

Ch 6/25/26

Page 1 of 2

## Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Behind the Headlines of Public Education: Understanding the Challenges of Consolidation and the Process of State Takeover

Report Date: June 18, 2026

Response by: Amie Carter

Title: Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools

Agency/Department Name: Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE)

### FINDINGS:

#### F1 RESPONSE

**F1. "Complex policy and financial constraints that impact critical decisions by public school boards are poorly understood by the public. This limits the public's ability to provide meaningful oversight and advocate for sound decision making by local school boards."**

#### **Response to F1:**

**The Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools agrees with Finding F1.**

California's public education system is governed by a highly complex structure of state laws, local governance responsibilities, funding formulas, labor obligations, and accountability requirements that are often difficult for the general public to fully understand. This complexity can make it challenging for community members to effectively engage in discussions related to school district budgets, declining enrollment, facilities decisions, collective bargaining, and long-term fiscal sustainability.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that local school districts are independent governmental entities governed by locally elected boards of education. While the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) provides oversight, technical assistance, training, and fiscal review responsibilities under California Education Code, many operational and budgetary decisions remain within the authority of local governing boards.

SCOE appreciates the Grand Jury's efforts to increase public understanding of these issues and agrees that informed community engagement is important to maintaining strong and fiscally healthy public schools.



## RECOMMENDATION R1 RESPONSE

**R1. "Commencing in 2027, the Sonoma County Superintendent of Education will direct SCOE staff to develop and implement a plan to educate the public concerning school district budget management to enable residents to provide meaningful input and act more effectively as advocates of sound financial planning by district school boards."**

### **Response to R1:**

**The recommendation has been implemented and will continue to be implemented.**

SCOE currently provides a variety of training, workshops, public presentations, fiscal guidance documents, district support meetings, governance training, budget review processes, and public information resources related to school finance and district oversight responsibilities. SCOE also regularly partners with organizations such as Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), California School Boards Association (CSBA), district leadership teams, and community stakeholders to support understanding of school finance, governance, and accountability systems. SCOE staff have presented at district board meetings throughout the county upon request to discuss financial matters and be in attendance as a resource during crucial fiscal decisions.

Beginning in 2027, SCOE will continue to expand efforts to improve public understanding of school district fiscal management and the respective roles of local districts, county offices of education, and the State of California. These efforts may include enhanced website resources, public-facing informational materials, presentations, workshops, and opportunities for community engagement regarding school finance and governance.

In recognition of the trust families place in their local schools, SCOE will encourage local districts to collaborate on these efforts. It's imperative that school budgeting is transparent and accessible, particularly regarding each district or charter school's unique mix of funding. The work of educating school families and the broader community about the hard choices faced by local schools is bigger than any one district or agency, underscoring the need to work together.

Implementation of these efforts will necessarily be balanced with available staffing and fiscal resources, as well as SCOE's statutory role and responsibilities under California law.

Date:

Signed:



June 18, 2026

Amie Carter  
Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools