



**Santa Cruz County**  
**Civil Grand Jury**

Santa Cruz Grand Jury <grandjury@scgrandjury.org>

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## **PVUSD Grand Jury Report on Distance Learning**

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**Eva Renteria** <eva\_renteria@pvusd.net>

Mon, Sep 20, 2021 at 9:44 AM

To: foreperson@scgrandjury.org

Cc: grandjury@scgrandjury.org

Good morning,

Attached is the response from Pajaro Valley Unified School District for the Grand Jury Report on Distance Learning. A hard copy has also been sent via first class mail.

Thank you.

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**Eva Renteria**

Executive Assistant

Office of the Superintendent

Pajaro Valley Unified School District

(831) 786-2135



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 **Grand Jury Report Distance Learning 8-25-21.pdf**  
280K



August 25, 2021

Civil Grand Jury  
Richard H. Goldberg, Foreperson  
701 Ocean Street, Room 318-I  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

OFFICE OF THE  
SUPERINTENDENT

**Dr. Michelle Rodriguez**  
Superintendent

Dear Foreperson Richard Goldberg:

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05(f), please consider this letter as the formal response from the Pajaro Valley Unified School District to the 2021 County Civil Grand Jury Final Report entitled “*Distance Learning During the Pandemic in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District*” (“Final Report”), published on June 17, 2021.

The Final Report addresses distance learning during COVID-19 closures. The Final Report includes seven Findings and six Recommendations that require a response from the District. Each of the Findings and Recommendations directed to the District is addressed below in the order presented in the Grand Jury’s Final Report.

**FINDINGS**

***Finding No. 1: Since distance learning will continue after schools reopen, students, teachers, families, and administrators will need to continue learning new ways to operate and will require continued support.***

***Response:***

- Agree***
- Partially Disagree – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement***
- Wholly Disagree – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement***

**Board of Education**

Jennifer Holm  
President

Jennifer Schacher  
Vice President/Clerk

Maria Orozco

Daniel Dodge Jr.

Georgia Acosta

Oscar Soto

Kim De Serpa

***Finding No. 2: Students, teachers, and families were well-served by the continuously-updated information provided by the PVUSD Superintendent’s weekly FAQ postings on PVUSD’s website.***

***Response:***

- Agree***
- Partially Disagree – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement***
- Wholly Disagree – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement***

***Finding No. 3: The administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves are all understandably concerned about students' social-emotional issues arising from the pandemic.***

***Response:***

***Agree***

***Partially Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Wholly Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Finding No. 4: The reasons that approximately 2% of PVUSD students have been “lost” are not well understood. Possible answers might include that they are either not logging on at all, or have left the area.***

***Response:***

***Agree***

***Partially Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Wholly Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Explanation (if applicable):*** PVUSD had a dedicated group of staff members at both the site and district level who worked with non-participating students to identify and understand their points of need. Both the Site and District Wellness Team called families, held virtual and in-person meetings, and when necessary conducted home visits. The reasons for non-participation were unique for each child, however, there were trends in their reasons for non-participation including mental health needs, home environment not conducive for distance learning, lack of stable internet/cell signal, disruption to family security, and lack of motivation with distance learning.

***Finding No. 5: The Safe Spaces program has worked well, supporting online learning as well as providing counseling and food to students.***

***Response:***

***Agree***

***Partially Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Wholly Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Finding No. 6: Even with all the training provided to teachers, and internet accessibility provided to students, distance learning has not worked well for some students.***

***Response:***

- Agree***
- Partially Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

***Finding No. 7: Additional upgrades in school air quality systems and furniture are necessary to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols.***

***Response:***

- Agree***
- Partially Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement
- Wholly Disagree*** – specify portion disputed and include explanation for disagreement

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

***Recommendation No. 1: Within six months, to prepare for continued distance learning, and possible future situations, PVUSD should survey students, teachers and parents to evaluate what worked and what didn't work regarding distance learning. (F1, F2, F6)***

***Response:***

- Has been implemented*** – include summary of implemented action
- Will be implemented in future*** – include explanation and timeframe
- Requires further analysis*** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)
- Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable*** – include explanation

Throughout the pandemic, PVUSD conducted multiple surveys and held multiple town halls to value to the voices of our students, staff and families. In May 2021, PVUSD conducted a survey of students, staff and families to learn from their experiences during the pandemic and understand the supports needed for a successful transition to the 2021-2022 school year. The May 2021 survey was completed by 3,122 parents and students representing 35% from grades K-5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>, 28% from 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> and 37% from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Students, staff and families were all asked similar questions in three key areas: Health and Safety, Social Emotional Supports and Academics, School Culture and Climate.

Key learnings from this survey included the importance of continuing surveillance testing for staff and the importance to our community for students to continue daily screening for symptoms. Both of which PVUSD continued into the 2021-2022 school year. We also learned that 42% of those surveyed stated they had lost important relationships and 64% stated they had loss of important experiences. Of significant importance, 79% of those surveyed stated that COVID-19 had mild to significant impact on their mental health. Therefore, PVUSD hired more mental health support staff including mental health clinicians and social emotional counselors. In addition, PVUSD established a Restorative Start for the first three weeks of school.

In terms of academics, 38% of those surveyed stated that they desired to have continued access to their Chromebook at home. Therefore, in the 2021-2022 school year, PVUSD has continued to allow students to take home their Chromebooks and has maintained the 4500 hotspots within the homes so students can continue with their 24/7 learning. As PVUSD staff and students had success with many of the new digital tools, the District maintained access to all of the digital tools provided during the 2020-2021 school year so the innovative new practices could continue.

As part of the analysis of learning loss, data was reviewed from both Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics and Sight Words (SIPPS) and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Although the K-3 teaching staff worked diligently to provide foundational literacy instruction during distance learning through SIPPS through small groups, our early literacy data proved that we were not as successful during distance learning as when we were able to provide the literacy instruction in-person.

***Recommendation No. 2: PVUSD should continue the Safe Spaces program. Evaluate and modify over time as students return to school. (F5).***

***Response:***

- Has been implemented*** – include summary of implemented action
- Will be implemented in future*** – include explanation and timeframe
- Requires further analysis*** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)
- Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable*** – include explanation

PVUSD does not intend to implement Safe Spaces as long as students are back to full time in-person learning as it would not be warranted. During the 2021-2022 school year, students have a safe learning environment within their classrooms, with their teachers and with our staff. The Safe Spaces were provided for students who did not have a conducive learning environment unresolvable internet connectivity, or other concerns at home. If we were required to go back to distance learning by the County Public Health or the California Department of Public Health, we would reinstate the Safe Spaces program.

***Recommendation No. 3: PVUSD should continue to keep their website updated with information and resources for teachers, students and families, including social-emotional issues, community support organizations, and educational resources.(F1, F2)***

***Response:***

- Has been implemented*** – include summary of implemented action
- Will be implemented in future*** – include explanation and timeframe

**Requires further analysis** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)

**Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable** – include explanation

On Wednesday, July 28, 2021, the California Department of Public Health provided the new School Guidelines for all schools in California. By Friday, July 30, 2021, PVUSD had updated its website to include new information aligned with current health and safety guidelines for the 2021-2022 school year. The PVUSD website can be found at <https://reopening.pvUSD.net/> in both English and Spanish. The website includes information regarding the Restorative Start, Home Symptom Screening (5 Star), current Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Transportation Schedules, requirements around masks and physical distancing, COVID-19 Data Dashboard, School Readiness Index, social emotional supports, and information on HVAC system upgrades. The website is updated frequently with relevant, new information including the [weekly Ask Dr. Rodriguez FAQs](#).

**Recommendation No. 4: Within six months, PVUSD should use forthcoming federal and state money to provide summer and after-school programs to help with learning loss and social-emotional issues. (F3, F6)**

**Response:**

**Has been implemented** – include summary of implemented action

**Will be implemented in future** – include explanation and timeframe

**Requires further analysis** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)

**Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable** – include explanation

PVUSD conducted significant outreach to establish the Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) Plan which will fund the summer and after-school programs. In addition to town halls, meetings with parent leadership groups such as the District English Learner Advisory Council, we held a digital Thought Exchange. Through a Thought Exchange all stakeholders can provide feedback in their preferred language in an online platform. We had 455 participants through the Thought Exchange who provided 405 suggestions which were commented on 8,863 times by fellow participants. Within the ELO plan, stakeholders' feedback identified five key areas to support and address learning loss and social emotional issues: 1) Pupil Supports—Restorative Start, additional social emotional counselors, expansion of contract with PVPSA and establishment of three Family Engagement and Wellness Centers, 2) Close the Learning Gap—hiring of additional intervention teachers and instructional assistants, 3) Extended Learning Time—expanded Summer School, Intersession programming and expansion of contracts with current community partners including Digital NEST, Life Lab, El Sistema and Food What?!, 4) Learning Hubs—safe locations throughout secondary schools where students will have access to both high speed internet and academic supports, secondary libraries updated to allow for afterschool Learning Hubs. The Learning Hubs will include additional EAOP tutors, community partners and credit recovery programs, 5) Training for Staff—all staff will be provided with two additional days of pay to engage in training around trauma informed instruction and culturally relevant teaching. In addition, staff will be provided with additional opportunities to engage in training around standards-based grade level teaching, social emotional learning curriculum and strategies that focus on acceleration versus remediation.

During the 2021 Summer, PVUSD made available to all students seven weeks of in-person full day learning opportunities. This is a significant increase from prior years when four weeks of summer learning is available to a limited students. In 2021, students were able to access social emotional learning, literacy and numeracy instruction, enrichment activities through the community partners noted above as well as credit recovery for our secondary students. For the 2021-2022 school year, Learning Hubs will be created at each high school with the support from the Educational Partnership Center (EPC) through UCSC agreement which was approved by the Board in March 2021. PVUSD will continue to provide an expanded summer learning program for Summer 2022 as well as additional after school learning through community partners. An example of the expansion is the contract with Life Lab which was approved by the Board in July 2021 which will bring their program to all elementary schools over the next three years.

***Recommendation No. 5: Within nine months, PVUSD should use forthcoming funds to make necessary upgrades in air quality systems and furniture in the schools. (F7)***

***Response:***

- Has been implemented*** – include summary of implemented action
- Will be implemented in future*** – include explanation and timeframe
- Requires further analysis*** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)
- Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable*** – include explanation

PVUSD has taken the responsibility of ensuring healthy air quality in all of our building seriously. PVUSD did a thorough review of all sites through the support of Air Tech and Geo Wilson during 2020. From the evaluation, each room in each building’s current level and any needed repairs were noted. On October 28, 2020, the Board approved contracts with various contractors to engage in HVAC repairs and upgrades at all PVUSD sites. PVUSD spent more than \$2 million in HVAC repairs through the use of CARES Act monies. All HVAC primary safety upgrades were completed prior to the return to in-person instruction. The [current status of each room](#) can be found on our Health and Safety website. On July 21, 2021, the Board took additional steps to increase the efficacies of the HVAC systems by allocating additional funding through ESSER funding.

***Recommendation No. 6: Within six months, “lost” students who are still in the district should be located and their needs addressed. (F4)***

***Response:***

- Has been implemented*** – include summary of implemented action
- Will be implemented in future*** – include explanation and timeframe
- Requires further analysis*** – include explanation, scope, and parameters of analysis, timeframe (not exceeding six mos. from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report.)
- Will not be implemented because not warranted or reasonable*** – include explanation

For all students who are currently registered with PVUSD, attendance is being monitored to ensure that they are present at school during the 2021-2022 school year. Any student who is not present has received automated phone calls as well as individual phone calls to ensure that they attend school if physically well. For students who are not located, both Site and District Wellness Teams will make contact via home visits.

This response to the Santa Cruz Grand Jury report was approved by the PVUSD Board of Trustees at the regularly scheduled August 25, 2021 Board Meeting. The response was created from my perspective and with the input of the Board of Trustees and constitutes both the required response of the Board of Trustees and my voluntary response as the Superintendent of Schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rodriguez', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez  
Superintendent of Schools  
Pajaro Valley Unified School District

cc: Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury