



**Santa Maria-Bonita
School District**
CULTIVATING BRIGHT FUTURES

Souza Student Support Center
708 South Miller Street
Santa Maria, CA 93454-6230
(805) 361-8110
dmcduffie@smbdsd.net

Dr. Darren McDuffie
Superintendent

September 8, 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

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

**Draft Response: Santa Maria-Bonita School District
Report #1: Bullying in Santa Barbara County Schools**

The Santa Maria- Bonita School District shares the Grand Jury's commitment to student well-being and recognizes that bullying can significantly affect students' academic success, mental health, and sense of belonging at school.

The Santa Maria-Bonita School District appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury's report, which applauded the "many efforts already undertaken by school districts to limit bullying in recent years." The District is committed to creating school environments that are safe, supportive, and inclusive for all students.

The Santa Maria-Bonita School District provides resources and support to students and families through a variety of initiatives focused on student wellness, mental health, school climate, family engagement, and student support services, including:

- Maintaining district policies and resources aligned with California's anti-bullying laws, including Education Code Sections 48900 and 48900.4.

FILED
SUPERIOR COURT of CALIFORNIA
COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA
09/08/2026
Angela Braun, Executive Officer
BY *M. Hanson*
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

- Provides comprehensive school counseling services at each school site, including Credentialed School Counselors, Wellness Coaches, School-Based Therapists, and access to School Psychologists and Mental Health Specialists.
- Maintains a team of licensed individuals who respond to assess mental health concerns, including risk of self-harm and threats to others.
- Supports all students through multi-tiered systems of interventions and supports.

Please find the Santa Maria-Bonita School District's responses to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations below:

Finding 1

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Finding 1: Agree

The Santa Maria-Bonita School District agrees that additional safety measures, when paired with prevention strategies, student support services, and a positive school climate, can help reduce bullying and improve student well-being.

Recommendation 1a

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 1a: Has been implemented.

Positive adult presence is an important part of providing a safe school environment for all students. SMBSD employs Student Supervision Aides (SSA) and additional security personnel at Junior High Schools to provide student supervision during the school day. Supervision is provided for 15 minutes before school until 15 minutes after school. SMBSD continues to recruit and hire additional supervision staff to fill vacant positions.

Recommendation 1b

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 1b: Requires further analysis.

Cameras provide one layer of support for overall campus safety, including as a tool to support investigations of incidents that occur on campus. They are one part of the SMBSD Comprehensive Safe Schools Plan, and do not replace positive adult supervision, positive relationships with students, and reporting systems that help proactively reduce conflicts. SMBSD has cameras at 4 Junior High School Sites and 6 Elementary Schools and continues to investigate funding and feasibility for additional cameras at all school sites.

Recommendation 1c

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 1c: Will not be implemented.

The recommendation will not be implemented as stated because achieving a districtwide counselor-to-student ratio of no greater than 250:1 is not currently reasonable given the significant ongoing personnel costs, availability of credentialed school counselors, and the District's existing multidisciplinary student-support model.

SMBSD currently employs one counselor at each elementary school, three counselors at each junior high school, and two counselors at Jiménez School. These services are supplemented by school psychologists, mental-health professionals, wellness coaches, school-based therapists, and community partners.

An independent review of the District's comprehensive school counseling program completed during the 2025–26 school year recommended that the District develop a plan to move toward a 350:1 counselor-to-student ratio. The District will use that recommendation, enrollment trends, student needs, staffing availability, and budget conditions to guide future staffing decisions.

Finding 2

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Finding 2: Disagree partially

School Administrators and School Counselors consistently work closely together to align resources and support for students across all campuses within SMBSD. School Counselors are often the first individuals to identify students' social or emotional needs and to provide direct support for students. This includes support for all parties involved when it comes to negative peer interactions and student conflicts. In addition to communication between school administrators and counselors, SMBSD has established school-based teams responsible for Coordination of Services (COST) and Culture and Climate. These integrated teams work together to support individual student needs through a multi-tiered system of supports, as well as review and improve school climate programs.

Recommendation 2

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 2: Will not be implemented

The Board of Education establishes policy and delegates implementation of student-support procedures to the Superintendent and school administrators. Within SMBSD, administrators and counselors regularly coordinate services for students involved in substantiated bullying incidents through site-level student-support structures, including Coordination of Services Teams and Culture and Climate Teams. The District will review its written procedures to ensure that expectations for counselor notification and involvement are clear and consistently implemented, subject to applicable student privacy requirements.

Finding 3

Parent participation in outreach programs for bullying has been poor.

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Finding 3: Disagree partially

SMBSD is committed to fostering meaningful partnerships with families and the community to support the success and well-being of every student. In alignment with our mission statement's whole-child approach, we are dedicated to ensuring that every student flourishes by addressing their academic, social, and emotional needs. Our Family Engagement plans focus on:

- Building the capacity of parents to support their children's academic efforts.
- Promoting parent leadership within the school and stakeholder community.
- Monitoring progress toward preparing students for success.
- Ensuring access and equity for students and their families.

We at the Santa Maria-Bonita School District value the participation of parents and all family members in the education of their children and actively seek to build a positive and respectful stakeholder culture. Together, we can create a supportive environment where students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. We provide parent education to support communication with school sites, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) support, safety forums, and other informational workshops. SMBSD sees regular attendance at a variety of events, including decision-making committees that help shape parent education.

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.

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 3a: Has been implemented.

SMBSD encourages family engagement in school and district programs. SMBSD's Family Engagement team plans and coordinates districtwide outreach and engagement throughout the community in a variety of ways, including in-person and online parent training, Parent Advisory Committees, regular booths at community events such as Downtown Fridays, and maintains a weekly radio program. The variety of formats and times seeks to engage the greatest number of parents throughout our school community.

Recommendation 3b

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

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 3b: Has been implemented

SMBSD continues to work towards the goal of reducing barriers to family participation and encouraging meaningful engagement between schools and families. Schools encourage participation through parent conferences, parent-teacher organizations, family nights, safety presentations, school events, electronic communication, direct contact from school personnel, and language support when appropriate. SMBSD provides a variety of ways for parents to be involved in districtwide Parent Advisory Committees (PAC)

SMBSD believes family engagement is most effective when schools retain flexibility to respond to the needs of their communities and individual families. 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.

Santa Maria-Bonita School District Response to Recommendation 3c: Has been implemented

SMBSD has existing systems of support in place that encourage parent participation in their child's education, as well as engage in district and community programs that support healthy children and parenting. Assistant Principals and School Counselors serve as direct connectors for parents to a variety of school- and community-based programs, in particular when their child is engaging in behaviors that negatively impact others. Parents are encouraged to attend or participate based upon the specific needs of their children and family. Examples of these include youth diversion programs through the Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (CADA), parent workshops through Family Services Agency (FSA), family counseling through Effective School Solutions (ESS), and connections to Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley resources.

Creating positive school climates where students feel safe, connected, and supported is a responsibility shared by educators, families, students, and community partners. The Santa Maria-Bonita School District remains committed to supporting student wellness initiatives, family engagement efforts, professional learning opportunities, and collaboration aimed at ensuring that all students have access to safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.

Respectfully submitted.

Dr. Darren McDuffie

Superintendent, Santa Maria-Bonita School District