



Santa Barbara County Education Office

4400 Cathedral Oaks Rd, PO Box 6307, Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307

Telephone: (805) 964-4711 • FAX: (805) 964-4712 • sbceo.org

Susan C. Salcido, Superintendent of Schools

July 20, 2026

The Honorable Patricia Kelly
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
pkelly@sbcourts.org

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

**Re: 2025-26 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report on Gangs of Santa Barbara County:
Should the Schools Do More to Address Them?**

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

The Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools and the Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) share the Grand Jury's commitment to supporting safe, supportive, and positive learning environments for all students. SBCEO recognizes that gangs can have harmful effects on youth, families, schools, and communities and appreciates the Grand Jury's focus on prevention, early intervention, student well-being, and school safety.

SBCEO serves as a support, resource, and coordinating agency for Santa Barbara County school districts by providing professional learning opportunities, technical assistance, school safety resources, and student wellness supports. At the same time, it is important to note that California school districts are independently governed by locally elected boards of education and are responsible for establishing local policies, student discipline procedures, supervision practices, staffing decisions, extracurricular programs, counseling services, and school climate initiatives.

Accordingly, SBCEO does not have authority to direct how local districts implement many of the recommendations contained in this report. Unless otherwise noted, SBCEO's responses are therefore limited to the Santa Barbara County Education Office's Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS), which serve court-involved and justice-involved youth.

Within JCCS, SBCEO is committed to fostering safe, supportive, and engaging learning environments through student wellness services, counseling and behavioral health supports,

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Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY *Mark Hanson*
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

family engagement efforts, mentoring and intervention strategies, school safety practices, and partnerships with community organizations and public agencies. These efforts are designed to support positive youth development, strengthen protective factors, and help students build successful futures.

It is with these responsibilities and considerations in mind that SBCEO provides the following responses to the Grand Jury's 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.

SBCEO Response to Finding 1: Disagree partially

SBCEO agrees that student conflicts occurring before and after school hours can present challenges for schools, particularly when those incidents affect student safety, school climate, or students' ability to learn. SBCEO recognizes the importance of early intervention, positive school climate, student engagement, and strong community partnerships in helping prevent conflicts from escalating and supports ongoing efforts to strengthen these practices within SBCEO-operated programs.

However, SBCEO notes that incidents occurring off campus and outside school hours generally take place beyond the direct supervision and authority of school personnel. Schools have limited ability to monitor or intervene in activities occurring in public spaces before students arrive at school or after they leave campus.

When off-campus incidents become known and have the potential to affect the school environment, Juvenile Court and Community Schools staff work collaboratively with students, families, probation personnel, mental health providers, community partners, and law enforcement agencies, as appropriate and as they are able, to intervene and address safety concerns, provide support services, and reduce the likelihood of future incidents.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 1a: Will not be implemented

SBCEO supports the intent of this recommendation and recognizes the importance of school safety planning and preparedness and the value of collaboration.

However, incidents occurring off campus and outside school hours generally take place beyond the direct supervision, authority, and control of school personnel. Given the wide variation in local circumstances and community needs across schools and districts throughout Santa Barbara County, a single “template” would neither be appropriate nor feasible to support off-campus before and after school activities.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 1b: Will not be implemented

SBCEO supports the intent of this recommendation and recognizes the importance of student safety before and after the school day. SBCEO also appreciates the working relationship between school and local law enforcement agencies. In fact, SBCEO hired a School Safety Liaison in 2023 to support communication and collaboration amongst the multiple entities across the county.

However, SBCEO notes that incidents occurring off campus and outside school hours generally take place beyond the direct supervision and authority of school personnel. Incidents that occur in public spaces before students arrive on campus or after they leave for the day result in a limited ability to monitor, manage, or regulate directly. While SBCEO supports ongoing collaboration among schools, families, community organizations, probation personnel, mental health providers, and law enforcement agencies, it does not believe it is appropriate or feasible for schools to establish policies or programs that extend school supervision beyond school grounds and school-sponsored activities.

To further clarify the point that each school and district has a unique local context to consider, at SBCEO’s Juvenile Court Schools, students are housed within the Juvenile Justice Center and are supervised by Santa Barbara County Probation staff throughout the school day, before and after school. At FitzGerald Community School, a security guard trained to work in school settings is present whenever students are on campus, and school staff and security personnel provide supervision before school, during breaks, and after school.

The majority of FitzGerald Community School students are transported to and from school by family members. At the end of the school day, staff supervise dismissal, monitor students as they leave campus, and frequently engage with family members during pick-up. Arrival and dismissal procedures are structured to support student

safety, including staggered schedules designed to minimize interaction between junior high and high school students.

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.

SBCEO Response to Finding 2: Disagree partially

SBCEO agrees that structured, constructive activities and supportive adult relationships can help reduce student vulnerability to negative influences, including gang recruitment. Research and prevention frameworks recognize that youth disconnection from family, school, community, and future opportunities can increase vulnerability, while positive school engagement, mentoring, and extracurricular opportunities can serve as protective factors.

However, SBCEO believes that vulnerability to gang involvement is influenced by a complex combination of individual, family, peer, school, and community factors. While a lack of structured activities outside of school may increase risk for some students, it does not necessarily result in gang involvement, nor does participation in organized activities alone prevent it.

SBCEO supports a comprehensive approach that includes positive youth development, family engagement, mentoring, counseling, educational opportunities, and community partnerships to help students make healthy choices and avoid involvement in gangs and other harmful influences.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 2a: Has been implemented

SBCEO recognizes that structured enrichment activities can promote student engagement, foster positive peer relationships, and provide opportunities for students to develop interests and skills outside the traditional classroom setting.

At the Community School, students have access to extracurricular opportunities including the Cultural Club and Gardening Club. In addition, JCCS partners with community-based organizations that provide a variety of enrichment, mentoring, and youth development activities available to both students and families outside of school hours. Information about these opportunities is regularly shared with students and

families, and parent information nights are used to connect families with available community resources and programs.

Court School students are housed within the Juvenile Justice Center, where supervision and programming outside of school hours are provided by the Santa Barbara County Probation Department. SBCEO supports continued collaboration with Probation and community partners to ensure students have access to constructive activities and supports both during and after school hours.

SBCEO's JCCS schools have increasingly focused on incorporating music and arts programming for students before and after school in the past several years. For example:

- Mural Project with Juan Manuel Perez Salazar
- Singer/Songwriter Workshops with Austin Willacy
- Visual Arts Workshops with Lacyeloo Winkelpleck
- Graphic Arts and Logo Design with Jon Donaghy

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 2b: Has been implemented

SBCEO sees the value that community partnerships can provide in expanding opportunities and support services for students, both during and after school.

As shared above, SBCEO's JCCS schools have incorporated music and arts programming for students before and after school. For example:

- Mural Project with Juan Manuel Perez Salazar
- Singer/Songwriter Workshops with Austin Willacy
- Visual Arts Workshops with Lacyeloo Winkelpleck
- Graphic Arts and Logo Design with Jon Donaghy

SBCEO's JCCS also collaborate with a variety of community partners and agencies to provide counseling, mentoring, case management, behavioral health services, restorative justice programs, and other supports for students, including:

- Family Service Agency
- One Community Action
- Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness

- Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
- More information on additional programs available at the Court School may be found here: <https://www.countyofsb.org/4042/Juvenile-Program-Menu>

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.

SBCEO Response to Finding 3: Disagree partially

SBCEO agrees it is important to begin age-appropriate prevention efforts early and are most effective when implemented before gang involvement occurs. Research and prevention frameworks recognize that children and adolescents may become vulnerable to gang recruitment during the elementary and middle school years and that early intervention, positive school engagement, mentoring, family support, and access to constructive activities can serve as important protective factors.

However, SBCEO acknowledges there are numerous age-appropriate prevention, intervention, mentoring, education, and support services currently available to students of all grades throughout Santa Barbara County. As noted within the Grand Jury's report, these efforts include programs and services provided by schools, community-based organizations, public agencies (like the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office), and collaborative partnerships such as Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley, the South Coast Youth Safety Partnership, D.A.R.E. programs, and other youth-focused initiatives designed to promote positive youth development, violence prevention, mentoring, and healthy decision-making.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 3: Has been implemented

SBCEO supports age-appropriate prevention, intervention, and student support efforts designed to strengthen student connectedness, resilience, and positive decision-making before gang involvement occurs.

While JCCS does not serve younger elementary students, the Community School serves students in grades 7-12 and the Court School can serve students from ages 10 - 18. Through counseling, mentoring, behavioral health services, case management, family engagement, and other student support services, JCCS works to promote positive

decision-making, school engagement, and student well-being for any and all students who come into our classrooms.

At the Community School, these efforts include:

- The POR VIDA program provided by One Community Action, which offers mentorship, case management, student engagement activities, and family support services designed to strengthen students' connections to their schools, families, and communities.
- Partnerships with organizations such as Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley, Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and Behavioral Wellness, which provide prevention, intervention, behavioral health, restorative justice, and youth development services.
- Other partnerships which provide counseling, behavioral health, and case management services that connect students with positive adult role models and support networks.

For Court School students, additional intervention and support services (more info here: <https://www.countyofsb.org/4042/Juvenile-Program-Menu>) are available through programs coordinated by the Santa Barbara County Probation Department and its community partners. Through these services and partnerships, students are connected with trusted adults, community resources, and evidence-based supports designed to reduce risk factors associated with harmful influences.

Finding 4

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

SBCEO Response to Finding 4: Disagree partially

SBCEO agrees that awareness of current gang trends, symbols, behaviors, and indicators can be an important component of school safety and student support efforts and recognizes the value of providing training opportunities and information-sharing resources to support school personnel in identifying and responding appropriately to gang-related concerns.

In SBCEO's Juvenile Court and Community Schools, staff regularly consult with Santa Barbara County Probation regarding gang-related issues. Staff have participated in targeted training provided by local law enforcement; however most of the training is developed through close ties with Probation and day-to-day experiences between students, staff, and families.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 4: Requires further analysis

SBCEO recognizes the importance of ensuring that school administrators have access to current information regarding student safety concerns, including gang-related trends that may affect their school communities.

Since youth task forces that address gang-related issues already exist in Santa Barbara County, SBCEO will consult with local educational agencies to assess their needs, if any, and determine which external agency could provide such training and at what frequency. To be completed by December 20, 2026.

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.

SBCEO Response to Finding 5: Agree

SBCEO agrees that weapons brought onto school campuses can pose a significant threat to the safety and well-being of students, staff, and visitors. Schools must maintain safe learning environments where students can focus on learning without fear of violence or intimidation. SBCEO supports policies, procedures, and educational efforts designed to prevent weapons from being brought onto campus and to respond appropriately when safety concerns arise.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 5: Has been implemented

SBCEO supports the intent of this recommendation and recognizes the important role that safe firearm storage plays in protecting children and preventing access to weapons.

Juvenile Court and Community Schools annually provide parents and guardians with information regarding California laws related to firearm safety, storage, and California Penal Code Section 25100 through the Annual Notification to Parents. This information is provided annually in accordance with California education code § 49392.

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.

SBCEO Response to Finding 6: Agree

SBCEO agrees that providing students and staff with accessible reporting mechanisms can help identify safety concerns, including potential gang-related activity, and support early intervention, prevention, and appropriate response efforts.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 6: Has been implemented

SBCEO has a Report a Concern form available on the website for all programs, where individuals can anonymously report incidents and concerns. All Juvenile Court and Community Schools classrooms and common areas display posters in English and Spanish with a QR code that directs users to the Report a Concern form on the SBCEO website. In addition, most students have one-to-one counseling sessions, where they can safely and confidentially share any concerns with a trusted adult. According to administrators, counselors routinely bring concerns to administration that are made in this manner while maintaining client confidentiality.

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.

SBCEO Response to Finding 7: Agree

SBCEO agrees that positive relationships with trusted adult mentors can be an important protective factor for students. Mentoring can help promote student connectedness, resilience, positive decision-making, and overall well-being, particularly for students who may be vulnerable to negative influences.

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.

SBCEO Response to Recommendation 7: Has been implemented

Juvenile Court and Community Schools utilize a variety of systems to identify and support all students, including those who may be socially isolated or otherwise in need of additional support. Students have access to counselors, therapists, educators, probation staff, case managers, and community-based mentors. Through Intervention Team meetings, Treatment Team meetings, counseling services, and mentoring partnerships with organizations such as One Community Action for Youth, students are connected with trusted adults who provide guidance, support, and mentorship.

Creating positive school climates where students feel safe, connected, and supported is a responsibility shared by educators, families, students, community organizations, and public agencies. SBCEO remains committed to supporting student wellness initiatives, family engagement efforts, professional learning opportunities, school safety resources, and countywide collaboration to support all students as they learn and grow.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Susan Salcido
Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools