

August 26, 2004

Honorable Clifford R. Andersen, III
Presiding Judge, Santa Barbara County Superior Court
P.O. Box 21107
Santa Barbara, CA 93121-1107

Re: Response to the 2003-04 Grand Jury Report, "Tilting at Windmills: The Disconnect Between Santa Barbara Schools Districts and the Special Education Local Plan"

Dear Judge Anderson:

On August 24, 2004, the Board of Education of the Santa Barbara School Districts (SBSD) adopted the following in response to the Findings and Recommendations contained in the 2003-2004 Grand Jury Report titled "Tilting at Windmills: The Disconnect Between Santa Barbara School Districts and the Special Education Local Plan". (The findings and recommendations listed below are verbatim from the report.)

Finding 1

The Santa Barbara School Districts have not fully participated in the local SELPA and JPA meetings held in Santa Ynez. The Superintendent of SBSB has offered to attend meetings, and the recently hired Director of Special Education will attend the coordinators' meetings.

Recommendation 1

The Superintendent should make every effort to attend JPA meetings on a regular basis, especially when policy or legal matters are discussed. If there are disputes with policy, representatives from the Districts need to bring them up at SELPA and JPA meetings and allow the group process to make the best decision for every district in the region.

Response to Finding and Recommendation 1

The Interim Superintendent Dr. Brian Sarvis will attend the SELPA JPA meetings and participate as a board member. Concerns expressed by the Board of Education of the Santa Barbara School Districts will be communicated directly to the JPA board. Director of Special Education Jeffrey Gabrielson will attend the coordinators' meetings on a monthly basis and communicate as needed with teachers, staff, and parents.

Finding 2

Santa Barbara School Board has criticized SELPA and the JPA in matters of governance, legal proceedings, staff development, visibility and accountability. The SBSB Board of Trustees had not been informed of the role of SELPA in special education.

Recommendation 2

Board members should continue educating themselves about SELPA. Efforts should be made to learn about its operation within the context of the region. Special education staff need to regularly update the Board on special education matters.

Response to Finding and Recommendation 2

Board members have learned much about the operation of the SELPA during the course of this past school year through verbal presentations and written materials provided by the SELPA and SBSB staff. Board members also receive copies of the SELPA JPA monthly meeting agendas and minutes in the Superintendent's Bulletin. At the board's request, Marcia McClish, SELPA Director will provide the board with an annual report regarding the SELPA so that the board is receiving updates of SELPA activities on a more frequent basis than the SELPA Local Plan review which occurs at five year intervals.. The first of such reports will be completed by July 30, 2004.

The Santa Barbara School Districts Board of Education wishes to acknowledge the hard work and time devoted by Grand Jury members to this report. While the Santa Barbara School Districts are committed to improving our relationship with SELPA, SELPA shares in the responsibility for the lack of communication identified in the report. It is important to recognize that there are some aspects of this relationship that we do not control. Furthermore, individual members of the school board believe the Grand Jury's findings reflect some inaccuracies and specific lack of understanding and knowledge of SELPA. Regardless of these individual opinions the recommendations of the Grand Jury will be diligently implemented.

Sincerely,

Nancy Harter, President
Board of Education
Santa Barbara School Districts