

June 16, 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

RE: March 13, 2008 Grand Jury Report: *Emergency
Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe*

Your Honor and Madam Foreperson:

The responses to the findings and recommendations of the Marin County Civil Grand Jury from the San Rafael City Schools president of the Board of Education and Superintendent are enclosed. These responses were agendized for Board action at our meeting of June 9, 2008, and approved at that time.

Sincerely,


Michael R. Watenpaugh, 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: MICHAEL R. WATENPAUGH, Ed.D. Title: Superintendent, San Rafael City Schools

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F4, F6, 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.)

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: 6/16/08 Signed: Michael Watenpaugh

Number of pages attached 3

**RESPONSE FROM SAN RAFAEL CITY SCHOOLS
TO THE FINDINGS (F) AND RECOMMENDATIONS ®
OF
THE 2007-2008 MARIN COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT
“Emergency Communications at Marin Schools: A Tale of Catastrophe**

INTRODUCTION

In developing the Districts’ response to the Findings and Recommendations of the Marin County Civil Grand Jury, it is important to put the responses in context to what the pertinent background and history is related to emergency radio systems for school entities and what developments have affected MERA.

Before December, 2007, the commonly held belief was that school districts such as San Rafael City Schools (SRCS) would become a part of MERA, however, there were not available funds (\$5000 per radio – at least one radio per school location) for purchase. Following the winter storms of late December, 2007, it became clear in January 2008 that the capacity of MERA to include all school entities came into question.

San Rafael City Schools remains committed to work and coordinate emergency communications with community partners. Our focus at this point in time is re-assessing our communications needs and working directly with the City of San Rafael and the County of Marin, the two public safety institutions which provide emergency services within our school district boundaries.

FINDINGS

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

Response: No schools in the San Rafael City Schools are part of MERA.

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 schools with no emergency radio communications capabilities.**

Response: San Rafael City Schools has an Emergency Plan which includes provisions for emergency communications between individual school sites and the District Office. SRCS, in partnership with the City of San Rafael continues to refine our communications procedures and protocols. There is agreement that the current countywide system used between SRCS and the Marin County Office of Education is in need of upgrading.

- 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 schools has not been made available because of questionable interpretations of Homeland Security guidelines by local authorities.**

Response: Unable to Respond

- 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 issue for not having MERA radios in SRCS 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 appropriate talk group configurations for SRCS to effectively interface with the MERA system and what equipment options would be available for purchase.

- 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: Agree.

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 various public school districts, 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.**

Response: SRCS will participate in planning on what is needed for effective and adequate emergency communications on a countywide basis.

- 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 response to R1.