



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2019-2020

**Vallejo City Unified School District
Student Transfers Result in \$36 Million Loss**

Solano County Grand Jury 2019-2020 Vallejo City Unified School District Student Transfers Result in \$36 Million Loss

I. SUMMARY

The 2019-2020 Solano County Civil Grand Jury examined the impact of student transfers from the Vallejo City Unified School District (VCUSD). The initial data provided by staff revealed the impact to be significant: more than \$36 million loss over four school years. Declining enrollment is a major factor in the reduction of revenue, which negatively affects the quality of education, staffing, professional development, facilities and availability of instructional supplies/materials. This has contributed to the erosion of public opinion and confidence in the VCUSD to provide a quality education.

II. INTRODUCTION

The 2019-2020 Solano County Civil Grand Jury examined the impact of student transfers from the Vallejo City Unified School District over the past four years. The District receives funding through Average Daily Attendance (ADA). According to the California Department of Education (CDE):

“Total ADA is defined as the total days of student attendance divided by the total days of instruction...”

All school districts within California must maintain a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). The CDE states:

“The LCAP is a three-year plan that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state and local priorities. The LCAP provides an opportunity for local educational agencies (LEAs) to share their stories of how, what, and why programs and services are selected to meet their local needs... The LCAP was established in 2013 under a state law called the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)... Community input is important because parents, students and stakeholders can use the LCAP process to advocate for funds to meet their specific school site needs, such as additional counselors, programs and tutors.”

III. METHODOLOGY

Reviewed VCUSD Board Policy 5117

Reviewed Administrative Regulation 5117

Reviewed VCUSD LCAP

Reviewed VCUSD Measure S (2018)

Interviewed VCUSD staff

Reviewed data regarding student transfers provided by VCUSD staff

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The Grand Jury reviewed data provided by VCUSD staff and found a loss of over \$36 million in funding over four school years. During interviews, staff confirmed a decrease in the number of students over the last several decades. According to staff, demographic data relative to student transfers has not been collected or reported because District Board Policy 5117 does not require it. Data provided did not include transfers to private or charter schools.

The Grand Jury reviewed student transfer data provided by VCUSD staff. The Grand Jury believes that this is not the only revenue lost by VCUSD. Not included in these calculations are income lost due to student absences, transfers to charter schools and residents who choose to send their children to private schools.

School Year	Transfers In	Transfers Out	Net Change	Revenue per Student (ADA)	Revenue Lost
2015-2016	21	859	-838	\$ 12,356	\$ (10,354,328)
2016-2017	23	782	-759	\$ 11,778	\$ (8,939,502)
2017-2018	21	859	-838	\$ 11,392	\$ (9,546,496)
2018-2019	19	737	-718	\$ 10,913	\$ (7,835,534)
Totals	84	3237	-3153		\$ (36,675,860)

Revenue lost is calculated by multiplying the net change in students by the ADA revenue.

VCUSD Board Policy 5117 provides an opportunity for students to transfer to a school outside of the boundaries of the VCUSD if specific criteria are met. The policy establishes the timeline and process for applications. Historically, if an application for transfer met the tenets of the policy, the District approved it. Staff indicated they are aware that applications for transfer may contain false information and, in most cases, there has been little or no follow-up on the validity of the information provided. The Solano County Board of Education reviewed the denied transfer appeals, and approved the majority. According to staff, the number of students transferring out of VCUSD is significantly higher than other surrounding school districts.

VCUSD previously had over 22,000 students. Enrollment at the time of this report was 11,500 and continues to decline. From 2015-2019, VCUSD lost more than \$36 million due to students transferring out of the District. In an effort to curtail appeal approvals, VCUSD recently developed a presentation to demonstrate to the County School Board the far-reaching implications of approving appeals that did not meet VCUSD Board Policy.

As an example, in 2015-2016, VCUSD approved 88 new transfer applications to Benicia Unified School District and renewed 102; it also approved 156 new transfer applications to Napa Unified School District and renewed 101. Transfer applications must be renewed annually. VCUSD approved many transfers to other districts. Neighboring school districts accepted a large number of these students. The following list illustrates where students have transferred:

- Calistoga Joint USD
- Contra Costa USD
- Corte Madera USD
- Acalanes Union High SD
- Alameda USD
- Albany USD
- Berkeley USD
- Emeryville USD
- Fairfield-Suisun USD
- Hayward USD
- John Swett USD
- Lafayette USD
- Larkspur-Corte Madera USD
- Marin County USD
- Martinez USD
- Mount Diablo USD
- Novato USD
- Oakland USD
- Petaluma USD
- Pittsburg USD
- Pleasanton USD
- Sacramento USD
- San Francisco USD
- San Leandro USD
- San Lorenzo USD
- San Rafael City Schools
- Sonoma Valley USD
- Travis USD
- Vacaville USD
- West Contra Costa USD

Trends were similar for 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

There are many reasons a family might want to apply for a student transfer: safety (student has experienced some type of safety issue at the school), employment (parent works several miles from home and desires to have his/her child nearby), childcare (stability in childcare provider), academic (parent desires child to participate in a particular program or attend a more academically-successful school) and, according to staff, poor perceptions about schools in VCUSD.

According to staff, the elevated number of student transfers negatively affects the quality of education in VCUSD due to decreased funds for staffing, professional development, facilities and instructional supplies/materials. VCUSD described the following plans to address declining enrollment:

- “1. Increase parent and community engagement
2. Create safe, supportive, and engaging learning environments for all staff and students
3. Increase number of students graduating and career ready.”

The VCUSD LCAP goals reflect these plans. Included in the plans to address declining enrollment, the District published a Parent/Guardian Handbook to “increase transparency.” Also, in 2018, Vallejo voters passed Measure S, a bond initiative to improve school facilities.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1 – VCUSD has lost over \$36 million of revenue over four years due to the unusually high rate of student transfers.

RECOMMENDATION 1A – The VCUSD Board of Trustees revise Board Policy 5117 and Administrative Regulation 5117 to reduce the number of transfers.

RECOMMENDATION 1B – The VCUSD Superintendent work with the Solano County Office of Education to comply with the policies regarding appeals relative to student transfers.

FINDING 2 – The number of student transfers negatively affects the quality of education in VCUSD due to decreased funds for staffing, professional development and instructional supplies/materials.

RECOMMENDATION 2A – VCUSD Superintendent establish a Community Task Force to evaluate the implications of transfers and to identify solutions to declining enrollment.

RECOMMENDATION 2B – VCUSD Superintendent conduct a curriculum audit to determine how to optimize the academic performance of the students attending VCUSD.

RECOMMENDATION 2C – VCUSD Superintendent utilize the transfer data in the budgeting process for staffing and facilities.

VI. COMMENTS

The 2019-2020 Solano County Civil Grand Jury has concerns about the revenues lost and the impact of that loss on current students and staff, as well as the community perception of VCUSD. The District has a long history of struggles, both financial and academic. Community perceptions and opinions of VCUSD may improve if it finds a way to stem these financial losses and implement cutting-edge curriculum taught by highly-qualified staff in well-maintained, state-of-the-art facilities.

VCUSD leadership, management, staff, students, families and community members would benefit by articulating common goals to reverse the enrollment decline. Every VCUSD student, regardless of race, gender identity or socio-economic status deserves the very best education possible so they can be successful, contributing citizens. District collaboration with a Community Task Force could facilitate establishment of a plan for revitalizing the District and its schools in the near future.

REQUIRED RESPONSES (ALL FINDINGS)

VCUSD Board of Trustees
VCUSD Superintendent

COURTESY COPIES

Superintendent of Schools, California Department of Education
Superintendent of Schools, Solano County Office of Education