



**Santa Maria Joint Union
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Where greatness grows.

August 4, 2026

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

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

Re: Santa Maria Joint Union High School District Response to the 2025–2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report: Bullying in Santa Barbara County Schools: *Addressing Aggressive and Violent Behavior Among Students*

Prepared pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05

Introduction

The Santa Maria Joint Union High School District (“District” or “SMJUHSD”) appreciates the work of the 2025–2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury and its commitment to improving the safety and well-being of students throughout Santa Barbara County. The District welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury’s report concerning bullying in county schools and views the response process as part of its ongoing work to evaluate, strengthen, and continuously improve student safety systems.

SMJUHSD believes every student deserves to learn in an environment that is safe, respectful, inclusive, and supportive. Bullying, harassment, intimidation, and aggressive behavior are inconsistent with that expectation and with the District’s educational mission. The district addresses these concerns through a layered system of prevention, intervention, accountability, and student support rather than through any single program, employee group, or safety measure.

Student safety is a shared responsibility. Administrators, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, Wellness Center personnel, campus security staff, School Resource Officers, classified employees, families, community partners, and law enforcement each contribute to school environments in which students feel connected, know how to seek help, and trust that reported concerns will be taken seriously.

FILED
SUPERIOR COURT of CALIFORNIA
COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA
08/11/2026
Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY *Mark Hanson*
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

District Framework

The District's framework for preventing and responding to bullying is built upon multiple, overlapping systems. These include visible adult supervision; positive school climate and student connectedness efforts; accessible reporting pathways; prompt assessment and investigation of allegations; counseling, behavioral health, and Wellness Center supports; appropriate corrective action when misconduct is substantiated; family communication; documentation; follow-up; and collaboration with community organizations and law enforcement.

Students, families, staff, and community members may report concerns through trusted adults, teachers, counselors, administrators, campus security personnel, School Resource Officers, coaches, and other school staff. The District also maintains Securly Tipline, an anonymous electronic reporting system accessible through links on District and school websites. When a Tipline report is submitted, notification is sent directly to the site's administrative team and to District leaders so the concern can be reviewed promptly, assessed for available facts, and investigated as needed. Anonymous reports are not ignored or discounted because they are anonymous; at the same time, reports are reviewed carefully because the information provided may be incomplete, inaccurate, or require verification. Anonymous reporting supplements, but does not replace, direct reporting and investigation and helps reduce barriers for individuals who may be reluctant to identify themselves.

In addition, SMJUHSD uses Securly Aware, which uses artificial intelligence to monitor student activity on District-provided one-to-one devices and generate alerts to site administrative teams and District leaders when student searches, writing, or other digital activity indicates potential concerns involving violence, weapons, drugs, suicide, self-harm, depression, or related safety and wellness risks.

When allegations of bullying are reported, site administrators assess the information and investigate the reported conduct in accordance with District policy, administrative regulation, and applicable law. Student support personnel are involved as appropriate to the circumstances. When bullying or related misconduct is substantiated, the District implements appropriate corrective action, parent communication, documentation, interventions, and ongoing supports based upon the facts of the matter and the needs of the students involved.

Response Methodology

This response is submitted pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05. The District has reviewed the findings and recommendations directed to the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District Governing Board and has evaluated them in consultation with District leadership responsible for student services, educational services, school safety, counseling, wellness, and school operations.

Each finding is quoted from the Grand Jury report and is followed by the District's response. Each recommendation is likewise quoted and followed by one of the statutory response categories required

by California Penal Code section 933.05, together with a summary of the District's rationale and implementation actions.

Finding 1 and Recommendations 1a-1c

Finding 1

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

District Response: Agree.

The District agrees that appropriate safety measures can help reduce bullying when they are implemented as part of a broader, coordinated system. Physical security, supervision, and technology are important, but they are most effective when combined with prevention, positive school climate, student connectedness, accessible reporting, prompt intervention, counseling and behavioral health supports, family engagement, and follow-up.

SMJUHSD therefore approaches student safety through a layered system of prevention, intervention, accountability, and student support. The District continually evaluates each layer and makes operational adjustments based upon school conditions, student needs, observed behavior patterns, available resources, and emerging safety practices.

Recommendation 1a

“The Grand Jury recommends that school boards increase staff presence in areas where students congregate before, during breaks, and after school. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.”

District Response: Has been implemented.

Visible adult supervision is an established component of the District's school safety program. At each comprehensive high school, the site administrative team includes a principal, three assistant principals, and a dean of students. These administrators are supported by approximately twelve to fourteen campus security personnel and a full-time School Resource Officer. Delta High School as a significantly smaller campus serving approximately 300 students with a principal, a dean of students, campus security personnel, and School Resource Officer support. Administrators and security personnel are present before students arrive on campus, throughout the school day, and after students leave campus.

Major student gathering areas are routinely covered through a combination of administrative supervision, campus security assignments, School Resource Officer presence, and assistance from teachers or other staff as needed. Supervision is not treated as a static schedule or as the responsibility of one employee group. Site leaders review where and when students congregate, identify emerging areas of concern, and adjust assignments based upon activity patterns, special events, reported concerns, and observed student needs. Because these practices are already embedded within District operations,

the District considers Recommendation 1a implemented and will continue to review and refine supervision plans as part of its ongoing school-safety responsibilities.

Recommendation 1b

“The Grand Jury recommends that school boards have sufficient cameras in order to monitor where students congregate before, during, and after school. To be implemented by June 30, 2027.”

District Response: Has been implemented.

The District maintains extensive video security systems at its high school campuses, including hundreds of cameras that support campus awareness, incident response, investigations, and the review of reported concerns in common areas, access points, walkways, exterior areas, and other locations where students congregate. The District continually reviews and updates camera needs as facilities, technology, and operational needs evolve.

Video security is one component of the District’s layered safety system and does not replace active adult supervision, relationships with students, direct reporting, or investigation. When an incident or allegation is reported, available video may assist administrators and School Resource Officers in establishing a timeline, identifying participants or witnesses, assessing the accuracy of reported information, and determining an appropriate response. Because substantial camera coverage is currently in place and additional needs are periodically reviewed and updated, the District considers Recommendation 1b implemented.

Recommendation 1c

“The Grand Jury recommends that school boards add more counselors to achieve a ratio no greater than 250:1. To be implemented by June 30, 2027.”

District Response: Will not be implemented as written.

The District agrees with the underlying purpose of the recommendation: students must have timely access to counseling, mental health, behavioral, and other support services. However, SMJUHSD does not believe a single numerical counselor-to-student ratio should operate as the sole measure of student access to support or as a mandatory staffing formula independent of enrollment, student needs, program design, available resources, and the broader continuum of professionals serving students.

Counselors are part of a broader student-support system that includes school psychologists, Wellness Center personnel, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support teams, administrators, special education professionals, community-based mental health providers, and other intervention partners. Each comprehensive high school currently has approximately ten or eleven school counselors, and the District has significantly expanded counseling capacity over time. Some District schools meet the 250:1

ratio identified by the Grand Jury, and others are near that level; however, the District does not believe the ratio should operate as a mandatory staffing formula independent of local needs and resources.

In addition to school counselors, the District has invested in Wellness Center supports across its campuses. During the prior school year, District Wellness Centers recorded 17,612 student visits. Each Wellness Center is staffed with a certified wellness coach and a school counselor, and the District also partners with licensed mental health therapists at each site. These supports demonstrate that students access assistance through multiple pathways beyond the assigned school counselor model.

The District will not implement the Recommendation 1c ratio as written but will continue to evaluate counseling and student-support staffing through its annual budgeting, enrollment, program review, and student-needs processes.

Finding 2 and Recommendation 2

Finding 2

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

District Response: Disagree as to SMJUHSD.

The District recognizes that the Grand Jury report was directed broadly to school districts throughout Santa Barbara County and may reflect concerns identified in other local educational agencies. However, SMJUHSD does not agree that this finding accurately describes District experience. In SMJUHSD, administrators involve counselors and other appropriate student-support personnel when the facts and student needs warrant such involvement. Communication is handled in a manner consistent with student privacy, educational needs, and the circumstances of each case.

The District agrees with the underlying principle that timely involvement of student-support personnel strengthens the response to reported bullying and related misconduct. Administrators assess each report individually and determine which personnel should participate based on the facts presented, the role of the students involved, and the needs of students who may have been harmed, witnessed the conduct, or engaged in misconduct. This individualized approach allows the District to provide appropriate support while maintaining confidentiality and responding proportionately to each matter.

Recommendation 2

“The Grand Jury recommends that school boards inform school counselors whenever any students under their guidance engage in bullying. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.”

District Response: Has been implemented.

The District has established practices for involving counselors and other student-support personnel when students involved in bullying-related matters are identified. Site administrators notify counselors as appropriate by phone, email, or in person, and information is documented in the District's student information system when applicable. In some reports, particularly anonymous reports, the information provided may be vague or may not identify the students involved. In those circumstances, administrators investigate available information and involve support personnel as additional facts are developed.

This approach allows the District to balance student welfare, confidentiality, educational continuity, and accountability. Because these practices are already established throughout the District, Recommendation 2 has been implemented. The District will continue to reinforce communication among administrators, counselors, Wellness Center staff, and other student-support personnel as part of its continuous improvement process.

Finding 3 and Recommendations 3a-3c

Finding 3

"Parent participation in outreach programs for bullying has been poor."

District Response: Disagree partially as to SMJUHSD.

The District agrees that meaningful parent and guardian engagement contributes to safer schools and better student outcomes and also recognizes that family participation can be affected by work schedules, transportation, language access, technology access, childcare needs, and other practical barriers. However, because the Grand Jury report was directed broadly to school districts throughout Santa Barbara County, SMJUHSD does not agree that the finding should be read as a specific conclusion that District parent participation in bullying-related outreach has been poor.

SMJUHSD uses multiple methods of communication and engagement rather than relying on a single format or event. Parents and guardians play an important role in supporting behavioral expectations, reinforcing interventions, communicating concerns, and partnering with schools when concerns arise.

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. To be implemented by December 31, 2026."

District Response: Has been implemented.

SMJUHSD currently maintains multiple methods for communicating with parents and guardians, including telephone calls, email, conferences, electronic communication systems, meetings, school events, translated materials when appropriate, and direct contact by administrators, counselors, teachers,

and other school personnel. These communication methods allow schools to reach families in different ways and at different times based on the circumstances and the needs of the family.

The District conducts parent outreach meetings and programs related to bullying, cyberbullying, conflict, social media, and student safety to determine at each school site on a yearly and as needed basis.

Recommendation 3b

“The Grand Jury recommends that school boards implement non-monetary incentives to encourage parents to attend outreach programs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.”

District Response: Will not be implemented as written.

The District supports the goal of reducing barriers to family participation and encouraging meaningful engagement between schools and families. Schools encourage participation through parent conferences, Wellness Center outreach, informational meetings, safety presentations, school events, electronic communication, direct contact from school personnel, and language support when appropriate.

However, the District does not intend to adopt a prescribed incentive model solely for bullying outreach programs. SMJUHSD believes family engagement is most effective when schools retain flexibility to respond to the needs of their communities and individual families. For that reason, Recommendation 3b will not be implemented as written, although the District will continue using practical, non-monetary engagement strategies to reduce barriers and encourage participation.

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. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.”

District Response: Has been implemented.

The District agrees that family engagement is especially important when a student has engaged in repeated bullying or related misconduct. Administrators and student-support personnel communicate with parents and guardians as appropriate, encourage family participation, and may involve families in conferences, intervention planning, behavioral supports, behavior contracts, counseling referrals, restorative processes, discipline matrix responses, safety planning, and follow-up communication. When warranted, schools may also coordinate with appropriate legal or safety processes.

SMJUHSD believes schools should retain flexibility to determine the most effective engagement strategies for individual students and families rather than adopting one prescribed incentive or outreach model. Because schools already strongly encourage parent and guardian participation when repeated

bullying concerns arise, and because these efforts are embedded in the District's student-support and discipline practices, Recommendation 3c has been implemented.

Conclusion

The Santa Maria Joint Union High School District appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 2025–2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report concerning bullying in Santa Barbara County schools. The District shares the Grand Jury's commitment to providing learning environments where every student feels safe, respected, connected, and supported.

As described throughout this response, SMJUHSD addresses bullying through a layered system of prevention, intervention, accountability, and student support. This system combines positive school climate efforts, visible adult supervision, multiple reporting pathways, prompt investigation of allegations, counseling and wellness services, behavioral and restorative interventions, collaboration with families, and partnerships with community agencies and law enforcement.

The District recognizes that maintaining safe schools is an ongoing responsibility rather than a fixed destination. Accordingly, SMJUHSD will continue reviewing its practices, evaluating data, listening to students and families, and refining programs as school needs evolve. Continuous improvement remains a core principle of the District's work on behalf of students.

Summary of District Commitments

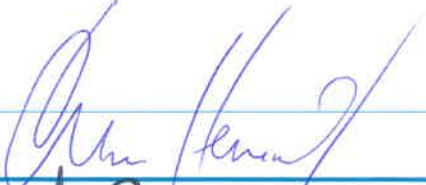
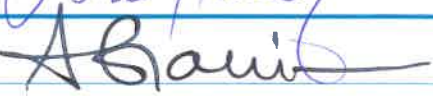
- Maintain multiple accessible reporting pathways for students, parents, guardians, staff, and community members, including Securlly Tipline for anonymous reporting.
- Promptly assess and investigate allegations of bullying in accordance with District policy and applicable law.
- Provide appropriate interventions and student supports based on the facts of each case.
- Continue strengthening prevention, school connectedness, counseling, wellness, behavioral support, and family engagement practices.
- Review supervision, training, Securlly Tipline, Securlly Aware, technology, and safety practices as part of an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.
- Maintain collaborative relationships with families, community agencies, and law enforcement in support of student safety.

Governing Board Action

The Governing Board of the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District adopts and approves this response to the 2025–2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report, *Bullying in Santa Barbara County Schools: Addressing Aggressive and Violent Behavior Among Students* at a regularly scheduled

Governing Board meeting on August 4, 2026, authorizes its submission pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, and directs the Superintendent or designee to transmit the adopted response to the appropriate agencies within the statutory timelines.

Signature Page

President, Governing Board	
Superintendent	
Date	8-4-2026
Board Action	8-4-2026

