

POPE VALLEY UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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June 23, 2025

RECEIVED

Hon. Scott R.L. Young
Presiding Judge
Napa County Superior Court
825 Brown Street
Napa, CA 94559

JUN 26 2025

Napa Superior Court
Court Executive Office

Dear Judge Young,

Please accept this letter as my formal response to the 2024–2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury Final Report titled "Pope Valley Union Elementary School District: Overcoming a Troubled Past." I was invited to respond to Findings F4 through F8 and Recommendations R3 through R6, as outlined in the Final Report dated April 23, 2025.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the Grand Jury for their time, diligence, and thoughtful evaluation of the systemic issues affecting Pope Valley Union Elementary School District. Your commitment to examining matters of governance, operational management, and community engagement reflects a deep concern for the long-term success of both the students and the broader Pope Valley community.

The enclosed responses reflect my commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. As Pope Valley Union Elementary School district's Superintendent/Principal, I remain focused on building a safe, inclusive, and academically rigorous environment for all students.

Respectfully,



Kim Kern
Superintendent/Principal
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Cc: Foreman, 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury

POPE VALLEY UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT/PRINCIPAL RESPONSE
TO THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE 2024-2025 NAPA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY
REPORT

"Pope Valley Union Elementary School District: Overcoming a Troubled Past"

April 23, 2025

Grand Jury Findings and District Superintendent/Principal Responses:

F4: *The Superintendent/Principal, who held the position during this Civil Grand Jury investigation, implemented policies and procedures to stabilize and build sustainable long-term operations, enforce student safety protocols, and improve academic instruction and student performance.*

RESPONSE TO F4

The Pope Valley Union Elementary School District (PVUESD) Superintendent/Principal agrees with this finding. As indicated by the Grand Jury in the Summary of the Report, PVUESD "has faced many challenges over the past decade, and district and school leadership have implemented changes to improve school operations and student outcomes." As noted on page 10 of the Report, the Civil Grand Jury found the current Superintendent/Principal to be focused on student safety, academics, accountability, and proper management of school operations. The Grand Jury also noted the importance of the significant improvements to campus security and oversight that have been implemented at PVUESD since 2023, and "acknowledge[d] the current Superintendent/Principal's commitment to restoring trust and ensuring accountability in the school community" (p. 11). In addition, the Grand Jury commended the current Superintendent/Principal for significantly increasing the school district's financial reserves. This progress, confirmed by positive certifications from NCOE and the California Department of Education, indicates strong fiscal leadership by the Superintendent/Principal, and demonstrates that she is effectively managing the district's budget and resources to ensure long-term sustainability and financial responsibility.

F5: *While the Civil Grand Jury investigation found no evidence of discrimination or unequal treatment by the school administration against Hispanic or Spanish-speaking families, the past lack of bilingual support revealed communication gaps, leaving Spanish-speaking parents and English Second Language learners feeling isolated and disconnected.*

RESPONSE TO F5

The PVUESD Superintendent/Principal agrees with this finding. It is accurate that, prior to 2023, there was little to no formal infrastructure in place to support communication with Spanish-speaking families. Past administrations failed to prioritize these needs, however, under the current administration, a comprehensive and intentional effort has been made to correct this.

Since assuming leadership, the current Superintendent/Principal has made significant progress with respect to closing communication gaps by offering meaningful opportunities at all grade levels for parents/guardians to be involved in district and school activities, advisory, decision-making, advocacy roles, and activities to support learning at home. As mentioned on page 11 of the Report,

the current Superintendent/Principal hired the school's first bilingual/bicultural teacher in January 2024. In addition, a bilingual/bicultural Student Wellness Coach was added to the PV team during the 2024-25 school year. Parents are encouraged to reach out to the Superintendent/Principal directly with any concerns or questions about their children's wellness and wellbeing.

Since 2023, the current Superintendent/Principal has made it a priority to ensure in-person certified Spanish language interpretation services have been provided/available at every school board meeting and at all school events, including fall/spring parent-teacher conferences, and parent community engagement meetings. The Superintendent/Principal expanded access by investing in professional and confidential translation and interpretation services the Superintendent/Principal removed the language barriers impeding a significant portion of the Pope Valley population. As specified in the Report, the Superintendent/Principal improved bilingual communications, "To enhance communications, the school's website has been updated and improved, now providing content in Spanish... School announcements and updates are also available in Spanish" (p. 11).

PVUESD also utilizes an on-demand interpretation service called LanguageLine for any instance in which an in-person interpreter is not available. LanguageLine is a mobile app that provides on demand interpreters 24/7 for over 95 languages. Teachers and school staff can call parents and communicate instantly using LanguageLine's live interpreters. LanguageLine services are immediate, professional, confidential, and cost effective. LanguageLine ensures high quality interpretation and ensures confidentiality – which is important for sensitive behavioral or special education home-school communications.

PVUESD is currently working on upgrading to a comprehensive student information system with integrated parent communication capabilities (this is planned for 2026). The District plans to utilize BrightArrow, an easy-to-use, flexible, mobile app capable of sending robocalls, texts, and emails (or all three) to all parents and staff via any device in seconds. BrightArrow accurately translates all messages into the receiver's preferred language to support and increase family communication and messaging.

These changes reflect a clear break from past practices and underscore the Superintendent/Principal's commitment to fostering equity, access, and trust. While the effects of past exclusion cannot be undone overnight, the District acknowledges the work ahead and remains dedicated to ensuring that every family feels seen, heard, and included in their children's educational journey.

F6: *Inadequate communication by district and school management following the trial and conviction of a former school employee for student sexual abuse left parents feeling disconnected and frustrated.*

RESPONSE TO F6

The District Superintendent/Principal respectfully disagrees with finding F6 and asserts that District administration communicated promptly and to the extent permitted by law. This was a profoundly serious and distressing matter for the entire school community. Every effort was made to communicate with transparency and compassion during this time. Additionally, the District issued

public statements at key moments, which were picked up by local press outlets and were made available to the broader community. Although these communications were timely, clear, and consistent with all legal and ethical requirements, the Superintendent/Principal understands that in times of crisis, families often seek more information than can lawfully be provided.

The Superintendent/Principal acknowledges that parents are frustrated following the trial and conviction of a former school employee for student sexual abuse and are working to enhance communications and rebuild trust.

In response, communication protocols have been reviewed and strengthened to ensure that families receive timely, clear, and supportive information during critical incidents, within legal boundaries. While the District fully complied with all required standards, the Superintendent/Principal agrees to implement additional practices and tools to help families feel more informed, connected, and reassured in these difficult moments. The safety and well-being of all students and families is always a top priority. PVUESD's Superintendent/Principal remains committed to fostering trust and maintaining transparency in the community.

F7: School bus transportation service was found to be inadequate to serve the district, with persistent equipment problems undermining reliability.

RESPONSE TO F7

The PVUESD Superintendent/Principal agrees with the Grand Jury's finding regarding the inadequacy of school bus transportation services and the impact of persistent equipment issues on reliability. Although California law does not require school districts to provide general education transportation, the Superintendent recognizes that safe and dependable access to school is an essential service—particularly in a rural district such as this one. The District will continue to maintain legally required transportation services for students with disabilities while exploring alternative options to be able to provide general education transportation.

As highlighted on pg. 12 of the Grand Jury Report, the district is actively working to address the concerns regarding school transportation, "Resolving this concern has become a top priority for the Superintendent/Principal and Board, reflecting their commitment to provide reliable, safe and efficient transportation options for students."

The school's transportation program has been burdened by two older propane-powered buses that have proven to be mechanically unreliable and difficult to repair due to limited servicing availability. These vehicles were not purchased under the current administration, but their chronic downtime has nonetheless had a real impact on families and school operations. In light of the concerns raised, the Superintendent/Principal and PVUESD Board of Trustees initiated a comprehensive review of the District's transportation program, including fleet condition, maintenance practices, and long-term sustainability. Efforts are currently underway to resolve issues related to persistent mechanical failures and chronically unreliable equipment and to identify additional funding sources and partnerships to support the acquisition of more reliable vehicles and to implement preventative maintenance protocols.

In the meantime, the District purchased a new gas-powered minibus to supplement its fleet and provide a more reliable solution. The Superintendent/Principal has also prioritized operational

continuity, ensuring that additional staff are trained and certified to drive District vehicles, so that student transportation is not disrupted due to employee absences. Further, efforts are underway to hire an additional bus driver to expand capacity and reduce service interruptions.

Ensuring that all students have consistent, safe, and equitable access to school remains a top priority. PVUESD's Superintendent/Principal is committed to addressing these transportation challenges transparently and proactively, in collaboration with the Board and the broader school community.

F8: *The school community is divided, with one group of parents and teachers supporting changes in the school and another favoring a return to prior practices and personnel.*

RESPONSE TO F8

PVUESD's Superintendent/Principal acknowledges and agrees with the Grand Jury's finding regarding division within the school community. The conviction of a former employee in 2024 for multiple counts of student abuse was a deeply traumatic event for the entire community. This incident, combined with decades of persistent academic underperformance and an overall lack of fiscal oversight and resource allocation in the past underscored the urgent need for systemic change.

In response, the current District administration has implemented immediate and extensive safety and security enhancements, along with significant reforms in academic instruction, governance, and operational oversight. These changes were necessary to ensure student safety, and address long-standing deficiencies in educational outcomes.

The District recognizes that such transformative efforts can surface differing perspectives within a close-knit community. While some stakeholders have expressed a desire to return to prior practices and personnel, others have strongly supported the direction of current reforms. Change is often hard, even when necessary. The Superintendent/Principal strongly affirms that a return to prior conditions is neither viable nor aligned with the needs of students or the responsibilities of leadership.

The Superintendent's current direction is fully consistent with Recommendation R3 of the Grand Jury Report, which urges continued implementation of these improvements to ensure long-term stability and performance, regardless of future leadership transitions. The Grand Jury's commendation of the current administration and Board for their leadership highlights the importance of the work underway.

The Superintendent/Principal remains focused on unifying the Pope Valley school community around shared values of student well-being, educational excellence, and accountability, and will continue to lead with transparency, integrity, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Grand Jury Recommendations and District Superintendent/Principal Responses:

R3: *The Superintendent/Principal continue the ongoing improvement process at Pope Valley Union Elementary School and ensure that changes instituted continue should school management change and do so by the 2025-2026 academic year.*

RESPONSE TO R3

This recommendation has been implemented. The PVUESD Superintendent/Principal acknowledges and agrees with the Grand Jury's recommendation to continue the ongoing improvement process at the PVUESD and to ensure the sustainability of these efforts beyond any potential changes in school management.

To that end, the Superintendent/Principal has prioritized the institutionalization of key reforms through updated board policies, administrative procedures, capacity-building, professional development, and long-term strategic planning. These measures are designed to embed improvements in academic instruction, school safety, governance, and community engagement into the operational fabric of the District.

In the 2025–2026 academic year, the District will finalize and implement a comprehensive improvement framework that includes measurable goals, timelines, and accountability structures. A strategic planning timeline and process has already been established, and work on this goal has already begun. This framework will ensure that progress continues regardless of leadership transitions and that the school community remains focused on student achievement, equity, and well-being.

The Superintendent/Principal remains committed to transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement in service of all students and families.

R4: *Regular updates by the School Board and Superintendent/Principal to inform the public, rebuild trust, promote inclusivity, and improve transparency in decision-making to strengthen the relationship between the school and the community, and do so by the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.*

RESPONSE TO R4

This recommendation has been implemented. The Superintendent/Principal acknowledges and supports the Grand Jury's recommendation to provide regular updates to the public in order to rebuild trust, promote inclusivity, and improve transparency in decision-making. Strengthening the relationship between the school and the broader community is a central priority for the District.

In alignment with this recommendation, the Superintendent/Principal is working with Board Trustees to continue to improve the District's communication plan. This plan includes regularly scheduled public updates, continued weekly newsletters, multilingual outreach, additional website improvements, and expanded opportunities for community feedback to increase parent participation. Parent participation was declining in the first half of the 2024-25 school year, however, the addition of extra PTO, SSC, and DELAC meetings and the continued provision of interpretation and translation services helped increase participation to over 70% during the last three months of the year. Almost 40% of the entire school community attended monthly Board

Meetings and a two-hour Brown Act Board training this Spring. Participation in parent teacher conferences remained at 100%, for the second year in a row, for both the fall and spring conferences this school year – up from 80% during the 2022-23 school year.

The District has also implemented specific strategies to foster successful school and family connections, with a focus on reducing barriers to greater parental participation and connection. Significant attention is given to parents who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, and/or belong to any racial or ethnic minority background. To support parents with limited English proficiency, PVUESD provides professional translation and interpretation services for all communications, online information, newsletters, and all meetings at school. Additionally, PVUESD made efforts to increase services for students and their families including social-emotional supports, counseling, transportation, backpacks, chromebooks, and clothing assistance. By addressing these diverse needs, PVUESD aims to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students and their families and increase safety and academic achievement.

The District has collected feedback through various channels, including surveys, the Site Council (SSC), the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and at District English Learner Advisory Council (DELAC) meetings, focus groups, staff meetings, comment cards and surveys.

Based on the analysis of educational partner input and local data, there is consensus that while there are multiple avenues for educational partners to provide input for decision-making, there is also need for continued input from a broad and representative sample of families. In response, PVUESD is making a concerted effort to elevate student voices through various initiatives, including implementing a student leadership program and more opportunities for student-led conferences and academic exhibitions.

PVUESD will continue to offer surveys and other opportunities for parents to provide feedback and input both in person and online. Parents have expressed positive feedback on having both options available. The Superintendent/Principal remains committed to fostering a culture of openness. The efforts outlined in this response reflect that commitment, as well as a dedication to ensuring that all families are informed, heard, and empowered to participate meaningfully in school life.

R5: *The Board of Trustees and Superintendent/Principal develop and execute a permanent solution to provide safe and reliable transportation for students by the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.*

RESPONSE TO R5

This recommendation is being implemented. PVUESD's Superintendent/Principal concurs with the Grand Jury's recommendation to establish and implement a lasting solution that ensures safe and reliable student transportation by the start of the 2025–2026 academic year.

In response, PVUESD's Superintendent/Principal is working in collaboration with the Board to assess current transportation operations, identify long-term needs, and secure sustainable resources to support a dependable transportation system. The review process will assess the condition of the current fleet and the effectiveness of maintenance protocols. It will also examine staffing capacity and explore potential partnerships to strengthen overall service delivery.

As an immediate measure, the District purchased a new gas-powered minibus to increase reliability and reduce service interruptions. To further ensure continuity of service, additional school staff have been trained and certified to drive District vehicles, creating operational redundancy when primary drivers are unavailable. The District is also actively working to hire a second bus driver. These initial steps are part of a broader permanent transportation plan currently in development. Priorities include student safety, operational reliability, and equitable access. The plan will include clear implementation timelines, accountability measures, and contingency strategies to ensure continuity of service. The District remains committed to resolving past transportation challenges and delivering a durable solution that meets the needs of all students and families.

R6: *The Board of Trustees and the Superintendent/Principal use the various resources, training, and support opportunities available through the Napa County Office of Education (NCOE), Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), California School Board Association (CSBA) and other educational and leadership resources and implement plans by the start of 2025–2026 academic year.*

RESPONSE TO R6

This recommendation is being implemented. PVUESD's Superintendent/Principal and Board of Trustees are actively engaging with key educational partners, including but not limited to NCOE, FCMAT and CSBA, to strengthen governance, planning, and operations.

The District is currently utilizing support from the Napa County Office of Education (NCOE) for fiscal oversight and student services. Interim financial certifications from NCOE and the California Department of Education confirm the District's improved financial stability under current leadership.

The Superintendent/Principal brings deep familiarity with resources such as NCOE, FCMAT, and CSBA from prior leadership roles, and has successfully leveraged this knowledge to benefit the District. One example includes working with NCOE to secure multiple grants, most notably over \$700,000 through the State of California's Community Schools Program, which will help fund expanded services. Additional grants have supported the hiring of a bilingual wellness coach through a partnership with NCOE. In addition, the District is also working with NCOE to recruit a school-based therapist.

The District utilizes FCMAT and CSBA resources and is currently reviewing additional opportunities through FCMAT and CSBA to support strategic planning and board development. The District plans to schedule a policy review and/or audit with CSBA during the 2025-2026 school year and engage in a comprehensive review to ensure all District policies are in compliance with current practices and current state and federal law.

PVUESD remains committed to using expert resources and community input to support continuous improvement and student success. In April, the Superintendent/Principal worked with external partners to organize governance training for the Board, including a community-wide Brown Act training attended by nearly 40% of the school community. The District is currently working with external partners to scheduling a Board Governance Training for the Fall.