

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.

No Board of Supervisors response required.

F2. Locker space is not available for all students.

No Board of Supervisors response required.

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.

Response to F3: The respondent agrees with the finding. The County does not have data confirming that enrollment will continue to increase. However, El Dorado County Department of Transportation (DOT) staff has enjoyed a close working relationship with the School's and District's staff over the last 10 years to address evolving parking issues along the County maintained roads in the vicinity of the high school.

F4. The limited vehicle entrances for students, buses, and visitors create unsafe and hazardous conditions on these roads.

Response to F4: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The current on-site facilities and circulation has contributed to "congestion" along Ponderosa and Meder roads, and numerous complaints from the nearby residents, but DOT does not have any data to suggest that current or past conditions should be termed "unsafe" or "hazardous".

F5. There is only one School Zone warning sign located near a blind curve on the south side of the campus.

Response to F5: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. There are two (2) School Zone signs on Ponderosa Road: one (1) north of the school on the southbound lane and one (1) south of the school on the northbound lane. The use of the word "blind" in

reference to the horizontal curve might be misleading in that it may imply that the sign is hidden from view due to the curvature of the road.

- F6. There is inadequate space to pick-up or drop-off students so students are frequently dropped off on the main roadway.

Response to F6: The respondent agrees with the finding.

- 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.

Response to F7: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. It is agreed that there are no streetlights in front of the school. With respect to traffic conditions, the County's Department of Transportation does not have any evidence to suggest that conditions have historically been shown to be unsafe. However, the finding may be intended to relate to other aspects of public safety that could be addressed from the perspective of law enforcement.

- F8. The restrooms are not always clean and are not well stocked with supplies.

No Board of Supervisors response required.

Recommendations

- R1. Additional student locker space should be provided.

No Board of Supervisors response required.

- R2. The current student parking needs should be evaluated.

Response to R2: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is unreasonable.

The response is qualified as follows. County Policy A-11 and Penal Code Section 933.05 require that we state the recommendation has been implemented, will be implemented, requires further analysis, or is not warranted. We state that "the recommendation will not be implemented because it is unreasonable" only because it is not within the County's purview to manage school parking and therefore the County cannot implement this recommendation.

The County has requirements for minimum amounts of parking for certain land uses. However, the County does not have authority to extend these requirements to public schools, such as Ponderosa High School. The County could potentially provide input into an evaluation of the situation, if it is deemed warranted and useful by the High School District.

One outcome of the past partnership between the County and the High School District was a project undertaken by the school to add additional on-site parking. It is believed that this

project added approximately 125 parking spaces bringing the current total to more than 500. The County commends the school for this very beneficial project.

- 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.

Response to R3: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is unreasonable.

The response is qualified as follows. County Policy A-11 and Penal Code Section 933.05 require that we state the recommendation has been implemented, will be implemented, requires further analysis, or is not warranted. We state that “the recommendation will not be implemented because it is unreasonable” only because it is not within the County’s purview to manage this issue.

Before new access points are constructed, or traffic control devices installed, an appropriate engineering-based study is necessary. The purpose of the study would be to predict changes in traffic flow and the benefit or dis-benefit of traffic control devices on vehicle safety, pedestrian safety, traffic flow, etc. A cost-benefit analysis might also be warranted to determine the most feasible of alternatives that are identified. While the County views this as an obligation of the school to prepare any such study, we would be pleased to cooperate with the High School District by reviewing and commenting, if such a study were undertaken. Ultimately, improvements that require encroachments to the County roads, and or construction within the County road right-of-way, will require review and approval by County engineering staff.

- R4. Additional School Zone warning signs should be installed on Meder Road and the north side of the campus on Ponderosa Road.

Response to R4: With respect to Meder Road, the recommendation has been implemented.

Based upon the Grand Jury’s recommendation, DOT installed school zone warning signs on the eastbound lane of Meder Road in advance of the existing “STOP” sign at its intersection with Ponderosa Road.

Response to R4: With respect to Ponderosa Road, the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

DOT will not install additional school zone signs on the “north side of the campus on Ponderosa Road” because there are existing signs and those signs have been posted in full conformance with the State’s mandated standards for signing school zones on public roads.

- R5. A turnout area should be added off Ponderosa Road for drivers to pick-up and drop-off students.

Response to R5: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is unreasonable.

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

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September 18, 2003

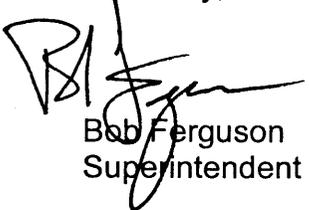
Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury
Presiding Judge, El Dorado County Superior Court
1354 Johnson Boulevard, Suite 2
South Lake Tahoe, California 96150

Re: El Dorado Union High School District
Responses to the Grand Jury Report 2002-2003

Dear Judge Kingsbury:

Enclosed please find the El Dorado Union High School District and Ponderosa High School's responses to the Grand Jury Report 2002-2003.

Sincerely,


Bob Ferguson
Superintendent

/rp

Enclosure (1)

cc: El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

9/25/03
To Judge
Kingsbury

El Dorado Union High School District
Responses to El Dorado County Grand Jury Report
2002-2003

Responses to Findings F1 through F7

The Superintendent of the El Dorado Union High School District concurs with the responses to Findings F1 through F7 contained in the Responses of Ponderosa High School.

Responses to Recommendations R1 through R6

The Superintendent of the El Dorado Union High School District concurs with the Responses to recommendations contained in the Responses of Ponderosa High School.

Ponderosa High School
Responses to El Dorado County Grand Jury Report
2002-2003

Responses to Findings:

#F1 - Page 61 *The Science Laboratory Building is the only permanent building built in the last 18 years. All other additions have been modular classrooms.*

Response: This finding is correct. The "K" building contains four science/computer labs and one additional classroom

#F2 - Page 61 *Locker Space is not available for all students.*

Response: The finding is accurate. However, the school has approximately 1,550 lockers to serve the needs of its student body of 1,896 students. Approximately 346 students must share lockers. This is many more lockers than the total of 250 mentioned in the report (page 60).

#F3 - Page 61 *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.*

Response: Parking spaces are at a premium on campus and surface streets around the high school. Prior to the 2002-03 school year, on campus student parking spaces totaled 335. Expansion has since been undertaken and student parking capacity increased to 460 spaces. (See response to recommendation #R2)

#F4 - Page 61 *The limited vehicle entrances for students, buses, and visitors create unsafe and hazardous conditions on these roads.*

Response: We do not agree that the current entrances and exits are unsafe. The school district has worked closely with the county transportation department to monitor the congestion during the morning arrival time and the school's dismissal time. Data that has been shared with the school does not indicate an "unsafe" or "hazardous" condition. The school's newly adopted bell schedule has helped mitigate the problem by establishing staggered beginning and dismissal times for students.

#F5 - Page 61

There is only one School Zone warning sign located near a blind curve on the south side of the campus.

Response: If additional signage is needed, we would cooperate with the County Transportation Department in the placement of additional signs. Two signs notifying drivers that they are entering a school zone presently exist on Ponderosa Road on the north and south boundaries of the school.

#F6 - Page 61

There is inadequate space to pick-up or drop-off students so students are frequently dropped off on the main roadway.

Response: The school agrees that student pick-up and drop-off creates congestion in and around the campus.

#F7 - Page 61

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.

Response: The school agrees that there are no streetlights on Ponderosa Road. However, the school has not been presented evidence that an unsafe condition exists due to the lack of streetlights. Lighting on campus is adequate to protect students who are awaiting the arrival of parents after activities. All exterior lighting, which is on a timer, is turned on prior to students' arrival at school each morning and sufficiently illuminates the campus.

#F8 - Page 61

The restrooms are not always clean and are not well stocked with supplies.

Response: The school partially agrees with this finding. A survey of restrooms last year indicated a need for installation of hand dryers or paper towels. That was done. During the summer of 2003, all restrooms in permanent buildings were totally refurbished and modernized. (3 boys & 3 girls bathrooms) All are cleaned nightly and are now stocked with supplies.

Responses to Recommendations

#R1 - Page 62

Additional student locker space should be provided.

Response: New lockers have been purchased and are awaiting installation.

They will replace the exiting lockers at the north end of the "B" building. This replacement of lockers will add to the total available for students but will not yet represent a locker for each student.

#R-2 - Page 62 *The current student parking needs should be evaluated.*

Response: During the 2002-03 school year, parking needs at Ponderosa were evaluated. As a result, a parking lot expansion project was contracted and a total of 125 new parking spaces were built on the east side of campus. This additional parking represented a 37% increase in available parking spaces.

#R-3 - Page 62 *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.*

Response: This recommendation requires analysis before conclusions are drawn. An engineering/safety/feasibility study would be necessary to determine whether an additional entrance/exit would be beneficial. Several years ago, a similar recommendation was studied. The conclusion at that point in time was that a south entrance/exit would be too close to the curve in Ponderosa Road to be safe or legal.

The school and district would be happy to work with the county to accomplish such a study.

R4 - Pg. 62 *Additional School Zone warning signs should be installed on Meder Road and the north side of campus on Ponderosa Road.*

Response: The school and district would approve of the placement of a "School Zone" warning sign on Meder Road. Since the issuance of the Grand Jury Report, a "School Zone" warning sign has been installed by the county on Meder Road. A "School Zone" sign is in existence on Ponderosa Road on the north side of the school.

#R5 - Pg. 62 *A turnout area should be added off Ponderosa Road for drivers to pick-up and drop-off students*

Response: A feasibility study regarding the construction of a turnout area for student pick-up and drop-off has been done. That study identified several design alternatives for such an area. At present, further steps are awaiting the identification of a funding source. When

funding becomes available, the district will cooperate with the County Transportation department and its engineers in selecting a final design alternative.

#R6 - Page 62

Streetlights should be installed in front of campus on Ponderosa Road.

Response

A feasibility study will be undertaken for the purpose of locating an onsite streetlight at the entrance/exit of Ponderosa High School. (The corner of Meder and Ponderosa Roads) In addition to illuminating the busy intersection, such a streetlight would provide greater safety for students parking along Meder Road and Ponderosa Road (North of Meder Road).

#R7 - Page 62

(Restrooms should be inspected for cleanliness and supplies by daytime maintenance staff each morning, especially in Building P.

Response

Recommendation agreed with. All restrooms are inspected each evening for necessary supplies. Special attention is paid to "P" building restrooms. The refurbishment and modernization of 6 restrooms, including all new tile, plumbing, plumbing fixtures, sinks and mirrors, has eliminated the appearance of dinginess or lack of care in those restrooms. (Summer, 2003)