



DIXIE SCHOOL DISTRICT

380 NOVA ALBION WAY
SAN RAFAEL, CA 94903
TEL: 415-492-3700
FAX: 415-492-3707

June 11, 2008

The Honorable Verna Adams
Marin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 4988
San Rafael CA 94913-4988

Roberta Robinson, Foreperson
Marin County Grand Jury
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 275
San Rafael CA 94903

Your Honor and Madam Foreperson:

On behalf of Dixie Elementary School District and our Board of Trustees, it is my pleasure to provide to you the District's response to the findings outlined in the Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report "*Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe (March 13, 2008)*." The question is an important one, and our Board and administration appreciate the Grand Jury's thorough focus on the issues involved and the need for collaboration between agencies, which will hopefully result in a resolution soon.

Please see the attached "Report Form" and the District's summary response to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations, which was approved by the Dixie District Board of Trustees at our regularly-scheduled meeting on June 10th, 2008.

I'd like to thank the members of the Marin County Civil Grand Jury for their time and care in compiling this report. Please feel free to contact me for further information.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Lohwasser, Ed.D.
Superintendent

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

Report Title: Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe

Report Date: March 13, 2008

Response by: Dixie Board of Trustees

Title: Board President

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F3, F5(Partly Agree), F9, F10, F11**
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: _____

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefor.)

**See statement attached for all Findings

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered _____ have been implemented.

(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

- Recommendations numbered _____ have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

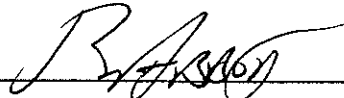
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)

- Recommendations numbered R1, R2 require further analysis.

(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.)

- Recommendations numbered _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

(Attach an explanation.)

Date: 6/10/08 Signed: 

Number of pages attached 3

**Dixie School District
Board of Trustees**

**Response to the Findings and Recommendations of
The 2007/08 Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report**

Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe

Findings (Dixie District responses in bold):

- F3. No public or private school in Marin is part of Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA).

Agree

- F5. The present public school emergency radio communication system is about to go belly up, leaving the schools with no emergency radio communication capabilities.

Partly Agree—Dixie School District has spent considerable resources equipping key personnel with Nextel radios (most recommended based on post-9/11 reporting) for communicating between district office and school sites in an emergency. The radio signal and all-call function for these radios has been tested in a variety of drills, with impressive range and consistent operation. In addition, the district office has stand-alone radios for communicating with each site and our transportation/maintenance department; while this equipment is older, we use it all the time and have not had problems with it. The stand-alone radio that the District office uses to communicate with the Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) as part of a monthly test, is older, has parts that are deteriorating and cannot be replaced due to age, and works inconsistently.

Finally and importantly, Dixie School District is partnering with San Rafael City Schools in the purchase of a parent/staff communication system called ConnectEd which, in the event of an emergency, will allow us to notify parents and staff via phone, email, and text message in an instantaneous and real-time manner.

- F9. Both the Red Cross and Department of Health and Human Services recognize the importance of the school sites as gathering places in times of emergency. Both have contracted with various school districts for their use in times of crisis.

Agree—Dixie School District has contracts with both agencies.

F10. There is a belief that installing MERA radios now could instill a false sense of security in the schools, because in any major crisis the MERA system would be overwhelmed, with any immediate help unlikely in spite of MERA.

Agree—Our school district has been repeatedly advised to work towards goals of self-sufficiency and strong internal communication in a wide-scale disaster or civil emergency because of the issues described above, including overwhelmed emergency responders such as paramedics and fire fighters.

F11. An alternate plan to equip the schools with an emergency radio communications system that could be outside the MERA radio network is in an early stage of consideration.

Agree—San Rafael City Manager Ken Nordhoff has offered to support Dixie School District and San Rafael City Schools in meeting goals related to MERA and/or alternate communication systems. Our district has had a longstanding interest in emergency preparedness and has consistently raised questions about which entity/individual we should rely on as a source of critical emergency information, which once received would then theoretically be disseminated to parents and staff via our communication systems. Having accurate, relevant information for and about our immediate locale and community (as opposed to culling through county-wide information and updates) could be lifesaving for our children, parents, and staff.

MCOE has also offered to coordinate such considerations in the coming year and report to the Marin County Civil Grand Jury by March 2009.

Recommendations (Dixie District responses in bold):

R1. The Board of Supervisors, the Marin Emergency Radio Authority, the Disaster Council, the Marin County Office of Emergency Services, the Marin County Department of Public Works, the Marin County Administrator's Office, the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services, the various public school districts and the private schools should immediately work together to fund and install the MERA system and its radios in all of Marin's public and private schools.

Dixie School District supports all efforts to determine whether MERA is capable of serving all school entities without being overwhelmed, and encourages all the entities named above to work together towards the common goal of protecting and communicating effectively with our school communities in the event of a natural disaster or civil emergency. Once the best communication system solution is identified, Dixie School District will be committed to the

process of partnering and seeking funding for installation and/or implementation.

- R2. In the event it is determined that MERA is not a feasible option for Marin's schools, an effective, alternative emergency radio communication network, independent of MERA, should be immediately modeled, funded, and installed in Marin's public and private schools through the collective efforts of the entities identified in Recommendation (R1) above.
Agree (see Dixie District response to R1 above)