

Pam Rennick
Superintendent/Principal

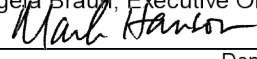
BALLARD SCHOOL DISTRICT

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GOVERNING BOARD:
Aniesa Ballinger
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July 16, 2026

The Honorable Patricia Kelly
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

FILED
SUPERIOR COURT of CALIFORNIA
COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA
07/16/2026
Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY 
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio, Foreperson
Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
sbcgj@sbcourts.org

Re: Ballard School District Response to the 2025-26 Grand Jury Report: "Gangs of Santa Barbara County: Should the Schools Do More to Address Them?"

Dear Judge Kelly, Foreperson Mezzetta de Cossio, and Members of the Grand Jury:

The Board of Trustees and administration at Ballard School District appreciate the opportunity to review and provide our feedback on this report. Protecting our young students and ensuring they have a positive, safe space to learn is our absolute priority. Before addressing the specific findings and recommendations, we must highlight a crucial piece of geographical and community context that directly shapes our responses: Rural vs. Urban Realities: Ballard School is a tiny, rural elementary school serving 104 students in a close-knit valley community. We have absolutely no history, presence, or indicators of local criminal street gang activity on or around our campus. While we recognize that larger, urban school districts in areas like downtown Santa Maria or Lompoc face complex youth gang recruitment challenges, applying those same heavy, resource-intensive mandates to a small rural school with a single administrator is an inefficient use of public education funds.

Following California Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Ballard School District responds as follows to the relevant items identified in the transmittal:

Responses to Findings

Finding 1: Criminal street gang activity in Santa Barbara County is a recurring concern that can affect youth, schools, and the community as a whole. Response:

Disagree partially.

While we understand and agree that youth gang activity is a serious recurring problem for certain communities within Santa Barbara County, it does not affect all schools

equally. It is not an issue, threat, or factor within the Ballard School District or our local rural community.

Finding 2: Most County schools are engaged in positive efforts to promote good learning environments for all their students.

Response: Agree.

Ballard School works to build a welcoming, positive, and high-trust learning climate where every student is known personally by name and feels a strong sense of belonging.

Finding 3: There are gaps in student protection, and measures that the Grand Jury suggests would further advance the well-being of County youth and the broader community.

Response: Disagree partially.

While there may be safety gaps in larger urban districts that require technical tip lines or gang-focused interventions, our small rural school does not have these gaps. Our student protection is maximized through a highly visible staff, personal adult-student relationships, and an actively engaged parent community.

Finding 5: Not all schools have online and physical anonymous tip-lines.

Response: Disagree partially.

While it is technically true that not every campus has these tools, an anonymous physical box or online tip application is not developmentally appropriate or useful for a 104-student elementary school (ages 4 to 12). In our small community, safety concerns are successfully caught because our students and parents talk directly and openly with our principal and teachers.

Finding 6: Gang attempts to groom and recruit new members can happen at relatively young ages, even at the elementary school level.

Response: Disagree partially.

While law enforcement data may show this occurring in specific high-density urban areas of the county, there is absolutely no evidence or history of gang grooming or recruitment attempts anywhere near our rural elementary student population.

Finding 7: Utilizing mentoring processes is especially valuable for the small number of at-risk students.

Response: Agree.

We strongly agree that personal mentorship and close adult guidance are vital for any student showing academic or behavioral risks. In our small school environment, this mentoring happens naturally and daily through our small class sizes, attentive teaching staff, and direct administrative support.

Responses to Recommendations

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards increase staff presence in areas where students congregate before, during breaks, and after school.

Response: Has been implemented.

Active, face-to-face adult supervision is already a core part of our daily school routine. Our staff is strategically positioned to monitor all student play areas, lunch spaces, and pick-up/drop-off zones before school, during recesses, and immediately after dismissal.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards implement more afterschool and extra-curricular programs.

Response: Has been implemented.

Despite our small size, Ballard School actively provides and supports enrichment activities and after-school opportunities to keep our students constructively engaged, connected, and safe beyond regular school hours.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards create programs and engage outside non-profits to help dissuade students from joining gangs.

Response: Will not be implemented.

Because there is a complete absence of gang activity and zero threat of gang recruitment in our rural community, dedicating our limited instructional time and funds to gang-prevention programs or specialized non-profits is unnecessary. We will continue to focus our resources on proactive character education, kindness initiatives, and general social-emotional development which naturally steers children toward positive life choices.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards establish online and physical anonymous tip-lines.

Response: Will not be implemented.

Setting up anonymous online forms or physical drop boxes is not suitable for a small elementary school serving young children. Digital reporting tools at this age group frequently lead to accidental behavioral misuse or unnecessary anxiety. In a small, high-trust school of 104 students, safety is maintained because kids and parents speak directly to our principal and teachers when something is wrong.

Recommendation 3: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards utilize mentoring processes, especially for the small number of at-risk students.

Response: Has been implemented.

Because our school is so small, we are able to easily identify any student who needs extra emotional or academic help. Our close-knit teaching team and administration provide direct, personalized attention and mentoring to ensure no child slips through the cracks.

The Ballard School District remains completely dedicated to providing a safe, joyful environment for our elementary students. We continue to stress that a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach to countywide reporting fails to recognize the vastly different realities between large city schools and small rural schools. We assert our local school board's role to focus our limited budget where it directly impacts the actual needs of our 104 students.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Rennick Superintendent/Principal on behalf of The Board of Trustees
Ballard School District