SOLANO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

2022-2023

SOLANO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
POST-PANDEMIC AND SAFETY MEASURES
I. SUMMARY

The 2022-2023 Solano County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) investigated multiple aspects of how Post-COVID-19 in-person instruction impacted mental health, safety, public school staff, and students. The Jury found that while many schools had strong access, lock, and camera policies, they were not uniformly enforced. One of the purposes of the Jury’s report was to learn what actions were taken to create a successful and safe return for students. The Jury examined how the Solano County school systems are implementing the necessary changes to meet its post-COVID-19 needs. School administrators on individual campuses addressed mental health care by various methods as deemed necessary. County schools are continually addressing staffing issues effectively and creatively.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Jury interviewed several superintendents and principals within the Solano County school system. The jury toured numerous elementary, middle, and high school facilities. The current enrollment for Solano County public schools is slightly over 60,000 students. The COVID-19 outbreak caused Solano County schools to halt in-person instruction on March 16, 2020. Some students began returning to classrooms in March of 2021, with many parents deciding to keep their children in distance learning. Before and after the schools returned to full-time instruction, schools faced issues caused by the long absence of students from the classroom. The in-class instruction resumed for almost all students in the current 2022-2023 school year. Districts are addressing concerns about student anxiety and school safety due to the country’s growing number of campus shootings. These strategies and changes work hand-in-hand with the involvement, awareness, and participation of all school employees, public safety partners, students, parents, and guardians.

III. METHODOLOGY

Toured Facilities

- Benicia High School
- Benicia Unified School District
- Cooper Elementary School
- Fairfield Suisun Unified School District Office
- Grange Middle School
- Public Safety Academy
- Rolling Hills Elementary School
- Vacaville High School
Reviewed Documents

Dixon Unified School District Budget
Solano Community College Budget
Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) Budget
Vacaville Unified School District Budget
Vallejo Unified School District Budget

News Articles;

https://www.dailyrepublic.com/all-dr-news/solano-news/fairfield/fairfield-suisun-trustees-to-
hear-updates-school-bond-projects-other-programs/, August 24, 2022 - Daily Republic -
Fairfield-Suisun school trustees to hear updates on bond projects, other programs

https://www.dailyrepublic.com/all-dr-news/solano-news/solano-college-police-red-
cross-announce-active-shooter-emergency-preparedness-training/, August 28, 2022 -Daily
Republic - Solano College police, Red Cross announce active shooter training

https://www.dailyrepublic.com/all-dr-news/solano-news/vacaville/travis-school-district-reaps-
benefit-of-fees-charged-to-developers/, September 16, 2022 - Daily Republic - School district
reaps benefit of fees charged to developers

https://www.dailyrepublic.com/all-dr-news/solano-news/vacaville/santopadre-brings-24-years-
of-service-as-next-vaca-schools-superintendent/, October 9, 2022 - Daily Republic - Santopadre
brings 24 years of service as next Vaca schools superintendent

https://www.dailyrepublic.com/all-dr-news/solano-news/fairfield/fairfield-suisun-school-
trustees-to-hear-updates-on-financial-matters/, October 26, 2022 - Daily Republic - Fairfield-
Suisun school trustees to hear updates on financial matters

Resources

Other Resources
2022 SCOE Spotlight Our Virtual Reality Vol 2 Issue 1 2019-20
SCOE Spotlight / The Whole Student Vol 2 Issue 2 September 2021
SCOE Spotlight / School Safety and Student Wellness Vol 3 Issue 2 January 2022
SCOE Spotlight /Annual Report Vol 4 Issue 1 August 2022

Websites

Benicia Unified School District: No Link
Dixon Unified School District 2022-2023 45-Day revise Budget 2021-2022 45 Day Revise.pdf -
Google Drive
(boarddocs.com)
Solano Community College District 2022_23 Adopted Budget .pdf (solano.edu)
IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

Solano County schools face many major challenges due to the use of various safety systems in this post-COVID-19 era.

A. Safety

Physical security includes many options: locks, fencing, and cameras among them. The default lock policy is rooms remain locked during school hours. Some of the classroom doors observed were open or unlocked. Some schools have upgraded to “Columbine-style” locks that can be locked from inside. One school used internal slider style locks that are keyless.

Campus access varies from a fully fenced campus perimeter to fences between buildings. Many schools, particularly elementary schools, have a single point of entry with locked gates. Camera use varies among schools. Some have systems that can view the entire campus, others have systems that have only partial views. Access to camera systems is restricted to administrative personnel. Most camera systems within the school districts are independently installed and monitored by principals or their front office staff. The Solano County school districts have the following number of cameras:

- Benicia – 198
- Dixon – 136
- Fairfield/Suisun – 550
- Travis - 164
- Vacaville – 149
- Vallejo – 345

Raptor is one of the security technologies used in most schools to screen campus visitors. This program checks against the sex offender registry. Envoy is another which collects a photo ID and emails it to the classrooms. ParentSquare and Class Dojo are applications used by teachers to communicate directly with all the parents. School campus communication systems vary from classroom phones to public address systems (some with LED message boards) to radios to cell phones.

Messages go from classrooms to the Administrative offices, then to the Police Department or School Resource Officer (SRO). An SRO is a sworn officer assigned to a school on a long-term basis trained to perform three major roles: law enforcement officer, law related-counselor, and law-related educator. SRO coverage varies on campuses. Some schools have them on site, others have them on call. Their presence increases from elementary to middle to high school.
Federal COVID-19 funds paid for upgrades for individual classroom HEPA filters and upgrades to HVAC systems. Individual school principals determined how to spend their portion of the funds. As COVID-19 money has now been expended, districts are maintaining the numerous COVID-19 improvements at their own expense. These include air purifiers, water filters, sanitizing stations, behavioral programs (i.e., wellness centers).

In-classroom instruction at Solano County’s schools has dropped Post-COVID-19.

The Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) coordinated with Solano County Office of Emergency Services (OES) to serve as a liaison and support between Solano Public Health (SPH) and Solano private and public schools. SCOE developed streamlined systems of communication to facilitate answers to the numerous COVID-19 related questions that schools face. A partnership with SPH to assist educators and families crafted webpages that consolidated COVID-19 guidance information related to schools for educators and community members.

**B. Mental Health**

School administrators supported mental health facilities generally, but they see an increased need for these services post-COVID-19. Schools have access to SCOE’s mobile crisis response team in cases that require mental health assistance by trained professionals. Schools use varying methods and techniques for mental health and behavioral issues. Most schools employ a tiered response moving from: in-classroom intervention with the teacher; outside of the classroom; front office counselor; to calling the Mobile Crisis Unit.

Availability of mental health care varies from scheduled visits on campus throughout the week to on call support from mental health professionals. Where some schools have no nurse available, the district assigns Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVN) health clerks. Some schools use external resources such as Care Solace, a mental health care coordination service, to inform parents of additional health resources.

Another method to address mental health for students is using quiet spaces within or outside of classrooms. Mindfulness Corners in classrooms and separate Wellness Centers are areas where students can regain focus and composure without disrupting classroom instruction. Not all schools offer these options. Quiet room staffing varies from a few that have full-time trained counselors to others using interns from local community colleges; some have student volunteers. Most of the facilities that do not have a Wellness Center or a quiet room share the services of a mental health psychologist or clinician who visits during the week.

**C. Staffing**

The need for school staffing varies widely – some are fully staffed, others only need classified staff, and others have a shortage of both. This problem has only increased as a result of COVID-19. The needs are for School Resource Officers, nurses, mental health professionals, certificated (teaching) and classified (non-teaching) staff. Districts are actively recruiting with a variety of means including: local hiring fairs, teacher training programs, outreach to local universities, and social/print media. Districts have established a number of policies to attract and retain teachers.
and classified staff including changing salary scales, assistance with certification, and hiring bonuses.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 – Although districts have an explicit locked door policy to ensure student security, it is not uniformly enforced.

Recommendation 1 – School districts enforce the locked room policy when school classes are being taught.

Finding 2 – Camera placement varies from site to site with some areas having no coverage.

Recommendation 2 – Schools should obtain more cameras to increase the scope of coverage to increase students’ safety.

Finding 3 – The majority of schools have a “single point of entry” process which benefits the safety of the community and students.

Recommendation 3 – The single point of entry process be adopted by all of the public schools in Solano County.

Finding 4 – RAPTOR and Envoy systems are used to identify any person entering schools and to notify staff. These programs are limited to a few schools.

Recommendation 4 – All schools be equipped with these or similar programs to prevent the access of undesirable persons.

Finding 5 – Some schools have areas such as a wellness center/quiet/calming corners for students to access where they can regain focus and composure.

Recommendation 5 – All schools establish a calming/refuge area with dedicated mental health staffing available for students.

COMMENTS

Solano County school districts have utilized COVID-19 funds effectively to ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff.

The districts are employing multipronged efforts to increase staffing.
Required Responses

Benicia Unified School District (Findings 2,3,4)
Dixon Unified School District (Findings 2,3,4)
Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District (Findings All)
Solano County Office of Education (Finding 5)
Travis Unified School District (Finding 2)
Vacaville Unified School District (Findings All)
Vallejo Unified School District (Finding 2)