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BY: _____

August 10, 2011

Hon. Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
P.O. Box 5369
Santa Maria, California 93456-5369

Hon. Joni Gray, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
County Administration Building
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Dear Judge Garcia and Supervisor Gray:

This is the Buellton Union School District's response to the Grand Jury's requests for responses to its report, "Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County? Truancy is Troubling...for Everyone."

This response (see attachment) has been approved by the governing board of the Buellton Union School District as part of its regularly scheduled board meeting on August 10, 2011. As such, this letter is signed by the Superintendent and the President of the Board as representatives of the local agency. Additionally, a CD-ROM with this letter in PDF format is attached, as requested by the Grand Jury.

Sincerely,

Tom Cooper
Superintendent

Joyce A. Azevedo
President, Board of Education

"Where Staff, Students and Community Strive for Excellence in Education."

Buellton Union School District
Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations⁷
“Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County?”

Finding 1

The only truancy programs in use today in the County of Santa Barbara are those independently developed and managed by individual districts or schools.

Recommendation 1c

That the Santa Barbara County Education Office in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney, Santa Barbara County elementary, secondary and unified school districts, immediately develop a countywide program to reduce truancy, by reinstating the School Attendance Review Boards.

Response

The Buellton Union School District agrees with this finding but would also request the participation of the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department through the use of their community resource officers as an active member of the SARB in their respective jurisdiction.

Recommendation 1d

That the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney, working with the Santa Barbara County Education Office, and the Santa Barbara County school districts, implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

The Buellton Union School District agrees with this finding as long as the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department participates on each SARB board and has the ability to issue citations to students or parents for excessive truancy.

Finding 2

There currently is no federal or state funding for truancy programs.

Recommendation 2b

That each Santa Barbara County school district provide in its budget a proportional share, based on the number of students, to the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney to assist in funding an enforceable truancy program for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

- a. The Buellton Union School District disagrees with this recommendation for the following reasons:
 - i. When compared to state cuts across all sectors, public schools in California have taken a disproportionate share of

funding reductions to Revenue Limit and categorical programs since 2008.

- ii. The Board of Supervisors asked Santa Barbara County schools to contribute a Santa Barbara County District Attorney truancy intervention position in the 2008-2009 school year. School districts overwhelmingly declined the request, citing state-caused financial cuts.
 - iii. Funding for public schools in California is worse than it was in 2008-2009, as evidenced by the total number of school districts filing "qualified" or "negative" certifications in the current year. For example, there was an increase in schools filing "qualified" or "negative" of 30% from the first interim to the second interim in 2010-2011 (School Services of California, June 14, 2011). The schools in Santa Barbara County are also operating at critically low funding levels, resulting in severe effects to their primary mission: educating students. The recommendation to have schools divert funding away from already weakened classrooms is not reasonable at this time.
 - iv. This recommendation is worthy of further study to determine how "proportional share" of school district contributions would be defined. Specifically, the differences between urban, suburban and rural school districts needs to be determined because they each have unique needs regarding family income levels, home-to-school transportation issues, and environmental factors that affect student attendance. Further, differences between elementary and secondary school districts also need to be identified before an appropriate "proportional share" can be applied to Santa Barbara County Schools.
 - v. Alternative methods of generating income must be explored such as significant fines for truancy citations issued by the SARB.
- b. The implementation of this recommendation when we don't know the costs is not reasonable at this time.