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Business Services Division

September 8, 2011

The Honorable Vincent O'Neill, Jr.
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Ave.
Ventura, CA 93009

RECEIVED
SEP 14 2011
VENTURA COUNTY
GRAND JURY

RE: Grand Jury Report Dated June 3, 2011 Concerning School Bus Safety

Rio School District has reviewed the Grand Jury report and **submits its response on the attached specified form as required** by your letter dated June 3, 2011. In summary, Rio School District agrees with the Grand Jury's finding that school bus travel in Ventura County is safe. Based upon the national statistics presented in the report, school bus travel is the safest method of transportation when compared to trains, commercial aviation, and private passenger vehicles.

The report also noted that the California Highway Patrol (CHP) is the governmental agency responsible for the supervision of the school pupil transportation industry, including investigating school bus accidents. The report states that data concerning all school bus accidents occurring within Ventura County is available from the CHP Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System.

Even though the Grand Jury report states that school bus travel is one of the safest methods of public transportation and that a database already exists to collect information about school bus accidents, it recommends that another data collection and reporting system be established for reporting school bus transportation statistics.

Rio School District and the Ventura County Office of Education respectfully disagree with the Grand Jury's recommendation and suggest that the existing data collection system operated by the California Highway Patrol be modified to collect and report the LEA/jurisdiction operating a bus involved in an accident. That simple change to an existing data collection system would provide the public with specific information relating to a single LEA/jurisdiction without creating a redundant, unfunded task for VCOE and the school districts in Ventura County.

If you have any questions regarding the information presented in this response, please contact Mark Krueger, Assistant Superintendent for Business Services at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,


Eleanor Torres
Board President

cc. Dr. Howard Hamilton, Interim Superintendent
Foreman, Ventura County Grand Jury
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Embracing hearts, inspiring minds

Response to Grand Jury Report
Statements to Findings and Recommendations
School Bus Safety
September 8, 2011

Rio School District

FINDINGS WITH WHICH WE AGREE:

FI-07 The Grand Jury was unable to identify any single local agency responsible for collecting, collating, and reporting County school bus safety information on a countywide basis.

We agree that there is not one agency mandated to collect, collate and report school bus safety information on a countywide basis if the information being identified by the Grand Jury attempts to directly link student ridership with school bus accidents. Public K-12 school districts in California are required to submit basic transportation program information to the California Department of Education on the "Form TRANS" each year along with the districts unaudited financial information. This public information includes the average number of students transported daily and total miles driven to/from school. School districts are not required to report accident information. However, as the report states, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) is required to investigate school bus accidents. The report goes on to state that the CHP Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System includes school bus-involved collision data on a countywide basis, but does not identify individual information for each district or jurisdiction in the County. We suggest that the existing database be expanded to include the school district or jurisdiction associated with the bus. This simple change to an existing data collection system would provide the public with specific information relating to a single jurisdiction. When combined with the currently available data from the "Form TRANS", an interested party could obtain more specific information on the operation of a public school transportation program.

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FINDINGS WITH WHICH WE DISAGREE:

FI-03 Not all districts maintain information on school bus safety statistics. Some districts do not track this information at all, while others rely on their contracted bus companies to do so.

We disagree with this statement because of its broad implications that school districts do not maintain records in accordance with established law. Rio School District is required to maintain and report specific information related to our student transportation program on the "Form TRANS." That form is included in the annual unaudited financial report available to the public and submitted to the California Department of Education. However, Rio School District is not required to maintain and report specific statistics related to school bus accidents. That requirement resides with the California Highway Patrol.

FI-04 Due to the lack of comparable, consistent school bus safety statistics provided by the districts, it is not possible to determine objective measures of school bus safety, such as accident rates. Thus, it is difficult to conclude that school bus transportation in the County is safe, as previously demonstrated at the national level. It is only possible to infer that school bus transportation in the County is safe from the information provided by the districts.

We disagree with this statement because of its broad implications that school districts do not maintain records in accordance with established law. Each school district in California is required by law to submit annual transportation information to the California Department of Education on the "Form TRANS." The California Highway Patrol is required to investigate school bus accidents and has a database capable of tracking the accidents by county. Both sets of data are available to the public and could be used to make an educated conclusion of the number of accidents per mile driven or per student served.

FI-05 School bus safety statistics, for districts or for individual schools, are not readily available to the public.

We disagree with this statement. We believe that the public has access to and can obtain all the school bus accident and transportation program information that the CHP and Rio School District are mandated to collect and report.

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RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ARE NOT APPLICABLE TO RIO SCHOOL DISTRICT.

R-01 The VCOE should assume responsibility for the collection, collating, and reporting of County school bus safety information.

We have been advised by the County Superintendent of Schools that the VCOE does not plan, and has not been provided funding, to implement this recommendation at this time.

R-02 The VCOE should develop a standard form for the annual collection of school bus safety information from the districts. This information should include: the total number of students who ride the bus to and from school on a daily basis; the total number of students who are transported for field trips, special events, or athletic events; total miles ridden by students; and total number of school bus-related accidents and injuries resulting from those accidents.

The Ventura County Office of Education does not have the authority over the public school districts and private schools in the County of Ventura to require these agencies to report this type of statistical information. In addition, during this time of severe budget cut backs to our schools, without specific legal mandates, it is not reasonable to place additional data collection requirements on VCOE. We have been advised by the County Superintendent of Schools that the VCOE does not plan to implement this recommendation at this time.

R-03 The Districts should use the VCOE standard form recommended in R-02, above, to collect school bus safety information, report this information to the VCOE, and post it on district websites.

We have been advised by the County Superintendent of Schools that based on the reasons identified in R-01, R-02 and R-04, the Ventura County Office of Education does not plan to implement this recommendation at this time.

R-04 The VCOE should use the forms provided by the districts to collate school bus safety information for the County and post it on its website.

The Ventura County Office of Education does not have the authority over the public school districts and private schools in the County of Ventura to require the LEA to report this type of statistical information. Without specific authority mandating a data collection process, local jurisdictions could choose not to report and the resulting data will be incomplete and ineffective for comparison purposes. We have been advised by the County Superintendent of Schools that VCOE does not plan to implement this recommendation at this time.

Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: School Bus Safety

Report Date: June 3, 2011

Response by: Mark Krueger Title: Assistant Superintendent of Schools

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: FI-07 (see statement attached)
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: FI-03, 04, 05
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefore.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered _____ have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered _____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered _____ require further analysis.
(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.)
- Recommendations numbered R-01, 02, 03, 04 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: September 8, 2011

Signed: 
Eleanor Torres, Board President

Number of pages attached: 3

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