

Education Committee

Ponderosa High School

Shingle Springs

Reason for the Report

The Grand Jury selected Ponderosa High School for a general review.

Scope of the Investigation

The members of the Grand Jury interviewed the following Ponderosa High School staff:

- Principal;
- Vice Principal;
- Library Media Teacher;
- El Dorado County Sheriff School Resource Officer;
- Food Service Supervisor/Manager;
- Food Service worker.

The Grand Jury members:

- Reviewed El Dorado Union High School District 2000/02 Strategic Planning Goals;
- Visited Ponderosa High school, met staff, and toured campus.

Background

Ponderosa High School opened as a two-year high school in 1963 with 1100 students. The student population, which reached 2200 in the year 2000/01, was reduced with the opening of Union Mine High School. Today the campus, which is located in a semi-rural setting of 40 acres, is a four-year school with over 1800 students. It is one of five high schools in the El Dorado Union High School District and was selected to receive a California Distinguished School Award in 2001.

The current principal has been in his current position for the past 18 years. The school staff includes 7 management positions: 3 vice-principals that each assists 600 students and 4 counselors, each of whom assists 450 students. There are 92 full and part-time teachers with the student-to-teacher ratio of 30 to 1. All teachers, except two, have credentials and teach in their major or minor field. There are also 50 classified personnel that include clerical, kitchen, and maintenance positions.

The school ranks well above average on overall test scores and well above average compared to similar schools in State tests. The student dropout rate is approximately 1.8 percent while the State average dropout rate is 2.8 percent. Two-thirds of graduating students continue to college.

The campus is the District's magnet school for agriculture and special education students. The agricultural program has 160 students. The campus has classes for 110 special education students for whom an integrated approach to classroom instruction is provided. These students come to this magnet campus from the Western Slope of the County.

The school hosts numerous after-school art and athletic programs. Arts include theatre/drama, orchestra, band, chorus, speech, debate, and photography. Athletics include traditional sports as well as rugby, swimming, boys' and girls' golf, softball, soccer and volleyball.

School facilities include 88 classrooms, of which 50 percent are modular portable structures. These buildings will remain at the Ponderosa campus due to the prohibitive cost of new construction. The District has been proactive in modernizing Ponderosa's physical plant by obtaining approximately \$2.5 million in grants. The State Modernization Grant has been used for landscaping projects, carpeting classroom, adding portable classrooms, building a permanent science laboratory building, replacing the gym ceiling, completing the county/school district joint project soccer field, and creating new plaza areas for student use. This summer the State Modernization funds will be used to enhance all campus permanent buildings by facing them with brick exteriors.

The campus has 250 student lockers available, but space per student is limited. Two students share a locker, while freshman students are not provided lockers.

The school's library is the largest high school library in the County with over 7,000 square feet of space and contains over 21,000 books. Students have continuous access to the facility from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. as well as at home access to the school's online database resources at their Web site. Ponderosa has benefited from the California Library Grant, which contributes as much as \$28.00 per student. Today this grant has been reduced to \$1.99 per student.

The campus has a self-supporting cafeteria that provides a hot breakfast and lunch daily as well as a walk-up snack bar. Lunchtime is divided into two periods to accommodate all students. About 350 students purchase a cafeteria meal each day. Meals are affordable and do not exceed \$2.00. Free and reduced lunch programs are also available.

The campus is maintained with a limited staff. On a daytime basis, one person is assigned to all the athletic fields, one gardener for the grounds, one custodian for the buildings, and one maintenance person for equipment. Five custodians work in the evenings. Classrooms are cleaned on alternating days. A half-time employee cleans the cafeteria.

A full-time Deputy Sheriff is funded by grants from the County and the Sheriff's Department. Four paid adult campus monitors patrol the school either by foot or bicycle throughout the school day. Administrators and teachers monitor all evening activities on a rotation basis. The school safety committee meets several times a year to update the school's safety plan each year. The

school is not far from the Shingle Springs Fire Department and emergency treatment is quickly available.

The district provides bus transportation used only by one-third of the student population. A majority of the students drive or carpool. Parking space offered on campus is inadequate; therefore many students park on adjacent roads. This often congests the two-lane road that fronts the school. In addition, there are no streetlights or stop lights at the two main entrances from Ponderosa Road. Only one School Zone warning sign is posted. Buses arrive and depart using a narrow circular driveway that does not allow parking or access to parents who pick-up or drop-off students. Parents who wish to avoid the congestion stop on the street to unload passengers, thus blocking traffic and cause an unsafe situation for cars and pedestrians. The traffic and parking problems are expected to increase next year when all students begin and end school at the same time.

The school has developed a Web site (<http://bruin.eduhsd.k12.ca.us/>) which provides students and parents access to daily bulletins, calendars, online resources, art, and athletic schedules. In addition, next year each department will offer homework and project assignments to be accessible online.

Findings

- F1. The Science Laboratory Building is the only permanent building built in the last 18 years. All other additions have been modular classrooms.
- F2. Locker space is not available for all students.
- F3. Parking is a problem. Students park on the congested two-lane road in front of the school as well as adjacent roads. As the student population continues to grow, this problem will increase dramatically.
- F4. The limited vehicle entrances for students, buses, and visitors create unsafe and hazardous conditions on these roads.
- F5. There is only one School Zone warning sign located near a blind curve on the south side of the campus.
- F6. There is inadequate space to pick-up or drop-off students so students are frequently dropped off on the main roadway.
- F7. There are no streetlights in front of the school on Ponderosa Road. This causes unsafe conditions for students and parents that attend evening after-school activities and for students arriving during early morning hours, especially in the winter months.
- F8. The restrooms are not always clean and are not well stocked with supplies.

Recommendations

- R1. Additional student locker space should be provided.
- R2. The current student parking needs should be evaluated.
- R3. An additional entrance on the south side of the lot should be considered and this entrance should have a three-way stop sign or traffic actuated stoplight.
- R4. Additional School Zone warning signs should be installed on Meder Road and the north side of the campus on Ponderosa Road.
- R5. A turnout area should be added off Ponderosa Road for drivers to pick-up and drop-off students.
- R6. Streetlights should be installed in front of the campus on Ponderosa Road.
- R7. Restrooms should be inspected for cleanliness and supplies by daytime maintenance staff each morning, especially in Building P.

Commendations

The Grand Jury commends the Principal, faculty, and staff for their enthusiastic school spirit and continued dedication to the academic performance and well being of the students at Ponderosa High School. We further commend the school for becoming a California Distinguished High School.

Responses Required for Findings

- F1 through F7 Superintendent, El Dorado County Office of Education
 Superintendent, El Dorado High School District
- F1 through F8 Principal, Ponderosa High School
- F3 through F7 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
 El Dorado County Department of Transportation

Responses Required for Recommendations

- R1 through R6 Superintendent, El Dorado County Office of Education
 Superintendent, El Dorado High School District
- R1 through R7 Principal, Ponderosa High School
- R2 through R6 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
 El Dorado County Department of Transportation