



Follow-up on San Mateo County Public School Fire Alarm Systems Report

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Issue

Did the twelve (12) San Mateo County public school districts identified in the 2008-2009 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury (2008 Grand Jury) report, “San Mateo County Public School Fire Alarm Systems”, implement the actions concerning the condition of fire alarms in their districts as recommended by the 2008 Grand Jury?

Background

The 2008 Grand Jury contacted all 23 of the County's school districts regarding the status of each school's fire alarm system, specifically requesting information on how and when each system was monitored. The 2008 Grand Jury made specific recommendations to twelve (12) school districts regarding actions that each school district should take to improve its fire alarm system.

These recommendations related to converting manual pull station fire alarm systems to automated systems. Additionally, the 2008 Grand Jury recommended that these school districts budget for upgraded fire alarm systems which provide direct connection to an alarm company or a public safety agency for 24 hour, 365-day coverage. All twelve (12) school districts responded to the 2008 Grand Jury with their plans to implement the 2008 Grand Jury's recommendations.

Investigation

The 2009-2010 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury (2009 Grand Jury) reviewed the responses to the 2008 Grand Jury report. This follow-up investigation involved surveying the following twelve (12) school districts to determine the current status of their responses to the 2008 Grand Jury recommendations:

- Bayshore Elementary School District
- Belmont-Redwood Shores Elementary District
- Cabrillo Unified School District La
- Honda-Pescadero Unified School District Las
- Lomas Elementary School District Millbrae
- Elementary School District Pacifica School District
- Portola Valley Elementary School District
- Ravenswood City Elementary School District San
- Bruno Park Elementary School District San Carlos
- Elementary School District San Mateo-Foster City
- Elementary School District

Findings

In responses to inquiries from the 2009 Grand Jury, all twelve school districts provided details of the actions they had taken in response to the 2008 Grand Jury recommendations. The school districts provided the following responses:

1. The Las Lomas and Portola Valley Elementary School Districts completed the recommendations, which included connecting their systems to fire alarm monitoring services.
2. The Cabrillo Unified School District stated that its middle school was in compliance with the recommendations.
3. The La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District has implemented automatic fire alarm systems for its modular classrooms at the elementary / middle school and district office and kitchen.
4. The San Mateo-Foster City Elementary School District stated it was receiving quotes from vendors and anticipated finalizing its fire alarm monitoring system in the 2009-2010 school-year.
5. The Ravenswood City Elementary School District is working with a vendor to bring all of its schools into compliance and anticipates completion by the 2010-2011 school-year.
6. The Millbrae Elementary School District stated it was in the planning process for fire alarm improvements to be funded by a bond which was passed.
7. Two districts, La Honda-Pescadero and Cabrillo Unified School Districts stated that they have plans in place to upgrade the sites not currently monitored when additional funding becomes available.
8. The Bayshore Elementary, Belmont-Redwood Shores Elementary, Pacifica, San Bruno Park Elementary, and San Carlos Elementary School Districts have not implemented the 2008 Grand Jury recommendations but stated that they would budget for additional services when funding became available.
9. No school district indicated that it disagreed with the 2008 Grand Jury recommendations. The 2008 Grand Jury recommendations were for increasing the safety of the students while on site and improving the monitoring of school facilities during non-school hours.

Conclusions

The 2009 – 2010 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury concludes that:

1. All of the San Mateo County School Districts that received recommendations for improvements of their fire alarm systems from the 2008 Grand Jury filed responses to the 2008 Grand Jury report. The responses set forth the actions each district is undertaking to implement the recommendations. Most of the Districts have:
 - a. implemented these recommendations, or
 - b. are in the planning process for implementation, or
 - c. have plans in place to upgrade their systems.Five Districts have not implemented the 2008 Grand Jury recommendations but stated they will budget for these additional services when funding becomes available.

2. All of the listed school districts have reported to their Boards of Trustees on their responses to the 2009 Grand Jury inquiry.

Recommendations

The 2009 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury makes no new recommendations regarding the 2008 Grand Jury report, “San Mateo County Public School Fire Alarm Systems” and:

1. Commends the following seven school districts for promptly taking action to upgrade their school fire alarm systems:
Las Lomas Elementary Portola Valley Elementary
Cabrillo Unified La Honda–Pescadero Unified
San Mateo–Foster City Elementary Ravenswood City Elementary
Millbrae Elementary
2. Recognizes the stated intent of the following five school districts to upgrade their fire alarm systems and acknowledges the difficulty of budgeting the needed funds. The Grand Jury urges them to make this element of student and school safety a high priority.
Bayshore Elementary Belmont–Redwood Shores Elementary
Pacifica San Bruno Park Elementary
San Carlos Elementary