiding Judge
Kings County Superior Court
1400 West Lacey Blvd.,
Hanford, CA 93230

Re: Reef-Sunset Unified School District, Grand Jury Report of June 4, 2018

Dear Judge Tarter:

The Reef-Sunset Unified School District hereby responds to the 2017-2018 Grand Jury Final Report (relevant portions of which are attached hereto as Exhibit A) regarding Avenal High School in accordance with section 933 (c) for the California Penal Code.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

There is a great need for the expansion of the English Learner Program.

Recommendation 1

Develop a credit program for bilingual West-Hills College students to work with Avenal High students (ideal for any teacher training program).

Recommendation 2

The district should consider hiring as many bilingual teachers and aides as possible.

Recommendation 3

Develop an after-school tutorial program which has some "reward" to omit any stigma by being enrolled.

Recommendation 4

Further develop the Student Assistant Program to permit bilingual students the opportunity to help English language learner (the could be supervised by district coacher).

Recommendation 5

Offer classes at no cost for parents to help build English skill.

Avenal High School supports English Language Learners (ELL) through the following systems and programs:

- All content courses at Avenal High School require learning objectives that combine content objectives as well as language objectives for each class. Content courses follow the California Department of Education's Framework for English Language Development that ask for integrated English Language Development and Designated English Language Development objectives for all ELL students.
- Designated classes are assigned to ELL students at their appropriate proficiency level to meet the language acquisition needs. Newcomer students are also assigned to a support with a bilingual teacher in order for students to make appropriate adjustments to High School in the United States.
- ELL students are regularly assessed with state and local language tests to monitor progress and adjust their schedules as necessary.
- Avenal High School has a long-standing student club named ELLOS (English Language Learners Opting for Success) that provides ELL students with positive standing in the school culture and is a model program for schools. The ELLOS club has the highest student participation of any club on campus.
- The District offers English Language Development courses during the day and evening for parents and community members through Avenal Adult School at no cost.
- Data from the 2016-2017 graduating cohort show that Avenal High students earned the California Seal of Biliteracy at the highest rate in Kings County and well above state averages.

The District disagrees with Finding 1, in part, based on the above information.

The District agrees the recommendation to work closely with developing programs to assist ELL students with transition from high school to college.

Finding 2

There were potential problems relating to student and staff parking on campus.

Recommendation 1

Develop a system to separate student and staff parking.

Students are allowed to park in three areas: along 5th street, Mariposa Ave., and in the Auditorium parking lot. Only staff are allowed to park in the interior campus. All staff monitor traffic and strictly enforce the policy. Student drivers represent approximately ten to fifteen cars.

The District disagrees with Finding 2, in part, based on the above information.

The District agrees to continue to maintain separate student parking.

Finding 3

There were potential safety hazards in dropping off children for the child care center.

Recommendation 1

Consider a separate drop-off area for the child-care center.

Recommendation 2

One-way traffic on the road for the back parking lot and child care center would eliminate congestion, confusion and safety concerns for students and staff.

Recommendation 1

Consider a separate drop-off area for the child-care center.

Avenal High School has closed entrance gate next to child-care center for the 2018-2019 school year. The District is considering improvements to the campus interior that would entirely eliminate traffic.

The District agrees with Finding 3. The District continues to monitor safety for students and staff.

Finding 4

With the current school climate in the United States there is the need for additional campus security.

Recommendation 1

The Reef-Sunset Unified School District should explore the possibility of having a second Campus Resource Office with an officer being assigned full-time to Avenal High School.

Avenal High School has an extensive video surveillance system that allows staff to monitor any student activity, anywhere on campus. In addition to the camera system, there is a full-time campus supervision aide assigned to various campus locations while students are in, as well as out class.

There has been extensive discussion with staff and students regarding school safety and recent events of school shootings across the United States. Avenal High School is perhaps the only high school without a perimeter fence. Approximately five years ago, the District developed plans for fencing which would have required major architectural modifications to the campus at an

extremely high cost. Construction was postponed due to lack of funds. Students and many staff expressed concern that fencing would eliminate the ability of students and staff to quickly evacuate the campus in event of an emergency.

Avenal High School and Reef-Sunset Unified have a strong working relationship with Avenal Police Department. The Juvenile Services Officer is funded through a joint agreement with the district. We continue to look at grant sources to increase campus safety as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The District agrees with Finding 4. The District will continue to explore possibilities for funding additional school resource officers when targeted additional funding becomes available.

Finding 5

There are some classes where the teaching and/or classroom management are in need of help.

Recommendation 1

Develop a plan to provide assistance to those teachers needing help in developing lesson plans and/or classroom management.

Recommendation 2

The administration should give public recognition to those teachers who are doing an excellent job.

Avenal High School administration is monitoring classrooms on a daily and weekly basis to ensure appropriate teaching and classroom management are moving towards continuous improvement. The District provides instructional and management support through the use of Instructional Strategies Coaches. Teachers are provided with a host of professional development opportunities with an emphasis on real-time coaching. There is variability in the skill-set that teachers possess in implementation of best practices for teaching and classroom management. This issue is a confidential personnel issue that will be addressed in accordance with Labor/Education codes as well as Collective Bargaining Contracts.

The District participates annually in a local recognition program named the Milton O. Wilen Awards that recognizes students and teachers for excellence. Additionally, the District participates in Kings County Excellence in Education Awards program. At Avenal High School, the emphasis for teacher recognition is service to under represented students and their reward is their students' success. At times, teachers express discomfort in public recognition. Nevertheless, the District recognizes the importance of recognizing excellence in the profession.

The District agrees with Finding 5. The District continues to provide support for promoting continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

Finding 6

There are classrooms with missing and/or damaged ceiling tiles.

Recommendation 1

Replace damaged and missing tiles as soon as possible.

Avenal High School was built in 1937. The District has applied for state modernization funding for the school that includes replacement of windows and ventilation systems. The community passed a general obligation bond in 2016 that includes projects for Avenal High School. Items such as ceiling tiles are part of the regular deferred maintenance program of the District.

The District agrees with Finding 6. School administration will add facility inspection to their daily/weekly classroom observations and submit work orders to the District maintenance department or school site custodian.

Finding 7

There is no Career Center at the Avenal High School campus as in other Kings County High Schools.

Recommendation 1

A Career Center should be established for student use.

Avenal High School has a host of career pathways available for students. The school is proud of their partnerships with area companies and West Hills College. Most recently, Avenal High graduated 36 seniors that received their Associates degree from West Hills College along with their high school diploma. Students participate in a variety of pathways from healthcare to science and engineering options supported through the partnership with Waste Management Company. All students have a school email account and are able to communicate with Counselors, Administrators and Teachers immediately and as needs arise. Students are able to use career exploration applications and templates for resumes and current career information with school provided Chromebooks and district provided Internet access at school and home.

Avenal High School is implementing a program called "Get Focused, Stay Focused"; a nationally recognized program that provides career exploration resulting in a personal five-year plan for individual students. This is a dual enrollment course for which students receive college credit. The school is in their second year of implementation with Freshman and Sophomore

classes enrolled. Avenal High will annually add a class cohort until full implementation in the 2020 –2021 school year.

The District agrees with Finding 7. Avenal High will explore housing a Career Center in the existing Counseling office or Library.

Finding 8

Avenal High School does not provide printed class information to students and depends on spoken work from Counselors for information.

Recommendation 1

Develop an Academic Handbook, which is provided to students as they enter 9th grade or enroll later.

The District agrees with Finding 8. Avenal High School will digitize their current course description catalog and post it on the school's website. School Counselors will continue to advise students via email and in person as needed.

Finding 9

Misuse of the cell phone policy in classrooms was evident which results in loss of instructional time.

Recommendation 1

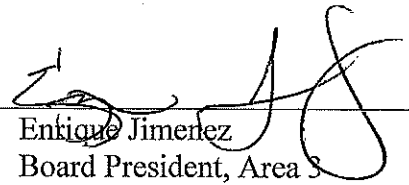
Enforce the Student/Parent Handbook policy regarding cell phones.

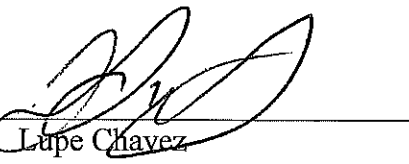
The issue of student use of cell phones has been ongoing and regularly addressed with staff. Teachers feel that occasional use of cell phones for educational purposes is useful for instruction. They have been given academic freedom to allow students to use a cell phone for educational purposes. The Student/Parent Handbook does not reflect the current status of cell phone use and needs to be updated to reflect current technology and be consistent with the District's Acceptable Use Policy.

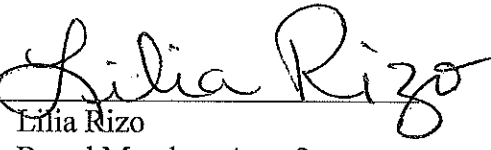
The District agrees with Finding 9. Avenal High School will amend the Student/Parent Handbook regarding student cell phone use.


The District agrees either wholly or in part with many of the Grand Jury Findings and recommendations. We encourage the Grand Jury to expand their investigations and appropriately target their questioning to staff that can adequately address their inquiries. Improved methodology will support the validity of their findings.

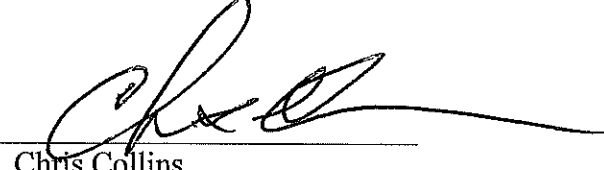
In conclusion, we hope that the foregoing is of assistance in better understanding the referenced Grand Jury report.

By 
Enrique Jimenez
Board President, Area 3

By 
Lupe Chavez
Board Clerk, Area 4

By 
Lilia Rizo
Board Member, Area 2

By 
Claudia Cazares
Board Member, Area 1

By 
Chris Collins
Board Member, Area 5

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AND CLERK OF THE COURTS**