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June 28, 2016

Michael Simmons, Foreperson  
Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury  
725 Court Street  
Martinez, CA 94553-0091

**Re: Response to Grand Jury Request, Report No. 1615, “Truancy and Chronic Absence in Contra Costa County Schools?” by the 2015-2016 Contra Costa County Grand Jury, per the June 24, 2016 Letter from Foreperson Michael Simmons**

Dear Foreperson Simmons,

Pursuant to your request in the letter dated June 6, 2016, the Moraga School District (respondent) responds accordingly to **Findings 3, 4, 6-10, and 13-16:**

- 1. Per **Finding #3:** “The SART and SARB programs help maintain and improve attendance rates, thereby increasing ADA funding for each school in the district and the COE.”.

The District replies to Finding #3 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #3.

- 2. Per **Finding #4:** “Not all County school districts comply with the requirement found in California Education Code section 15497 that each district collect, track and report its chronically absent rates in an annual LCAP”.

The District replies to Finding #4 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #4.

- 3. Per **Finding #6:** “To identify students with attendance issues and quickly address these issues, the school district needs complete and accurate data about attendance and well-developed support infrastructure.”

The District replies to Finding #6 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #6.

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4. Per **Finding #7**: “The school district has its own software system for collecting attendance information and its own process and standards for collecting, storing and utilizing the truancy attendance information gathered, which are not necessarily the same as other districts in the County.”

The District replies to Finding #7 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #7.

5. Per **Finding #8**: “Without a centralized attendance system or compatible software among school districts, it is challenging to get a complete picture of a student’s attendance profile and patterns over multiple years or across the districts.”

The District replies to Finding #8 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #8.

6. Per **Finding #9**: “Some school districts have little communication with other school districts and the COE about best practices, common achievement goals, and best data systems regarding attendance.”

The District replies to Finding #9 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #9.

7. Per **Finding #10**: “The California Attorney general, Kamala Harris 2015 report, “In-School and on Track”, indicates that over 80 percent of chronically absent students in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade are unable to read at grade level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. These students are four times more likely to drop out than children who can read at grade level.”

The District replies to Finding #10 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #10.

8. Per **Finding #13**: “Chronically absent or truant students, who do not get back on track before age 18, are more likely to drop out of high school before graduation.”

The District replies to Finding #13 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #13.

9. Per **Finding #14**: “Parent and Truancy Courts offer attendance support and are one of the last opportunities to alter a student’s attendance behavior.”

The District replies to Finding #14 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #14.

10. Per **Finding #15**: “Attendance improvement programs used by the County’s Juvenile Courts, such as the Lincoln Child Center, ankle monitors, drug and mental health counselors and tutoring classes lack long-term funding.”

The District replies to Finding #15 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #15.

11. Per **Finding #16**: “The school districts that have Truancy or Resource Officers who connect directly with students, help get chronically absent or truant students back on track.”

The District replies to Finding #16 accordingly: The respondent agrees with Finding #16.

Pursuant to your request in the letter dated June 24, 2016, the Moraga School District (“District”) responds accordingly to **Recommendations 6, 9, 12, and 14**:

1. Per **Recommendation #6**: “All school districts should consider participating in the Attendance Works program.”

The District replies to Recommendation #6 accordingly: The recommendation has been partially implemented. The District has utilized some Attendance Works resources, such as parent notices and flyers. There is an opportunity to increase the utilization of Attendance Works resources. The District’s Management Team will review the Attendance Works resources on August 2-3 to determine if there are additional resources to implement.

2. Per **Recommendation #9**: “School districts should raise parent awareness concerning how to prevent a student’s school absence from affecting ADA funding or the student’s truancy rate.”

The District replies to Recommendation #9 accordingly: The recommendation has been partially implemented. All principals have raised awareness in school site newsletters during the 2015-2016 school year. Communication to increase awareness and prevent absences in site newsletters will continue in 2016-2017. As noted above, the District has utilized some Attendance Works resources, such as parent notices and flyers. There is an opportunity to increase the utilization of Attendance Works resources. The District’s Management Team will review the Attendance Works resources on August 2-3 to determine if there are additional resources to implement.

3. Per **Recommendation #12**: “Each school district should consider designating staff to collect, track, and analyze, attendance data in order to follow up on students that appear to be at risk, and identifying funds do so.

The District replies to Recommendation #12 accordingly: The recommendation has been implemented. A district office staff person and site principals are assigned to collect, track, and analyze attendance data for the purpose of following up with students and their parents who appear or are at-risk. Funding is available for these purposes.

4. Per **Recommendation #14**: “The school district should consider incentivizing schools to seek increased ADA funding by means such as splitting the additional ADA money between the district and the school for achieving increased ADA funding.

The District replies to Recommendation #14 accordingly: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation. For the 2016-2017 school year, incentives will be provided to school sites for improving ADA.

Sincerely,

*Bruce K. Burns*

Bruce K. Burns  
Superintendent  
Secretary to the Governing Board