

**RESPONSES FROM THE
KENTFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**TO THE FINDINGS (F) AND RECOMMENDATIONS (R)
OF
THE 2007-2008 MARIN COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT**

“Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe”

PROLOGUE

Before making formal responses to the Findings and Recommendations of the Marin County Civil Grand Jury, it is important to put the responses in the context of what has been happening related to emergency radio systems for school entities and what developments have affected MERA. Prior to December, 2007, the view was held by school entities that becoming a part of MERA was only an issue of available funding. Following the storms of late December, it became clear in January, 2008 that the capacity of MERA to include all of the school entities had come into question. It also became clear that school entities needed to do more formal planning about what talk group configurations might be needed to become a part of MERA and what equipment each school entity might require.

It is also important for the Grand Jury to know that our partners who are mentioned in the findings and recommendations have been working over a period of many years with school entities on issues of emergency preparedness, including radio systems. As school entities formulate more exactly what radio requirements are needed. We believe our partners continue to be ready to help us in any way that they are able to do so.

With this background, the commitment of the Marin County Office of Education is to work with and to coordinate the efforts of the various school entities to review current systems in place and to determine what configurations best facilitate local school communications should MERA determine that it will be able to include the school entities in the countywide system. The Marin County Office of Education plans to provide a progress report to the Grand Jury by March, 2009.

It is in this context that the responses provided below should be read.

FINDINGS

F3. No public or private school in Marin is part of MERA.

Response: Agree.

F4. Marin County is a likely candidate for a major disaster at any time.

Response: 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.

Response: Our district has prepared an Emergency Plan which includes provisions for emergency communications between individual school sites and school district offices, as well as direct contact with the Kentfield Fire Department. We agree that the current countywide system used by district offices and the Marin County Office of Education is in need of upgrading given the age of the equipment.

- F6. Repeated attempts by the Marin County Office of Education to fund MERA in the schools has failed to raise any money.**

Response: Agree.

- F7: Money from Homeland Security grants for MERA radios in the schools has not been made available because of questionable interpretations of Homeland Security guidelines by local authorities.**

Response: Do not have enough information to agree or disagree.

- F8. Money has been the stumbling block for MERA radios in the schools. The immediate need for an emergency radio communication system for Marin's schools has been trumped by the lack of financing and what seems to be a widespread attitude that puts money before school safety.**

Response: Prior to January, 2008, the primary reason for not having MERA radios for school entities was the availability of financial resources. It has since become apparent that, even with adequate funding, planning is needed so that a determination can be made relative to the configurations for school entities to interface with the MERA system and what equipment each school entity might require that would be effective.

- F9. Both the Red Cross and Department of Health & 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.**

Response: Agree.

- 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.**

Response: Agree

- 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.**

Response: These considerations will be coordinated and intensified by the Marin County Office of Education in the coming period of time with a preliminary report to the Marin County Civil Grand Jury by March, 2009.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The Board of Supervisors, the Marin Emergency Radio Authority, the Disaster Council, the Marin County Office of Education, 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 & 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 the Marin's public and private schools.**

Response: It is clear that further planning on the part of the school entities is needed. When the intensified, coordinated efforts of the Marin County Office of Education and the school entities to determine all of the needed steps and information to become a part of MERA is complete, and when the ability of MERA to serve the school entities is determined, we will continue working to find a way to activate an improved emergency radio communications system.

- 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.**

Response: See the Response to R1.