

Check against Delivery

**Statement by Superintendent Michael E. Hanson
Edison High School Investigation
Tuesday, November 18, 2008, Board Room**

As a school district still in a major transformation effort, we have made significant improvement in significant areas such as budget, human resources, student achievement, technology infrastructure, facilities, and safety, to name but a few.

As part of this work, we have conducted audits, sought external expertise through FCMAT reviews, established third-party blue ribbon panels such as the Safety Commission, the FAAC on the Facilities Master Plan and we have continued this trend with the recently established Superintendent's Taskforce on English Learners and CTE to ensure that Fresno Unified is implementing best practices in all areas. This work will no doubt be on-going for years.

From these efforts we have gleaned information, identified and implemented best practices and we have made significant progress in multiple areas.

As we approached the Edison investigation, we chose to view this work in much of the same way. Through the identification of what is wrong – we will fix it and make our schools much better. These past two months have provided us with an opportunity to examine and improve a significant part of our district's operations, an area that impacts student issues and student achievement. Specifically, grading procedures, course placements, transcripts and records management.

At the same time, for all of our improvements, we understand that we still have some in our organization that have made decisions that landed us here today. This must **and will** be addressed. If I have found anything about our staff in FUSD. They are getting better every day and embrace the difficult improvement process.

During the past two months, I have often been asked if people are "unconscious – not paying close attention to detail" or "aggressively trying to beat the system rooted in bad intentions"?

After a deep and long investigation, it is clear to me that we are here today as a result of a combination of both.

There are enough employees who go through the motions so that people who want to take advantage of the system can do so with relative ease. It doesn't take many in a any organization for this to occur.

This type of behavior has been concealed from our view and as we shift from district level to focus on school level improvement, we are now uncovering it. Like all other problems we have found in the past 31/2 years, we will fix it.

This is the essential, but unappealing part of the transforming a school district. What it comes down to, in basic terms - is that without a foundation of integrity, nothing will really work in our system going forward.

Given the system wide findings on this topic, I am recommending a new senior position, with support, for FUSD. This office will aggressively attack the issues of student equity and access to high quality options upon graduation. Equity – we need to offer the supports necessary to help each child and each staff member achieve. Access – if it is good enough for one student, it is good enough for all. This focus on equity and access will signal a huge departure from the way we have run our district for decades. This office would be accountable for the day to day operations, working with the senior leaders in our district to create, develop, and manage a system that will address the majority of findings listed in this briefing.

Nothing is more important. We must always be sharp and intentional about issues of grades, student course placement, transcript management and the like.

This is the fundamental improvement that is needed. There is no other answer. This is the medicine that is required for FUSD now. We will get better by doing so.

1. Scope of Investigation

Between September 11, 2008 and November 17, 2008, approximately 500 hours of investigation were conducted by OTC and legal staff. They attacked the anonymous complaint and identified systemic issues represented by the complaint as well as environmental/organizational issues that led to the alleged incidents.

These time estimates and associated costs do not include any indirect costs of the time spent by district staff who have been involved in interviews, debriefings, meetings, reviews of policies and other related matters to the investigation. This has been deep, detailed, complex and costly.

Our investigators interviewed 40 witnesses including administrators, counselors, teachers, classified staff, coaches, students, and community members. This included 27 adults and 13 students.

Our investigation team reviewed thousands of pages of computer records at both the user and mainframe levels from the District's Technology Services Department. These documents included class and co-curricular requirements; current and historical data on student grades and attendance; detailed statistical information; and, student transcripts.

The investigation team also reviewed the California Education Code, Board policies, and associated administrative regulations.

As I mentioned, we went well beyond the issues that were identified in the initial anonymous letter. Early on, we began to review systems issues, not just at Edison High School but at all high schools at FUSD. We wanted to ensure that we are providing academic support and preparing career ready graduates for all students including those who are participating in athletics.

2. Findings and determinations regarding the alleged grade change - Edison

Let me be specific now, about the findings regarding the alleged grade change at Edison High School.

The investigators interviewed the teacher and student in question.

The investigators obtained documents from the District's Technology Services Department in order to isolate and analyze computer records at both the user and mainframe levels regarding class and co-curricular requirements; current and historical data on student grades and attendance; as well as detailed statistical information from PowerGrade and PowerSchool.

The teacher has denied changing the grade and suggested that "someone higher up" changed his grade from an F to an A.

Computer records retrieved from the teacher's laptop conclusively establish that a change in student athlete's math grade from an F to an A did indeed appear in the teacher's PowerGrade on June 11, 2008.

Evidence obtained from the teacher's laptop further shows that the teacher was actively using PowerGrade on June 4th, June 6th and June 11th, 2008. During these periods, the teacher entered grades into his electronic grade book for virtually all of his students.

Let's be clear what it means to make a change a grade from an F to an A.

For the student in question, the teacher made 52 separate data entries into his grade book adding varying numbers of points for quizzes, tests, notes and assignments going back to the beginning of the semester. The end result of these point additions? Enough points for the student to get an A.

The computer records detail the teacher's activity for the above dates. These records show that he entered points to his electronic grade book for the vast majority of his students in all of his classes. Many of the points added during this period for a significant number of his students, including the student in question, were for assignments, tests, and quizzes that occurred much earlier in the semester.

However, after 500 hours and the interviews with 40 individuals, **absolutely no evidence exists** to suggest that anyone other than the teacher changed the grade.

No evidence exists to prove that the student in question was treated any differently than the other students in the same math class or in any of the teacher's other math classes.

No factual basis exists to support the teacher's claim that he did not give the A grade.

Much has been made about the teacher's laptop having been stolen. It is important to note that the laptop was stolen several months after the grading period in question was recorded.

As a result of all of this information, no justification exists to warrant a change in the student athlete's final grade of an A.

The District is required to treat all similarly situated students alike.

If the District were to change the student athlete's grade to an F as it appeared in PowerGrade on June 6, 2008, the District would be required to similarly change the final grades of approximately 27 other students who were enrolled in the same teacher's classes.

The end result for those 27 students would be significantly lower final grades and a lower grade point average which would have serious implications. In particular, those students who graduated in June 2008.

3. Findings regarding the allegation of excessive absenteeism - Edison

In addition to the grade change, there was an allegation that the student athlete was absent from the math class in question on 66 separate occasions. In other words, the contention is that the student should have failed the class based on absenteeism alone.

Pursuant to District Policy and Administrative Regulation, the determination of whether to fail a student for excessive absenteeism alone rests with the teacher.

A review of attendance records for students enrolled in the subject teacher's spring semester 2008 classes, revealed that the teacher in question gave a final grade of A or B to at least two other students who were absent a great deal of time.

As a result, the District conducted a review of attendance records to determine whether students in other teachers' classes similarly received A and B grades despite having a considerable number of unexcused absences.

After conducting an exhaustive analysis of student attendance and final grades, the District has concluded that no evidence exists to show that excessive absenteeism in and of itself, results in an F grade.

In fact, the records reflect the contrary in that many students have been awarded high grades despite having an excessive number of absences.

4. Employee performance and resulting actions - Edison

The investigation revealed deficiencies in employee performance. Some of these deficiencies were quite serious. If you report NOTHING else –please get this clear... The issues of deficient employee performance at Edison High School are limited.

They reflect a **very** small percentage of the staff. The total staff at Edison deserves our praise and recognition for staying focused on student learning during a difficult time. Outside of the limited number of staff issues we found, the staff at Edison is extraordinary. I am a tough critic and I would have no issues or concerns with sending my own children to Edison – in fact, I **WOULD BE PROUD TO DO SO.**

The nature of these deficiencies included adherence to District policies and practices in multiple areas. Areas included student attendance, password security, the integrity of the grading process, student placement, and the treatment of transcripts.

While the District is legally required to ensure the confidentiality of all personnel actions, corrective action will be taken to address these performance deficiencies for all employees involved regardless of whether they are classified, certificated or administrative.

These actions will not be made public but will be taken in the upcoming weeks and months as appropriate.

5. System Improvements

As a result of the investigation, as I have already mentioned, we identified a number of systemic issues that created an environment that led to the alleged incidents.

What became clear as a result of our examination is that there is a significant disparity in our practices and procedures across the district. This disparity has taken root over decades of decentralized decision making. This will be fixed quickly.

I see these new issues that we have identified as yet another example of the deep work that we have to do and we will attack them like we have all others. In doing so, we cannot lose sight of the primary goal: we are here to support the academic performance of our students to create career ready graduates.

We will work to ensure that our Board of Education's Core Beliefs and Commitments are embedded and in practice at all of our schools for all of our students.

The system-wide issues can be summarized into three key areas:

1. Support and preparation of student (athletes) to be career ready graduates.
2. Board policies/administrative regulations related to changing student grades and attendance procedures.
3. Systems that need to be centralized to improve district performance.

For each area, we have identified a number of findings and recommendations as well as district leaders to implement the recommendations.

Action plans are being developed and implemented to begin to address these issues immediately.

In order to be completely transparent, we are releasing a copy of the report to the Superintendent summarizing the recommendations as a result of the investigation. This report was created by our investigators, legal counsel and Executive Leadership Team and is based on the entirety of the findings.

I will now take questions.

###

6. Background to the Edison Investigation

On September 11, an anonymous letter with nine (9) articulated issues was delivered by California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Commissioner Crichlow to Edison Principal Rick Lopez.

One of the allegations in the letter was that a student athlete had received a grade change from an F to an A, and that the records for this student reflect that the student had been absent from class for a total of 66 days.

At that time, Commissioner Crichlow reviewed the student's transcripts and assured Principal Lopez that the CIF would not punish the student for an adult's grading error. In addition, Mr. Crichlow stated that the CIF would not act on its own to render the student ineligible, deferring instead to the District to conduct the complaint investigation.

The district relied on Commissioner Crichlow's representation, permitting the student in question to continue to play football, pending the results of the District's investigation.

Oliver Thomas and Caeton Investigators (OTC) an external investigation firm was hired to address the allegations in the anonymous complaint.

A district lead, Kim Mecum, Associate Superintendent, Human Resources/Labor Relations and legal counsel, Mary Beth DeGoede was identified to work with the investigators throughout the investigation.

###