

Soledad Unified School District

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Superintendent

Dr. Limary T. Gutierrez
Associate Superintendent of Ed Services

July 15, 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 Soledad Unified School District leadership team 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 Soledad Unified School District Superintendent Randy Bangs to the Findings and Recommendations of the Monterey County Civil Grand Jury. The Soledad Unified School District greatly appreciates the work of the Monterey County Grand Jury and the opportunity to respond to the findings and recommendations.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if any additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Randy Bangs", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Randy Bangs.
Soledad Unified School District Superintendent

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:

We agree with this finding. Soledad Unified School District employee team members did an extraordinary job meeting the needs of students, parents and families as well as their own colleagues during the pandemic. The pandemic created unprecedented challenges to providing academic instruction and mental health services to students. Our team members stepped up and worked diligently to meet the needs of students and families.

- 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 Soledad Unified School District provided 1 to 1 devices, a device for every student during the pandemic. Additionally, over 1,000 hotspots free of charge were distributed to students and families who needed them in order to access online learning. The Soledad Unified School District partnered with the City of Soledad and Spectrum to provide no-cost internet access for families in homes with Wi-Fi links.

- 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 Soledad Unified School District school sites were closed effective March 16, 2020. By Friday, March 20, an instructional packet program was implemented with materials available for student checkout at each school site. Students in grades 7-12 had devices and were able to access online resources from teachers immediately. By April, devices were distributed to students in grades K-6. Beginning March 16, 2020, daily grab and go meals were being distributed from school sites to students and parents.

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 Soledad Unified School District worked to provide students with internet access at home. Over 1,000 hotspots were distributed to district families during the course of the pandemic. Our District also partnered with the City of Soledad to provide parents with information and support to enroll into a no-cost at home Wi-Fi service through Spectrum. The District also offered community Wi-Fi at two school sites.

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

AGREE
 PARTIALLY AGREE
 DISAGREE

Response:

The Soledad USD partnered with several agencies to meet the needs of students and families during the pandemic. The District provided space at Soledad High School for the Monterey County Health Department to establish a drive-through COVID testing station. The District partnered with the Soledad Health Care District to provide over a dozen vaccination clinics at which hundreds of employees and students were vaccinated. The District provided space for the Monterey County Health Department, in partnership with UC Berkeley, the Visiting Nurses Association and the Soledad Community Health Care District, to host Saturday Vaccination clinics. The district partnered with the City of Soledad and Spectrum to provide no-cost enrollment for home Wi-Fi internet access. The district made the Soledad High School parking lot available to the Monterey County Food Bank for weekly food distribution to Soledad community members.

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

AGREE
 PARTIALLY AGREE
 DISAGREE

Response:

During the 2021-22 school year, the district experienced an increase in student behavior issues including bullying. Administrators, employees and parents expressed their concerns and the need for more student support. Concerns were heard in town halls as well as surveys administered to employees, students and parents. The

district augmented existing mental health services during the 2020-2021 school year with additional hours and services from the Monterey County Behavioral Health department, Harmony at Home and the Mindful Life Project. The 2022-23 LCAP includes continuance of these services as well as additional services including training for teachers in the KidPower program.

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 Soledad USD conducted pandemic-related town halls for students and employees during the 2021-22 school year. Participants expressed their concerns about academic learning as well as health-related issues. The district conducted surveys related to access to technology and other topics to help it define needed services. The development of the 2022-23 LCAP included surveys of parents, students and employees as well as numerous focus groups. The outcome of these information gathering methods was an LCAP which addresses learning loss and academic interventions for students.

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 Soledad USD experienced a slight decline in enrollment and a significant drop in ADA due to the impact of the pandemic during the 2021-2022 school year. Despite the approval by the state of a three-year averaging of ADA, the district will face a decline in ADA generated revenue for the 2022-23 school year and future years. The district has expended most of the federal funding received on learning loss mitigation, student mental health services and health supplies and services.

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.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY AGREE**
- DISAGREE**

Response:

The recommendation requires further analysis. The district provides each elementary school site with one full time certificated counselor. Our middle school has two counselors, our high school has four counselors and our alternate education center has one counselor. The district also contracts with the Monterey

County Department of Behavioral Health for staffing of three therapists who provide services to school sites. The district employs one Board Certified Behavior Analyst. These services are included and supported through the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and are sustainable through the 2025-2026 school year. Additional MCBH therapists provide services through a countywide contract between the MCBH and the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA).

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.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY AGREE**
- DISAGREE**

Response:

The recommendation requires further analysis. The district provides each elementary school site with one full time certificated counselor. Our middle school has two counselors, our high school has four counselors and our alternate education center has one counselor. The district also contracts with the Monterey County Department of Behavioral Health for staffing of three therapists who provide services to school sites. The district employs one Board Certified Behavior Analyst. These services are included and supported through the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and are sustainable through the 2025-2026 school year. Additional MCBH therapists provide services through a countywide contract between the MCBH and the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA).

R2. School districts maintain learning loss mitigation programs and extended learning opportunities until the end of the 2025-206 school year.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY AGREE**
- DISAGREE**

Response:

The Soledad USD offers several intervention programs for students. This includes iReady learning. Students who assess on iReady are able to access virtual learning and intervention at school and at home based on their assessed needs. The district offers in-person and virtual tutoring services through Varsity Tutors and the Soledad Interact Club. The district offers an after school program to over 450 students in grades K-6 extending the school day. These services are funded through the LCAP, other state funding and federal Title 1 programs and thus are sustainable through the 2025-2026 school year.