



Vista Del Mar Union School District
Vista de las Cruces School
9467 San Julian Rd.
Gaviota, CA 93117

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

Regarding: RFI 17a

Dear Presiding Judge Patricia Kelly and Members of the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury:

The Vista del Mar Union School District appreciates the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury's efforts to examine issues affecting the safety and well-being of students throughout the County. Student safety, positive relationships, and a strong sense of belonging are fundamental to the District's work, and Vista del Mar remains committed to providing a safe, supportive environment in which every student is known, connected, and supported.

Vista del Mar is a small, rural, single-school district, and the District has not experienced the gang recruitment, gang affiliation, or gang-related activity described in the Grand Jury's report. The District recognizes, however, that the prevalence and nature of these concerns vary among communities throughout Santa Barbara County and that many of the preventive practices identified in the report have broader value in supporting student safety and well-being.

Vista del Mar's small-school environment allows staff to know students individually, maintain close relationships with families, observe student interactions, and respond promptly when a student may need additional support. The District also provides

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structured after-school opportunities and maintains practices designed to strengthen student connection, positive relationships, responsible decision-making, and school safety.

In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Vista del Mar Union School District respectfully submits the following responses to the findings and recommendations for which the District was requested to respond. The District's responses reflect Vista del Mar's local circumstances and current practices while identifying reasonable actions the District will take to further strengthen student safety and prevention efforts.

Responses to 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.*

Response to Finding 1: Partially Disagree

Explanation: Vista del Mar recognizes that student conflicts occurring outside school supervision may present challenges in some communities. However, the District has not experienced the pattern of student fights before or after school described in this finding. Vista del Mar is a small, rural, single-school district, and the conditions described in the finding do not reflect the District's experience. Staff maintain close relationships with students and families and are able to respond promptly when concerns involving student safety or conflict arise.

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.*

Response to Recommendation 1b: Will Be Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar has not experienced the pattern of before- or after-school fights identified in the report. Nevertheless, the District recognizes the value of maintaining strong communication and collaboration with local law enforcement. By December 31, 2026, the District will consult with local law enforcement regarding student travel to and from school and determine whether any additional procedures or collaborative practices are warranted given Vista del Mar's rural setting and local circumstances.

Recommendation 1c: *The Grand Jury recommends that all school districts consider the templates, policies, and programs proposed in Recommendations 1a and 1b.*

Response to Recommendation 1c: Will Be Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar will review and consider any templates, policies, and programs developed in response to Recommendations 1a and 1b. By June 30, 2027, the District will determine whether any of these resources are appropriate or necessary for Vista del Mar based on the District's rural setting, student population, and local safety conditions.

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.

Response to Finding 2: Agree

Explanation: Vista del Mar agrees that structured, positive activities outside regular school hours can promote student engagement, connection, and supervision. While the District has not identified gang recruitment as an issue among its students, it recognizes the broader value of providing students with constructive opportunities beyond the instructional day.

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.

Response to Recommendation 2a: Has Been Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar currently provides structured after-school opportunities for students, including sports and after-school care through the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P). These offerings provide students with opportunities for supervision, engagement, connection, and positive interaction beyond the instructional day. The District will continue these programs and consider additional extracurricular and enrichment opportunities based on student interest, participation, available staffing, and District resources.

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.

Response to Recommendation 2b: Will Be Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar currently provides after-school care and extracurricular opportunities without relying on outside organizations. The District's rural location and small student population limit the availability and practicality of some community-based partnerships. By December 31, 2026, the District will explore whether appropriate partnerships are available that would meaningfully enhance existing opportunities for students. Any partnership will be

considered based on student need, program availability, transportation, staffing, cost, and benefit to students.

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.

Response to Finding 3: Partially Disagree

Explanation: Vista del Mar recognizes the Grand Jury's concern regarding the recruitment of younger students in communities experiencing gang activity. However, the District has not identified gang recruitment, gang affiliation, or gang-related activity as an issue among its students. Vista del Mar is a small, rural school community in which staff know students individually and maintain close relationships with students and families. Accordingly, while the District recognizes the broader concern identified by the Grand Jury, the conditions described in this finding do not reflect Vista del Mar's current experience.

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.

Response to Recommendation 3: Will Be Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar has not identified gang membership or recruitment as an issue among its students and does not currently utilize a gang-specific prevention curriculum. The District does, however, recognize the value of prevention and will continue strengthening the protective factors that support students in making positive choices. By December 31, 2026, the District will incorporate age-appropriate prevention strategies through its student support practices, including the Nurtured Heart Approach, restorative practices, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The District will also review available age-appropriate gang-prevention resources and determine whether additional programming is warranted based on the needs of Vista del Mar students.

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.

Response to Finding 5: Agree

Explanation: Vista del Mar agrees that weapons on or near a school campus present a serious safety concern regardless of the reason for their possession. Although the District has not experienced the gang-related weapons concerns described in the report, it remains committed to maintaining a safe learning environment and communicating applicable safety expectations and legal requirements to students, staff, and families.

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.*

Response to Recommendation 5: Has Been Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar provides parents and guardians with annual information regarding firearm safe-storage requirements, including California Penal Code Section 25100, through the District's Annual Parent Notification. The District will continue to provide this information annually.

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.*

Response to Finding 6: Partially Disagree

Explanation: Vista del Mar recognizes that anonymous reporting systems may provide an additional means for reporting safety concerns in some school settings. However, the District has not identified gang activity as an issue within its school community and does not believe that the absence of a formal anonymous reporting system represents a deficiency in its current reporting practices. As a small, single-school district serving 71 students, Vista del Mar maintains close relationships among students, staff, administration, and families. Students have regular access to trusted adults on campus and are encouraged to communicate safety concerns directly. The District will continue to evaluate its reporting practices and consider additional mechanisms if student needs or circumstances indicate they would provide a meaningful safety benefit.

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.*

Response to Recommendation 6: Will Not Be Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar does not plan to establish a formal anonymous electronic reporting system or physical reporting drop box at this time. With 71 students in a small, single-school setting, students have regular access to administrators, teachers, and other trusted adults and are encouraged to communicate safety concerns directly. The District's size allows staff to know students individually, maintain close communication with families, and respond promptly when concerns arise. In addition, the District has not identified gang activity as a concern within its school community. Based on the District's current circumstances and student needs, Vista del Mar does not believe that

establishing and maintaining separate electronic and physical anonymous reporting systems would provide a sufficient additional safety benefit to warrant implementation. The District will continue to evaluate its reporting practices and may consider additional reporting mechanisms if future needs demonstrate that they would meaningfully strengthen student safety.

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.

Response to Finding 7: Agree

Explanation: Vista del Mar agrees that positive relationships with caring adults and peers can strengthen student belonging and provide protection against negative influences. This is particularly consistent with Vista del Mar's existing school culture. Because the District is small, staff know students individually, students interact regularly across grade levels, and staff are able to observe student relationships closely and identify when a student may need additional connection or support.

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.

Response to Recommendation 7: Has Been Implemented

Explanation: Vista del Mar's small-school environment allows the District to accomplish the intent of this recommendation through its existing relationship-based practices. Staff know students individually, maintain positive adult connections, regularly observe student interactions, and intentionally facilitate positive peer relationships. Students interact across grade levels and participate in activities together, making social isolation readily observable to staff. At present, the District has not identified a pattern of students experiencing social isolation. If a student demonstrates a need for additional connection or support, staff respond promptly by providing individualized adult support and facilitating positive peer interactions.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Ray Fausel, Superintendent/Principal, Vista del Mar Union School District

Board of Trustees, Vista del Mar Union School District