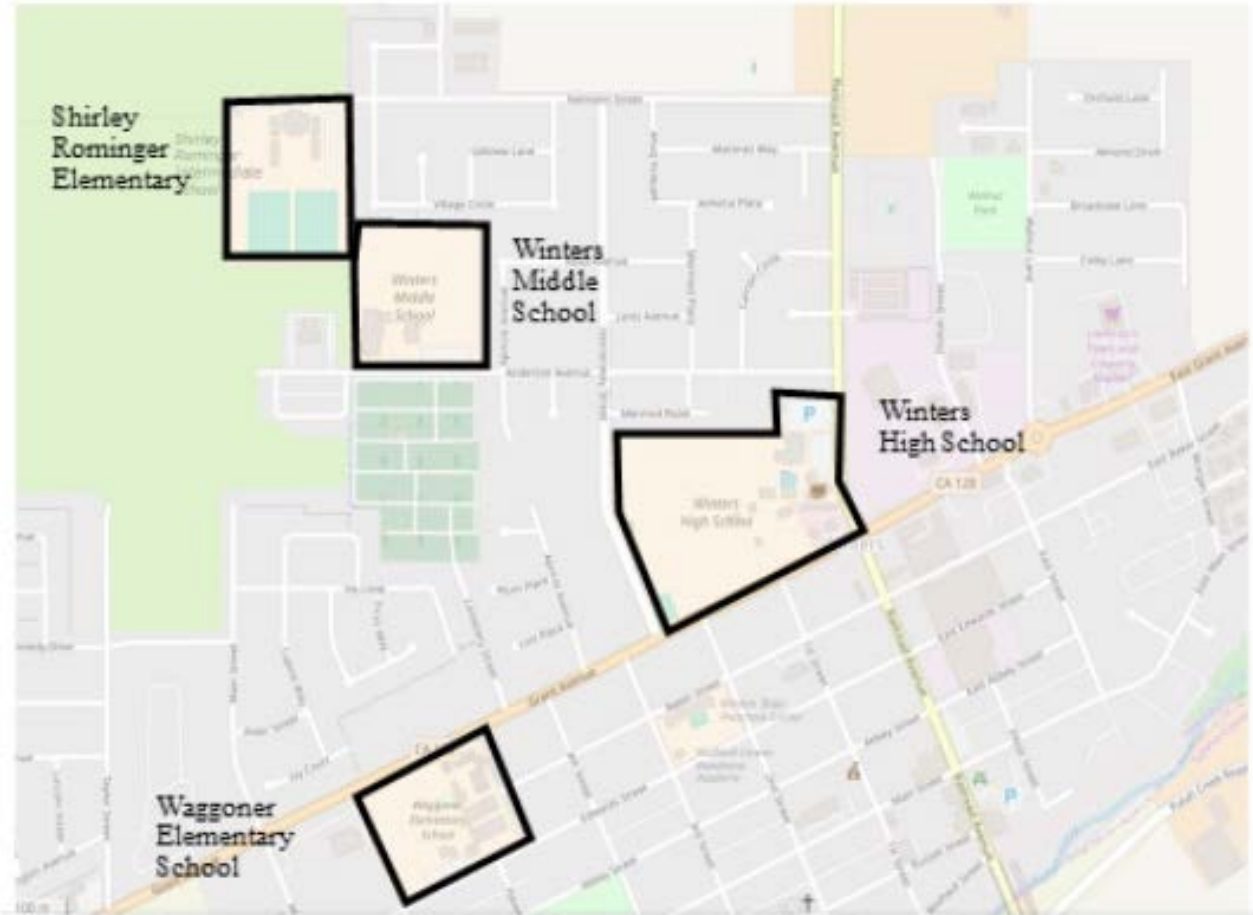


**HELP! I NEED SOMEBODY**

**GETTING AN EDUCATION:**

The Winters Joint Unified School District

*May 9, 2022*



Winters Joint Unified School District  
909 West Grant Ave, Winters, CA 95694  
Superintendent: Diana Jimenez

Grades TK-12

Enrollment: Approximately 1,550 per District website on 3.16.22

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## **SUMMARY**

This report evaluates two aspects of the Winters Joint Unified School District (district) in Winters, California:

- The district's published materials for parents/guardians describing the steps necessary to obtain legally mandated services for a disabled child and classroom accommodations or special education services
- The success of the third through fifth grade English Language Arts program at creating a literate student body

This 2021-22 Grand Jury investigation focused on the district's execution of its responsibility to produce literate students, and its responsibility to describe to parents/guardians of a struggling student not only the scope of the services to which they are legally entitled, but also the way to obtain these services. This investigation was prompted by citizen allegations that the district is not providing the legally required services to struggling students. In addition to the citizen complaint to the grand jury, in 2019 the California Department of Education produced Investigation Report Case S-0888-18/19, which found the district was out of compliance with certain aspects of its obligation to provide special education services.

This 2021-22 Yolo County Grand Jury recommends that the district improve communication with parents/guardians, specifically with respect to describing the steps required to obtain services for a disabled child. We also recommend that the district maintain a close focus on the English language arts test scores to determine whether its curriculum is producing literate students.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Winters Joint Unified School District has approximately 1,550 students and includes the following schools:

- Winters State Preschool Center
- Waggoner Elementary School (grades TK - 2)
- Shirley Rominger Intermediate School (grades 3 - 5)
- Winters Middle School (grades 6 - 8)
- Winters High School (grades 9 - 12)
- Wolfskill Career Readiness Academy (grades 9 - 12)

### A Brief Description of the District's Responsibility to Provide Services to Disabled Students

A free appropriate public education for students with disabilities is a requirement under Section 504 of Public Law 93-112, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Provisions found in Public Law 94-142 and Public Law 99-457 also relate to a school district's responsibility to provide educational services for disabled students.

A wealth of material related to the three federal laws noted above is available at the U.S. Department of Education website, the State of California Department of Education website and other print and online sources. These resources provide a detailed explanation of the laws, and specify the types of classroom accommodations or special education services school districts are required to provide. An exhaustive description of such services is beyond the scope of this report, and we collectively refer to all legally mandated services for disabled children as educational support services.

Likewise beyond the scope of this report is a description of the complex process used to determine whether a child is (1) legally disabled and (2) qualifies for coverage under any one of the applicable code sections. Eligible disabilities encompass a wide range of conditions. The district's obligation to provide educational support can range from ensuring the student has a seat at the front of the class, to creating a special education program for the severely disabled. The extent of the disability determines the services to which the child is entitled. However, determining whether a child has a legally recognized disability is the critical first step necessary to determine what, if any, additional services the district must provide. This grand jury has focused on how well the district has described to parents/guardians the steps required to obtain education support services.

### Evaluating the Success of the English Language Arts Program

The district is responsible for creating a literate student body. The Common Core State Standard Initiative, adopted by California in 2013, defines literacy through a series of English Language Arts standards, specifically:

- College and career readiness anchor standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening and language
- Reading standards for literature, informational text and foundational skills
- Writing and language standards
- Speaking and listening standards
- Language progressive skills
- Range, quality and complexity of student reading

The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress System (CAASPP) is a battery of standardized tests that California uses to assess student educational achievement and performance, and was established on January 1, 2014.

## **APPROACH**

### Evaluating the District's Guide to Guardians Attempting to Obtain Educational Support Services

The 2021-22 Grand Jury reviewed all published district materials for documentation that the district has provided a guide describing steps to obtain classroom accommodations or special education services. The jurors considered whether the information was easily accessible or whether exhaustive effort was required to obtain or understand the materials. Specifically, the jurors looked for information present in district manuals and handbooks available online or upon request. In addition to document review, several district administrators were interviewed, as well as independent educational experts.

The published district materials obtained and reviewed by the 2021-22 Grand Jury include:

- District-wide Parent's Rights Handbook 2021-2022 School Year
- Wagoner Elementary Family Handbook
- Shirley Rominger Intermediate School
  - School Plan for Student Achievement
  - 2021-22 School Year Parents Rights Handbook
- Winters Middle School 2021-22 Student Planner
- Winters High School Parent and Student Handbook 2021-22
- Yolo County Special Education Local Plan Area -Special Education Rights of Parents and Children-Notice of Procedural Safeguards
- Yolo County Office of Education 2021-2022 Annual Notification to Parents and Guardians

### Evaluating the Success of the English Language Arts Program

To evaluate the district's success in creating literate students, the 2021-22 Grand Jury reviewed the English Language Art Test scores for the student body at Shirley Rominger Intermediate School, which has 365 students in grades 3-5. We also identified that the curriculum in use is the Wonders English Language Arts Program published by McGraw-Hill. According to the McGraw-Hill website, and district staff, this program is valuable because: it enables immediate, leveled re-teaching and targeted assignments; groups students automatically to recommended individual lessons; reports results at the individual, class and district levels; and tracks progress in key literacy skills and standards.

**DISCUSSION**

Evaluating the District’s Guide to Guardians Attempting to Obtain Educational Support Services

The 2021-22 Grand Jury could find no step-by-step guide by which parents/guardians could obtain educational support services for their children.

A reference was found on page 7 of the Parent’s Rights Handbook 2021-22, which directs readers to request a Parent Handbook for Special Education. Jurors requested this document but, in lieu of the Parent Handbook for Special Education, we were provided The Yolo County Special Education Local Plan Area - Special Education Rights of Guardians and Children-Notice of Procedural Safeguards. This document provides an overview of the relevant statutes, but does not describe the steps required to obtain educational support from the district. We understand that district staff are preparing a Parent Handbook for Special Education, but we were unable to find any existing document outlining the steps required to obtain educational support services for a child.

Evaluating the Success of the English Language Arts Program

The following chart combines the results from the 2018-19 Reading Proficiency evaluation conducted as part of the English Language Arts testing program from Shirley Rominger Intermediate to California statewide averages for the same test during the 2020-21 period. At the time this report was written, more recent testing data was not available from Shirley Rominger Intermediate, necessitating comparison between different time periods. Data from Shirley Rominger Intermediate is available on the school’s website and can be found in its *School Plan for Student Achievement*. Statewide data is available at: <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/ViewReport>

Reading: Demonstrating understanding of literary and non-fictional texts						
	% Above Standard		% At or Near Standard		% Below Standard	
	District 2018-19	CA Avg 2020-21	District 2018-19	CA Avg 2020-21	District 2018-19	CA Avg 2020-21
<b>Grade 3</b>	21.26	16.67	42.52	55.55	36.22	27.89
<b>Grade 4</b>	12.24	17.19	50.00	60.04	37.76	22.37
<b>Grade 5</b>	25.25	18.19	44.44	59.66	30.30	22.15

“Conclusions based on this data” from the 2018-19 School Plan for Student Achievement:

- Due to COVID we did not have CAASPP testing in 2020 and 2021.
- 40% of our students met or exceeded the standard in English Language Arts on the CAASPP in 2018-2019. This was a 2% decrease from 2017-2018.
- We had a 98.2% participation rate in English Language Arts on the CAASPP in 2018-2019.

The data provided in the School Plan for Student Achievement and included above for reference states that no more than 37.76% of the children tested below the reading standard. However, the analysis at the end of the report indicates that 40% of the children did meet the standard. This data reporting and data analysis is incongruent and confusing.

Based on Note 2 above, it appears that there are significant literacy issues at Shirley Rominger Intermediate. An ambiguous number of students (the exact number is impossible to determine with the currently available data) do not meet the English Language Arts standard, and thus are not literate.

## **FINDINGS**

- F-1 The district does not have a published step-by-step guide for parents/guardians seeking educational support services for struggling students, making it difficult for parents/guardians to advocate for a child to obtain the support to which they are legally entitled.
- F-2 The most recently available data from the 2018-19 literacy testing at Shirley Rominger Intermediate and the comments in the School Plan for Student Achievement’s Note 2, indicate the district struggles with literacy with their third through fifth grade students.
- F-3 The district has been unable to clarify, in publicly available data, the percentage of students who are underperforming in literacy skills.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- R-1 The district create a Parent Handbook for Special Education with the goal of providing a transparent process for parents/guardians and district staff to follow. Provide this document to the grand jury by October 1, 2022, and to families enrolled in the district.
- R-2 The district provide a graphic in a publicly accessible office in each school which clearly outlines the steps required to (a) evaluate a child for disabilities and (b) obtain special education services or classroom accommodations for a child by October 1, 2022.

- R-3 The district complete the CAASPP testing for the 2021-22 school year for grades three-five and report these literacy scores to the Grand Jury by October 1, 2022. Additionally, this grand jury recommends an annual reporting of these literacy scores to grand juries through the 2024-25 school year.
- R-4 The district review the English Language Arts student performance data provided in the School Plan for Student Achievement to ensure the information is clear to a lay public and mathematically accurate.

### **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following individuals:

District Superintendent Diana Jimenez Findings F-1, F-2, F-3 and Recommendations R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4.

From the following governing bodies:

Board of Trustees, Winters Joint Unified School District Findings F-1, F-2, F-3 and Recommendations R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4.