



Vista Del Mar Union School District

Vista de Las Cruces School
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November 23, 2021

The Honorable Judge Gustavo Lavayen
Presiding Judge
Grand Jury, Santa Barbara County
312 East Cook Street
Santa Maria, California 93454

Mrs. Pamela Olsen
Foreperson
2021 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
sbcgj@sbcourts.org

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

Dear Honorable Judge Lavayen:

The Vista Del Mar Union School District (hereinafter, "Vista Del Mar") has formally received your Report entitled "Remote Learning During COVID-19". On behalf of Vista Del Mar Governing Board and the District administrative team, we appreciate your thoughtful review and analysis of the challenges faced by public school districts in Santa Barbara County as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Governor Newsom's various orders affecting school district operations. Never before have public schools been asked to make so many changes, modifications and adjustments to provide a continuous learning experience for our public and private school children. The constantly changing recommendations, guidance and orders added an unprecedented level of uncertainty and stress to our teachers, educational staff and administrative teams.

Your Report identifies many of the issues that we as educators have spent countless hours evaluating and developing plans and strategies. Your Report also thoughtfully identifies some of the positive outcomes resulting from the tireless efforts of educators to ensure continuous instruction and learning.

Per your instructions and pursuant to Sections 933 and 933.05 of the California Penal Code, I am, on behalf of the Vista Del Mar, providing you with the following responses to the enumerated findings and recommendations in your report:

Finding 1

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Vista Del Mar believes that In-Person learning is far superior to distance learning or independent study. Vista Del Mar returned to a five-day per week In-Person instruction model on Monday, March 15, 2021.

Vista Del Mar has been a strong advocate locally and at the State level for continuous in-person instruction throughout the Pandemic. The District has been opposed to school closures. The District has also strictly complied with the guidance from the CDC, the California Department of Public Health and the Santa Barbara County Department of Public Health. The District is pleased to report that as of the date of this response, there have been no known cases of transmission of COVID-19 on campus.

With this said, we recognize that there are a number of high achieving students who perform well in remote learning. These students are usually self-motivated. Notwithstanding their ability to perform in a remote setting, these students nevertheless require social interaction and social and emotional school support.

Finding 2

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Vista Del Mar's Local Control & Accountability Plan (LCAP or Strategic Plan) places a high priority on individualized instruction. The District believes that both low performing students and high performing students benefit from smaller class size. Small class size provides the teacher with the ability to individualize instruction to the specific needs of each student.

The District maintains an average class size ratio of 5.6 students to one teacher. During the Pandemic, the District maintained a small class size at 7.0.

Finding 3

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Certificated Teachers have always stressed the importance of providing a positive learning environment at home. Remote learning, particularly in the instance of multiple siblings attempting to engage simultaneously, presented numerous challenges to student learning, placing added burdens on the teaching staff to effectively work with students remotely. This was further complicated by households where parents were also working remotely or simply absent during the remote learning experience for younger children. The various and numerous challenges faced by teachers and schools trying to implement an effective remote learning experience has stretched our abilities to provide as robust as possible learning environment.

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.

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Disagree, Partially

The State of California requires all school districts to assess all third grade through eighth grade and eleventh grade students using the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) test in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. This is a universally applied summative assessment. Each local school district, based on local preferences, has the option of implementing additional formative and summative assessment tools. Notwithstanding the State's waiver of the CAASPP in 2019-2020, Vista Del Mar opted to have all of its students assessed using the CAASPP instrument. 2020-2021, the State gave school districts the option to either administer the STAR, the CAASPP or the NWEA Assessment instruments. Vista Del Mar voluntarily administered the CAASPP assessments.

The District would strongly oppose any effort to add yet another set of County assessments on those already mandated by the State or those that are optional under principles of local control.

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 2022-2023 school year.

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Has been implemented.

See explanation provided above in response to Finding 4.

Finding 5

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Recommendation 5

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Has been implemented.

The Vista Del Mar respectfully disagrees with this recommendation in so far as the recommendation fails to recognize the various levels of planning that already occur within public school districts. In addition to the comprehensive Local Control & Accountability Planning that takes place each year, school districts have been asked to develop in excess of ten additional planning instruments each tied to the various Pandemic related funding allocations and grants. The plans all require school districts to identify efforts to mitigate learning loss and attain Federal and State grade level standards in all core subject areas. Requiring yet another level of planning would not further this effort and serves only to distract educators from focusing on mitigating the learning losses.

Vista Del Mar experienced no learning loss during the pandemic. The District experienced growth in all areas. The District has already incorporated plans for maintaining grade level standards across all grades in its LCAP. No additional planning is required at this time.

Finding 6

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Finding 7

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Recommendation 7

That the Santa Barbara County Education Office scheduled a series of meetings prior to the 2022-2023 school year with Santa Barbara County school districts to establish spending guidelines and review budgets' post COVID relief funds to ensure that mitigation efforts continue.

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Will not be implemented.

Vista Del Mar respectfully disagrees with this recommendation. This is outside of the scope of authority of county offices of education and would require legislative action. California public schools are run by locally elected governing boards. Those boards are charged with authority and responsibility of setting locally developed policies, goals and objectives. Furthermore, with each grant there is oversight and reporting obligations to the State and Federal agencies responsible for each grant. The Santa Barbara County Education Office has been reviewing some COVID related plans and has been providing school districts with feedback. No additional oversight is required or desired.

Finding 8

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

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

Recommendation 8

That each Santa Barbara County school district develop plans by the start of the 2022-2023 school year to encourage community organizations to continue to provide critical academic and emotional support.

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Will not be implemented.

Vista Del Mar is a one-school school district that simply does not have the staff to dedicate to the various additional planning activities recommended in the 2021 Grand Jury Report. The District is aware of the various activities of several organizations throughout

the County. However, Vista Del Mar received support directly from the community and a handful of community organizations focused on certain unique needs of our school and our students. The District does not need an additional plan to plan for, or access, this community support. Each District should have the option of incorporating these elements into their LCAP, if needed. Furthermore, Vista Del Mar has included these elements in its Remote Learning Plan and its Re-Entry to School Plan.

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.

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Agree

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.

Vista Del Mar Union School District Response: Has been implemented.

The District has confirmed and will continue to confirm that each student has access to internet services at home. Furthermore, the District has an adequate supply of computers, iPads, and hot spots to allow each student to take home a computing device for remote learning, if required.

Again, the Vista Del Mar Union School District thanks the 2021 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury for its thoughtful work in compiling the report on “Remote Learning During COVID-19”.

Sincerely,



Lois M. Peterson, Ed.D.
Superintendent/Principal
Vista Del Mar Union School District