



## ***Los Olivos School District***

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### **Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations “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.

#### **Response**

The Los Olivos School District agrees with this finding. The District currently sends letters to parents of students with unexcused absences and excessive tardies. The letters escalate depending upon the severity of the situation; however, when the countywide truancy program was dismantled in 2008-09, these letters lost a good portion of their clout in the absence of consequences beyond District sanctions.

#### **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**

This recommendation requires further analysis. Is the Grand Jury suggesting that reinstating the School Attendance Review Boards is the complete solution for “immediately developing a countywide program to reduce truancy”? Will the program be run exactly as it was in the past, or do changes need to be made? Specifically, who will be the overseeing agency, who will bear responsibility and accountability for implementation? What will be the role of the Probation Department? The Los Olivos School District believes that it is important to recognize that the previous SARBs were ineffective without the direct support of the District Attorney’s office and the Probation Department. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the Los Olivos School District.

#### **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**

This recommendation requires further analysis before full implementation. A clear plan of action regarding a proposed “truancy enforcement” program needs to be articulated, including the corresponding levels of accountability at each level (i.e. District Attorney, SBCEO, school district, and family). Additionally, cost estimates and budgetary decisions need to be firmly identified and adopted as part of the action plan before implementation of a “truancy enforcement” program countywide. Without this crucial information, any new enforcement plan will cause confusion and ultimately fail. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the Los Olivos School District.

### **Finding 2**

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

### **Response**

The Los Olivos School District agrees with this finding.

### **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**

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.

The Board of Supervisors asked Santa Barbara County schools to contribute a Santa Barbara County District Attorney truancy intervention position in the 2008-09 school year. School districts overwhelmingly declined the request, citing state-caused financial cuts.

At the present time, funding for public school in California is worse than it was in 2008-09, 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 2010-11 (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.

This recommendation is worthy of further study to determine exactly how “proportional share” of school district contributions would be defined. Specifically, the differences between urban, suburban, and rural school districts needs to be determined since each has unique needs regarding family income levels, home-to-school transportation issues, and environmental factors that affect student attendance. Further, differences between

elementary and secondary districts need to be identified before an appropriate “proportional share” can be assigned to Santa Barbara County schools.

This recommendation will not be implemented at this time because it is not reasonable to expect that underfunded school districts will be capable of providing funds previously provided by federal and state agencies.

Respectfully submitted,

Marsha Filbin  
Superintendent