



NOVATO  
UNIFIED  
SCHOOL  
DISTRICT

Jan La Torre-Derby, Ed.D  
Superintendent

1015 7th St  
Novato, CA 94945  
T: (415) 897-4211  
F: (415) 897-4221

June 14, 2022

The Honorable Judge James Chou  
Marin County Superior Court  
P.O. Box 4988  
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Ms. Deborah Haase, Foreperson  
Marin County Civil Grand Jury  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room #275  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Judge Chou and Foreperson Haase,

Below is the Novato Unified School District's response to the 2021-2022 Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report dated April 27, 2022, *Marin Schools: A Prescription for COVID Recovery*.

**FINDINGS:**

**F1:** Excellent collaboration between Marin County Public Health officers and Marin's public school administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic produced science-based and demonstrably workable guidelines for reopening Marin County's public schools safely early in the 2020-21 school year.

**Response: Agree** - The collaboration between Marin County Public Health officers and Marin's public school administrators was excellent. Regular communication was established at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic with weekly calls or Zoom meetings. The development of the 30-point plan was, and continues to be, a workable guideline for the Novato Unified School District (NUSD).

**F2:** Since experts agree that in-person classroom instruction is best for students, putting students first by keeping schools open as much as possible should be an imperative for all of Marin's educators.

**Response: Agree** - The Novato Unified School District wholeheartedly agrees that in-person instruction is the best for all students as well as keeping schools open as much as possible.

**F3:** Because labor negotiations over resuming in-person classroom instruction added to the complexity and delays in public school reopenings, Marin's public school districts would benefit by developing standard practices and models for resolving staff concerns.

**Response: Partially Disagree** - It is true that labor negotiations added to the complexity and delays in public school reopenings, for good reason. We disagree that standard practices and models should be developed for resolving staff concerns. The structure and nature of labor units, negotiations, and collective bargaining agreements appropriately are designed to address a wide variety of

*Engage. Inspire. Empower.*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Maria Aguila, Debbie Butler, Diane Gasson, Julie Jacobson, Derek Knell, Greg Mack, Ross Millerick

[www.NUSD.org](http://www.NUSD.org)

**Novato Unified School District Response to the Marin County Grand Jury Report  
"Marin Schools: A Prescription for COVID Recovery"**

individualized and localized concerns and circumstances that must be addressed to reach agreement in each respective district.

Marin County public school teachers and school staff (labor) should be commended for their efforts to help Marin County public schools to be among the first in the state to return to and sustain in person classroom instruction.

**F4:** Marin's Public schools would benefit from studying the private and public schools that demonstrated an ability to fully reopen early in the 2020-21 school year while complying with Marin's Public Health requirements.

**Response: Partially Disagree** - While it is beneficial to review best practices and resources that were developed by schools during the pandemic, we disagree that additional study is needed regarding how private and some public schools were able to reopen early in the 2020-21 school year. Private and public schools worked collaboratively and directly with Marin Public Health to develop the 30-point plan that allowed Marin schools to reopen complying with Marin's Public Health requirements, and to continually adjust to conditions and changing guidance to remain open during the biggest surges of COVID-19 in our community.

**F5:** As a consequence of significant differences in the amount of in-person instruction time offered by Marin County's 18 public school districts during the 2020-21 school year, Marin's public-school students experienced wide disparities in educational instruction.

**Response: Agree** - NUSD provided a variety of in-person and on-line opportunities for students including "staggered" sessions to enhance student learning. These opportunities varied countywide.

**F6:** A shortage of in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year slowed measurable learning progress for many Marin public school students, resulting in deficits that should be addressed over the long-term with a concerted recovery program.

**Response: Agree** - State funding and local efforts continue to address loss of learning throughout the school day and after school interventions. Recovery has included increased before and/or after school intervention, the addition of intervention specialists at every school to provide 1:1 and small group academic supports to accelerate learning, and the addition of a data specialist at every school to conduct targeted data cycles, monitor student progress, and coordinated intervention and support services.

**F7:** Slow in-person school reopenings undermined confidence in public schools and contributed to an enrollment decline, potentially weakening long-term financial support for Marin's districts that rely on attendance for state funding.

**Response: Partially Disagree** - COVID was contributed to a decline, not just school closures. Several families moved out of California for economic reasons while others took the opportunity to homeschool. Each year NUSD conducts an

*Engage. Inspire. Empower.*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Maria Agulla, Debbie Butler, Diane Gasson, Julie Jacobson, Derek Knell, Greg Mack, Ross Millerick

www.NUSD.org

Novato Unified School District Response to the Marin County Grand Jury Report  
*"Marin Schools: A Prescription for COVID Recovery"*

anonymous, optional survey of families whose students no longer attend a NUSD school. Over the six years of giving the survey, NUSD has consistently seen between 25-46% of respondents report that they moved out of the area. In addition, NUSD saw Homeschooling as a reason for families to leave (20 in 2020 and 21 in 2021 of total respondents 152 in 2020 and 157 in 2021.)

**F8:** The Marin County Superintendent of Schools and Office of Education are best positioned to take a leadership role in enabling school districts to coordinate and implement a focused pandemic recovery plan that addresses students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

*Response: Agree - The County Superintendent of Schools is best to coordinate the wide ranges and sizes of our district to ensure safety, supplies and services.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1:** By August 1, 2022, the Marin County Superintendent of Schools and all Marin public school districts should convene a countywide Lost Learning Task Force to rapidly develop lost learning recovery models that are available for implementation by all of Marin's public school districts.

*Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.*

There are currently multiple existing groups and structures in place that have been in place before the pandemic and have developed and implemented plans for learning loss mitigation to some degree throughout the pandemic, with the clear understanding that remote learning is not effective or accessible for many students.

The Marin County Superintendent of Schools convenes a monthly meeting of Marin County School District Superintendents to coordinate efforts and share best practices for supporting student learning and success. The frequency of these meetings was increased to weekly through a majority of the pandemic, including regular participation of the Marin County Public Health Office and/or Deputy Public Health Officer. A central priority of the Superintendents group through the past two years is to share best practices to address learning loss, and to implement robust student and staff mental health and wellness supports.

All Marin County school districts applied for and were recipients of Learning Loss Mitigation Funding (LLMF) to support pupil academic achievement and mitigate learning loss related to COVID-19 school closures. As such, all school districts were required to create learning continuity and attendance plans, which have been adopted and submitted to the California Department of Education.

*Engage. Inspire. Empower.*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Maria Aguila, Debbie Butler, Diane Gasson, Julie Jacobson, Derek Knell, Greg Mack, Ross Millerick

www.NUSD.org

**Novato Unified School District Response to the Marin County Grand Jury Report  
"Marin Schools: A Prescription for COVID Recovery"**

The Novato Unified School District's Learning Continuity and Attendance Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees on October 5, 2021, submitted to the California Department of Education, and implemented as planned.

R2. By August 1, 2022, the Marin County Superintendent of Schools and all Marin public school districts should also call on the Lost Learning Task Force, as a second but vital priority, to develop and recommend protocols and policies for minimizing the length of emergency school closures during future disruptions.

**Response: This recommendation has been implemented.** This recommendation has been implemented, although not in the name of a Lost Learning Task Force. There is recognition that this work is ongoing.

Prior to COVID there was strong consensus among all Marin County Public School leaders that continuity of school operations and in person learning is a critical priority. Tools to support this priority through recent experiences with wildfire, air quality and winter storms have been developed in collaboration with Marin County Public Health and the Office of Emergency Services. Tools include an air quality chart that identifies appropriate indoor and outdoor activities at school to support health and safety depending on changing air quality indicators, systems of communication and planning for potential closures, and many districts taking the step of adding additional potential instructional days (like snow days in the mountainous areas) in the event of a closure.

When the first shelter in place and suspension of classroom activity was ordered in the Spring of 2020, immediate steps were taken in conjunction with Public Health to develop protocols and procedures for a safe return to site-based classroom instruction, resulting in the development of the Marin County School Guidelines (30 Point Plan) first issued June 18, 2020. With the fundamental goal of keeping students in site-based classroom instruction these guidelines have been revised and updated eleven times through May 3, 2022, including an update to a 32 Point Plan on August 18, 2021, and more recently an update to the Marin County SMARTER Schools Plan on March 24, 2022.

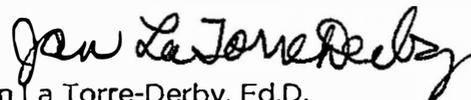
Public Health is currently working with all Marin County public, private, independent and parochial schools in planning for the 2022-23 school year including the development of a COVID mitigation strategies chart, similar to the air quality chart, to help schools continue implement best-practices and procedures aligned with changing COVID-19 transmission levels and risks due to future variants and uncertainties, with the central and agreed upon priority of keeping students in site based classroom instructions. This work is ongoing.

Sincerely,

Thank you for your continued attention and support of our public schools and the health and wellness of our county's young people.



Derek Knell  
President, NUSD Board of Education



Jan La Torre-Derby, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

*Engage. Inspire. Empower.*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Maria Aguila, Debbie Butler, Diane Gasson, Julie Jacobson, Derek Knell, Greg Mack, Ross Millerick

www.NUSD.org

## Response to Grand Jury Report

Report Title: Marin Schools: A Prescription for COVID Recovery

Respondent/Agency Name: Novato Unified School District

Your Name: Jan La Torre-Derby Title: Superintendent

### FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F5, F6, F8
- I (we) disagree *partially* with the findings numbered: F3, F4, F7
- I (we) disagree *wholly* with the findings numbered: \_\_\_\_\_

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefor.)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered R2 have been implemented.  
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered R1 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.  
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered \_\_\_\_\_ require further analysis.  
(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.)
- Recommendations numbered \_\_\_\_\_ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.  
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: 6/14/22 Signed: 

Number of pages attached: 5