



**ORANGE COUNTY
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August 11, 2023

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Hernandez:

The emergence of illicit fentanyl and the resultant surge in opioid poisoning deaths in Orange County have left devastating impacts on our community. Unfortunately, our youth have not been spared from these impacts. Tragic and unprecedented poisonings on school campuses have underscored the crucial role that schools play in supporting the behavioral health and social-emotional needs of young people.

Our fundamental purpose as a school system is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to thrive and succeed. To address this crisis, students need access to accurate and current information about the risks of medication misuse and fentanyl to help them make informed and healthy choices. They need the opportunity to develop and practice skills like recognizing and responding to their feelings, analyzing internal and external influences on their decisions, and resisting peer pressure. Finally, young people who are engaged in substance use or experiencing mental health concerns need a coordinated system of interventions and support services.

The Orange County Department of Education is committed to providing continued leadership and guidance to the administrators, teachers, counselors, and other personnel who are mobilizing to meet those needs. We welcome this report as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with law enforcement, public health, and community-based organizations while expanding and enhancing our collaborative partnerships. A community-wide issue calls for a community-wide response, and a united front will make us stronger and more effective.

Please see below for the responses to each Finding (2,7,8, 9, and 10) as is required in the Orange County Grand Jury report and attached cover letter dated June 14, 2023.

Finding	Response	Explanation (if required)
F2. Illicit fentanyl is a pervasive problem in Orange County.	The respondent agrees with the finding.	
F7. Orange County will benefit by establishing a chartered multi-agency Task Force to address the fentanyl crisis in Orange County.	The respondent agrees with the finding.	
F8. As long as there is a demand, producers will find ways to supply drugs. Orange County cannot law enforce its way out of the fentanyl crisis. Education, prevention, and treatment are critical to reducing demand.	The respondent agrees with the finding.	
F9. There is a need to increase public awareness and acknowledgement of the risks of illicit fentanyl.	The respondent agrees with the finding.	
F10. Some educational institutions are not participating in available educational and preventive fentanyl/drug programs.	The respondent agrees with the finding.	The respondent agrees with the finding. While the Grand Jury has determined that “some” educational institutions are not participating in available educational and preventive fentanyl/drug programs, the Orange County Department of Education and other districts are, in fact, participating in available educational and preventive fentanyl/drug programs.

Please see below for the responses to each Recommendation (1, 5, and 6) as is required in the Orange County Grand Jury report and attached cover letter dated June 14, 2023.

Recommendation	Action	Explanation
<p>R1. By January 1, 2024, the Orange County Board of Supervisors should charter a multi-agency Task Force to address the fentanyl crisis.</p>	<p>The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.</p>	<p>The recommendation has not yet been implemented, as it is directed to the Orange County Board of Supervisors and has a January 1, 2024 date for implementation. The Orange County Department of Education would participate in the “multi-agency Task Force” if invited.</p>
<p>R5. By January 1, 2024, the Orange County Department of Education should develop a model fentanyl/opioid educational program to be offered to all K-12 school districts in Orange County.</p>	<p>The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.</p>	<p>The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future. Specifically, the Orange County Department of Education is developing a health education program to address opioid and fentanyl use among students. The program will include lesson plans, family engagement resources, substance use treatment information, and guidelines for implementation. This program will be shared with all K-12 school districts in Orange County by January 1, 2024.</p>
<p>R6. By October 1, 2023, the Orange County Department of Education should promote the use of currently established and in-place fentanyl and drug-related educational programs offered by OC agencies such as the OC Health Care Agency, OC Sheriff’s Department, and non-governmental organizations to all K-12 school districts in Orange County.</p>	<p>The recommendation has been implemented.</p>	<p>The recommendation has been implemented. The Orange County Department of Education currently supports and promotes existing health education services provided by the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, Orange County Health Care Agency, and other County-funded programs. Information about these services is made available through a variety of professional networks administered by the OCDE, as well as through focused collaborative events. OCDE staff also provide individual referrals to available services when responding to school and district staff inquiries.</p>

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Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al Mijares", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Al Mijares, Ph.D.
County Superintendent of Schools
Orange County Department of Education