



# Santa Barbara County Education Office

4400 Cathedral Oaks Rd, PO Box 6307, Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307  
Telephone: (805) 964-4711 • FAX: (805) 964-4712 • [sbceo.org](http://sbceo.org)

Susan C. Salcido, Superintendent of Schools

---

August 21, 2020

The Honorable Michael Carrozzo  
110 Anacapa Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Santa Barbara County Grand Jury  
[sbcgrandjury@sbcgj.org](mailto:sbcgrandjury@sbcgj.org)

**Subject: Response to the 2019-2020 Grand Jury Report: “Juveniles in Gangs in Santa Barbara County”**

Dear Judge Carrozzo and Members of the Grand Jury:

In response to your report, findings and recommendations, please see below.

Finding 4: Students in middle schools and elementary schools are increasingly recruited into gangs. *Disagree partially – see explanation below.*

The Grand Jury report provides evidence that some middle school students are involved in gangs, however, as stated within the report, there is very limited data available and referenced to demonstrate the numbers are *increasing* for elementary and middle school students.

On page 3, the Grand Jury report states that “juvenile gang membership in Santa Barbara County is hard to calculate,” and cites that 4.6% of boys and 3.5% of girls in 7<sup>th</sup> grade reported gang affiliation in Santa Barbara County (2017 data, [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org)). The report goes on to state that these “low percentages indicate a small subset of youth in the county.”

In addition to the data reported by the Grand Jury, the 2016-2017 Santa Barbara County California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) data shows that 3% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students reported any gang affiliation. Similarly, the 2018-2019 CHKS shows 4% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in Santa Barbara County noted a gang affiliation. Anecdotally, we understand that some students in elementary grades communicate, associate, and are involved with gang members and/or gang activities, however, current data does not support that elementary and middle school students are *increasingly* recruited into gangs.

Recommendation 4: Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Education assist elementary and middle schools in instituting and renewing programs that dissuade students from gang membership and provide alternatives. *Has been implemented, with a brief summary of the implementation actions taken.*

Youth involvement in gangs occurs for a variety of complex reasons that can include social, generational, economic, and familial. Schools aim to provide safe, rewarding, inclusive and affirming educational environments to engage all youth in learning, ensure high student attendance, and motivate high levels of student achievement. Some of the most effective ways to prevent youth from joining gangs are to strengthen family and school relationships, provide community engagement opportunities, and train teachers and parents in supporting all students. Research suggests three distinct strategies for early intervention: first supporting youth, then the family, and finally the school and community.<sup>1</sup> Often, schools approach these strategies -- not by adopting or implementing a singular curriculum -- but by providing a multi-tiered system of support and wrap-around services that are tailored for at-risk youth, support and strengthen families, and engage schools and communities in inclusive, affirming, engaging practices.

In California, each school district has local decision-making authority for its curriculum, program implementation, budget, and board policies. Although governed separately and locally, districts in Santa Barbara County regularly collaborate and discuss strategies, preventions and interventions based on grade levels, geography, demographics, and common issues affecting students countywide.

Each district in Santa Barbara County implements supports for students that recognize individual needs for students academically, socially and emotionally. Some of the supports in school include Lion's Quest and Second Step, two evidence-based programs that address social-emotional learning in young children. These programs teach students how to identify their emotions, manage relationships and social conflicts, and they provide drug and bullying prevention strategies. And, for older youth, some schools provide Reconnecting Youth, a program that teaches students about decision-making, personal control and interpersonal communication. Also, many districts have licensed Marriage Family Therapists on campuses to provide individualized counseling and mental health services for youth.

Schools throughout Santa Barbara County partner with several agencies to support youth success. Districts participate in the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) which convenes community partners, including the Santa Barbara County Probation Department, the Sheriff's Department, and local jurisdictions to discuss and provide actionable supports for youth and the Juvenile Justice System. Districts work with external agencies like the Family Services

---

<sup>1</sup> Gang Prevention: An Overview of Research and Programs;  
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/231116.pdf>

Agency (FSA) and Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley, which focus on supporting and educating the entire family by offering parenting classes and coaching, drug and alcohol prevention, and youth mentor programs. Additionally, some districts engage with the Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (CADA) to operate a teen court for 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students both in north and south county. This is a representative sampling of the types of activities districts are engaging in across the county.

We appreciate the Grand Jury's concern for the health, safety and well-being of our 70,000 students and our community. Santa Barbara County schools are deeply committed to supporting all students and particularly those who are at-risk. We will continue to provide elementary and secondary schools and districts with trainings, professional learning, and research-based approaches to serve all students, including those affiliated with gangs. We appreciate the partnership with school districts, local agencies and non-profit organizations as we serve students at-risk and provide supports to families and school communities.

Sincerely,



Dr. Susan Salcido  
Santa Barbara County  
Superintendent of Schools

SS:bb