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BY: _____

Solvang Elementary School

565 Atterdag Road
Solvang, California 93463
Telephone (805) 697-4454
FAX (805) 688-6410

TO:

Honorable Arthur Garcia
Assistant Presiding Judge
312 East Cook St.
P.O Box 5369
Santa Maria, CA 93456-5369

Hon. Joni Gray
County Administration Building
105 East Anapama St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations:

"Where is the Truancy Program in Santa Barbara County?"

The Solvang Elementary School District shares the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury's concern regarding truancy. Truancy not only affects District revenues but likewise has an adverse affect on the students and in the final analysis society itself.

However, the District does not necessarily agree with the Grand Jury's analysis and recommendations of this ongoing problem.

In fact, the District has been working collaboratively with fellow Santa Ynez Valley school districts to address the problem at the beginning of the 2011-12 school year. It is our hope the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's office will work closely with us in implementing a plan to curb truancy by enforcing the California Education Code.

The Solvang School District currently sends letter to the parents of students with unexcused absences. It is our intention to send the sheriff to homes of chronically truant students and hold them accountable for their students' attendance. Parents of chronically truant students can be fined or jailed for failure to send their children to school.

On November 1, 2010, Joyce Dudley, Santa Barbara County District Attorney addressed the truancy issue at a meeting of the Santa Barbara County School superintendents at Jonata School in Buellton. We agreed in principle that issue needs to be addressed and the DA's office is willing to assist school districts enforcing compulsory attendance.

The following is the Solvang School District's response to the Grand Jury's recommendations:

Finding I

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

I. The Solvang Elementary School District disagrees with the following section of this recommendation: "immediately develop a countywide program to reduce truancy, by reinstating the School Attendance Review Boards.

A. The Solvang ESD does not necessarily believe School Attendance Review Boards are an effective way of curbing truancy. It is our opinion that SARB's are a "slap on the wrist" and no longer have the clout needed to change behavior. Taking parents to court and fining them will have the desired effect.

B. This recommendation needs further study before being fully adopted and implemented. Specifically, this recommendation crosses multiple agencies with no identification of the following:

1. The "overseeing" agency;
2. The costs associated with the recommended strategies (as yet unidentified) at the local agency level and the SBCEO or SB District Attorney level;
3. The scope of responsibility versus the scope of accountability for local school districts implementing the final truancy prevention strategies;
4. The role of the Probation Department as a "body of accountability" in truancy prevention measures; and
5. Recognition 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.

II. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of the Solvang Elementary School District.

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, implements truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools.

Response

I The Solvang Elementary School District disagrees with the following section of this recommendation: "implement truancy enforcement countywide for all Santa Barbara County schools."

A. 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.

B. 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. Without this crucial information, any new enforcement plan will cause confusion and ultimately fail.

II. The implementation of this recommendation is outside the scope of The Solvang Elementary School District. We believe that implementation of a program will work better on a "local" basis rather than a county-wide program.

Finding II

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

I. The Solvang Elementary School District disagrees with this recommendation for the following reasons:

A. 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.

B. The Board of Supervisors asked Santa Barbara County schools to contribute 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.

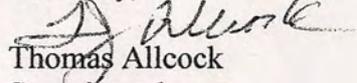
C. Funding for public schools in California is worse than it was in 2008 - 2009, as evidenced by the total number of school districts filing "qualified" or "negative" certifications in the current year. For example, there was an increase in schools filing "qualified" or "negative" of 30% from the first interim to the second interim in 2010 - 2011 (School Services of California, June 14, 2011). 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.

D. 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.

Solvang School is determined to work with the District Attorney and our local Sheriff Department to deal with our truancy issue. We have a relatively small number of truants, but have already worked with the Sheriff's Department this school year in contacting and citing parents who are in violation of the law.

We appreciate the Grand Jury's concern regarding truancy and will cooperate in within our budgetary constraints to resolve this societal concern.

Sincerely,


Thomas Allcock
Superintendent
Solvang School