



TRONA: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

SUMMARY

In response to a complaint, the 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury (GJ, Grand Jury, Civil Grand Jury) decided to investigate the Trona Joint Unified School District (TJUSD, the school district, district). The district currently consists of one K-12 school. Although it is a small district, the teachers, staff, administrators and School Board are all very passionate about giving the students the best education possible. Unfortunately, there are some big hills to climb.

In 2019, Trona was devastated by two earthquakes, registering 6.4 and 7.1 respectively, that severely damaged the city and the high school, which housed students from grades 6-12. The high school was damaged to the point that several buildings have been red tagged, (see Glossary) making them uninhabitable. Fortunately, the elementary school did not have to be closed and is now being used as an elementary and high school site.

Although the high school students are still being taught at the elementary school campus, they are missing some important facilities. They no longer have science labs, or trade school classes, like wood shop or welding. They do not have their own cafeteria and the gym needs to be replaced.

For these reasons, a study was conducted to determine the feasibility of repairing the existing structures. State architectural engineers and others determined that building a new high school would be more cost-effective than trying to repair the old one. The new high school will be right sized for the population and will have all the necessary facilities required for a successful high school program. The Grand Jury's evidence showed that many in the school district agreed with this course of action. Plans have been approved and funds have been allocated. The bidding to select a contractor is currently underway.

Unfortunately, building a new high school will not solve all the challenges faced by this school district. A good school is more than a building. It encompasses motivated parents, students, dedicated teachers, staff and a collaborative school board. The 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury has found some deficiencies in these areas.

BACKGROUND

The 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury received a complaint concerning the Trona Joint Unified School District and funding for the construction of a new high school. The Grand Jury decided to interview the complainant. After the interview, the Grand Jury began an investigation into the Trona Joint Unified School District and its School Board.

The investigation uncovered the following areas of concern:

- lack of transparency of the School Board
- questions about the plans to build a new high school
- absence of trust between the community of Trona and its School Board
- lack of trust between the teachers of the Trona Joint Unified School District and its School Board
- unavailability of virtual School Board meetings
- lack of policy and procedure manuals for School District Administration and Staff
- “Vote of No Confidence” in the School Board by the Trona Teachers’ Association
- lack of adequate staff/administration for the schools
- appearance of cronyism and nepotism
- poor communication between School Board, community residents, teachers and staff
- no written or formal complaint procedure for the teachers and the community to provide feedback and receive prompt answers to their complaints
- low participation of parents and students in the community regarding school board meetings and school site council meetings
- the funding to the School District from the mining royalties is not guaranteed
- lack of properly credentialed teachers
- staff assigned to special projects for which they have not been trained

Therefore, the investigation was expanded to not just examine the financing of the building of the new high school, but to investigate these other issues. This report reflects the findings and recommendations regarding the Grand Jury investigation.

METHODOLOGY

The 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury received a complaint regarding the Trona Joint Unified School District. After subsequent interviews, the Grand Jury decided to investigate the Trona School District and its School Board.

The Grand Jury researched numerous documents including budgets, meeting agendas, meeting minutes and public documents from California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES, see Glossary). The Grand Jury read multiple reports on the building of the proposed new high school. The history of the area of Trona was researched.

The Grand Jury interviewed multiple witnesses including teachers, administrators, administration staff, community members, School Board personnel and school staff. Finally, the Grand Jury made a visit to the area of Trona and observed the Trona Schools and the site for the potential new high school.



View of Trona (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)



Searles Valley Mineral Inc. (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)

DISCUSSION

History of Trona

- Trona is an unincorporated area in the high desert of San Bernardino County, (“Special district,” see Glossary). The town takes its name from the mineral trona, abundant in the Searles Valley lakebed. Historically, (1914) Trona came into existence as workers from the nearby plant of the American Trona Company began to mine potash, borax and mineral salts from the dry lake at Searles Valley. A mineral-rich layer of salts was discovered about 100 feet beneath the lakebed surface and operations have concentrated on recovering the brine ever since.
- Trona was established as a self-contained company town wholly operated by its resident mining company to house employees. The mining company also built a library, a grocery store, a school and recreation facilities. The Trona Railway was built to provide the town with a rail connection at Searles, and the railway still operates today.
- the Trona plants are now owned by Searles Valley Minerals, Inc. based in Overland Park, Kansas, and is owned by the Indian company Nirma. It is the town’s largest employer. The company produces borax, boric acid, soda ash, salt cake and salt. As a raw material, soda ash is vital to the production of certain types of detergents and cleaning agents, types of adhesives and sealants, chemical fertilizers and dyes. Potash is a key ingredient of gun powder. (Kerr – McGee Chem. Corp. 1989 brochure, see Glossary)

- Mineral Royalties: As it operates on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) leased land, the Searles Valley Minerals, Inc. (mining company) pays royalties (money) each year to the federal and state governments. Much of the royalties cover expenses of the local school district and had been set at 6%.
- effective January 1st, 2021, to compete with global production Congress and the BLM devised a 10-year plan to cut the 6% royalties to 2%.

The intention was to:

- counter the Chinese and Turkish expansion
- encourage investment and job expansion by U.S. Industry
- increase U.S. mineral development
- give greater economic certainty to make immediate and long-term investments to strengthen the industry

The population of Trona, though once booming, has been on a steady decline since the 1970 United States Census Bureau Report (US Census). Conceived in 1914, Trona appeared for the first time in the 1920 US Census. The population was reported to be 724. By the 1970 US Census, the reported population increased to 10,065, an increase from the 1960 US Census recording of 5,698.

The beginning of the decline was set in motion by the strike between the unions and the then owners of the plant, Kerr-McGee, in March 1970. The strike lasted 150 days and by the time it concluded in July 1970, the town of Trona was severely crippled. Kerr-McGee had laid off 75% of their workforce, neighbors turned on each other, and several acts of violence had been committed, including 21 bombings of homes, businesses, and sewer lines. (Source: <https://www.trona-ca.com/trona-strike-in-1970>). By the 1980 US Census, Trona's population decreased to 4,285. The population counts recorded for each US Census thereafter continued to decrease substantially-from "Boom to Bust" in two decades.

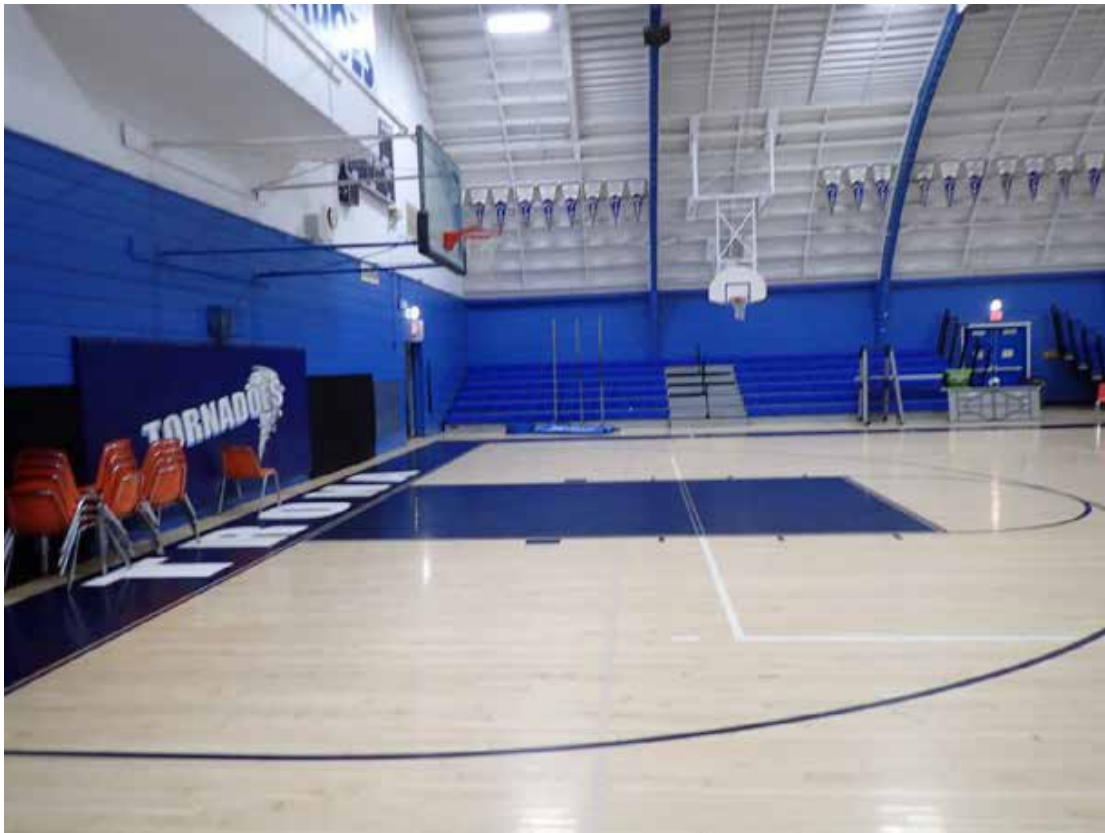
Trona's population now stands at approximately 1,600 residents. The nearest city, Ridgecrest, is 24 miles away and has a population of over 28,000 (according to Google). According to TJUSD's 2020-21 School Accountability Report Card (SARC), the entire high school student population was 128, down from the peak years when approximately 350 graduated from high school yearly.



Trona High School Office (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)



Trona High School Gym (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)



Trona High School Gym (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)

History of the Trona Joint Unified School District

The Trona School District was established on October 23, 1916. The high school was founded in 1940 in a company-provided building that was also used for recreational purposes. For the 1941-42 school year the 11th & 12th grades were added to the new building. The high school had eight teachers and a principal, who taught one class. Fourteen students graduated at the end of that school year. (www.trona-ca.com/trona-schools) The town was still using the high school for recreational and community purposes until the earthquake.

The high school has a football team, the Trona Tornados. This is the only team in the country playing on a dirt field. Evidence shows that the community congregates around its sports teams and is proud of the field. Trona's population ups and downs were reflected by the number of players on its football team. After the earthquakes in 2019, both Trona High School and the district offices were deemed unsafe for occupancy, but the football field continues to be used.



Trona High School Football Field (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)

The Earthquakes

Because the earthquakes destroyed much of Trona and the Trona Joint Unified School District, Trona was declared to be a local emergency area. Between July 5th and August 20th of 2019, responding governmental agencies and the residents dealt with the situation. On July 8th medical and mental health services were provided at Trona High School, as well as portable showers and bottled water. On July 10th 2019, a town hall meeting was held at Trona High School, and San Bernardino County opened a local assistance center. A 4.2 magnitude earthquake was registered on that date.

On July 11th water service was restored when it was piped in from Ridgecrest.

The Trona High School was the center of emergency services including distribution of water, medical supplies, information, showers and the meeting place for the town of Trona immediately after the two earthquakes. The school suffered extensive structural damage (exterior and interior walls, cracking to concrete slabs and walkways, flooring, electrical – see Cal OES brief enclosure # 1) Also, due to hazardous soil conditions (liquefaction), the school needed to be relocated. Eventually the high school was also red tagged (see Glossary) which deemed it “uninhabitable”. (Cal OES brief enclosure # 1)

The Question of Building a New High School

After the 2019 earthquakes, the Grand Jury discovered that Cal OES prepared a Damage Survey Report. The original estimate to repair the high school was over \$48 million. After surveys from the architect, engineers and geologists, it was determined that the existing structure was damaged beyond repair and the location was unacceptable for multiple reasons. The cost for new construction was approximately \$71 million. The Trona School Board requested funding for the replacement and relocation of the high school. The funding was approved in March 2023. (Cal OES 3/14/23 Brief)



New Highschool Site (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)



New Highschool Site (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)



Proposed Trona High School Artist Rendition (Photo Taken 09/05/2023)

Funding

The Trona School District previously functioned on an annual budget of roughly \$5.58 million; \$4.11 million came from the royalties. A portion of the royalties has been used for competitive salaries for teachers and to assist in recruitment to the Trona area. The average salary for teachers in Trona is \$77,782 as listed below in the school statistics.

The current royalties are being held by the school district to provide for their 25% portion of the cost to build the new high school. For the 2020-21 School Year, Trona Joint Unified School District received \$7.3 million in funds from governmental entities. TJUSD is now receiving \$1.37 million in royalties from the nearby mine, and the district is struggling to educate its 260 students.

A new high school was deemed cost effective because the cost to repair the old high school exceeded 50% of the cost estimate to build a new high school. The School District was able to obtain outside financing from governmental agencies totaling \$78.6 million of the entire estimate amount of \$80 million. The district's share of the new high school financing was estimated to be \$1.4 million.

Evidence shows that community members expressed a desire for a new high school for multiple reasons. The community members felt the high schoolers needed their own school to allow for social activities. Additionally, they noted that the high school served the purpose as a gathering place for the community.

Trona High School Statistics

Trona High School includes grades 7-12 and is located at 83600 Trona Road, in Trona CA. The total enrollment for 2021-22 was 116 students as recorded by the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and for 2020-21 the student enrollment was 128 as reported in the 2020-21 School Accountability Report Card.

The demographics are as follows:

- 49.2% White
- 33.6% Hispanic
- 10.9% Black/African American
- 0.08% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 0.08% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 4.7% Other Races

Class Size and Teacher Credentials

As of the 2022-23 school year, the average class size for Trona High School is 17 students in each subject with a graduation rate of 78.30%. The total average number of fully credential teachers is 4.1. The number of teachers without credentials and in misassignments (not teaching the subject for which they are credentialed by the state) is 4.5. The number of credential teachers assigned out of field is .01, and the number of unknown credentialed teachers (unknown meaning missing, incomplete, incorrect and/or unidentified information about the status of the credential) is 1.5 for a total of 10.3 teaching positions (The demographics, class size, graduation rate and credentialed teachers are reported in the 2020-21 SARC.)

Teacher Salary

As of the 2022-23 school year, one of the concerns the Grand Jury found is the difficulty the Trona Joint Unified School District has in hiring teachers who are willing to relocate to the Trona or Ridgecrest area. The salaries offered to teachers for Trona High School is very competitive. The average annual teacher's salary at Trona High School is \$77,782. The average annual teacher salary in California is \$71,544. (Salaries from California Department of Education report for 2020-21 page 36.)

As of the time of this report, the Grand Jury found that the Trona teachers had received a 10% raise in salary. This may have attracted more applicants for the 2023-24 school year. Evidence revealed that the High School has filled all its teaching vacancies.

State Testing Results for 2018-2022

For the school year of 2021-22, Trona High School results in English Language Arts (ELA) 37.51% of students tested met or exceeded ELA standards. For Mathematics (Math) 16.13% met or exceeded standards.

For the school year of 2020-21 Trona High School results in ELA 30.61% of students tested met or exceeded the ELA standards. For Math 10.20% met or exceeded standards.

For the school year of 2019-20 for Trona High School there are no State test results due to Covid19.

For the school year of 2018-19, Trona High School results in ELA 43.08% of students tested met or exceeded ELA standards. For Math 21.31 % met or exceeded the standards. (All test results are reported from CAASPP for each school year.)

TRONA HIGH SCHOOL TEST RESULTS 2018-2022				
School Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
ELA	43.08%	❖	30.61%	37.51%
Math	21.31%	❖	10.20%	16.13%

The scores above are the percentage of students who met or exceeded the state standards.
California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP)
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/>

❖ Indicates score was not reported due to COVID19.

School Test Result Comparisons

At first glance, the Trona High School test results appear to be very low. Two high schools were randomly selected to compare State test results. The schools selected are both in San Bernardino County and the test score comparisons are from 2021-22. The Trona State scores are compared to Bloomington High School in Colton Unified School District and Eisenhower High School in Rialto Unified School District.

Trona High School 37.51% of those tested exceeded or met the ELA standard; Math 16.13% exceeded or met the standard.

Bloomington High School 37.62% of those tested exceeded or met the ELA standard; Math 7.36% exceeded or met the standard.

Eisenhower High School 33.14% of those tested exceeded or met the ELA standard, Math 14.34% exceeded or met the standard.

COMPARISON OF HIGH SCHOOL TEST RESULTS 2021-2022			
High School	Trona HS	Bloomington HS	Eisenhower HS
ELA	31.75%	37.62%	33.14%
Math	16.13%	7.36%	14.34%
<p>The scores above are the percentage of students who met or exceeded the state standard English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics (Math).</p> <p>California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tq/ca/</p>			

After comparing two other high schools in the San Bernardino County, regardless of the demographics and number of students attending, the scores do not reveal a significant difference. It does not appear that the displacement of high school students to the elementary school affected the overall state scores.

Problems With the Trona Teachers' Association

After the earthquakes, the School Board began retaining royalty funds in anticipation of building the new high school. In the 2022-23 school year, the teachers' association and School Board engaged in contract negotiations. The association felt that some of the \$9 million accumulated in reserves should be used for teacher raises; the school board felt they should continue to retain the money in reserve in case of possible cost increases for the construction of the new high school. Eventually, the contract negotiations reached an impasse (see Glossary); the School District started the 2023-24 school year with only one high school teacher held over from the prior year. The other teachers and many of the staff either resigned or retired.

The GJ found that multiple sources did not believe that the TJUSD needed to retain \$9 million or to build a school that was the size of the proposed new building. The population of Trona, which has been declining for years, does not warrant the large size of a new high school.

Eventually the Trona Teachers' Association and the School Board reached an impasse on negotiations. Consequently, multiple teachers either resigned or retired at the end of the 2022-23 school year.

The TJUSD Teachers' Association asked for a 15% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) raise for the 2022-23 school year, and the School District offered 2%. The Teachers' Association disagreed with this offer. The bickering between the Teachers' Association and the school district seems to come out of frustration and misunderstanding. The Grand Jury learned when going into contract negotiations, TJUSD was trying to show teachers they did not have the funds to provide raises. The Teachers' Association saw there was money held in reserve, which, they believed, could go toward raises. Therefore, there was a misunderstanding because this reserve money was held to help Trona pay its portion of building a new high school.

Detention

At the high school level, there was little to no accountability for students. In the 2022-23 school year, there was no detention program at the high school level. While recognizing that detention will not solve all student behavior issues, the ability to discipline students for infractions could be helpful for deterring students from misbehaving. The Grand Jury notes, “detention, and other punitive measures, like suspensions and expulsions, can contribute to other issues, such as recidivism among students, despite harsher or longer punishments. These measures have the potential to increase apathy and defiance.” (edutopia.org)

The Grand Jury found that there is still no detention as of the date of this report.

School Site Council

TJUSD schools hold School Site Council (SSC) meetings, one for the elementary level and one for the high school level, that are poorly attended. Attendance is voluntary for parents. Perhaps one or two parents may attend, and possibly, two to three teachers. The Grand Jury would like to see the school district strengthen its SSC meetings. “California Education Code 52852 stipulates that a School Site Council is to be established at every school that participates in the Title I program (see Glossary). This team is to be comprised of the principal, teachers, other staff members, and selected parents, and community members. In high schools, students may participate as well.(<https://www.cde.ca.gov/Re/tr/cl>)

“The School Site Council looks at student data and information, identifies student needs and areas for improvement and participates in the writing of the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). The SPSA is the school’s blueprint for what will be carried out to improve school and student achievement. The SSC also monitors the plan to see that these actions have occurred, that the funding has been spent and, lastly, they evaluate these activities at the end of the school year.

Participation by teachers, staff members, administrators and community members are very important, since these selected persons participate in significant decision making that can bring positive benefits to students.” (scuds.edu)

All SSC meetings are public meetings. The Grand Jury researched and learned everyone working together can create a more positive teaching and learning atmosphere at schools.

Distrust Between the Administration, School Board and Teachers

Evidence showed that, in the past, teachers felt when they went to administration with problems, the administration failed to take any action to help. The Grand Jury also found that the elimination of certain extracurricular programs seemed to happen to teachers who had complained to administration. Additionally, administration eliminated its detention policy. The detention program was discontinued by the 2022-23 school year due to lack of space for detention to be held, and the lack of teacher coverage to oversee detention.

The Grand Jury also found that school administration seldom observed individual classrooms to verify how the teachers were teaching and if any recommendations for improvement, or positive comments, could be offered to teachers.

In 2018 there was an altercation between a student and a staff member; there were differences in the way the school board and the school staff advocated handling the situation. As a result, a member of school administration was demoted.

Lack of Communication

Findings show that the school board meetings were held in two parts: closed session and open session. The school board held the closed session of meetings at 3:30 p.m. and the open session at 6:00 p.m. and were not convenient for the teaching staff as most teachers lived in Ridgecrest, 24 miles away. Many teachers were off work at about two or three in the afternoon and a long drive at 6:00 p.m. meant a drive back to Trona within an hour or two of leaving their workday. While the board meetings were open to all community members, not all were able to attend.

Emergency (special) meetings did not require as much notice to the community, with the potential of lower attendance due to less notice. Evidence showed there were many emergency meetings held in the 2022-23 school year. Also, for school site council meetings, some parents were specifically invited, but parental participation was very low. During the Covid pandemic, school board meetings were virtual, but that was discontinued after Covid. The virtual meetings have not resumed.

Lack of Adequate and Qualified Administrative Staff

Trona is a small desert community. The population of the town is approximately 1,600 and the nearest town of 28,000 is half an hour away. Thus, Trona is limited in its hiring options. Evidence has shown that job applicants for non-educator positions are often lacking all the necessary qualifications and skillsets to perform the jobs for which they are hired. The GJ found that the school district is one of the larger employers in the area but there has been some degree of turnover in some para-professional positions.

In some cases, the person is hired to fill a position in which the previous occupant left before their replacement has been hired. There is no one with direct knowledge of what a job entails within the school district. The Grand Jury found that for multiple positions there are no manuals (such as policy, procedural or training) or materials to assist in training people filling these positions.

Thus, the new hire must figure out how to do the job without what would be considered the necessary prerequisites, any on-the-job training from the person they are replacing or any training materials. The GJ determined that some of these employees, who have been in this position, have had additional duties assigned to them. The Grand Jury found that this been a cause of stress in the working environment.

The Grand Jury discovered that there are funds to train non-educator staff. However, there is no “in-house” training specific to the school district’s procedures so the training would have to be obtained from outside vendors.

Teacher Credentialing Problems

The GJ found that the School District has used non-credentialed instructors to teach some classes it provides, which is allowed by law. However, that requires a waiver and is certainly not the best practice. The School District does not offer onsite training or classes to assist those instructors in obtaining their credentials. The Grand Jury found that there is some confusion concerning the usage of school district funds for outside training for educators. Evidence has shown there were funds available for training. However, the School District was not reimbursing some teachers for the cost of training and of classroom materials purchased.

Lack of input from the community

Evidence indicates parent attendance and participation at School Board meetings is very poor and hinders the opportunity to express concerns. Trona School Board meets on the second Thursday of each month and are generally open sessions. The meeting agendas, calendar, minutes and School Board policies are available on their website. The meetings are recorded and available to the public for viewing, by request. Virtual meetings were held during the Covid pandemic however, this method of communication was discontinued when pandemic restrictions were repealed, and in-person meetings resumed. There is no system for anonymous complaints in such a small, close-knit community.

Financial problems

Evidence supports that Trona School District's financial stability is heavily dependent on revenues received from Searle's Mining company. Evidence also shows that these revenues have been decreasing over the years, requiring legislative intervention to mitigate total loss of these funds. Furthermore, the evidence shows there are no other resources available to replace these funds in the event of total loss.

Low test scores

One of the concerns reviewed by the GJ was the low state test scores for the students at Trona High School. The potential reasons researched were the earthquakes, which caused the displacement of high school classes to the elementary school, uncredentialed teachers and lack of detention as discipline.

However, evidence revealed the test scores of high school students at Trona are not significantly lower or higher than the other high schools compared earlier. Trona High School test scores were randomly compared to Bloomington and Eisenhower High Schools. The comparisons were done for the 2021-22 school year and reported to the California Department of Education. (see School Statistics section above)

The Appearance of Nepotism

The Grand Jury found that in the small unincorporated town of Trona many of the school administration, staff and school board members have family relations. Evidence revealed many in the community and the School District do not believe a non-nepotism policy is necessary in the district. When necessary, some staff members automatically recuse themselves when dealing with a family relative. There could be, however, the appearance of favoritism to people who live outside of Trona (and especially to those considering applying for a position within the TJUSD). Several family members are on the School Board, in administration, in charge of discipline and are policy makers and manage funds within the School District. It could be perceived that those applicants may enjoy an unfair advantage and be hired just because they are related to others in the School District or on the School Board, even though possibly less qualified.

The Grand Jury found it would benefit the School District to create and implement a procedure to address the hiring and selection practices to avoid the appearance of favoritism. The procedure would clearly state the steps required to ensure the appearance of transparent hiring practices and criteria. Such a non-nepotism process would promote public trust within the community and benefit the School District, its employees, its students and encourage those outside of Trona to potentially apply for positions there.

Hope for the Future

Evidence revealed the Trona School District has many problems in need of solutions. What can the School Board and the employees do to help the district they care about and in which they are deeply invested? The Grand Jury investigation points to some suggestions:

- open communication between the teachers and the Administration needs improvement
- open communication between the Administration, School Board and parents would benefit everyone in the School District
- a plan to secure additional funding, in the event, the royalties from the Mineral Plant are reduced or eliminated
- a Policy and Procedures Manual would help the Administrative staff do their jobs more effectively
- School Board meetings, including special sessions, need to be accessible to all members of the community in virtual form, in order to increase transparency and accessibility
- Superintendent and School Board members need to observe in the classroom on a regular basis
- proper credentialing, including teachers instructing in their credentialed fields of expertise, to ensure better learning
- institute a written formal complaint process whereby teachers, students, parents and community members can voice concerns and ask questions (online also) and receive prompt answers from the Superintendent and the School Board
- a system needs to be developed to solicit input from the community, teachers, parents and students regarding all proposed major projects

If the School Board and the Administration of TJUSD want to gain trust in the eyes of the teachers and the community, consideration needs to be given to the Recommendations below.

COMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury commends the community of Trona for answering requests for interviews, documents and observations promptly.

The School Board, Administration, teachers and residents are also commended for their obvious passion towards Trona, the school district and its students. The passion shines through, and willingness to change may help the entire area and School District through these trying times.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 2023 San Bernardino County Civil Grand Jury found issues of serious concern while investigating the Trona Joint Unified School District and its School Board. Evidence shows there is much distrust in the entire School District, among the Superintendent's office, the School Board, school employees and the community it is meant to serve.

It should be noted: as of September 5, 2023, evidence revealed the communication between the community/school district staff and the Administration/School Board is beginning to improve. There were many new staff hired. These newly hired staff seem happy and motivated to communicate openly with the Administration. Trust is beginning to be restored. The Administration is again visiting classrooms.

To continue open communication and restore trust, the Grand Jury presents the following findings and recommendations:

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-1: There is no complete and comprehensive written Policy and Procedures Manual for administrative positions, causing administrative employees to not fully understand their assigned duties.</p>	<p>R-1: Create and implement a District written Policy and Procedures Manual for administrative positions in the cabinet, i.e.: Business Manager; Maintenance Director; Human Resources; Payroll, updated yearly.</p>	<p>September 30, 2024.</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>
<p>F-2: There is a lack of transparency within the district regarding special meetings and agendas.</p>	<p>R-2: Establish monthly communication between teachers, staff, School Board, and administrators: for example, an accessible newsletter; posted online for the parents and community as well.</p>	<p>June 1, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-3: TJUSD lacks a nepotism policy, which causes the potential for appearance of favoritism.</p>	<p>R-3: Write a procedure to address nepotism in the district in compliance with the California Code of Regulations Title 2, Section 86. Enforce and update the procedure annually with signed acknowledgement that the School Board/administration/staff/teachers have read and understand the policy.</p> <p>R-3a: Keep records that show School Board/administration/staff/teachers have read and understand the policy.</p>	<p>July 1, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>
<p>F-4: The School Board members, school Superintendent, teaching staff and teachers' association have differing opinions. These have not been addressed openly or managed in a transparent way, which is contributing to a lack of unity within the school district.</p>	<p>R-4: Institute monthly meetings between Superintendent/Board members, teachers' association and parents/community members (virtual also).</p>	<p>June 1, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-5: No virtually accessible board meetings</p>	<p>R-5: Re-establish a virtual option for School Board meetings.</p>	<p>June 1, 2024.</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-6: Administrative staff hiring and retention problems have resulted in some employees stretched far beyond their knowledge and capability. Some Administrative employees' needs are not being met. Stretching an employee to perform both their duties and additional responsibilities not within their job description causes employees to have additional stress.</p> <p>F-6a: Staff are not always provided adequate training for their primary job before receiving additional tasks.</p>	<p>R-6: Job description is to be revised for each position, listing required education and skill sets. If someone is hired who does not have all qualifications for the job, once on-the-job training has been completed, outside training will be considered to improve applicant's skills in areas where required.</p> <p>R-6a: No additional duties as assigned is to be performed by hires until they are fully trained and adequately performing the job to which they were hired.</p> <p>R-6b: Training manuals are to be developed by employees currently holding all staff/ non-educational positions within the School District.</p>	<p>June 1, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-7: Lack of in-person visits of classrooms by Board Members and the Superintendent means that the students and teachers do not have enough oversight and communication with the Superintendent and Board Members.</p>	<p>R-7: Frequent and documented principal or assistant principal visits to every classroom.</p> <p>R-7a: Frequent and documented Superintendent/School Board member visits to every classroom.</p>	<p>April 30, 2024.</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>
<p>F-8: Poor communication results in the appearance of lack of transparency and creates mistrust and misunderstanding among the School Board, the teachers and the community.</p>	<p>R-8: Implement a systematic method of communication, for example, a monthly grade-level newsletter, for the community, students, parents and the School Board and Superintendent. The communication is to be available in hard copy and online.</p> <p>R-8a: Regular meetings between Superintendent/Board members and parents/community members (virtual also).</p>	<p>June 1, 2024.</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-9: There is a lack of planning, (having “Plan B”), in case royalties from mining company are discontinued or greatly reduced.</p>	<p>R-9: Develop a community, teacher, Superintendent and Board strategic plan addressing the possibility of the mining company royalties stopping or being significantly reduced (explore a “Plan B”: how to fund the school district without the extra monies). Place in writing and on the website, and update annually.</p>	<p>July 1, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>
<p>F-10: The District had little feedback from the community regarding the building of the new high school.</p> <p>F10a: The current system in place does not solicit the public for input from the community as it pertains to relevant issues of importance within the School District.</p>	<p>R-10: In the future, the School Board to ensure that every high-level, relevant and important decision impacting Trona and its School District be openly and transparently discussed and input solicited by all impacted parties before a major change is made.</p>	<p>April 30, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	RESPONSES
<p>F-11: There is no formal written complaint and response procedure whereby teachers, staff, students and community members can voice their concerns and be answered quickly and effectively.</p>	<p>R-11: Implement a written complaint and response procedure. Response to be provided within two weeks from the School Board/Superintendent.</p>	<p>April 30, 2024.</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>
<p>F-12: School Site Council meetings are poorly planned, poorly attended and are not scheduled regularly.</p>	<p>R-12: Create and implement a system to let parents, students, teachers and administrators know the date of every School Site Council meeting with meetings regularly scheduled for the same time every month.</p>	<p>April 30, 2024</p>	<p>Required: Trona Joint Unified School Board</p> <p>Invited: San Bernardino County Board of Education</p>

GLOSSARY

The following Glossary was created by the Civil Grand Jury to provide context and clarification for some terms used in this report.

1. **California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP)**: The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System was established on January 1, 2014. The CAASPP System replaced the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, which became inoperative on July 1, 2013.
2. **Impasse**: a situation in which no progress is possible.
3. **Liquefaction**: conversion of soil into a fluidlike mass during an earthquake or other seismic event.
4. **Searles Valley Minerals, Inc.**: Searles Valley Minerals Inc. processes brine solutions. The Company offers products such as borax, boric acid, soda ash, and sodium sulfate. Searles Valley Minerals, Inc. operates in Trona, CA.
5. **Nepotism**: when an employer uses its influence or power to hire, transfer, or promote an applicant or employee because of a personal relationship, without regard to the qualifications/skills of the applicant.
6. **Cal Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)**: this is an agency of the state government that supervises civil defense, disaster planning and emergency medical services.
7. **Royalties**: Royalties are a legally binding payment made to an individual or company for the ongoing use of their assets, including copyrighted works, franchises, and natural resources.
8. **School Site Council (SSC)**: The School Site Council is intended to be a decision-making body that represents all stakeholders of the school community. The school principal, teachers, other school personnel, parents, and students (secondary level) make up this group. Their primary responsibility is to identify common goals and assist the leadership team in establishing a plan to achieve the goals. The key to a successful SSC depends upon a good working relationship among all members of the

Council. Each member of the Council shares their unique perspective and knowledge of the school's needs, as they affect all students, during SSC meetings.

9. **Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA)**: a document that represents a school's cycle of continuous improvement of student achievement.

10. **Special District**: Public agencies/limited purpose local government created to provide one or more specific services to a community, such as water service, sewer service, parks, fire protection and others.

REFERENCES

August 21, Cal OES provided the following link:

<https://www.oesnews.com/where-to-go-for-california-earthquake-assistance/>.

August 26, The SBA announced it would close the Trona Disaster Loan Outreach Center on August 29. For more information contact:

<https://www.sba.gov/offices/disaster/dfocw/resources/1647366>.

School Board Accountability Report Card (SARC) www.sia.us.com and [DataQuest \(CA Dept of Education\)](#)

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP)

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/>

California Department of Education-Cohort Graduation Statistics

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/acgrinfo.asp>

Definition of Soda Ash/Potash https://trona_ca.com

State Funding [EdData - District Profile - Trona Joint Unified \(ed-data.org\)](http://EdData - District Profile - Trona Joint Unified (ed-data.org))

Cal OES GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES:

<https://www.CalOES.ca.gov>.

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