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HILDA MALDONADO
Superintendent

November 10, 2021

To: Presiding Judge Gustavo Lavayern
312 E. Cook St.
Santa Maria, CA 93454

Pamela Olsen
Foreperson
Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
sbcgj@sbcourts.org

From: Hilda Maldonado, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Santa Barbara Unified School District
720 Santa Barbara St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: 2021 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report on Remote Learning During COVID-19

On behalf of the Santa Barbara Unified School District, I have reviewed the report on “Remote Learning During COVID-19” developed by the 2021 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury and submit the following responses as requested in Foreperson Olsen’s communication of November 8, 2021.

Finding 1

In-person learning is more effective than remote learning both academically and emotionally.

SBUSD response: Agree. Although, some families and students prefer remote instruction. As such, we have established an enhanced independent study program in grades TK-12 in 2021-2022 that incorporates individualized instruction as per Assembly Bill 130.

Finding 2

For student achievement, especially for low performing students, in-person learning in small classes or small groups is preferable to larger classrooms.

SBUSD response: Agree.

Finding 3

Remote learning exposed the importance of outreach efforts to provide coaching to parents on creating a positive home learning environment.

SBUSD response: Agree. As such we increased our language access capacity, switched to webinar parent information sessions, issued hotspots, and added a Family engagement Hotline.

Finding 4

Santa Barbara County school districts did not use one common test throughout Santa Barbara County, making it impossible to compare countywide testing results.

SBUSD response: Agree. For summative testing at the conclusion of the 2020-21 school year, we administered the Renaissance Learning Star Reading and Math assessments to students in grades 1-12 and the California Alternative Assessment (CAA) for students with severe disabilities. We anticipate a return to completing the standard California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science in the 2021-2022 school year.

Recommendation 4

That the Santa Barbara County school districts and the Santa Barbara County Education Office work together to develop a common summative testing program to be adopted for all Santa Barbara County school districts for the 2022-23 school year.

SBUSD response: Will be implemented. By 2021-2022 we expect that all Santa Barbara County school districts will have resumed regular administration of California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) tests in English Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 3-8 and 11.

Finding 5

Students with the greatest learning loss will require a concentrated effort to bring them up to Federal and State grade level standards.

SBUSD response: Agree. As such, we offered a robust summer school program, offered targeted professional learning and developed our Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), Expanded Learning Opportunity Plan (ELO), and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief III (ESSER III) Plan to address learning loss.

Recommendation 5

That Santa Barbara County Schools outline their plans to attain Federal and State grade level standards for math and English language arts.

SBUSD response: Has been implemented. Goal 1 (*Prepare students for college and career by providing a meaningful, engaging, responsive, and individualized education.*) of the Santa Barbara Unified School District Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) is to provide students high quality instruction that maximizes student achievement, including student accomplishment of English/language arts and mathematics standards. All of Santa Barbara Unified School Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) documents have goals to improve student achievement in English/language arts and mathematics, with the goal of all students achieving proficiency. Goal 2 (*Create and sustain safe and affirming learning environments, ensuring our students and families feel valued, respected, and connected to our schools.*) of all Santa Barbara Unified Schools' SPSAs is to improve student achievement in mathematics, with the goal of all students achieving proficiency. The LCAPs and SPSAs contain detailed action plans to bring about improved student achievement.

Finding 6

As the 2020-21 school year wore on, remote learning and teaching techniques and students' computer skills improved.

SBUSD response: Agree.

Finding 7

Federal and State COVID relief funds cannot be counted on indefinitely.

SBUSD response: Agree.

Finding 8

Community organizations provided critical assistance to the Santa Barbara County school districts by expanding their efforts to bridge the learning gap between the home environment and school.

SBUSD response: Agree.

Recommendation 8

That each Santa Barbara County school district develop plans by the start of the 2022-23 school year to encourage community organizations to continue to provide critical academic and emotional support.

SBUSD response: Has been implemented. Our Executive Director of Family Engagement and School Partnerships works with many nonprofit organizations to provide support to our students. For example, we have partnerships with community organizations CALM and FSA to provide counseling for our students. During the pandemic, we partnered with various community organizations for remote learning pod support and for summer school extended learning opportunities.

Finding 9

Internet services were critical to remote learning and, in most cases, Santa Barbara County school districts filled the gap for homes that did not have them.

SBUSD response: Agree. Families with needs were provided additional hot spots to support students. Through our partnership with Santa Barbara Education Foundation we raised funds to help low income families pay for internet services.

Recommendation 9

That each Santa Barbara County school district maintain adequate internet services for all students if distance learning or an emergency should again require remote learning.

SBUSD response: Has been implemented. We annually survey families to determine those with and without home Internet access, provide support to families to access low-cost Internet services, and provide mobile hotspots to families for whom traditional home Internet is not an option. We are partnering with the Santa Barbara County Education Office and community organizations to perform ongoing outreach to families without home

Internet access to connect them to the resources we provide. The Santa Barbara Education Foundation has also assisted our families by directly reimbursing low-income families for some of the cost of their home Internet bills.

Sincerely and respectfully submitted,

Hilda Maldonado

Hilda Maldonado, Ed. D.
Superintendent
Santa Barbara Unified School District