

Nicasio School District

Since 1862

Board of Trustees

Elaine Doss, Board President ~ Daniel Ager, Trustee ~ Mark Burton, Trustee

Agenda Item # 8h

June 17, 2022

The Honorable Judge James Chou
Marin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 4988
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Ms. Deborah Haase, Foreperson
Marin County Civil Grand Jury
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room #275
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Judge Chou and Foreperson Haase,

Below is the Nicasio School District's response to the 2021-2022 Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report dated April 27, 2022, *Marin Schools: A Prescription for COVID Recovery*.

RECOMMENDATION:

R1: By August 1, 2022 the Marin County Superintendent of Schools and all Marin public school districts should convene a countywide Lost Learning Task Force to rapidly develop lost learning recovery models that are available for implementation by all of Marin's public school districts.

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.

There are currently multiple existing groups and structures in place that have been in place before the pandemic and have developed and implemented plans for learning loss mitigation to some degree throughout the pandemic, with the clear understanding that remote learning is not effective or accessible for many students. The Marin County Superintendent of Schools convenes a monthly meeting of Marin County School District Superintendents to coordinate efforts and share best practices for supporting student learning and success. The frequency of these meetings was increased to weekly through a majority of the pandemic, including regular participation of the Marin County Public Health Office and/or Deputy Public Health Officer. A central priority of the Superintendents group through the past two years is to share best practices to address learning loss, and to implement robust student and staff mental health and wellness supports. All Marin County school districts applied for and were recipients of Learning Loss Mitigation Funding (LLMF) to support pupil academic achievement and mitigate learning loss related to COVID-19 school closures. As such all school districts were required to create learning continuity and attendance plans, which have been adopted and submitted to the California Department of Education.

In addition to monthly Superintendents meetings, other countywide groups that meet on a regular basis with representatives from all school districts who have been addressing learning loss mitigation through the pandemic include the Innovative Learning Team (ILT), District Business Officials (DBOs), Elementary and Middle School Principals Networks, and the Marin County Schools Wellness Collaborative.

Nicasio School District's Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees on December 15, 2020 and submitted to the California Department of Education.

R2: By August 1, 2022 the Marin County Superintendent of Schools and all Marin public school districts should also call on the Lost Learning Task Force, as a second but vital priority, to develop and recommend protocols and policies for minimizing the length of emergency school closures during future disruptions.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

This recommendation has been implemented, although not in the name of a Lost Learning Task Force. There is recognition that this work is ongoing. Prior to COVID there was strong consensus among all Marin County Public School leaders that continuity of school operations and in person learning is a critical priority. Tools to support this priority through recent experiences with wildfire, air quality and winter storms have been developed in collaboration with Marin County Public Health and the Office of Emergency Services. Tools include an air quality chart that identifies appropriate indoor and outdoor activities at school to support health and safety depending on changing air quality indicators, systems of communication and planning for potential closures, and many districts taking the step of adding additional potential instructional days (similar to snow days in the mountainous areas) in the event of a closure.

When the first shelter in place and suspension of classroom activity was ordered in the Spring of 2020, immediate steps were taken in conjunction with Public Health to develop protocols and procedures for a safe return to site based classroom instruction, resulting in the development of the Marin County School Guidelines (30 Point Plan) first issued June 18, 2020. With the fundamental goal of keeping students in site based classroom instruction these guidelines have been revised and updated 11 times through May 3, 2022, including an update to a 32 Point Plan on August 18, 2021, and more recently an update to the Marin County SMARTER Schools Plan on March 24, 2022.

Public Health is currently working with all Marin County public, private, independent and parochial schools in planning for the 2022-23 school year including the development of a COVID mitigation strategies chart, similar to the air quality chart, to help schools continue implement best practices and procedures aligned with changing COVID-19 transmission levels and risks due to future variants and uncertainties, with the central and agreed upon priority of keeping students in site based classroom instructions. This work is ongoing.

FINDINGS:

F1: Excellent collaboration between Marin County Public Health officers and Marin's public school administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic produced science-based and demonstrably workable guidelines for reopening Marin County's public schools safely early in the 2020-21 school year.

Response: Agree - The collaboration between Marin County Public Health officers and Marin's public-school administrators was excellent. Regular communication was established at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic with weekly calls or Zoom meetings. The development of the 30-point plan was, and continues to be, a workable guideline for the Nicasio School District.

F2: Since experts agree that in-person classroom instruction is best for students, putting students first by keeping schools open as much as possible should be an imperative for all of Marin's educators.

Response: Agree - Nicasio School District wholeheartedly agrees that in-person instruction is the best for all students as well as keeping schools open as much as possible as is evidenced by our reopening for full-day in-person instruction for students on September 29, 2020.

F3: Because labor negotiations over resuming in-person classroom instruction added to the complexity and delays in public school reopenings, Marin's public school districts would benefit by developing standard practices and models for resolving staff concerns.

Response: Partially Disagree – It is true that labor negotiations added to the complexity and delays in public school reopenings, for good reason. We disagree that standard practices and models should be developed for resolving staff concerns. The structure and nature of labor units, negotiations, and collective bargaining agreements appropriately are designed to address a wide variety of individualized and localized concerns and circumstances that must be addressed to reach agreement in each respective district.

Nicasio School District teachers and staff should be commended for their efforts to be one of the first schools in Marin County to return to and sustain in-person classroom instruction.

F4: Marin's Public schools would benefit from studying the private and public schools that demonstrated an ability to fully reopen early in the 2020-21 school year while complying with Marin's Public Health requirements.

Response: Partially Disagree - While it is beneficial to review best practices and resources that were developed by schools during the pandemic, we disagree that additional study is needed regarding how private and some public schools were able to reopen early in the 2020-21 school year. Private and public schools worked collaboratively and directly with Public Health to develop the 30-point plan that allowed Marin schools to reopen complying with Marin's Public Health requirements, and to continually adjust to conditions and changing guidance to remain open during the biggest surges of COVID-19 in our community.

F5: As a consequence of significant differences in the amount of in-person instruction time offered by Marin County's 18 public school districts during the 2020-21 school year, Marin's public school students experienced wide disparities in educational instruction.

Response: Agree – Nicasio School District offered full-day in-person instruction for all students beginning September 29, 2020 while concurrently providing on-line opportunities for students who elected to remain in a remote-learning model.

F6: A shortage of in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year slowed measurable learning progress for many Marin public school students, resulting in deficits that should be addressed over the long-term with a concerted recovery program.

Response: Agree - State funding and local efforts continue to address loss of learning throughout the school day and after school interventions.

F7: Slow in-person school reopenings undermined confidence in public schools and contributed to an enrollment decline, potentially weakening long-term financial support for Marin's districts that rely on attendance for state funding.

Response: Partially Disagree – COVID has contributed to a decline, not just school closures. Several families moved out of California for economic reasons while others took the opportunity to homeschool. However, Nicasio School's overall enrollment remained consistent in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years.

F8: The Marin County Superintendent of Schools and Office of Education are best positioned to take a leadership role in enabling school districts to coordinate and implement a focused pandemic recovery plan that addresses students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

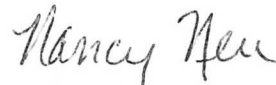
Response: Agree – The County Superintendent of Schools is best to coordinate the wide range and sizes of our district to ensure safety, supplies and services.

Thank you for your continued attention and support of our public schools and the health and wellness of our county's young people.

Sincerely,



Elaine Doss
President, Nicasio School District



Nancy Neu
Interim Superintendent