

Press Release

Date: June 8, 2023

To: News Editors and Media

Subject: Yolo County Grand Jury Reports Released

The 2022-23 Yolo County Grand Jury today issues its second and third reports of the 2022-23 term.

The Summary section of each report, which explains why the Grand Jury undertook the investigation and summarizes important issues, findings, and recommendations.

ARE WE THERE YET? - On the Road to School Safety, pertains to five Yolo County school districts.

SUMMARY

Threats to schools – nationally, statewide and in Yolo County – have continued since the 2019-20 Yolo County Grand Jury issued its [report](#) “Every School is Vulnerable: Staff and Students Must Feel Safe for Learning to Occur.” (1) That grand jury made several recommendations, noted in the Background section below, to improve school safety. The 2022-23 Grand Jury (Grand Jury) found that the five school districts headquartered in Yolo County are in compliance with state-mandated Comprehensive School Safety Plan requirements and have continued to improve their safety measures, including physical improvements (hardening), safety training and working with law enforcement and other first responders. The Grand Jury also found that opportunities to improve safety measures and training still exist, as noted in the Recommendations section below.

In addition to reviewing each school district’s implementation of the earlier report’s recommendations, the Grand Jury also responded to a complaint expressing concern about how parents were notified by their children’s schools when violence occurred or was threatened. The Grand Jury found that each school district in Yolo County uses a web-based third-party provider to send messages developed by school administration directly to parents and guardians using text messaging, email, phone call, and/or app. If necessary, messages to parents may also be put into a child’s backpack. The school districts also regularly follow up with families to ensure that parents can receive timely emergency notifications and their contact information is up to date.

As students in Yolo County and elsewhere have had to grapple with threats impacting their safety and ability to learn – whether from direct threats or the COVID-19 pandemic – schools continue to focus resources on providing more mental health support. The Grand Jury found that all Yolo County school districts employ trained specialists and partner with nonprofit organizations or local government agencies to help students facing trauma.

While some school districts do not use the “train-the-trainer” model for training staff in safety measures as recommended by the earlier grand jury, all have contracted with web-based third-party providers to provide online safety and other trainings. The school districts have also implemented tracking of training and needed follow-up measures.

The Grand Jury also found student mental health support, budgets and unforeseen events (“the unexpected”) to be challenges. But such challenges also create opportunities for increasing school safety measures and responding to any resulting trauma to children and staff.

In its November 20, 2020, [written response](#) to the 2019-20 Grand Jury report, the Yolo County Office of Education supported that grand jury’s recommendations.

As a result of interviews, reviews of materials provided and internet research, the Grand Jury found that, while Yolo County school districts may implement different safety measures based on such factors as philosophy or financial means, all five Yolo County school districts are taking student and staff safety very seriously and continue to improve their safety measures.

The report **SAFETY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER**--Concerns about Yolo High School pertains to Washington Unified School District.

SUMMARY

The [mission](#) of Yolo High School (YHS), part of the Washington Unified School District in West Sacramento, is “to challenge and support each student to develop effective critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills in a safe and positive environment in order to become lifelong learners and active citizens serving a broader community.”

(1) The 2022-23 Yolo County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) received a complaint that raised concerns about school safety for students, teachers, and administrators at Yolo High School.

The Grand Jury concurrently published a report entitled *Are We There Yet? On the Road to School Safety*. That report investigated safety concerns at Washington Unified School District, in addition to the other four school districts headquartered in Yolo County. That report investigated “school hardening”¹ measures, safety training, working with law enforcement, emergency notification to parents or guardians, and mental health support for students should an emergency occur. As with the other four school districts, the Grand Jury found that Washington Unified School District continues to take

appropriate steps toward improving overall safety, but additional actions were recommended.

The Grand Jury had concerns about the safety of students, teachers and administrators at YHS, how investigations are conducted and how victims of bullying are treated. Despite those concerns, the Grand Jury found that the teachers and administrators interviewed are dedicated to serving students to the best of their abilities given limited safety resources.

The Grand Jury would have preferred to do a more extensive investigation but was precluded due to limited time and resources. The Grand Jury believes that further review and/or investigation is merited.

The Yolo County Grand Jury, composed of Yolo County residents under the direction of the California Superior Court for Yolo County, issues reports on the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of local government. Local governments respond to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations.

New Grand Jury reports, as well as reports for past terms, and forms for filing a grievance with the Grand Jury, may be reviewed at the Yolo County Grand Jury web site <https://www.yolocounty.org/living/grand-jury/yolo-county-grand-jury-reports>

Very truly yours,

Steven A. Oldham

Steven A. Oldham, Foreperson
2022-23 Yolo County Grand Jury