



# Santa Rita

## Union School District

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July 17, 2018

The Honorable Stephanie E. Hulsey Judge of the Superior Court  
County of Monterey 240 Church Street  
Salinas, CA 93901

RE: Response to the 2017-2018 Monterey County Civil-Grand Jury Final Report - "School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards"

Dear Honorable Judge Hulsey:

The 2017-2018 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report - "School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards" - focuses on the critical role school boards play in shaping their school districts.

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent concur with the Grand Jury Report that improving student achievement requires full public attention of the community. We also concur our local school board has influence and control over the effectiveness of their school district. It should be noted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) has enhanced this.

We believe student achievement can be improved at a more rapid rate with capable school board members who make that a primary focus through every decision they make. There are always opportunities for improvement, and capable school board members are part of what makes an organization function at a high level. Our responses to the findings and recommendations in this report are based on that premise.

Below please find the Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education's and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent's responses to the findings and recommendations.

### FINDINGS

**F1. Student achievement suffers when school districts are unproductive or dysfunctional. It can be very costly and take years to address problems if the Monterey County Office of Education and/or California Department of Education have to step in to support or save a school district.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree** with this finding.

#### Serving the students of Santa Rita –

<b>Superintendent:</b> Dr. Shelly D. Morr <a href="mailto:smorr@santaritaschools.org">smorr@santaritaschools.org</a>	<b>Chief Business Officer:</b> Timothy Ryan <a href="mailto:tryan@santaritaschools.org">tryan@santaritaschools.org</a>	<b>Director of Special Education and Student Services:</b> Nadene Dermody <a href="mailto:ndermody@santaritaschools.org">ndermody@santaritaschools.org</a>	<b>Board of Trustees:</b>
	<b>Director of Human Resources:</b> Cesar Torrico <a href="mailto:ctorrico@santaritaschools.org">ctorrico@santaritaschools.org</a>	<b>Director of Curriculum/Special Projects:</b> Melissa Alderman <a href="mailto:malderman@santaritaschools.org">malderman@santaritaschools.org</a>	Mrs. Elva Arellano Ms. Meri Keiser Mr. Sunil Patel Mr. Tom Spencer Ms. Sarah Turner

## **F2 and F3.**

**F2. There are proactive steps that can be taken by the Monterey County Office of Education in collaboration with school boards to prevent many pitfalls of poor governance.**

**F3. The Monterey County Office of Education and local school boards can do more to promote effective local governance that is accountable to the community and produces better district outcomes.**

The Monterey County Board of Education (MCOE) provides numerous proactive steps to promote effective governance. The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree** there can always be improvement on efforts and will continue to support our school district governance team to fulfill our responsibilities and the mission of public education for every student in the Santa Rita Union School District.

The Monterey County Office of Education is taking many proactive steps. They include:

- The Monterey County Superintendent of Schools and Monterey County Board of Education members provide ongoing assistance and support to school district boards and superintendents when questions and issues arise, as well as leadership assistance when very challenging circumstances arise.
- The Monterey County Board of Education, the Monterey County Office of Education and the Monterey County School Boards Association biannually host an Education Leadership Summit. This full-day leadership summit is held for all school district governance teams and covers topics such as:
  - Keys to Effective Leadership and Governance: Lessons Learned
  - Board Relations and Developing Cohesive and Effective Governance Teams
  - The Shift to Future Ready: Technology Integration and Innovative School Programs
  - Understanding the Legal Requirements of School Boards and Board Members
  - The Bully, The Bullied, and the Not-So-Innocent Bystander
  - California's Fiscal and Political Outlook for K-12 Education and Legislative Overview
  - The Role of Equity: California's New Accountability and Continuous Improvement System
  - The Importance of Multicultural Literacy
  - A Focus on Undocumented Students: Ensuring a Safe and Affirming Learning Environment for All Students
  - Human Trafficking Happens Here: Identifying and Responding to Human Trafficking
  - Preparing K-12 Students for the Rigor of College: What Districts Need To Do
  - Raising Results for English Learners

The Monterey County Office of Education works in close collaboration with the Monterey County School Boards Association to conduct several trainings available to all Monterey County school board members and superintendents that address the topics that school boards identify as the greatest needs for training and provide follow-up training to summit topics. Recent trainings include:

- Best Practices and Strategies for Effective Governance for School Board Members:
  - Understanding and Following the Brown Act
  - Working Together as a Governance Team: The Board and Superintendent
  - Board Member Participation at Board Meetings
  - Effective Board Member Communication with All Stakeholders
  - College and Career Pathways Workshop for School Board Members:
  - Aligning the Curriculum: K-12, Community Colleges, and Universities
  - College and University Partnerships: AB 288 Dual Enrollment Opportunities
  - Successful College and University Initiatives

- Cost Overview and Affordability
- The Nuts and Bolts of Local Control Funding Formula and Local Control and Accountability Plan for Board Members:
  - Fiscal Components of LCFF
  - New LCAP Template
  - California Schools Dashboard
  - Implications for Governance in the New Era of California School Planning and Accountability

In the Fall of 2017, the Monterey County Office of Education scheduled the California School Boards Association's Year-Long Masters in Governance Program to be held in Salinas for the 2018-2019 school year. The topics include:

- Foundations of Effective Governance/Setting Directions
- Student Learning and Achievement/Policy & Judicial Review
- School Finance
- Collective Bargaining/Human Resources o, Brown Act training
- Community Relations & Advocacy/Governance Integration

**F4. Promoting effective local governance requires better public information, communication, and a strong commitment to board development.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree** that public information and communications can always be improved.

**F5. Although each school district has individual priorities, school boards can each make a commitment to adhering to best practices, training, and ongoing professional development when it comes to school board governance.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree** with this finding.

**F6. While the Monterey County Office of Education cannot dictate how school boards govern, they can provide strong leadership in promoting a culture of effective school board governance.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree** that the MCOE does provide strong leadership in promoting effective school board governance. They do so at the individual district level through the support and consultation that they provide as issues and challenges arise and through the professional training opportunities that are provided as detailed in our response to F2 and F3.

**F7. Information posted on Monterey County Office of Education and school district websites is insufficient and not user- friendly. It does not provide the public with adequate information about what school boards do, how to evaluate school board performance, or how to assess school district outcomes.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **partially agree** with this finding. As with most websites, friendliness is in the eyes of the beholder, and it should be noted a website is a “living document” which is continually updated. Both the Monterey County Office of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District website offers access to all board policies and procedures as well as numerous contacts for the public to inquire about any interest they may have in relation to school districts in general and/or a particular school district if they do not find what they are looking for on the website.

In its ongoing work to make the website accessible to the public and maintained in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Monterey County Office of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District is ensuring each webpage conforms to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

**FS. School boards can do better in fulfilling their responsibility to communicate with school district stakeholders.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree** that communication can always be improved and requires ongoing improvement efforts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1. School Boards should adopt a policy to commit to all National School Boards Association best practices.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree**.

**R2. School Boards should adopt a bylaw to make initial training and ongoing workshops mandatory.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **partially agree**. It is important for school board members to develop their knowledge, skill and ability to be highly effective board members. However, there is not a law requiring mandatory training and workshop attendance.

We suggest that the sample bylaws of the California School Boards Association or California County Boards of Education be used where applicable. The one caveat is that adequate funds should be allocated to cover the training and travel expenses that might occur for this training. Special consideration should be allowed to accommodate Board members who have full-time jobs.

**R3. Schools Boards, along with their superintendent and teacher union representatives, should make annual public presentations on school district goals and student achievement.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree**. This recommendation has already been implemented in accordance with the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) requirements for engaging all stakeholders including all bargaining units in the development of the LCAP. Further, the LCAP is presented at a public hearing and approved at a regular board meeting.

The Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent regularly briefs the Santa Rita Union School District Board on progress toward achieving the goals in the LCAP.

**R4. Schools Boards should provide clear, concise, and easy to find communications on their district's goals and outcomes on their district's website.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree**. Every school district is already required to post on their website their Local Control and Accountability Plan. District LCAP's include the district's goals and student achievement results. In addition,

each school is required to post by February 1st annually their School Accountability Report Card, which include their schools' goals and student achievement results.

**RS. School Boards should provide information on their district's website about the role and responsibilities of school board members to educate parents, the public and potential school board candidates.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree.**

**R6. School Boards should provide access to informational sessions to educate potential school board candidates on the duties and commitment associated with serving on a local school board.**

The Santa Rita Union School District Board of Education and the Santa Rita Union School District Superintendent **agree.** A potential school board candidate should contact their local board and/or the district superintendent to learn about the board's roles and responsibilities. School Board candidates should take the initiative to find out what is expected of school board members by attending school board meetings, reading the district website, and checking the school district policies and bylaws.

We thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations of the 2017-2018 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Final Report - "School Boards Make a Difference, Improving Education: The Role of Local School Boards."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelly D. Morr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Shelly D. Morr, Ed.D.  
Superintendent, Santa Rita Union School District