

Solvang School District

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Date: September 6, 2026

The Honorable Patricia Kelly
Santa Barbara County Superior Court
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Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio
Foreperson Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
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FILED
SUPERIOR COURT of CALIFORNIA
COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA

09/09/2026

Angela Braun, Executive Officer

BY 
M. Hanson Deputy Clerk

RE: Response of the Solvang Elementary School District to the 2025–26 Civil Grand Jury Report:
"PREPARING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE: How are Santa Barbara County Schools Preparing to Prevent or Minimize the Effects of a Potential Mass Shooting?"

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

The Governing Board and administration of the Solvang Elementary School District are pleased to provide this formal response to the 2025–26 Civil Grand Jury Report. We share the Grand Jury's foundational commitment to ensuring that our schools remain safe, welcoming, and supportive places for students and staff. Keeping our students safe, secure, and emotionally healthy is the most important responsibility we fulfill every day. To achieve this, the District has integrated proactive, site-specific physical security upgrades, extensive staff training, and deep community partnerships directly into our Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP), which is updated and adopted annually by March 1st.

Below, we highlight the concrete measures and evidence from our safety planning that demonstrate our unwavering commitment to campus readiness.

I. Physical and Infrastructure Enhancements ("Project Safe")

The District has taken significant action to build robust physical security measures that prevent unauthorized access and protect our students and staff:

- **Perimeter Fencing (Project Safe):** Under the active support of our School Board, the District completed Project Safe, which fully enclosed the perimeters of both our Lower and Upper campuses with secure fencing. This physical barrier has greatly enhanced the overall safety of our campuses against unwanted intruders.
- **Relocated and Secured Entrances:** To tightly control campus access during school hours, the District relocated front offices and fortified entrances. In the 2025–26 school year, we installed automatic door and gate locking systems integrated with an intercom and buzzer front door locking system. This

technology ensures that office staff can safely see who is attempting to enter our campuses and buzz in appropriate visitors to be signed in at their respective offices.

- Advanced Video Surveillance: As part of our physical site management, we have added new security cameras at key locations across both campuses to record critical areas, aiding in natural surveillance and active threat deterrence.

II. Comprehensive Staff Preparation and Training

We recognize that safety plans are only as effective as the personnel trained to execute them. The District has invested heavily in establishing a culture of readiness through specialized training:

- Reunification Drill Consultation: Our safety goals prioritize improving staff readiness to handle the complexities of post-incident operations. To that end, the District has partnered with Consortium Training and Consulting to design and provide hands-on, comprehensive reunification drill training for all staff.
- Active Assailant and Specialized Training: Beyond routine monthly drills, Solvang staff receive continuous education on critical threat response. Staff have participated in specialized safety trainings, including active assailant procedures, biohazard response, and Public Information Officer (PIO) protocols for managing incident communications during a crisis.
- Regular SBCEO Symposia Attendance: The District works closely with the Santa Barbara County Office of Education (SBCEO). Our administrators and safety team regularly attend the annual SBCEO School Safety Symposium to align our site-based protocols with evolving county-wide best practices.

III. Collaborative Safety Partnerships

Solvang Elementary School District operates on the firm belief that school safety cannot exist in isolation. We are proud of our deep-rooted relationships with regional partners:

- Excellent Law Enforcement Relations: We enjoy strong, collaborative relations built over years of mutual trust with local law enforcement. The Superintendent and our School Safety Committee consult annually with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department to update our tactical response procedures, coordinate incident management, and ensure first responders are familiar with our precise building layouts.
- Close Partnership with Valley Superintendents: We are fortunate to maintain close collegial relationships and strong partnerships with other school superintendents throughout the Santa Ynez Valley and Santa Barbara County. In the event that a natural disaster or emergency forces a school relocation, our partner Valley districts stand ready to step up and support us without hesitation, just as Solvang stands ready to open its doors to any neighboring district in need.
- Active Coordination with SB County and SBCEO Liaison: The District works seamlessly with the SBCEO School Safety Liaison during natural disasters and safety incidents, participates in joint emergency exercises, and coordinates with Santa Barbara County emergency management officials as needed. We appreciate and highly value our close communication with Sheriff Bill Brown and County agencies to ensure a unified, swift response to any regional emergency.

Through this combination of robust infrastructure, rigorous training, and active local partnerships, the Solvang Elementary School District continues to maintain a secure, supportive environment where students can focus on learning. We appreciate the Grand Jury's diligent review and recommendations as we work together toward our shared goal of safeguarding the children of Santa Barbara County

Pursuant to California Penal Code § 933 and § 933.05, the Solvang Elementary School District respectfully submits its formal responses to the specific findings and recommendations contained within the Grand Jury's report.

SECTION I: RESPONSES TO GRAND JURY FINDINGS

Finding 1

The Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) provides County school districts training in identifying pathways to targeted violence, although attendance by employees of the various Santa Barbara County school districts in the SBCEO's School Safety Symposium is limited.

Response: Disagree partially with explanation.

While Solvang Elementary School District agrees that the Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) provides exceptional regional school safety training, this finding does not accurately characterize the active and consistent participation of our district's leadership. Solvang administrative leaders prioritize attending these sessions and have a strong record of participation. Our Superintendent, site principals, and safety team regularly attend the annual SBCEO School Safety Symposiums and collaborate closely with the SBCEO Safety Liaison to integrate regional threat prevention strategies directly into our localized safety practices.

Finding 2

Santa Barbara County school districts are compliant in creating Comprehensive School Safety Plans for their schools, but some staff require more information and training on safety protocols.

Response: Agree with explanation.

Solvang Elementary School District is fully compliant with California Education Code Sections 32280–32289.6. Our Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) is updated, reviewed, and adopted annually by March 1st (with our most recent plan updated on February 11, 2026, and approved by the Governing Board). We recognize that safety training is an ongoing process of improvement, Solvang ensures that all certificated, classified, and temporary staff receive robust training on the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) and site-specific emergency checklists. We conduct regular safety debriefings and dedicate site professional development days to safety protocols, ensuring our staff is highly informed and prepared. With that said, we have new teams and substitutes coming on board and as part of this year's safety plan, we will strengthen our substitute safety training and complete a comprehensive drill with staff and students.

Finding 3

While many Santa Barbara County school districts have a watch, listen, and report culture for enhancement of threat detection in their schools, not all schools have anonymous pathways for reporting threats or potential threats online or on campus.

Response: Disagree as to Solvang Elementary School District.

This finding does not apply to Solvang Elementary School District. The District has established comprehensive, multi-layered anonymous pathways for threat and safety reporting. Solvang utilizes the STOPit anonymous reporting application, which is electronically pre-installed and pushed to all school-provided devices, made accessible via our district website, and promoted through posters placed throughout both campuses. The STOPit app has been successfully utilized by both students and adults. In addition, we maintain physical reporting options, allowing students and parents to submit anonymous written notes directly to school administrators.

Finding 4

School Resource Officers or Deputies are valuable in preventing or addressing potentially dangerous situations on campus, but many schools do not employ them.

Response: Disagree partially with explanation.

While on-campus School Resource Officers (SROs) or Deputies (SRDs) can be valuable on large secondary school campuses, employing a full-time officer at a small, low-crime elementary and middle school district (TK-8) like Solvang is financially cost-prohibitive and structurally impractical. Rather than diverting limited

educational funds to purchase dedicated SRO services, Solvang prioritizes its budget on physical security infrastructure and proactive wellness programs led by our credentialed School Counselor and School Psychologist. Furthermore, the District maintains excellent relations and active communication with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department and Fire Department. Our local deputy response times to our campuses average approximately two minutes, providing outstanding protection without on-campus SRO staffing.

Finding 5

Some schools in Santa Barbara County school districts lack adequate controls for visitor access.

Response: Disagree as to Solvang Elementary School District.

This finding does not apply to Solvang Elementary School District. Solvang enforces strict, modern visitor access controls on both campuses. Under Project Safe, the District relocated site offices and fully enclosed our perimeters with fencing. During school hours, visitors cannot enter the interior of either campus without utilizing an automatic door and gate locking entry system integrated with a secure buzzer, intercom, and camera front door system. All visitors must report directly to the main office immediately upon arrival, present proof of identity to office personnel, sign in, and wear a visible visitor pass at all times while on campus.

Finding 6

Not all schools in Santa Barbara County have adequate safety infrastructure, including fences, cameras, classrooms that lock from the inside, restricted access points, and instantaneous communication devices.

Response: Disagree as to Solvang Elementary School District.

This finding does not apply to Solvang Elementary School District. With the active support of our Board, the District completed comprehensive safety upgrades under Project Safe. Both of our campuses are completely enclosed with perimeter fencing. All classroom doors lock securely from the inside. Restricted entry is managed via our front door buzzer/intercom and camera systems. Site safety is monitored by security cameras throughout school grounds, and instantaneous communication is maintained using campus intercoms and battery-operated two-way walkie-talkies.

SECTION II: RESPONSES TO GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1b

The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts require administrative leaders to attend the School Safety Symposium in person at least once every two years.

Response: Has been implemented.

Solvang Elementary School District already requires its administrative leadership to participate in ongoing school safety and emergency management training. Superintendent Loughridge, site principals, and/or safety coordinators attend the annual SBCEO School Safety Symposium in person each year, exceeding the Grand Jury's recommended frequency.

Recommendation 1c

The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts encourage teachers and staff to attend the School Safety Symposium in-person, and if not in-person, access the online seminar annually.

Response: It will not be implemented with explanation of why.

The Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) does not offer, record, or stream the School Safety Symposium online. This is due to presenter permission requirements (including federal partners), the sensitive nature of the safety topics, and the interactive table-discussion format. We cannot encourage staff to access it because an online seminar option doesn't exist. Additionally, releasing classroom teachers for an off-site, all-day symposium is not operationally feasible due to the ongoing local substitute teacher shortage. To ensure all personnel are trained, Solvang utilizes a "train-the-trainer" model. Administrators who attend the

symposium bring key safety guidelines directly back to our site teams. We also provide mandatory on-site safety training for all certificated and classified staff each school year.

Recommendation 2a

The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts train and drill all fulltime campus personnel and students for campus safety at least once per semester.

Response: Has been implemented.

Solvang Elementary School District conducts regular, age-appropriate drills that exceed this recommendation. In accordance with California Education Code and our safety plan, our students and staff participate in monthly fire drills, and quarterly earthquake drills (including participation in the annual Great California ShakeOut). Standard Response Protocol (SRP) lockdown, secure, and shelter-in-place drills are conducted each semester with all full-time personnel and students to practice immediate, decisive action.

Recommendation 2b

The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide written and verbal instruction to all temporary personnel, including substitute teachers, prior to their entering a new classroom location.

Response: Will be implemented.

Solvang School will enhance its onboarding of substitutes to ensure all temporary and substitute personnel are briefed on safety procedures. Upon checking in at our site front offices, substitute teachers are provided with physical written emergency procedures, site maps, and keys. To ensure these protocols remain highly accessible, every classroom and workroom across both campuses is equipped with physical, printed Emergency Safety Flip Charts in plain view. Site office managers provide direct verbal safety briefings to incoming substitutes before they assume classroom responsibilities. Additionally, all classrooms are equipped with the Standard Response Protocols visible and in the red emergency backpacks.

Recommendation 2c

The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide quick reference situational cards and/or information posters conveying simple instructions for emergency response procedures in every classroom and in public rooms.

Response: Has been implemented.

The District has provided and displayed physical, non-digital safety reference materials in every classroom, office, workroom, and public space across both campuses. Standard visual posters illustrating the five core actions of the Standard Response Protocol (Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, Shelter) and their corresponding directives are posted prominently. Classrooms are also equipped with physical Emergency Safety Flip Charts for at-a-glance reference.

Recommendation 3a

The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts train school personnel on how to gain trust, understand healthy boundaries, and engage in strategic partnerships with community service groups to support student needs.

Response: Has been implemented.

Solvang actively prioritizes student wellness, safety, and positive relationship building. Staff receive professional development in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative justice, and mandatory child abuse reporting laws. The District supports student wellness through our credentialed School Counselor, School Psychologist, and our dedicated school Inclusion Team. These professionals work in close partnership with teachers to provide 1:1 and small group counseling, de-escalation, and academic/social interventions. Additionally, the District maintains highly active partnerships with regional service groups,

including the SB County Office of Education (SBCEO), and Santa Barbara County Behavioral Wellness (including MWell) to connect our students and families with intensive mental health and counseling resources.

Recommendation 3b

The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts provide an anonymous reporting mechanism on school-provided devices, in addition to a drop box available on campus.

Response: Has been implemented.

Solvang provides electronic and physical anonymous reporting pathways. The STOPit anonymous reporting application is pre-installed and electronically pushed to all school-provided devices (Chromebooks and iPads) and is linked on our district website. Promotional posters highlighting the app are displayed throughout both campuses to encourage student awareness. In addition, students and families can physically submit anonymous written notes directly to school administrators or office staff.

Recommendation 4

The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have School Resource Officers (SRO) or Deputies (SRD).

Response: It will not be implemented with explanation of why.

Solvang Elementary School District has evaluated this recommendation and determined that employing a dedicated SRO or SRD is not financially sustainable or operationally necessary. Purchasing full-time law enforcement services is highly expensive and cost-prohibitive for a small elementary school district our size. Diverting limited general funds to on-campus officers would force deep cuts to our direct classroom instruction, our credentialed School Counselor, our School Psychologist, and our intervention team members.

Solvang is a safe, close-knit, rural community with a historically low crime rate. We maintain an exceptional partnership with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, consulting annually to update our Comprehensive School Safety Plan. In actual emergency situations, deputy response times to our campuses average approximately two minutes, ensuring outstanding security without the immense financial burden of an on-campus officer.

Recommendation 5a

The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts improve visitor access control during school hours by requiring valid government-issued photo identification verified by school personnel, utilizing a system that checks for restraining orders or other legal restrictions.

Response: Has been implemented.

Solvang requires all visitors and volunteers to report directly to the school office immediately upon entering campus. Visitors must present a valid government-issued photo identification to office personnel. Because we are a small school community, our office staff personally know almost every parent, guardian, and regular visitor who enters our campuses. This allows personnel to highly effectively verify identity and manually cross-reference visitors against legal restrictions, restraining orders, and safety folders kept on file in our site offices. Given our district's size, this rigorous manual verification process provides exceptional security and is more appropriate than purchasing a costly automated database.

Recommendation 5b

The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts require all schools to issue visitors a badge and require its visibility on the visitor while on campus during school hours.

Response: Has been implemented.

All visitors and volunteers registered in our front offices are issued a visible identifying visitor pass or badge. Visitors are strictly required to wear this pass in a visible location at all times while on school grounds. This

protocol is firmly enforced; district staff and administrators are fully authorized to stop and redirect any unbadged adult to the front office immediately.

Recommendation 6

The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have each school conduct an annual security review with respect to video security cameras at key points across school grounds, two-way communications on campus, and innovations, such as artificial intelligence-aided technologies or drones, and make improvements based on those reviews.

Response: Has been implemented.

Solvang conducts regular, ongoing, and annual campus safety and physical security reviews. These reviews are led by the Superintendent, site principals, and the maintenance lead. Active consultation with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, CTC Safety Consultants, and our SBCEO School Safety Liaison through campus walkthroughs has been conducted. Past security reviews led directly to the successful funding and completion of our perimeter fencing, camera expansions, and secure buzzer/intercom systems under Project Safe. Currently, our team is acting on our most recent site reviews by planning critical upgrades to our campus intercom and outdoor speaker communication systems on our Upper Campus.

Respectfully submitted,



Sierra Loughridge
Superintendent,
Solvang Elementary School District
(On behalf of the Governing Board of the Solvang Elementary School District)