

Soledad Unified School District

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Timothy J. Vanoli
Superintendent

Randy Bangs
Associate Superintendent of Educational Services

1261 Metz Rd., Soledad, CA 93960

August 9, 2018

Honorable Stephanie E. Hulseley
Judge of the Superior Court
County of Monterey
240 Church Street
Salinas, Ca 93901

RE: Response to the 2017-18 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report – “School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards.”

Dear Honorable Judge Hulseley:

The 2017-18 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report – “School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards - focused on the critical role that school boards play in shaping the directions for their school districts.

The Soledad Unified School District took action at the August 8, 2018 School Board Meeting to adopt the attached responses to Findings 1-8 and Recommendations 1-6 of the Grand Jury Report. Attached, please find the Soledad Unified School District’s responses to these findings and recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations of the 2017-18 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report – “School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards.”

Sincerely,

Timothy J. Vanoli, Superintendent

Josie Perez-Aguilera, Board President

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The Monterey County Civil Grand Jury has produced a report titled – “School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards.” This report is a Final report for the purposes of Penal Code section 933. The Soledad Unified School District must submit comments on the report to the Honorable, Stephanie E. Hulsey, Judge of the Superior Court, 240 Church Street, Salinas, California 93901, within ninety (90) days following its transmittal. The Soledad Unified School District is responsible for Findings F1-F8 and Recommendations R1-R6.

Attached you will find the Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Report, along with the responses for Findings F1-F8 as well as Recommendations R1-R6.

FINDINGS

F1. Student achievement suffers when school districts are unproductive or dysfunctional. It can be very costly and take years to address problems if the Monterey County Office of Education and/or California Department of Education have to step in to support or save a school district.

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees with this finding.

F2. There are proactive steps that can be taken by the Monterey County Office of Education in collaboration with school boards to prevent many pitfalls of poor governance.

F3. The Monterey County Office of Education and local school boards can do more to promote effective governance that is accountable to the community and produces better district outcomes.

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees with this finding. The Soledad Unified School District has provided leadership for effective governance by participating in the biannual Education Leadership Forums hosted by the Monterey County School Boards Association (MCSBA). This board training event is a full day of training for school board members and covers such topics as:

- Keys to Effective Leadership and Governance: Lessons Learned
- Board Relations and Developing Cohesive and Effective Governance Teams
- Understanding the Legal Requirements of School Boards and Board Members
- Behind the Numbers: Where California Stands in School Funding and What School Districts Can Do to Inform Public Perceptions of Education
- The Shift of Future Ready: Technology Integration and Innovative School Programs
- The Bully, The Bullied, and the Not-So-Innocent Bystander
- California’s Fiscal and Political Outlook for K-12 Education and Legislative Overview
- The Role of Equity: California’s New Accountability and Continuous Improvement System
- Raising Results for English Learners
- Preparing K-12 Students for the Rigor of College: What Districts Need to Do
- Human Trafficking Happens Here: Identifying and Responding to Human Trafficking
- A Focus on Undocumented Students: Ensuring a Safe and Affirming Learning Environment for All Students.

F4. *Promoting effective local governance requires better public information, communication, and a strong commitment to board development.*

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees that better public information, communication, and a strong commitment to board development are important elements of effective governance for school districts.

F5. *Although each school district has individual priorities, school boards can each make a commitment to adhering to best practices, training, and ongoing professional development when it comes to school board governance.*

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees with this finding. The Board has been active in recent years in Monterey County School Boards Association trainings, as well as the National/California School Boards Association Annual Conferences, workshops, and trainings. The School Board has also participated in trainings locally regarding professional development and school governance. Some of the local training topics include:

- Ethics Training by Tom DeLapp for District Leadership Team and Board Members – May 2, 2017
- Board Retreat – Communications Training with Tom DeLapp – August 2016
- Nov 16, 2016 – Trainings by Lozano-Smith on:
 - Conflict of Interest - fits
 - Form 700 – training
 - Credit Card Usage – what is authorized and what is not
 - Misappropriation of Public Funds
 - Fraud Prevention
- Soledad Leadership Summit with Board Members & Soledad City Council on November 2, 2017.
Topics included:
 - Services
 - Communication
 - Future Development
 - Facilities
- Follow- Leadership Summit with Board Members & Soledad City Council on July 31, 2018
- Two Board Members have completed the Masters In Governance Program (sponsored by the California School Boards Association); and one member is registered to start the program in September 2018
- In April 2018, the Soledad Unified School Board of Trustees created a Governance Handbook for use as a Governing Board

F6. *While the Monterey County Office of Education cannot dictate how school boards govern, they can provide strong leadership in promoting a culture of effective school board governance.*

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees that the Monterey County Office of Education can provide strong leadership in promoting a culture of effective school board governance. In recent years, the Soledad Unified School District has participated in effective school board workshops hosted by the Monterey County School Boards Association. Topics of these workshops include:

- Public Records – What You Need to Know – December 10, 2015
- Annual Educational Leadership Summits – November of each year (November 18, 2015, November 16, 2017)
- MCSBA Annual Dinner & Organizational Meetings of each year (April 14, 2016; April 27, 2017; March 22, 2018)
- Back to School Legal Updates Workshop by Lozano Smith

- Unifying To End Cyber Bullying – February 28, 2017 – at Soledad High School – Sponsored by the Pebble Beach Authors & Ideas Festival and Carmel Ideas Foundation & MCOE
- Participation in the Monterey County School Boards Association Scheduled Meetings
- Safe Schools – Safety and Crisis Plan Training
- A.L.I.C.E Training (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate)
- 2017 MCOE Trainings:
 - Best Practices and Strategies for Effective Governance
 - College and Career Pathways
 - The Nuts and Bolts of LCFF and LCAP
- 2014 MCOE Trainings:
 - Brown Act Jeopardy! Clarifying Tough Issues
 - Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP)
 - Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

F7. *Information posted on Monterey County Office of Education and school district websites is insufficient and not user-friendly. It does not provide with adequate information about what school boards do, how to evaluate school board performance, or how to assess school district outcomes.*

Response: The Soledad school District has a comprehensive website with over # 187 webpages and over 378 documents that are accessible to the public. The District's link to the School Board is <http://soledadusd.org/boardoftrustees/>

Other links from the District's website include the following:

- Home – <http://soledadusd.org/>
- Community – <http://soledadusd.org/community/>
- Our District – <http://soledadusd.org/our-district/>
- Parents – <http://soledadusd.org/parents-portal/>
- Students - <http://soledadusd.org/students/>
- Schools – <http://soledadusd.org/schools/>
- Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/SoledadUnifiedSchoolDistrict>
- Also Available in Spanish Language – -there is no link, but the option is available in the upper right hand corner

Communication also includes Auto-Dialers, School Marquees, school website, and weekly District/School Newsletters.

The Soledad Unified School District continues to work to make the website accessible to the public and maintain it in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The District is also working to ensure that each webpage conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

F8. *School boards can do better in fulfilling their responsibility to communicate with school district stakeholders.*

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees that communication can always be improved and this requires efforts of continuous improvement. The District communicates with the public by providing weekly newsletters, website information, and school Marquees. The district also communicates with the public through Twitter and Facebook, with over 490 followers with each social media platform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. *School Boards should adopt a policy to commit to all National School Boards Association best practices.***

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees that school boards should adopt a policy to commit to all National School Boards Association best Practices. The Soledad Unified School District Board of Trustees has attended the National School Boards Association Annual Conference for the past 3 Years. They continue to seek out best practices from a National Perspective. The strands that have been presented at the National Conference include the following:

- New School Board Member Bootcamp
- Stop Doing Things that Don't Work, and Really Close the Achievement Gap
- Global Learning Initiatives, Discovery Education
- How the Best Schools and education Systems Keep Getting B
- Community and Adolescent Resiliency-Unifying Solution
- School Safety
- Becoming a Lifelong Learner
- Disrupting Poverty: Where to Start...What to Stop
- School Boards and Superintendents Partnering for Innovation
- School Board/Superintendent Relations
- What the Public Wants from our Schools
- Addressing Neighborhood effects in High Poverty Schools
- 10 Strategies Proven to Inspire & Engage Every Student
- You Have the Power of One to Start a Fire, But you Need the Power of Many to keep the Fire Burning

- R2. *School Boards should adopt a bylaw to make initial training and ongoing workshops mandatory.***

Response: The Soledad Unified School District partially agrees with this statement. It is important for school board members to develop their skills and knowledge to become highly effective board members. Our current bylaw on Board training indicates that training is encouraged by board members. Also, there are budgeted funds available for board members to attend the necessary trainings.

- R3. *Schools Boards, along with their superintendent and teacher union representatives, should make annual public presentations on school district goals and student achievement.***

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees with this recommendation. This recommendation has already been implemented in accordance with the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). This plan requires the engagement of all stakeholders in the process, including bargaining units. Also, the LCAP is presented at a public hearing and approved at a regular board meeting each year.

- R4. *Schools Boards should provide clear, concise, and easy to find communications on their district's goals and outcomes on their district's website.***

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees with this recommendation. The Soledad Unified School District is required to post the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) on the website each year. Also, the LCAP includes the District's LCAP goals and student achievement results. In addition, the District is required to post their Annual Accountability Report Cards by February 1st of each year.

- R5. *School Boards should provide information on their district's website about the role and responsibilities of school board members to educate parents, the public and potential school board candidates***

Response: The Soledad Unified School District agrees with this recommendation. The District has posted on the website the roles and responsibilities of school board members to educate parents, the public, and potential school board members.

- R6. *School Boards should provide access to informational sessions to educate potential school board candidates on the duties and commitment associated with serving on a local school board.***

Response: The Soledad Unified School District Board of Trustees agrees with this recommendation. Potential school board candidates should attend school board meetings, and read information on the district's website, which includes board policies, administrative regulations, and board by-laws. Potential candidates should also contact other board members or the district superintendent to learn more about board member roles and responsibilities.