

2009 - 2010
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Pioneer Technical Center

Introduction:

Pursuant to California Penal Code section 925, on February 18, 2010, the Madera County Grand Jury visited Pioneer Technical Center (PTC), a public high school under the Charter Section of the California Education Code. PTC is under the supervision of the Executive Director, Career and Alternative Education, Madera County Office of Education. The Principal gave a briefing covering the mission, staffing, operations, resources, and procedures of the school.

Findings:

Pioneer Technical Center serves students in grades 9 through 12 with both academic courses and career technical education. The current enrollment is 230 of which 90 are females. PTC has been in its current location, a renovated commercial building, for nearly eight years. The Principal noted that PTC students completed much of the building renovation as part of their educational process. An eight-room classroom building was added about two years ago.

The staff consists of 17 Full Time Equivalent credentialed faculty. In addition to the Principal, other staff members include a psychologist and school nurse (each part-time), and two office staff. Class sizes are, on average, in a range of 20 to 1. The school is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Funding is based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) distributions; as a charter school, PTC receives a lower ADA than a regular high school. Supplemental funding for vocational programs comes from the California Department of Education Regional Occupational Programs and Centers, which is aimed at career and workforce preparation for high school students and adults.

PTC offers vocational courses in the following areas: Building Trades, Business Technology, Criminal Justice, and Art & Design. Student success was recently demonstrated when a PTC student produced video took second place, winning \$10,000, in a contest sponsored by the California Milk Processor Board. Criminal justice students contribute actively to the community graffiti abatement program.

Campus security planning is well thought-out. It is a closed campus; all visitors must sign-in with the administrative office. Security cameras are installed and can be monitored in real time. Rooms not in use are locked. Safety and disaster plans are written and exercised.

A Student/Parent Handbook provides guidance regarding student responsibilities for attendance, appearance, and deportment. As PTC is a charter school, students who do not comply with the expected standards for academic performance or deportment can be returned to the regular school environment.

The Principal discussed how student success in PTC should be measured differently than that of a regular school. The state mandated academic performance index score of 539, down from the previous year, is a concern and is being addressed by the faculty. The graduation rate of approximately 30%, when measured by state standards, is also low. However, the Principal stressed that students come to PTC with special educational issues such as limited success in the regular school environment, a significant shortcoming in English language proficiency, and a socio-economic background in which academic success is not always a high priority. PTC offers such students closer ties to teachers, smaller class sizes, classes and vocational programs geared to the student's interests, and a culture of support and encouragement not always possible in a larger school. Approximately 70% of students finish the program, although it may take some students longer than the expected four years.

The Principal reported that the faculty encourages student involvement in school activities such as field trips, social events such as proms and "grad" night trips, community involvement and athletics. PTC is developing an athletic program. It has hired a teacher/athletic director, and applied for membership in the California Interscholastic Federation. Starting next year, PTC will be playing small local schools in soccer and basketball; teams will be open to both boys and girls.

Conclusions:

The Madera County Grand Jury found this school to be well run with a highly motivated staff.

School leadership and faculty were knowledgeable about the students and genuinely concerned for their academic and/or vocational success.

The school building is functional and demonstrates student involvement.

Recommendations:

- The API score of 539 is a major concern to the Madera County Grand Jury and all efforts to improve this score should continue.

Respondents: Written response required pursuant to PC 933 (c)

Madera County Office of Education

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Attn: Executive Director, Career and Alternative Education

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Pioneer Technical Center

Attn: Principal

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Respondents: Response optional

Madera County Board of Supervisors

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