

August 9, 2011
Hon. Arthur A. Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
312 East Cook Street
P.O. Box 5369
Santa Maria, California 93456-5369

Hon. Joni Gray, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
County Administration Building
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

Dear Judge Garcia and Supervisor Gray:

This is the Ballard School District's response to the Grand Jury's report, "Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County?"

This response has been reviewed by the governing board of the Ballard School District as part of its regularly scheduled board meeting on August 9, 2011. A CD-ROM with this letter in PDF format is attached, as requested by the Grand Jury.

Sincerely,

Allan Pelletier
Superintendent/Principal
Ballard School District

Ballard School District
Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations:
“Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County?”

Finding 1

The only truancy programs in use today in the County of Santa Barbara are those independently developed and managed by individual school districts.

Response

- a. The Ballard School District agrees with this finding.

Recommendation 1b

That the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney report the results quarterly of the truancy intervention letters data, to the Santa Barbara County Education Office and all Santa Barbara County school districts.

Response

- a. The Ballard School District agrees with this recommendation.

Recommendation 1c

That the Santa Barbara County Education Office in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney, Santa Barbara County elementary, secondary, and unified school districts, immediately develop a countywide program to reduce truancy, by reinstating the School Attendance Review Boards.

Response

- a. The Ballard School District agrees with this recommendation. The local SARB process has proven to be an effective intervention when the District Attorney’s Office and the Probation Department worked together with local school districts.
- b. This recommendation crosses multiple agencies with no identification of the following:
 - I. the “overseeing” agency;
 - II. the costs associated with the recommended strategies (as yet unidentified) at the local agency level and the SBCEO or SB District Attorney level;
 - III. the scope of responsibility versus the scope of accountability for local school districts implementing the final truancy prevention strategies;
- c. It is important to note that SARBs were ineffective without the direct support of the District Attorney and the Probation Department prior to the dismantling of the truancy program in 2008/2009.

Recommendation 1d

That the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney, working with the Santa Barbara County Education Office, and the Santa Barbara County school districts, implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

- a. The Ballard School District partially disagrees with the following section of this recommendation: *“...implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools.”*
 - I. This recommendation needs further study before full implementation. Specifically, a clear plan of action regarding a proposed “truancy enforcement” program needs to be articulated, including the corresponding levels of accountability at each level (i.e. District Attorney, SBCEO, school district, and family) before implementation.
 - II. Additionally, cost estimates and budgetary decisions need to be firmly identified and adopted as part of the action plan before implementing a “truancy enforcement” program countywide.

Finding 2

The Ballard School District agrees with this finding.

Recommendation 2b

That each Santa Barbara County school district provide in its budget a proportional share, based on the number of students, to the Santa Barbara County Office of the District Attorney to assist in funding an enforceable truancy program for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

- a. The Ballard School District disagrees with this recommendation for the following reasons:
 - I. When compared to state cuts across all sectors, public schools in California have taken a disproportionate share of funding reductions to Revenue Limit and categorical programs since 2008.
 - II. The Board of Supervisors asked Santa Barbara County schools to contribute to a Santa Barbara County District Attorney truancy intervention position in the 2008/2009 school year. School districts overwhelmingly declined the request, citing state-caused financial cuts.
 - III. Funding for public schools in California is worse than it was in 2008/2009, as evidenced by the total number of school districts filing “qualified” or “negative” certifications in the current year. The schools in Santa Barbara County are also operating at critically low funding levels, resulting in severe effects to their primary mission: educating students. The recommendation to have schools divert funding away from already weakened classrooms is not reasonable at this time.
 - IV. This recommendation is worthy of further study to determine how “proportional share” of school district contributions would be defined. Specifically, the differences between urban, suburban, and rural school districts needs to be determined because they each have unique needs regarding family income levels, home-to-school transportation issues, and

environmental factors that affect student attendance. Further, differences between elementary and secondary school districts also need to be identified before an appropriate “proportional share” can be applied to Santa Barbara County schools.