



July 24, 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 Bullying in Santa Barbara County Schools

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

The Orcutt Union School District shares the Grand Jury's commitment to student safety and well-being. We recognize that bullying in all forms can have a significant impact on students' academic success, mental health, and sense of belonging at school.

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) results show that bullying and mistreatment do persist on our campuses. Some findings from the 2026 CHKS taken by fifth graders (118 total respondents), seventh graders (516 respondents), ninth graders (161 respondents), and 11th graders (128 respondents) in Orcutt:

- 31% of fifth graders reported that other students hit or push them at school some, most, or all of the time
- 55% of fifth graders reported that other students spread mean rumors or lies about them some, most, or all of the time
- 47% of fifth graders reported that other students call them bad names or make mean jokes about them some, most, or all of the time
- 38% of seventh graders, 28% of ninth graders, and 26% of 11th graders said they had experienced some kind of harassment or bullying in the past year
- 17% of seventh graders, 8% of ninth graders, and 13% of 11th graders said they had been harassed or bullied one or more times in the past year due to their race, ethnicity, or national origin

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COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA
08/14/2026
Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY Mark Hanson
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk



- 11% of seventh graders, 8% of ninth graders, and 9% of 11th graders said they had been harassed or bullied one or more times in the past year due to their sexual orientation
- 25% of seventh graders, 12% of ninth graders, and 6% of 11th graders reported they had been hit, pushed, or kicked by another student on campus one or more times in the past year
- 22% of seventh graders, 13% of ninth graders, and 7% of 11th graders reported they had been afraid of getting beat up by another student one or more times in the past year
- 40% of seventh graders, 24% of ninth graders, and 20% of 11th graders reported that other students spread mean rumors or lies about them one or more times in the past year

Cyberbullying – spreading mean rumors, hurtful images, or threats online, on social media, or by text – also is being experienced by students. Some findings from the 2026 CHKS:

- 26% of fifth graders reported being victimized by cyberbullying by other students some, most, or all of the time
- 34% of seventh graders, 18% of ninth graders, and 15% of 11th graders reported being victimized by cyberbullying by other students one or more times in the past year

What is Orcutt doing about bullying? Our efforts to foster safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students are on several fronts:

- **PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports).** Since 2017 our schools have adopted this evidence based program. The program entails communication about specific behavioral expectations in a range of school settings, incentives for positive behavior, and interventions for students who have difficulty with behavior.
- **Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS).** The district operates an MTSS Behavior program that is a comprehensive, data-driven framework for organizing instruction and intervention so that every student receives support matched to their level of need. All schools hold regular MTSS Behavior team meetings to analyze behavioral data and talk through behavioral situations such as incidents of bullying. For more on this, see response to Recommendation 2.
- **Student supervision, surveillance, and reporting.** We have worked to provide active, watchful staff supervision on campus during school and during busy drop-off and pick-up times before and after school. We have put in place over 200 campus cameras districtwide as both a deterrent and a monitoring system. We have a Securly system for monitoring student online activity for cyberbullying, bullying, and threats. We also have a "See Something, Say Something" system whereby students and parents can report bullying.



- **Behavioral support.** Our district has funded additional elementary counselors, additional psychologists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), and additional vice-principals, all with the goal of addressing student misbehavior.
- **Staff training.** School staff have been trained on PBIS, and in the past two school years we have brought in Lizzie Rodriguez, a Santa Barbara-based psychologist, to work with staff on restorative practices that steer students away from behaviors such as bullying.
- **Parent communication and training.** We have done considerable work with parent communication around bullying, especially what bullying is. Bullying is the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. What we have found is that students and parents often label an incident "bullying" when it actually is conflict – a simple disagreement or argument in which both sides express their views.

We take some comfort in the fact that students in Orcutt generally give their schools positive ratings for overall safety on the CHKS. Just 3% of fifth graders say they "never" feel safe at school, and just 7% of seventh graders, 4% of ninth graders, and 3% of 11th graders say they believe their school is "unsafe" or "very unsafe." We also note that our students' responses on safety actually are better than statewide responses as shown on the School Climate Report Card. So, while challenges involving bullying and mistreatment persist, they do not appear to be greatly impacting students' overall perspectives on campus safety.

With this background information provided, Orcutt respectfully submits the following responses to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations:

Responses to Findings

Finding 1

Bullying in County schools will be reduced by implementing additional safety measures.

OUSD Response to Finding 1: Agree

Orcutt agrees that additional safety measures can contribute to the reduction of school bullying. That said, additional safety measures must be evidence-based and thoughtfully planned and executed in order to have maximal effectiveness.

Finding 2

Administrators do not consistently inform school counselors when students under their guidance engage in bullying.



OUSD Response to Finding 2: Disagree

Our school administrators and counselors work as a team in addressing bullying, mistreatment, and other misbehavior. When incidents occur on campus, they strategize about how best to respond and what steps need to be taken to prevent a future incident.

An important perspective on student behavior for both administrators and counselors is provided by the district's Securly system, which does real-time scanning of students' online activity, searches, posts, etc. for self-harm, depression, violence, threats, and bullying. If Securly notices a concerning search or post, it immediately sends an email message to a district administrator notifying them so the district and school can respond. School administrators and counselors then collaborate around appropriate follow-up with the student.

Another way for schools to know about bullying is the "See Something, Say Something" anonymous reporting form on each school website. Anonymous reports are sent directly to school administrators for follow-up, and counselors typically are included in follow-up.

We want to add that school staff, including administrators and counselors, understand the importance of addressing student bullying and mistreatment. All school staff, including teachers, administrators, and classified employees, are required at the start of each school year to complete a training module in bullying. The module describes what bullying and cyberbullying are, details best practices for bullying prevention, and corrects commonly held assumptions about bullying. Employees must pass an end-of-module test in order to qualify for a certificate of completion.

Finding 3

Parent participation in outreach programs for bullying has been poor.

OUSD Response to Finding 3: Disagree Partially

Parent participation in parent education and outreach programs is irregular. Some parent education topics draw strong interest while others do not. In the past two school years Orcutt has hosted California Highway Patrol Officer Maria Barriga for a virtual parent education session on online safety (with cyberbullying addressed) and human trafficking. Both sessions have drawn considerable interest, and we plan to reprise the topic in 2026-2027.



Responses to Recommendations

Recommendation 1a

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

OUSD Response to Recommendation 1a: Has Been Implemented

Orcutt supports the intent of this recommendation and agrees that active, visible adult supervision is an important component of safe school environments. Orcutt works to ensure that staff are present to monitor student play areas, student eating areas, and drop-off/pick-up zones before, during, and after the school day. Orcutt also works to provide training for staff in active, watchful student supervision practices.

Recommendation 1b

The Grand Jury recommends that school boards have sufficient cameras in order to monitor where students congregate before, during, and after school.

OUSD Response to Recommendation 1b: Has Been Implemented

Orcutt has embraced campus cameras as another way to maintain safe learning environments. Cameras are a deterrent to misbehavior and provide evidence when misbehavior does occur. As of this date, we have a total of 220 cameras in place on our nine school sites. Our junior high schools and Orcutt Academy High School each have more than 30 cameras.

Recommendation 1c

The Grand Jury recommends that school boards add more counselors to achieve a ratio no greater than 250:1.

OUSD Response to Recommendation 1c: Will Not Be Implemented

Orcutt recognizes the immense value of counseling and mental health support but does not have the financial resources to accomplish a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1. It should be noted that our district has utilized its resources – particularly Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) funding – to implement a comprehensive plan for addressing student behaviors. These resources have funded additional elementary counselors, additional psychologists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, and additional vice-principals. We are seeing results from this plan, and we do not have sufficient resources to add even more counselors.



Recommendation 2

The Grand Jury recommends that school boards inform school counselors whenever any students under their guidance engage in bullying.

OUSD Response to Recommendation 2: Has Been Implemented

As mentioned in the response to Finding 2, in Orcutt school administrators work closely with school counselors to address bullying and other misbehavior. Additionally, all schools hold regular MTSS Behavior team meetings to analyze behavioral data and talk through behavioral situations such as incidents of bullying. This team typically consists of school administrators, school counselor(s), school psychologist, the BCBA assigned to the school site, and Special Education and general education staff as appropriate. These MTSS Behavior teams are important for communication, coordination, planning, and follow-up around addressing bullying.

Recommendation 3a

The Grand Jury recommends that school boards direct school administrators to schedule parent outreach programs regarding bullying on evenings, weekends, online, and with archived recordings to accommodate working parents.

OUSD Response to Recommendation 3a: Has Been Implemented

Our district consistently has worked to schedule parent education and outreach programs on evenings and often online for the convenience of parents. Orcutt is developing a Parent University page on its website (<https://www.orcuttschools.net/university>) that will include an array of parent resources, including video tutorials and recordings of parent education events. Our first focus for the page has been videos on school readiness for the parents/guardians of our youngest students: transitional kindergartners and kindergartners. We also have made our parents aware of the impressive library of YouTube parent workshops posted by YouthWell of Santa Barbara County ([link](#)).

Recommendation 3b

The Grand Jury recommends that school boards implement non-monetary incentives to encourage parents to attend outreach programs.

OUSD Response to Recommendation 3b: Has Been Implemented

In our experience we have found that providing meals and childcare can be powerful incentives for parents to attend in-person parent education and outreach programs. We also have found that virtual sessions enable parents to participate from the comfort and convenience of their own home. Both are very effective at enticing parent attendance.



Recommendation 3c

The Grand Jury recommends that school boards strongly encourage parents of students who have engaged in repeated acts of bullying to attend outreach programs.

OUSD Response to Recommendation 3c: Has Been Implemented

Orcutt agrees that family engagement is important in addressing repeated bullying behavior and supporting student well-being. Families are encouraged to participate in all support and outreach programs, including those put on by community organizations such as Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley and YouthWell.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Waffle
President, Board of Trustees
Orcutt Union School District

Holly Edds, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Orcutt Union School District