

VIA EMAIL ([grandjury@yolocounty.org](mailto:grandjury@yolocounty.org))  
& U.S. MAIL

November 20, 2020

Grand Jury, County of Yolo  
P.O. Box 2142  
Woodland, CA 95776

**RE: 2019-2020 YOLO COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT**  
**Superintendent of Schools and Board of Education, Yolo County Office of Education:**  
**Responses to "Every School is Vulnerable: Staff and Students Must Feel Safe for Learning to**  
**Occur"**

Dear Grand Jury Representatives:

On behalf of the Yolo County Board of Education and the Yolo County Office of Education ("YCOE") (collectively "Respondents"), I want to thank you for the time and effort taken by the Yolo County Grand Jury ("Grand Jury") to conduct its safety analysis of schools within Yolo County.

Our collective responses to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations are set forth below in accordance with the format required by Penal Code section 933.05.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Sincerely,



Garth Lewis  
Yolo County Superintendent of Schools

cc: Honorable Sonia Cortés, Judge, Superior Court of California, Yolo County

## Response to Findings

**Finding F-1:** The California Education Code requires, with the exception of small districts, that individual safety plans be developed for each school site. Esparto Unified School District qualifies as a small district, and has a single district-wide Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) that applies to all school sites in the district, not individual plans for each school site.

The Respondents agree with this finding.

**Finding F-2:** Districts made safety improvements, including increased visitor signage and tighter check-in procedures, installed new fencing and locks, collaborated with first responders, engaged in after-action debrief sessions to further secure (i.e. “harden”) school campuses and facilities, and continue to plan for further actions.

The Respondents agree with this finding as it applies to the operations of YCOE. YCOE has implemented additional safety improvements designed to harden campuses, including installation of a controlled access gate system at Greengate School and updating many of its sites to require access cards. In addition to other safety measures, YCOE has also installed high security keyways at its sites and engaged in after-action safety meetings to improve the safety of its facilities.

**Finding F-3:** Increased efforts to harden schools and direct visitors to the front office with improved signage creates additional responsibilities for those working this vital gateway and exposes them to more safety threats.

The Respondents agree with this finding.

**Finding F-4:** Tracking of who has or has not participated in safety training events is inconsistent in Yolo County schools.

The Respondents agree with this finding.

**Finding F-5:** Measures or approaches for assessing the quality or effectiveness of safety training are missing from the CSSPs.

The Respondents agree with this finding as it applies to the operations of the YCOE.

**Finding F-6:** There is an expectation that all teachers and substitute teachers have a depth and breadth of safety training that enables them to respond to a variety of threats.

The Respondents partially agree with this finding. YCOE expects its teachers and substitute teachers to have a sufficient combination of safety training, knowledge, and experience to respond to a variety of

threats. However, the statement “depth and breadth of safety training” is vague and ambiguous, and YCOE is therefore unable to unequivocally agree with that portion of Finding F-6.

**Finding F-7:** Because substitute teachers and teachers hired after the start of the school year are not present for the launch of safety training, their ability to respond to emergency situations is compromised.

The Respondents partially agree with this finding. As a general matter, we understand certain districts within Yolo County, including the Davis Joint Unified School District, require substitute teachers and teachers hired after the school year to participate in safety training, including participation in online training modules at or around the time they are employed. YCOE is also reviewing the inclusion of safety training for its employees as part of staff orientation and requiring such training for both newly hired staff and substitute teachers. Nevertheless, the teachers’ presence at the launch of safety training in and of itself does not inherently compromise their ability to respond to emergency situations. YCOE conducts safety drills throughout the year and provides teachers with safety materials and emergency procedures, and many teachers received safety training in the past despite not attending YCOE’s annual launch of safety training. As a result, YCOE cannot agree that all teachers and substitute teachers hired after the start of the launch of school year have a compromised ability to respond to emergency situations.

**Finding F-8:** In the wake of past high-profile school shootings, school officials face great pressure to react to any threat of potential violence by locking down schools.

The Respondents agree with this finding. Safety is YCOE’s highest priority. As a result, YCOE stresses the importance of taking all potential threats seriously and requires all staff to immediately react accordingly. As a result, YCOE has contracted with Everbridge to implement a County-wide interoperability safety plan. Everbridge is a company that provides platforms to immediately publish safety notices to staff in emergency situations. The County-wide interoperability safety plan enables staff to use their mobile devices to access a panic button feature which provides for immediate communication with local law enforcement in the event of an emergency.

**Finding F-9:** Increasing incidence of trauma-impacted students call on teachers and staff to shift focus from instruction mode to providing support they may not be fully trained to offer.

The Respondents disagree with this finding. YCOE’s Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (“PBIS”) Consortium currently includes 26 Yolo County school sites. PBIS is a three-year initiative that began in 2019. PBIS training is provided to school site teams composed of teachers, administrators, school counselors, and classified employees and is based on a train-the-trainer model in which the site teams ultimately train the school site’s entire staff. PBIS training is split into two tiers, with Tier 1 and Tier 2 each consisting of four six-hour interactive training sessions. Site teams also meet with PBIS coaches between official training sessions no less than monthly. PBIS training helps school site administrators and staff to understand their roles in maintaining safe campuses and supporting students’ emotional needs. YCOE



also obtained a \$100,000 grant to host a social and emotional learning network that assists Yolo County districts in preparing their staff to provide additional social and emotional support to their students.

In addition to this training, each Yolo County district employs and/or contracts with mental health professionals to provide support to trauma-impacted students. Moreover, Yolo County Health and Human Services and YCOE have secured a grant through the California Mental Health Student Services Act to provide additional on-site services that are expected to begin in January 2021.

### **Response to Recommendations**

**Recommendation R-1:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year, Esparto Unified School District should develop individual safety plans tailored to each school site's particular needs and environment (as opposed to a district-wide Comprehensive School Safety Plan [CSSP]) to enhance the overall value of the CSSP.

This recommendation will not be implemented by YCOE because it is not warranted and is not reasonable. YCOE does not have the authority to require Esparto Unified School District to develop CSSP's for each of its school sites. However, YCOE will assist Esparto Unified School District with the development of any such plan as requested.

**Recommendation R-2:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year, District officials should identify additional approaches in their CSSPs for hardening access to areas of schools that remain vulnerable.

This recommendation will be implemented prior to the 2021-2022 school year and YCOE will share the recommendation with all Yolo County school districts. YCOE will also recommend that districts perform Threat and Physical Security assessments to ensure any necessary additional approaches are included in the districts' CSSPs.

**Recommendation R-3:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year and each subsequent school year, District officials should identify administrative, certificated, and classified employees to engage in train-the-trainer classes to build internal capacity and share resources across districts.

This recommendation will be implemented. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation of this recommendation will need to be postponed. Specifically, YCOE plans to host and/or have its staff attend train-the-trainer courses in the future, and it will inform district administrators of those opportunities once the training is available. However, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, YCOE does not expect to be able to implement the training prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

**Recommendation R-4:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year, District officials should require online, on-demand safety training modules be provided and completed by all staff, particularly those hired after the start of the school year, to assure consistency in and breadth of training in safety protocols and procedures.

This recommendation will be implemented as it pertains to YCOE operations prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year pending YCOE examining available resources and selecting options to provide online training modules.

**Recommendation R-5:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year and each subsequent school year, District officials should identify safety training that all substitute teachers must complete before reporting for work in any district.

This recommendation will be implemented as it pertains to operations at YCOE after further analysis regarding what training should be required and how to include such training in the onboarding process for both newly hired staff and substitute teachers.

**Recommendation R-6:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year and each subsequent school year, District officials should identify a method and/or tool for measuring the effectiveness of safety training, including an annual survey of all staff.

This recommendation will be implemented following YCOE's review and development of a survey process to evaluate the effectiveness of safety training as it pertains to operations at YCOE.

**Recommendation R-7:** Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year and for use in each subsequent school year, each school principal or designee should develop an attendance and tracking mechanism for determining who has or has not participated in safety training offerings.

This recommendation will be implemented following YCOE's review of available online systems to track these metrics. Following YCOE's implementation, and for consideration, it will provide information to Yolo County school districts regarding YCOE's method of tracking attendance.