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BALLARD SCHOOL DISTRICT

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GOVERNING BOARD:
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July 16, 2026

The Honorable Patricia Kelly
Santa Barbara County Superior Court 1
100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

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: "Preparing for the Unthinkable"

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

The Board of Trustees and Ballard School District are pleased to provide our feedback on the 2025-2026 Grand Jury Report. Keeping our students safe, secure, and emotionally healthy is the most important thing we do every day. Before diving into our official responses to your specific findings and recommendations, we want to share a key piece of context that shapes how we look at this report: Many of the expensive security upgrades suggested in this report come with no funding. For a single-school district like ours with just 104 students, spending our limited budget on heavy, secondary-school style security hardware would mean making painful cuts to classroom learning and mental health support. We firmly believe that close-knit relationships and a positive school climate are what truly keep our campus safe.

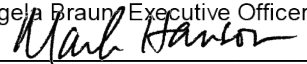
As required by California Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Ballard School District provides the following responses:

Responses to Findings

Finding 1: The Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) provides County school districts training in identifying pathways to targeted violence, although attendance by employees of the various Santa Barbara County school districts in the SBCEO's School Safety Symposium is limited.

Response: Disagree partially.

While we agree that SBCEO hosts an excellent annual safety symposium, this finding doesn't account for how tough it is for a tiny school staff to attend all-day events. We do

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Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY 
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

everything we can within our small staffing limits to ensure our leadership participates and brings those vital safety practices directly back to our campus team.

Finding 2: Santa Barbara County school districts are compliant in creating Comprehensive School Safety Plans for their schools, but some staff require more information and training on safety protocols.

Response: Agree.

We are fully compliant with California Education Code Sections 32280-32289.6. Our Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) is updated and approved by our Board of Trustees every single year, and we make refreshing our staff on safety protocols a continuous focus.

Finding 3: While many Santa Barbara County school districts have a watch, listen, and report culture for enhancement of threat detection in their schools, not all schools have anonymous pathways for reporting threats or potential threats online or on campus.

Response: Disagree partially.

An open culture where people speak up is incredibly important, but a digital reporting app or anonymous box is not the right fit for a small elementary school. With only 104 young children, we find that the best way to catch potential threats is through the close, trusting bonds our kids have with our teachers and staff, rather than online tools built for older teenagers.

Finding 4: School Resource Officers or Deputies are valuable in preventing or addressing potentially dangerous situations on campus, but many schools do not employ them.

Response: Disagree partially.

Law enforcement officers are wonderful assets for high schools and middle schools, but we have an exceptional safety record with zero on-campus crime. Stationing a full-time deputy at our small elementary school would be an unnecessary use of public education funds.

Finding 5: Some schools in Santa Barbara County school districts lack adequate controls for visitor access.

Response: Disagree.

This finding does not apply to Ballard School. We strictly manage campus access by requiring all visitors to check in directly at our front office, where we log and track guest identifications manually.

Finding 6: Not all schools in Santa Barbara County have adequate safety infrastructure, including fences, cameras, classrooms that lock from the inside, restricted access points, and instantaneous communication devices.

Response: Disagree partially.

While we know safety needs look different across the county, this finding misses the geographic reality of our site. Ballard School sits on a beautiful, wide-open five-acre property, which makes installing total perimeter fencing and gates completely unfeasible and unaffordable for us. Instead, we have smartly fortified our campus from the inside out. We enforce a strict check-in policy, our classrooms lock securely from the inside, our team uses instant communication devices, and we have upgraded every single room on campus with quick-close shutters and tinted security windows.

Responses to Recommendations

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts require administrative leaders to attend the School Safety Symposium in person at least once every two years.

Response: Has been implemented.

Our district leadership already makes it a routine priority to attend the SBCEO safety symposium so we stay perfectly aligned with local emergency guidelines.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts encourage teachers and staff to attend the School Safety Symposium in-person, and if not in-person, access the online seminar annually.

Response: Will not be implemented.

Because of the sensitive safety topics discussed, SBCEO does not archive or stream these presentations online. Since an online option doesn't exist, we cannot encourage staff to take it. We will keep using a "train-the-trainer" method where the administrators who attend share the information directly with the rest of our staff.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts train and drill all full time campus personnel and students for campus safety at least once per semester.

Response: Has been implemented.

We run regular, age-appropriate safety drills for fire, earthquakes, and lockdowns every semester with our staff and students, fully in line with our school safety plan.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide written and verbal instruction to all temporary personnel, including substitute teachers, prior to their entering a new classroom location.

Response: Has been implemented.

We make sure all substitute teachers and temporary staff are given our emergency protocols, site maps, and safety rules before they take over a classroom.

Recommendation 2c: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide quick reference situational cards and/or information posters conveying simple instructions for emergency response procedures in every classroom and in public rooms.

Response: Has been implemented.

Every classroom and common area on our campus is equipped with clear, easy-to-read posters and emergency reference sheets detailing our safety protocols.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts train school personnel on how to gain trust, understand healthy boundaries, and engage in strategic partnerships with community service groups to support student needs.

Response: Has been implemented.

Our staff regularly receives professional development focused on student well-being, building healthy classroom boundaries, mandatory reporting, and connecting with local mental health resources.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts provide an anonymous reporting mechanism on school-provided devices, in addition to a drop box available on campus.

Response: Will not be implemented.

An anonymous physical drop box or digital device app is not developmentally appropriate for children between the ages of 4 and 12. At the elementary level, these tools often lead to accidental misuse or unnecessary worry. In our 104-student community, safety is built on personal trust—we teach our students to talk directly to an adult they know when something is wrong.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have School Resource Officers (SRO) or Deputies (SRD).

Response: Will not be implemented.

Funding a full-time law enforcement officer on campus is simply too expensive for a tiny elementary district and would take critical resources away from regular classroom teaching. We enjoy an incredibly fast response time and close relationship with our local law enforcement officers when needed, without having to station one on campus full-time.

Recommendation 5a: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts improve visitor access control during school hours by requiring valid government-issued photo identification verified by school personnel, utilizing a system that checks for restraining orders or other legal restrictions.

Response: Will not be implemented.

Paying for an automated, electronic background-checking database system is not realistic or practical for a single-campus school of 104 students. Because our community is so small, our office staff personally know almost every parent and guardian who walks through the door, and our current manual sign-in protocols keep our campus completely secure.

The Ballard School District is entirely devoted to protecting our school community. However, we hope future Grand Juries will talk directly with very small districts before recommending broad, expensive safety mandates. Security shouldn't look the same for every school, and local boards need the flexibility to protect their students while remaining financially stable and focusing on age-appropriate education.

Respectfully submitted,

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