

June 3, 2022

The Honorable Stephanie E. Hulsey
Judge of the Superior Court
c/o Office of the County Counsel
Attn: Sandra Ontiveros
168 W. Alisal Street, 3rd Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

RE: Response to the 2021-2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final
Report - "EXCELLENCE IN ACTION: MONTEREY COUNTY'S
EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19"

Dear Honorable Judge Hulsey:

The School District Board of Trustees has carefully reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations set forth in the 2021-2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report entitled, "Excellence in Action: Monterey County's Educational Response to COVID-19". This letter shall serve as the official response of the County Board to the Findings and Recommendations of the Monterey County Civil Grand Jury.

We thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the findings and recommendations of the 2021-2022 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report – "Excellence in Action: Monterey County's Educational Response to COVID-19".

We are also thankful to the Grand Jury for their thorough review and recognition of the efforts of the educational community during the most challenging times. The Monterey County Office of Education and Monterey County School Districts remain committed to providing the highest quality education for Monterey County students.

Sincerely,

Sandra Soares

School District Board President

Findings

F1. Educators and classified staff in Monterey County are to be commended for their initiative and flexibility in meeting the challenges of COVID-19. From the MCOE Superintendent to the newest part-time classroom aide, county educational employees went beyond their job descriptions in meeting the needs of students and their families during the pandemic.

☒ **AGREE**
☐ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
☐ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agree with this finding. School district, charter school, and county office of education personnel throughout Monterey County made extraordinary efforts to meet the needs of our students and families during the most difficult and challenging times. While all public schools have approved Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSP) and are typically well prepared for emergency response, this global pandemic brought many unexpected challenges that required school personnel to be flexible and nimble. We are proud of and thankful for their professionalism and willingness to step up and do what needed to be done to continue educating our students even when school facilities were required to remain closed.

F5. Administrators, teachers, and information technology staff in Monterey County are to be commended for making great strides in providing remote learning devices and solving internet access problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

☒ **AGREE**
☐ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
☐ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agree that administrators, teachers, and information technology staff in Monterey County are to be commended for making great strides in providing remote learning devices and solving internet access problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools utilized innovative solutions to solve the digital divide problems and are continuing to work toward long term solutions that hopefully in the future will close the digital divide.

F8. Despite a lack of preparedness at many levels of government, MCOE, school districts, and staff responded to the impact of the pandemic in a timely manner.

☒ **AGREE**
☐ **PARTIALLY AGREE**

___ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agree with this finding. The global pandemic surfaced gaps in communications and needed resources at all levels of government. MCOE, school districts, and staff worked diligently to respond appropriately and timely to each challenge the pandemic surfaced.

F9. Monterey County successfully expanded internet connectivity due to the efforts of MCOE, industry partners, grant institutions, the Digital Task Force, and school district investment in technology.

☒ **AGREE**
___ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
___ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agrees with this finding. MCOE worked with many partner agencies, granting institutions, vendors, technology experts, district superintendents, and elected officials to expand the internet connectivity for students in need. The School District is thankful for the collective efforts of all Digital Divide Task Force participants for their willingness to work together to identify solutions to the digital divide.

F10. There is increased collaboration and coordination among agencies that provide services and support, including the MCOE, Monterey County Behavioral Health, the Monterey County Health Department, internet partners, school districts, support providers, and community groups.

☒ **AGREE**
___ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
___ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agrees with this finding. The increased collaboration and coordination among agencies allows for more efficient response and better coordination of services and support.

F11. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students are all extremely concerned about students' social-emotional issues arising from COVID-19.

☒ **AGREE**
___ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
___ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agrees with this finding. According to the American Psychological Association, 71 percent of parents across the nation are reporting that the pandemic has taken a toll on their child's mental health. School officials are reporting that they are seeing more behavioral challenges, as well as social and emotional health concerns this year than in years past.

F12. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students are concerned about the learning loss that took place during the 2020-2021 school year. There is an urgent need for mitigation of such a loss.

☒ **AGREE**
☐ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
☐ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agree that administrators, teachers, parents, and students are concerned about the learning loss that took place during the 2020-2021 school year and that there is an urgent need for additional support for students who fell behind academically.

F13. There is the potential for significant fiscal disruption with the continuing loss of ADA and the end of additional federal funding occurring at the same time.

☒ **AGREE**
☐ **PARTIALLY AGREE**
☐ **DISAGREE**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agrees with this finding. California and Monterey County are experiencing declining enrollment and increased absenteeism in many districts due to the pandemic. With federal COVID relief funds ending, school districts will need to take appropriate action to maintain fiscal solvency as funding declines due to reduced ADA.

Recommendations

R1. School districts maintain a minimum level of one behavioral support staff member at each school site until the end of the 2025-2026 school year.

☒ **HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**
☐ **HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE**
☐ **REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS**
☐ **WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED**

Response:

The School District Board of Trustees agrees with the need to have a minimum of one behavioral support staff member at each site. Each school will need to analyze the needs of their students and behavioral support may look different at each school depending upon available resources. For example, some schools will have Wellness Center staff available on a full-time basis, while others may have a school counselor, teacher on special assignment, a Behavioral Health clinician, a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) coordinator, trained behaviorist, or an administrator assigned to behavioral support. The type of behavioral support staff is dependent upon the local needs assessment, availability of funding, and workforce availability. Schools determine behavioral support needs and services as a part of their multi tiered system of support.

Further, Monterey County is fortunate to have a nationally recognized model for behavioral and mental health support. MCOE's Educational Services Division provides support and services to implement California's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model. A critical part of this work is called the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) which is a partnership between the Monterey County Office of Education, Monterey County Behavioral Health (MCBH), and the school districts. Through this framework, MCBH provides 65 clinicians in 18 of the 24 school districts in our county. The MCBH team also provides five social workers and one manager who is the liaison between MCBH and school staff. Schools employ school counselors and PBIS coordinators as well as any other support staff. Our community partners such as Partners for Peace, Harmony at Home, and Restorative Justice also work directly on school campuses so MCBH clinicians, school counselors, PBIS coordinators, and other support staff all work collaboratively with each other and community partners to provide support to students in all three tiers.

The Monterey County Office of Education employs a full-time MTSS Coordinator and a PBIS Coordinator that provide support to all schools in Monterey County. Team members provide ongoing training and technical assistance for MTSS, PBIS, and trauma-informed education practices through the county Transformational Leadership Team where all of the partners work together to discuss current services and plan for future needs of students and families. As an integrated part of this work, team members provide training for Tier 1 universal supports, like Universal Design for Learning and Social-Emotional Learning activities; Tier 2 targeted supports, like small group interventions, tutoring and mentoring; and Tier 3 individual support for students, families, and staff. This is the tier where our mental health clinicians come into play.

R2. School districts maintain learning loss mitigation programs and extended learning opportunities until the end of the 2025-2026 school year.

☒ **HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**
☐ **HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE**
☐ **REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS**
☐ **WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED**

Response:

Learning loss mitigation is occurring through the implementation of comprehensive MTSS models and a focus on universal supports for all students. This support will include diagnostic and formative assessments to address disparities in performance outcomes and allow schools to create a plan for learning acceleration. Learning acceleration will be embedded in all instructional decisions for students and will be aligned to school and district goals formalized in the LCAP. Schools will continue to prioritize high-priority academic standards and provide strategic interventions to support acceleration and vertical alignment. These supports will be integrated as part of Tier 1 and Tier 2 MTSS efforts and reinforced through continued professional development for educators.

Additionally, tutoring, afterschool programs, and/or other academic support, including offering expanded learning opportunities during out-of-school sessions, will be enhanced. Local districts are currently assessing and planning for increased resources and implementation of the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program. The California Department of Education (CDE) defines expanded learning as, “learning programs that occur before school, after school, summer, or intersession that focus on developing the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of pupils through hands-on, engaging learning experiences and activities.” This augmented support will increase access to expanded learning resources for students in grades TK-6 and will help to accelerate learning for students across the county. These opportunities will continue through the 2025-2026 school year and beyond, contingent upon funding and staffing availability. Our students will benefit from the expanded learning opportunities these programs provide.