



SANTA PAULA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Educational Support Center
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SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

June 21, 2011

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

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**VENTURA COUNTY
GRAND JURY**

Dear Judge O'Neill:

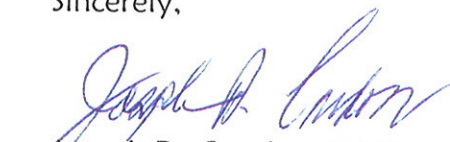
This letter is in reply to your letter of June 3, 2011, requesting a response to the Grand Jury's Final Report on School Bus Safety. As you know from previous correspondence, the Santa Paula Elementary School District complied with requests from the Grand Jury for information related to school bus transportation on both October 27, 2010, and again on February 23, 2011,


We were especially pleased to read finding FI-01, which states that "School transportation systems have been studied extensively at the national level, and the information indicates that school buses are one of the safest modes of transportation."

In regards to the recommendations on page 8 of the Final Report, the Santa Paula Elementary School District believes that the collection of data may be helpful, but disagrees with the recommended methodology as outlined in recommendations R-01 through R-04. In our correspondence of February 23, 2011, we noted that data may be available from the California Highway Patrol as that agency is charged with the responsibility of investigating school bus accidents, and therefore, maintains records of accidents involving California's school bus accidents. Given that California's schools have been and currently are reducing the number of personnel due to budget reductions, it seems inappropriate to create a new and alternative data collection process when such may be available through the Highway Patrol.

Please see the attached for additional details as requested in your correspondence of June 3, 2011.

Sincerely,


Joseph D. Condon, Ed.D.
Acting Superintendent


Michelle Kolbeck, President
Board of Trustees

✓ c: Foreman, Ventura County Grand Jury

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Response to Grand Jury Report
Statements of Finds and Recommendations Regarding
School Bus Safety

Regarding 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.

School bus safety information is available from a variety of agencies including school districts, county offices, the California Highway Patrol, private transportation companies and the California Department of Education. However, data are not collected and collated on a county by county basis. As previously noted, a more sophisticated data collection process by the Highway Patrol may be the most effective means of addressing this stated need.

Regarding 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 n their contracted bus companies to do so.

School bus safety information is available from a variety of agencies including school districts, county offices, the California Highway Patrol and the California Department of Education. However, data are not collected and collated on a county by county basis. As previously noted, a more sophisticated data collection process by the Highway Patrol may be the most effective means of addressing this stated need.

FI - 04 – Due to the lack of comparable, consistent school safety statistics provided by the Districts, it is not possible to determine objective measure 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 nation level. It is only possible to infer that school bus transportation in the County is safe from the information provided by the Districts.

This finding presumes the existence of a nationally accepted and objective measurement of school bus safety. Lacking such an agreed upon measuring instrument, any county by county data would still result in an inadequate measure of school bus safety as comparisons would be insufficient. However, as noted previously, the California Highway Patrol maintains a database on school bus accidents and I would recommend the Highway Patrol participate in data collection that may meet the Grand Jury's need to measure school bus safety on a district by district and county by county basis.

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

As of this date, school bus safety data are collected in accordance with current California law and all required data are available to the public through the Public Records Act. While data may not be collected across districts and counties, they are collected to the extent required and available to anyone who may seek such information.

Regarding Recommendations

At this time, the Santa Paula Elementary School District is unable to respond to recommendations 01, 02, 03 and 04, as they address data collection procedures implemented by the Ventura County Office of Education which is beyond the authority of the District. Should such data collection procedures be implemented, the District will comply with all requests for data regarding school bus safety.