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May 4, 2018

Re: County Office of Education Response to 2017-18 Grand Jury Report

The County Office of Education has carefully reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations set forth in the “2017-18 Santa Cruz County Grand Jury Report, Threat Assessment in Our Public Schools.” This letter shall serve as the official response of the Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (collectively, the “COE”) to the Findings and Recommendations of the Santa Cruz County Grand Jury (“Grand Jury”).

The County Office of Education and our partners in Law Enforcement, hold student and staff safety as our highest priority. We have been meeting actively since August 2017 with all local school Superintendents and Chiefs of Police, forming a committee we refer to as the School Safety Partnership, to coordinate the development and implementation of a Countywide Threat Assessment Plan for Schools as recommended by the Grand Jury Report. This collaboration between school and law enforcement leaders resulted in a countywide plan that addresses the findings of the 2016-17 Grand Jury report including communication protocols, guidance to districts, coordination with law enforcement, and professional development.

The Countywide Threat Assessment Plan for Schools was completed in December 2017. The School Safety Partnership supported the development of training materials and a Countywide Professional Development Plan for student safety. School districts were asked in turn to train their school staff in the implementation of the threat assessment protocol. We have scheduled trainings in the implementation of the Threat Assessment Protocol on May 2, 2018 for County program staff and May 10, 2018 for School District personnel.

The achievements of the School Safety Partnership are highlighted in the latest Grand Jury report in Findings 1, 2 and 3 and in Report Commendations 1 and 2. As a result of Finding 4 and Recommendation 2, we have modified the Threat assessment Protocol in two areas to include rehearsing the threat assessment protocol in non-threat situations. We are confident that our schools have systems in place to effectively prepare for and implement the threat assessment protocol.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Michael Watkins'.

Michael Watkins
Superintendent

Findings

- F1.** *As promised in their responses to the 2016-17 Grand Jury report, the COE and CSO collaborated with local law enforcement agencies to produce a thorough and well-written Countywide Threat Assessment Plan.*
- F2.** *The Plan's detailed flow chart, assessment protocol, and related documents will be valuable resources for school districts to use in threat situations.*
- F3.** *The Santa Cruz County Professional Development Plan for School Safety demonstrates the COE and CSO's commitment to adequately preparing school staff and local law enforcement to respond to future threats in our schools.*

Response (F1, F2, F3)

The COE and CSO have worked hard to implement the direction of the Grand Jury. This work has resulted in the development of resources, policies, and practices that improve student safety across all schools in the county.

- F4.** *Neither the Countywide Threat Assessment Plan nor the Professional Development Plan for School Safety explicitly call for rehearsing the threat assessment protocol in a non-threat situation, which may compromise the responders' readiness in a threat situation.*

Response The Threat Assessment protocol has been modified to explicitly call for rehearsing the threat assessment protocol in non-threat situations. Please see pages 4 and 25 of the updated Threat Assessment Protocol (attached).

Recommendations

- R1.** *The COE and CSO should continue to work together to ensure that our schools and law enforcement agencies have up-to-date resources and training in threat response, assessment, and management. (F3, F4)*

Response The COE and CSO continue to meet quarterly with all Superintendents and representatives from all law enforcement agencies. The School Safety Partnership continues to develop resources, policies, and training to create safer schools for all students in Santa Cruz County. We have scheduled trainings in the implementation of the Threat Assessment Protocol on May 2, 2018 for County program staff and May 10, 2018 for School District personnel.

- R2.** *The COE should mandate rehearsals of the threat assessment process in every school district to improve the schools' ability to determine the existence of a credible threat before violence actually occurs. (F4)*

Response Though the COE and CSO are not authorized to mandate school district staff rehearsals of the threat assessment process, we have included these tabletop rehearsals in the modified version of the Threat Assessment Protocol.

Commendations

- C1.** *The COE and CSO responded quickly and comprehensively to the recommendations of the 2016-17 Grand Jury report and drafted a plan that creates a firm foundation to address the safety of our students in the context of targeted school violence.*
- C2.** *The COE and CSO have demonstrated clear commitment to providing ongoing training so that school staff and law enforcement can function collaboratively and respond effectively to threats of violence in our schools.*

Response (C1, C2)

We are grateful to the Grand Jury for the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to student safety through a collaborative process that resulted in the development of resources, policies, and practices that will improve student safety.