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ANTHONY RANIL, SUPERINTENDENT
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July 10, 2026

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

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

FILED
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA,
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

JUL 10 2026

Angela Braun, Executive Officer
by M. Hanson
Deputy Clerk

M. HANSON

**Re: Montecito Union 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 of Montecito Union School District (MUSD) appreciate the opportunity to respond to the 2025-2026 Grand Jury. The safety and security of our students, staff members, and community members are extremely important to us, and we have worked assiduously over the last several years to ensure excellent service in this regard.

Pursuant to California Penal Code §933 and §933.05 MUSD provides the following responses to the findings and recommendations:

Finding 1: Many student fights occur in the areas surrounding school campuses before and after school hours, outside school supervision, leaving a gap in County schools' responses.

- MUSD Disagrees Partially. At MUSD, we do not have a large number of student fights. In fact, most years we do not have any student fights. We cannot speak to the trends across the county.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Education Office create a template for schools' response procedures for student safety in the areas surrounding school campuses before and after school hours. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD was not asked to respond to this recommendation.

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that local law enforcement agencies, in conjunction with school districts, create policies and programs to extend the safe space for students to go to or from home. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD Agrees. If local law enforcement agencies seek our support, feedback, and collaboration in creating policies or programs, MUSD will certainly participate.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that all school districts consider the templates, policies, and programs proposed in Recommendations 1a and 1b. To be implemented by June 30, 2027.

- MUSD Agrees. MUSD will thoughtfully consider any and all templates, policies, and programs proposed under Recommendations 1a and 1b.

Finding 2: When children lack a set structure to occupy their time on constructive activities outside of regular school hours, they become vulnerable to recruitment from criminal street gangs.

- MUSD Disagrees Partially. As it pertains to our district, we have not encountered any gang activity within our TK-6 community. Moreover, all students have access to constructive activities outside of school hours, including a range of after-school activities on campus. We cannot speak to the larger county-wide trends in this area, feeling we can only speak with assurance about our small, one-school, TK-6 district.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts implement more after-school programs such as music, sports, art, drama, and other extra-curricular activities. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD has already implemented this recommendation. In a recent survey, 95% of respondents were “Highly satisfied” or “satisfied” with our after-school offerings. This represented the most positive response in a decade or more, and is the result of MUSD increasing both the quality and quantity of afterschool offerings. Nature, art, band, skateboarding, cooking, and after-school care are a few of our most popular offerings.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts partner with others, including community-based organizations and local government entities, such as Parks and Recreation Departments, to offer after-school programs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD has already implemented this recommendation. We partner with our local YMCA, Nature Rangers, Apples to Zucchini Cooking, the South Coast Youth Band, AHA!, and more local organizations to support our students and this community.

Finding 3: Gangs are increasingly grooming and recruiting students in elementary, middle, and junior high schools, yet many anti-gang programs focus on older students.

- MUSD Disagrees Partially. MUSD has not noted any grooming of our TK-6 grade students. We are not knowledgeable enough to comment about the larger trends across the county.

Recommendation 3: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts implement programs that are aimed at dissuading elementary, middle, and junior high school students from gang membership. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD will not implement this recommendation. As we have seen no gang activity amongst our TK-6 grade students, it would be a poor use of our limited time to put programming which targets gang membership. Instead, we will continue to focus on enriching after school experiences, social-emotional curriculum, and on sustaining a warm and positive school environment.

Finding 4: Some school administrators across the County lack information to identify gang clothing, insignia, or signs.

- MUSD was not asked to respond to this finding.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Education Office provide annual information to school administrators to make them aware of the latest gang clothing, insignia, and signs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD was not asked to respond to this recommendation.

Finding 5: Students who bring guns, knives, and other weapons on campus, even when provided by parents for their children's safety, pose a threat to school safety.

- MUSD Agrees. Students who bring guns, knives, and other weapons to campus are a threat to student safety. We have never encountered a student who brought a gun to school here in this TK-6 one-school district, and students have brought pocketknives or similar weapons very seldomly, usually by mistake.

Recommendation 5: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts remind parents and guardians annually of California Penal Code Section 25100 regarding the criminalization of unsafe storage of guns. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD has already implemented this recommendation. MUSD has been providing this notice for the last several years annually to parents.

Finding 6: Anonymous communications systems, both digital programs and physical drop-boxes, when made available to school students and personnel, can help identify gang activity ahead of serious consequences.

- MUSD Disagrees Partially. While the District agrees that a proactive culture of reporting is vital, the finding fails to differentiate between high school environments and elementary environments. In a TK-6 elementary district, threat reporting is optimized through strong relational bonds with trusted adults, counselors, and robust Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks, rather than digital reporting mechanics designed for older student demographics.

Recommendation 6: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide all schools with anonymous communications systems for student or staff reporting of danger on and off campus, both via digital media and local drop boxes. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD will not implement this recommendation. Implementing anonymous physical drop boxes or digital reporting software on devices is developmentally inappropriate for our student base (ages 4 to 12). For elementary school students, anonymous digital tools frequently result in behavioral misuse or heightened anxiety. Safety in a TK-6 environment is best achieved by fostering high-trust relationships where students speak directly to counselors, teachers, and administrators.

Finding 7: Socially isolated students can benefit from engagement with responsible mentors as a deterrent to negative manipulation by outside influences, such as gangs, social media, or other ongoing stresses in family life.

- MUSD Disagrees Partially. MUSD's TK-6th grade students have not been involved in gangs, however, we agree that mentorship can be a positive force in a student's life.

Recommendation 7: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts create systems in their schools to pair socially isolated students with school mentors. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD has already implemented this recommendation. Whenever we have encountered a socially isolated student, a plan is made to connect that student to same-age peers as well as adult mentors within the school system.

Finding 8: A task force comprised of governmental and community-based organizations in the area would aid local authorities to reduce gang effectiveness.

- MUSD Disagrees Partially. Our TK-6th grade students have not been involved with gangs and so we cannot speak to the effectiveness of such a remedy on our school. We also cannot speak to the needs of the county in this regard.

Recommendation 8: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors form a North County Youth Safety Partnership to work on gang intervention and prevention. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

- MUSD was not asked to respond to this recommendation.

The Montecito Union School District remains committed to the safety and security of our students, staff members, and community and is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury's report.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AR' followed by a horizontal line.

Anthony Ranii, Superintendent
The Board of Trustees, Montecito Union School District