



DR. HILDA MALDONADO
Superintendent

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Via Electronic Mail

August 26, 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, "Bullying in Santa Barbara County Schools: Addressing Aggressive and Violent Behavior Among Students"

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

The Santa Barbara Unified School District appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 2025-26 Grand Jury Report on bullying in County schools. Bullying prevention is central to our work on school climate, student well-being, and belonging, and we have invested substantially in the supervision, physical infrastructure, staff training, mental health services, and parent outreach that address bullying at each grade level. Our Culture of Care framework, in place at every school, begins with a Prevent step focused on building belonging, followed by Recognize, Respond, Report, and Repair. We welcome the Grand Jury's careful attention to this work and remain open to strengthening it.

One structural note framing several of our responses. Our elementary schools (TK-6) do not staff traditional school counselors. Instead, bullying response at that level runs through Family Engagement Liaisons, mental health clinicians, and site administrators. Our junior high schools staff counselors, deans in charge of climate and culture, and mental health clinicians who share bullying response responsibilities, and our high schools use a similar team approach centered on counselors and mental health clinicians. Several of the Grand Jury's recommendations assume a school counselor role at every level, which does not fully match our structure. Where

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SUPERIOR COURT of CALIFORNIA
COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA
09/15/2026
Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY *Mark Hanson*
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

Main Office **720 Santa Barbara Street** **Santa Barbara, CA 93101** **Phone: 805.963.4338 | TDD: 805.963.7734**

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relevant, our responses below identify how the underlying goal is met through the roles we do staff.

Our responses to each assigned finding and recommendation follow.

Finding 1: Bullying in County schools will be reduced by implementing additional safety measures.

Response: Agree.

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.

Response: Has been implemented. Each of our sites assigns supervision staff to areas where students congregate before school, during breaks, and after school, using site-specific maps of common areas that identify high-need supervision points. Supervision extends to areas immediately outside campus during the 15 to 20 minutes before school and the comparable dismissal window, so that students are supported during transitions to and from school. Site leadership adjusts supervision assignments as needs change. Our Safe2SpeakUp anonymous reporting app complements this supervision by allowing students and staff to report bullying and other safety concerns that arise outside adult sightlines, both on and off campus.

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.

Response: Has been implemented. Each of our sites operates a Verkada camera system sized to campus needs, ranging from 1-5 cameras at elementary schools, 7-13 cameras at junior high schools, and 32-40 cameras at high schools. Coverage includes primary areas where students gather, including quads, gathering areas on campus, and school perimeters at the junior high and high school levels. Site administrators identify additional coverage needs and work with the District office to fund and install additional cameras as needed.

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.

Response: Will not be implemented, with an explanation. We will not implement this recommendation. Our current student-to-counselor ratios are 275:1 at the junior high school level, 329:1 at the high school level, and 297:1 on average across the District. The 250:1 ratio the Grand Jury cites is a benchmark advocated by the American School Counselor Association, a professional advocacy body, and is not a statutory or regulatory requirement in California. We support students' mental health and belonging through a service model broader than school counselors alone. Our RISE clinicians provide mental health support at school sites. Family Service Agency provides Tier 2 and Tier 3 services in partnership with the District. Daybreak teletherapy provides online mental health support accessible to any student. We maintain

additional partnerships with Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics and other community-based providers to expand access. All schools TK-12 also have access to Ripple Effects, which provides Tier 2 and Tier 3 lessons for students identified as needing additional support. Together, these supports provide equivalent or greater capacity to serve students than the ratio benchmark would suggest, and reflect a deliberate resource allocation choice that we believe better matches student need.

Finding 2: Administrators do not consistently inform school counselors when students under their guidance engage in bullying.

Response: Disagree partially with an explanation. The finding's framing assumes school counselors are available at every grade level. As noted in our introduction, our elementary schools do not staff traditional school counselors; Family Engagement Liaisons, mental health clinicians, and site administrators handle bullying response at TK-6. At the junior high and high school levels, we do have counselors, though notification practices vary by site and we continue to work toward documented consistency across all campuses.

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.

Response: Has been implemented. At our junior high and high schools, site administrators inform counselors, deans in charge of climate and culture, wellness or intervention center staff, and mental health clinicians when students under their guidance engage in bullying, so that the appropriate site team members can follow up with the student and connect them to supports. At our elementary schools, which do not staff traditional school counselors, site administrators inform Family Engagement Liaisons and mental health clinicians. Across all levels, our aim is that the site team members responsible for supporting the student receive timely notification, so that follow-up services can be coordinated.

Finding 3: Parent participation in outreach programs for bullying has been poor.

Response: Disagree partially with an explanation. We cannot speak to conditions at other County schools. As applied to us, participation across our parent outreach programs (AHA!, Daybreak, ELAC, SEAC, and La Cuesta parenting classes) varies by program and site. Some programs, such as Daybreak's on-demand recordings, are difficult to measure by traditional attendance metrics because parents access content asynchronously. Our responses to Recommendations 3a, 3b, and 3c describe how we support and encourage parent participation.

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.

Response: Has been implemented. We offer parent outreach on bullying and related topics through multiple channels. AHA! provides parenting classes and student classes focused on

preventing bullying, delivered on campus and off site. Our English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) and Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) present to parents on related topics. Daybreak provides online mental health programming accessible on parents' own schedule, with archived recordings available for later access. La Cuesta has opened its parenting classes to the District as a whole.

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.

Response: Has been implemented. Our schools offer non-monetary incentives to encourage parent attendance at outreach programs, including District swag distributed at parent events. Parent meetings at the District level and at several school sites include on-site childcare, which reduces a common barrier to working parents' 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. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Response: Has been implemented. At our junior high schools, deans in charge of climate and culture, together with mental health clinicians, engage the families of students involved in repeated bullying incidents and connect them to outreach programming. At our high schools, counselors, mental health clinicians, and wellness club programming provide the same function. At the elementary level, Family Engagement Liaisons perform related outreach. The District also has community partnerships that support school climate work through 1:1 and small group interventions on a referral basis. We do not currently condition disciplinary follow-up on parent attendance at outreach programs at any level.

We thank the Grand Jury for its focus on bullying prevention and student well-being. We share the goal of creating safe, inclusive campuses where every student feels a sense of belonging, and we welcome continued dialogue as we build on the work already underway.

Sincerely,



Dr. Hilda Maldonado

Superintendent

Santa Barbara Unified School District