



A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service

NAPA COUNTY GRAND JURY

2010-2011

Final Report on the

**NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL
DISTRICT
TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT**

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NAPA COUNTY GRAND JURY
P.O. BOX 5397
NAPA, CALIFORNIA 94581

May 11, 2011

The Honorable Stephen T. Kroyer
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of the State of California
County of Napa
825 Brown Street
Napa, CA 94459

Re: 2010-2011 Grand Jury Final Report on the NVUSD's Transportation
Department

Dear Judge Kroyer,

Pursuant to Sections 933 (a) of the California Penal Code, the 2010 -2011 Napa County Grand Jury submits to you its final report on the Napa Valley Unified School District's Transportation Department. Our investigation of this subject was conducted in a manner consistent with the California Penal Code, this Court's Charge, and the historic role of the Grand Jury, to protect the interests of the residents of Napa County.

This is the fourth in a series of final reports we will be issuing before the term ends. I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the Grand Jurors, which our report reflects. It is a privilege and pleasure to work with them.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judith Bernat".

Judith Bernat
Forewoman
2010-2011 Napa County Grand Jury



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To the Residents of Napa County:

In order to fulfill the Grand Jury's mandate to investigate all local government agencies, to assure they are being administered efficiently, honestly, and in the best interest of Napa County residents, the 2010-2011 Grand Jury investigated the Napa Valley Unified School District's (NVUSD) Transportation Department.

The Grand Jury has carefully investigated this matter and developed a set of findings and recommendations with the objective of representing the public interest.

The Grand Jury has made two recommendations. The first recommends that the NVUSD Board of Trustees evaluate and revise the maximum walking distances in Administration Regulation (AR) 3541 to be consistent with current practices and available financial resources.

The second recommends that the NVUSD Transportation Department use computerized routing tools and a graphic information system to determine if current transportation services are efficient and meet the NVUSD regulations with respect to AR 3541.

The Napa County Office of County Counsel has reviewed this final report. The Napa County Superior Court Presiding Judge, pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933 (a), has found that this report complies with California Penal Code Part 2 Title 4. This report has been accepted and filed as a public document by the County Clerk.

Copies of this report are available for review in the Napa City-County Library and online at www.napa.courts.ca.gov. Follow the link to Grand Jury.

We hope you find this report informative.

It is an honor and privilege to serve on the 2010-2011 Grand Jury.

Respectfully submitted,

The 2010-2011 Napa County Grand Jury

NAPA VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

SUMMARY

In order to fulfill the Grand Jury's mandate to investigate Napa County government agencies to assure they are being administered efficiently, honestly and in the best interest of Napa County's residents, the 2010-2011 Grand Jury investigated the Napa Valley Unified School District's (NVUSD) Transportation Department (TD). The focus of this investigation was to determine if school busing services are provided in a safe and efficient manner. The Grand Jury also reviewed applicable state and district policies, codes, and regulations to determine if they are currently followed.

The Grand Jury found that the TD follows safe and responsible training, operation, and inspection practices. The TD is a leader in using alternative fuels which has allowed the NVUSD to acquire vehicles and equipment through Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) grant programs.

The TD provides services to two rider types: Severely Disabled/Orthopedically Injured (SD/OI) and Home to School (H2S). The TD also provides services to students on school related trips. The TD's current challenge is continuing to provide services with a shrinking budget. Because of a legislative requirement to provide services to SD/OI students, H2S and transportation for school related trips are at the greatest risk of a reduction in services.

In anticipation of financial cutbacks, the NVUSD has conducted an internal and external review and is evaluating the recommendations. The Grand Jury recommends that the NVUSD re-evaluate its board policies relative to these recommendations.

BACKGROUND

On an average 2009/10 school day, the TD transported 1,923 students to and from school. In June of 2010, the budget for the TD was reported as \$3,294,180. Over

the same year, the actual expenditures were reported as \$3,175,508. This investigation evaluated the efficiency and safety of these services.

School Transportation Services

California school districts are required by law to provide transportation services to SD/OI students, regardless of annual budget constraints. SD/OI students have special needs and require special accommodations which are addressed through specific legislation and funding. Many SD/OI students have an Individualized Education Program that includes specific transportation accommodations provided at no cost to their parents or guardians.

H2S riders, unlike SD/OI students, do not require special accommodations. The NVUSD is under no legal obligation to provide transportation services to H2S students. However, NVUSD may provide such services, and has chosen to do so.

The NVUSD has discretion to provide transportation services to H2S students. Bus routes may be based on maximum walking distances, safety of walking routes, or both. The maximum walking distance from a student's home school is defined by a school board regulation. The following are current maximum walking distances adopted by the NVUSD's Administration Regulation (AR) 3541:

- grades K-6: 1.25 miles
- grades 7-8: 3 miles
- grades 9-12: 4.25 miles

Routes and Schedules

The NVUSD prepares transportation routes annually for H2S and SD/OI riders. The routing is typically updated at the beginning of each school year and adjusted as needed to address changing needs. There are numerous factors that can influence routing including:

- safety of students and pedestrians
- school bell schedules
- home school boundaries
- number of students a route can service
- funding available for transportation
- school closures

SD/OI routes evolve with the changing conditions and needs of the students. SD/OI vehicles are typically vans or passenger cars and carry fewer riders than

H2S buses. The SD/OI routes require close daily monitoring and the attention of a dispatcher to adjust the routes to fit students' needs.

H2S routes and schedules change less frequently. The bus routes and schedules are established at the beginning of the school year to fit the bell schedules of each school within the district. These routes will typically remain unchanged through the school year.

Methods of Providing Transportation Services

School districts have two options for providing transportation services. The first option is to own and maintain a fleet of vehicles and employ and train qualified drivers. The second option is to contract with a vendor for the necessary equipment and services. The NVUSD owns, operates, and maintains its own fleet and equipment.

School Transportation Safety

School transportation safety is specifically addressed in the California Education Code and District Policies. The Grand Jury has reviewed the codes, policies, and procedures and has identified the following as essential elements of a successful safety plan:

- driver training
- driver certification
- regular vehicle maintenance
- regular vehicle inspection by bus drivers
- annual vehicle inspection by the CHP

The Grand Jury's investigation discovered that NVUSD is a model of how to implement a successful safety plan. This determination is based on driver testimony, evaluation of CHP inspection reports, verification of certifications, and review of the NVUSD training program. The Grand Jury also attributes the success of the safety plan to an uncompromising culture of putting safety first. This culture is a result of ongoing efforts from the transportation supervisor, training instructors, school bus drivers, dispatcher, and shop supervisor.

Alternative Fuel Vehicles and Grant Funding

The NVUSD owns and maintains a fleet of vehicles to provide transportation services. This fleet is comprised of:

- transit buses

- conventional buses
- vans
- passenger vehicles

A noteworthy aspect of the NVUSD's fleet is the emphasis on using alternative fuels. Through grant funding from the BAAQMD's Lower Emissions School Bus Program, the District has funded acquisition of vehicles that run on compressed natural gas and the District is also a pioneer in the use of electric school buses.

DISCUSSION

The transportation services provided within the County serve economically and physically disadvantaged students. School busing reduces congestion and improves air quality by lowering the number of vehicles on the road at peak travel times. These benefits are currently at risk due to funding cutbacks. The ongoing state budget crisis requires NVUSD to find ways to provide services more efficiently or reduce the level of services.

Improving Transportation Efficiency

During the course of the Grand Jury's investigation, two reviews of the TD were conducted. One review was completed internally by the TD, and the other was completed externally by an outside consultant commissioned by the NVUSD. The objective of the reviews was to produce a list of recommendations to more efficiently deliver transportation services. These reviews resulted in the following recommendations:

Summary of Internal Recommendations by the TD

- Change operations and procedures to reduce opportunities for drivers to accumulate overtime hours and meal allowances.
- Evaluate field trips on a case-by-case basis to determine if charter companies can provide transportation services more economically.
- Evaluate walking distances, bell times, safety, and ridership on all routes to consolidate trips and remove buses from service.
- Match the number of TD shop personnel to the current maintenance and service needs based on age of fleet and annual mileage.
- Consolidate and reassign TD staff responsibilities to reduce the number of required positions.

- Evaluate other opportunities to realize savings such as leasing equipment, lengthening frequency of fleet washing, cutting in supervisor's salaries, and implementing more efficient time tracking and time sheet management systems.

Summary of Recommendations by External Transportation Consultant

- Evaluate the abilities of TD transportation staff to perform duties in a more effective and efficient manner.
- Provide training to staff and replace personnel not able to carry out their assigned duties.
- Train and license additional drivers to provide substitute drivers to reduce overtime.
- Use modern computerized tools to develop more efficient routes.
- Develop accounting procedures to determine true costs of providing services to other NVUSD departments other than TD.

The external and internal reviews have resulted in numerous recommendations to improve efficiency. Regardless of the selected approach to reduce costs, there is a high probability that current services will realize a significant reduction. Such reduction must be accomplished without jeopardizing the safety of the students.

Financial Trends in School Transportation

The NVUSD receives restricted and unrestricted revenues from the State. Unrestricted revenues represent about 70% of the funds received by most districts. Restricted revenues are dedicated to a specific category of activities or type of students.

H2S transportation services typically rely on unrestricted funds and compete for funding with other educational needs. Districts may discontinue H2S services at their discretion. SD/OI services rely on restricted revenues. Districts are required to provide these services by law. Only a change in law would allow a district to reduce these services.

The NVUSD reports annual financial results. The Grand Jury acquired the Unaudited Actual Annual Report of Pupil Transportation for the previous five years from the NVUSD to evaluate the financial trends. Figures 1, 2, and 3 compare the trends in expenditures for H2S and SD/OI services.

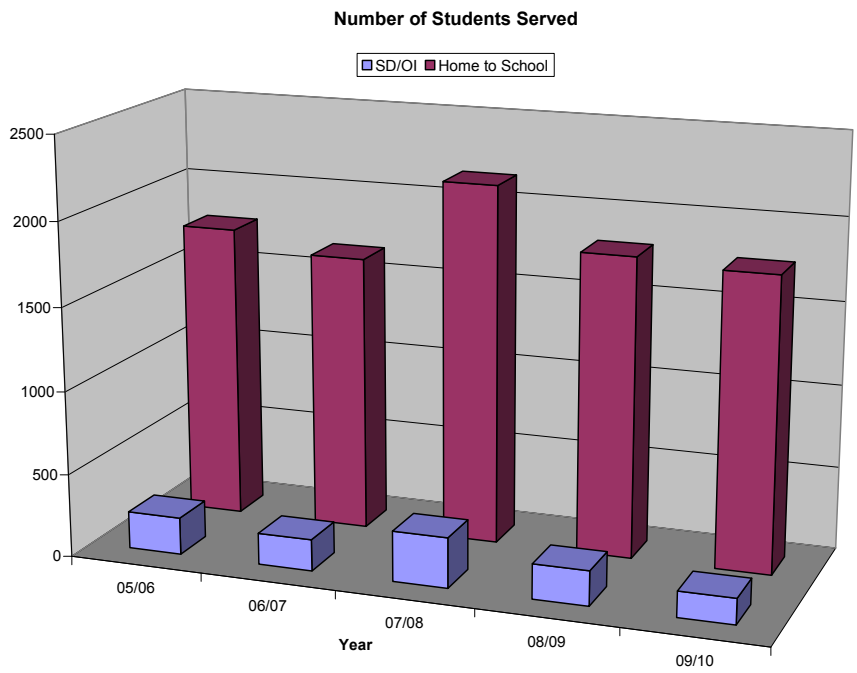


Figure 1

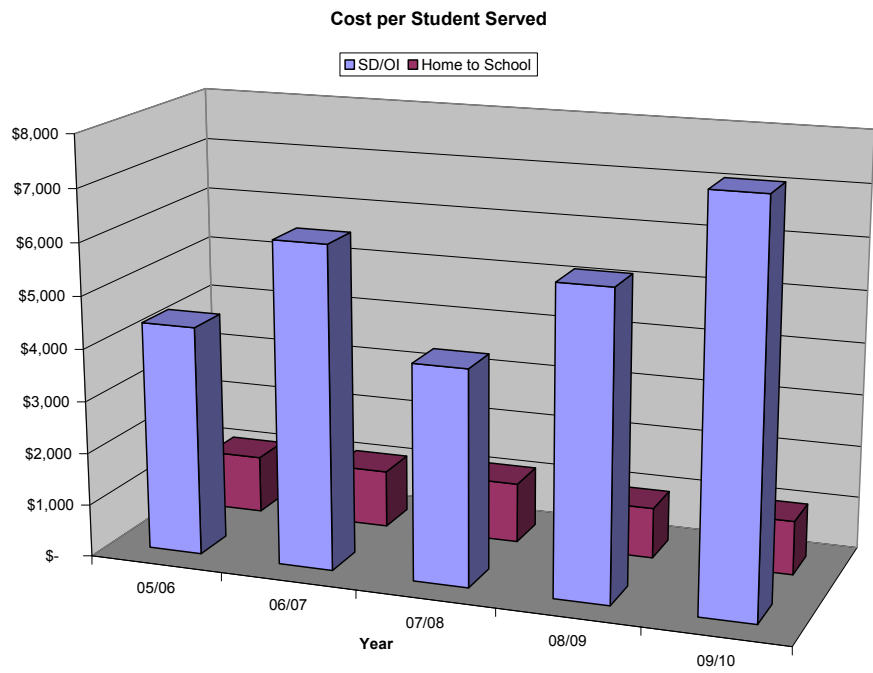


Figure 2

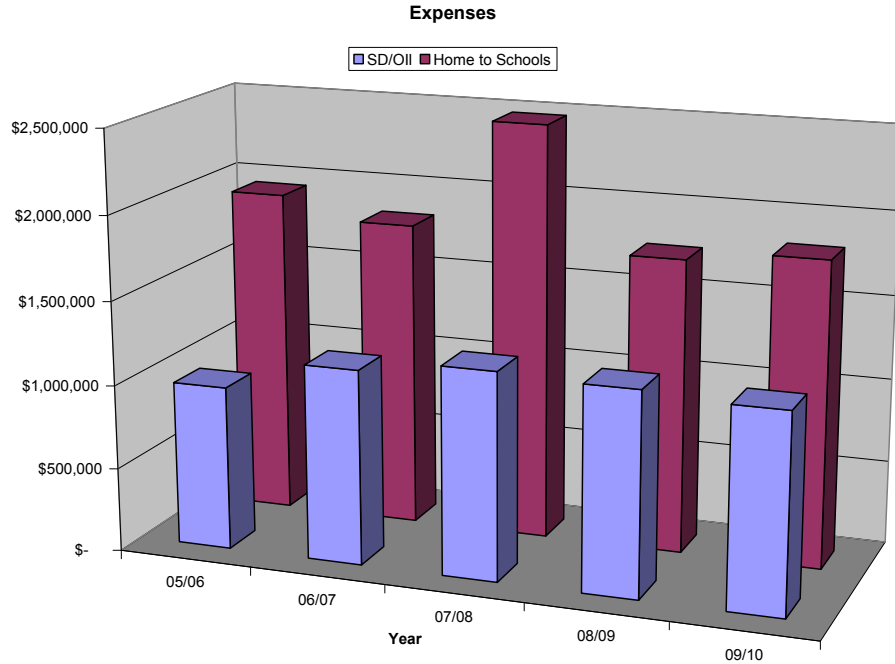


Figure 3

Based on the above financial reporting, the facts and trends in school transportation services are:

- SD/OI serves far fewer students than H2S.
- The number of SD/OI and H2S students served has remained relatively constant over the last five years.
- The cost to provide SD/OI transportation services per student shows an upward trend.

Alignment of Governing Board Policies and Transportation Operations

During this investigation, the Grand Jury found that the operation of the TD relies heavily on the experience and knowledge of a few individuals who develop routes and schedules. The current process of developing routes does not include a means for the TD management or anyone outside of the department to evaluate how well the routes meet the maximum walking distance requirements outlined in AR 3541.

The Grand Jury attempted to compare the maximum walking distances in AR 3541, adopted by the NVUSD on December 19, 1996, with the current services provided to H2S students. In order to make this comparison, the Grand Jury requested a map of school boundaries and the locations of the students who attend each school. This map is not available.

Each school year, the process for setting bus routes is dictated by school bell schedules. The final bus route schedule is published showing the bus stop locations and times. The end result of this process does not provide adequate information for the general public, NVUSD management, or the NVUSD Superintendent to determine if the Board's regulations and goals are being met.

During the Grand Jury's investigation, the NVUSD School Board announced that they plan to cut the 2011-2012 school year budget by as much as \$6.2M. If the NVUSD School Board is considering cutbacks in the TD costs of transportation services, the NVUSD School Board may need to re-evaluate the walking distances relative to the actual services that the district can afford to provide. In order to do this effectively, the District would benefit from an evaluation from the TD about how well services meet the current policies and regulations adopted by the District in AR 3541.

FINDINGS

The 2010-2011 Grand Jury finds that:

- F1. The NVUSD provides safe transportation services to its students.
- F2. The TD has completed an internal and external review and has developed recommendations to operate more effectively and efficiently.
- F3. The TD does not use computerized routing systems.
- F4. The NVUSD Transportation Department would not provide the necessary information to determine if AR 3541 requirements are met relative to maximum walking distances.
- F5. A substantial portion of NVUSD transportation funds goes to providing services to SD/OI students. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the TD 2009/10 budget is expended on nine percent (9%) of the students.
- F6. The cost to provide transportation services to SD/OI students on a per student basis shows a rising trend.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2010-2011 Grand Jury recommends that the:

- R1. NVUSD Board of Trustees evaluates and revises the maximum walking distances in AR 3541 to be consistent with current practices and available financial resources.
- R2. Transportation Department uses computerized routing tools and a graphic information system to determine if current transportation services are efficient and meet the NVUSD regulations with respect to AR 3541.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses from as follows:

From the following individuals:

- Napa Valley Unified School District Superintendent of Schools: F2, F3, F4, F5, F6; R2
- Napa Valley Unified School District Administrator of General Services: F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6; R1

From the following governing bodies:

- Napa Valley Unified School District Board of Education: F1, F2, F4, F5, F6; R1, R2

GLOSSARY

AR – Administration Regulation

BAAQMD – Bay Area Air Quality Management District

CHP – California Highway Patrol

H2S – Home to School excluding SD/OI

NVUSD – Napa Valley Unified School District

SD/OI – Severely Disabled/Orthopedically Injured

TD – Napa Valley Unified School District Transportation Department

METHODOLOGY

Interviews Conducted:

- NVUSD General Services and Operation Department Personnel
- NVUSD Transportation Department Personnel
- NVUSD School Bus Drivers

Documents and Websites Reviewed:

- Bjerke, Joseph K., Transportation Consultant's Report, February 19, 2011
- California Education Code – Section 39800-39809.5 and Section 39830-39842
- Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Board of Education NVUSD and the California School Employees Association, Napa Chapter No. 184
- Department of California Highway Patrol, Inspection letter, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD AR 3541 Transportation Routes and Services, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD AR 3541.1 Transportation for School Related Trips, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD AR 3542 School Bus Drivers, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD AR 3543 Transportation Safety and Emergencies, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD AR 5131.1 Bus Conduct, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD BP 3541.2 Transportation for Students with Disabilities, September 20, 2010
- NVUSD BP 6153 School Sponsored Trips, September 20, 2010

- NVUSD, Budget Information as of June 30, 2010
- NVUSD, Employee Drug Test List, October 1, 2010
- NVUSD, Employee Classifications and Organizational Chart
- NVUSD Map, Prepared by Napa County GIS, May 13, 2003
- NVUSD, Transportation Department, Transportation Efficiency Plan, February 14, 2011
- Various grant documents
- www.baaqmd.gov
- www.cde.ca.gov
- www.nvusd.k12.ca.us