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**A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service**

NAPA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY 2024-2025

March 21, 2025

FINAL REPORT

Helping Napa Public Schools Make the Grade: Does Bond Financing Pass the Test?

SUMMARY

In the 2024 General Election, Napa voters narrowly approved Measure B, a \$230 million local bond measure to finance capital projects planned for the Napa Valley Unified School District (NVUSD). The 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury observed that the NVUSD Board of Trustees has placed four bond measures on ballots in the last six general elections. The Civil Grand Jury decided to investigate the appropriateness and effectiveness of this reliance on bond financing.

Most public school districts in California depend on state financial support which can fluctuate significantly based on the State's annual financial conditions, which makes local budgeting of the resources needed for expensive and often multi-year initiatives challenging and complicated. Raising local revenues through bond sales can help stabilize local school district financing. Measure B funds are committed for repairs, renovations and classroom updates for Napa-based campuses within NVUSD.

After a seven-month investigation, the Civil Grand Jury made six findings of facts and six recommendations regarding NVUSD's use of bond financing for capital projects and the oversight of the allocation of funds.

- **Reliance on Bond Financing:** Bond financing is the primary source of funding for NVUSD capital needs. The Civil Grand Jury recommends NVUSD maintain an ongoing campaign using multiple media outlets and distribution tools to inform stakeholders and the general public on the details and progress of the projects associated with bond fund allocations.
- **Web Accessibility and Public Trust:** The NVUSD website is complex to navigate, making it challenging to access bond financial data and reports. Noting narrow bond election results, the Civil Grand Jury recommends that NVUSD proactively distribute information and updates to inform the general public on how bond funds are being allocated and used, to help build community trust.
- **Use of Bonds for Salaries:** While permissible in limited circumstances, using bond funds for NVUSD employee salaries may reduce public trust by contradicting public pledges and bond ballot language that states, "no funds for administrators". The Civil Grand Jury recommends NVUSD refrain from using bond funds for any district salaries, operating expenses or other administrative activities.
- **Public Awareness of Citizen Bond Oversight Committees:** California's Proposition 39 (2000) requires school boards to establish independent oversight committees and conduct annual financial and performance audits until all bond funds are

spent. The Civil Grand Jury recommends NVUSD inform the general public about the role of bond oversight committees and actively encourage participation from stakeholder groups, especially community members and parents of students, to participate on such committees.

- **Citizen Bond Oversight Committee Training: NVUSD Bond Oversight Committees** lack thorough and independent training on the roles, scope of work, and authority of its members. The Civil Grand Jury recommends NVUSD provide independent training of Citizen Bond Oversight Committees, starting with the new Measure B committee.
- **Facilities Master Plan and Public Participation: NVUSD's 2016-2025 Facilities Master Plan** was developed and implemented with only limited public participation. The Civil Grand Jury recommends NVUSD fully implement its existing facilities planning policy by establishing a Facilities Advisory Committee consisting of staff, parents/guardians and business, local government, and other community representatives.

Prior to the publication of this report, the Civil Grand Jury learned that NVUSD began implementing elements of these recommendations shortly after Measure B was certified in December of 2024. The Civil Grand Jury commends the district staff and Board of Trustees for these actions.

METHODOLOGY

The 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury interviewed officials from the Napa County Office of Education and the Napa Valley Unified School District, as well as members of the Measure H and Measure A2 Bond Oversight Committees. Members of the Civil Grand Jury attended meetings of the Measure H and Measure A2 Bond Oversight Committees.

The Civil Grand Jury reviewed the budgets of the Napa Valley Unified School District, audits of Measure H bond spending, the annual reports of the Measure H Bond Oversight Committee, the minutes and recordings of Bond Oversight Committees, and the documents cited below in this report.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury observed that the Napa Valley Unified School District (“NVUSD” or “district”) Board of Trustees has placed four bond measures on the ballots in the last six general elections. The Civil Grand Jury decided to investigate whether the district is relying appropriately on bond funding to finance capital projects in its 10-year Facilities Master Plan. The Civil Grand Jury’s review was limited to the use of bond financing, not the specifics, merits, or prioritization of any particular bond-funded projects.

California School Financing

K-12 public education financing in California has a complex structure. To assist policy makers, California school business officers have developed “The Bottom Line”³⁴, a guide to essential information about school business and finance. K-12 funding is generally provided through a combination of local, state, and federal sources.

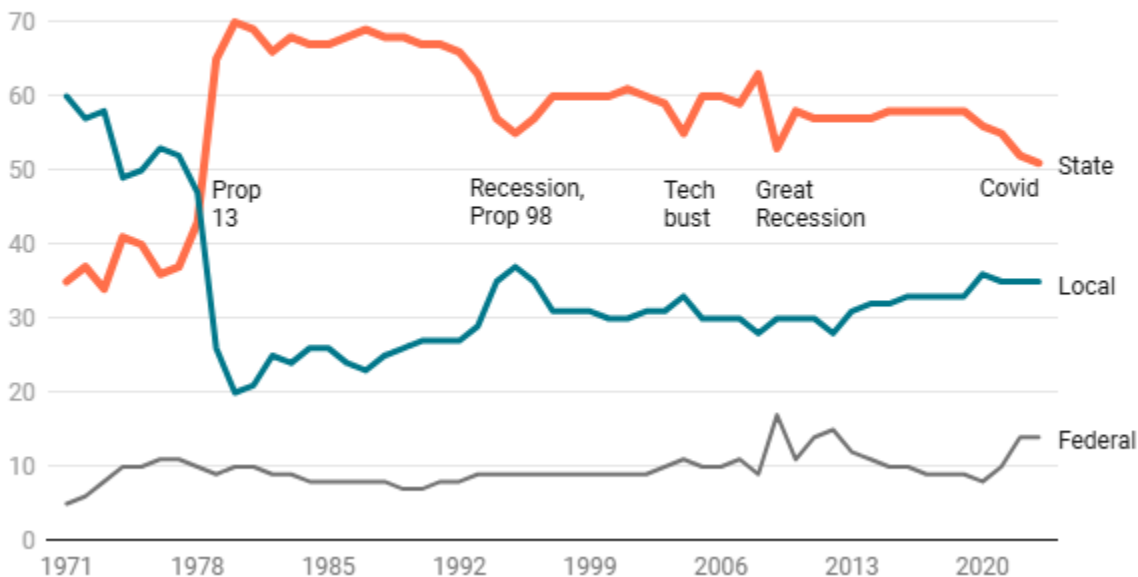
Proposition 13, passed in 1978, sharply curtailed local property taxes, causing increased reliance on state funding, primarily through income taxes. Proposition 13 limited property taxes to 1% of assessed value, limited annual increases due to inflation to 2% per year, and permitted reassessments of value only when properties changed hands. It also required a two-thirds majority approval by voters for any local “special purpose” taxes.

³⁴ California Association of School Business Officials, “The Bottom Line: A CASBO guide on school business and finance in California” (2023) available at <https://www.casbo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CASBO-Guide-to-School-Business-and-Finance.pdf>.

Ten years later, in 1998, California voters passed Proposition 98, which mandates minimum education spending. In 2013, the California Legislature passed the Local Control Funding Formula (“LCFF”) which combined a myriad of previously existing K–12 funding streams, including revenue limits, general purpose block grants, and most state categorical programs.³⁵

Revenue sources for California K-12 schools since 1970

Percentage of public school funding from state, local, and federal sources



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LCFF funding provides an allocation to each district based primarily on average daily attendance, supplemented by additional allocations based on “unduplicated percentage of targeted disadvantaged pupils. Targeted pupils are those classified as English learners (EL), meet income requirements to receive a free or reduced-price meal (FRPM), foster youth, or any combination of these factors (unduplicated count).”³⁷ Local property taxes are used to meet the LCFF allocation, and the state funds for any shortfall beyond this level. If local property taxes exceed the LCFF allocation, the district retains this additional revenue and does not receive LCFF funding, though remains eligible for various categorical funding for specific purposes. These districts are referred

³⁵ California Department of Education, “Local Control Funding Formula Overview”, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcfftoverview.asp>.

³⁶ This chart is from Ed 100, “What are Basic Aid districts”, <https://ed100.org/blog/basic-aid>.

³⁷ California Department of Education, “Local Control Funding Formula Overview”, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcfftoverview.asp>.

to as “basic aid”, “excess revenue”, or “community supported” districts. Although the property tax base in Napa County has been rising each year for many years due to increased property values, NVUSD is not a “basic aid”, “excess revenue” or “community supported” district, though it may meet the criteria in coming years.³⁸

The “local control” of LCFF allocations provides broader flexibility for local school districts to use funding to meet local needs and includes a requirement for Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) for each district to set goals, plan actions, and leverage resources to meet those goals to improve student outcomes. Although flexible,

“... the amount of actual, discretionary money available from year to year for school districts can be very limited. The Base Grant must primarily support core expenses for teacher and staff salaries and health benefits, which account for the largest percentage of school expenses (typically 85-90% of a district’s budget). Fixed costs for categories such as utilities and maintenance must also come out of the base. The state has also increased the obligation of districts to fund retirement and pension costs. Fiscal pressure against the Base Grant can be extreme, especially when coupled with inflation increasing faster than the growth in school districts’ annual, ongoing LCFF base revenues and cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).”³⁹

Districts are also required to maintain a minimum 3% reserve for contingencies (though encouraged to maintain reserves closer to 2 months of operating expenses, or 16.6%), and devote at least 3% of general unrestricted funds to facilities and maintenance.⁴⁰ These fiscal pressures have limited the ability of school districts, including NVUSD, to use general funds to address long-term facility needs. Instead, most districts turn to bond financing, combined with matching state funds, for capital projects. For example, in the most recent 2024 general election, 18 North Bay Area public school districts sought bond funding (14 passed), and 266 local school bond measures were on the ballot statewide, of which 204 or 77% passed, for a total of \$45.4 billion in bonds.⁴¹

³⁸ Calistoga Unified, St. Helena Unified, Howell Mountain Elementary and Pope Valley Elementary Districts are all “community supported” districts, as local property tax revenues exceed the LCFF allocations, as is the Napa Valley Community College District under a similar funding formula for community colleges. For a useful explanation of basic aid or community supported districts, see Ed 100, “What are Basic Aid Districts”, <https://ed100.org/blog/basic-aid>.

³⁹ California Association of School Business Officials, “The Bottom Line: A CASBO guide on school business and finance in California” (2023), page 4, <https://www.casbo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CASBO-Guide-to-School-Business-and-Finance.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Cal. Code Regs. Title 5 (Education) § 15450.

⁴¹ California Local Government Finance Almanac, “Local Measure Results: November 2024”, <https://californiacityfinance.com/Votes2411final.pdf>

Over the past 20 years, California voters approved \$181 billion in local bonds for public school and community college facility projects.⁴²

California Proposition 39, passed in 2000, allows 55 percent of local voters to approve school bonds, lowering the threshold from the previous two-thirds (66.7%) requirement. It imposed accountability requirements on districts that want to issue school bonds, including establishing citizen oversight committees to review all bond expenditures.⁴³ Proposition 39 contained ballot language that includes “a requirement that the proceeds from the sale of the bonds be used only for the purposes specified in Article XIII A, Section 1(b)(3) [facilities], and not for any other purpose, including teacher and administrator salaries and other school operating expenses.” However, California Attorney General Opinion 04-110⁴⁴ concludes that “a school district may use Proposition 39 school bond proceeds to pay the salaries of district employees to the extent they perform administrative oversight work on construction projects authorized by a voter approved bond measure.”

K-12 school districts rely on local bonds to generate the funds needed for major capital projects. In addition, the State’s “School Facility Program” financing model for school districts generally requires local matching funds for new construction and modernization of facilities.⁴⁵ The State dollars typically are allocated to districts to reimburse for projects that have been completed and on a first-come, first-served basis. According to

⁴² Official Voter Guide, 2024 Election, Prop 2 Analysis by the Legislative Analyst, <https://voterguide.sos.ca.gov/propositions/2/analysis.htm>.

⁴³ Implementing Proposition 39, California Education Code section 15282 provides in part that “The citizens' oversight committee shall consist of at least seven members to serve for a term of two years without compensation and for no more than two consecutive terms. While consisting of a minimum of at least seven members, the citizens' oversight committee shall be comprised as follows:

- (1) One member shall be active in a business organization representing the business community located within the district.
- (2) One member shall be active in a senior citizens' organization.
- (3) One member shall be active in a bona fide taxpayers' organization.
- (4) For a school district, one member shall be the parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the district..
- (5) For a school district, one member shall be both a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the district and active in a parent-teacher organization, such as the Parent Teacher Association or school site council..”

⁴⁴ Attorney General Opinion 04-110, found at <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/opinions/pdfs/04-110.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Public Policy Institute of California, “Equitable Funding for School Facilities”, <https://www.ppic.org/publication/policy-brief-equitable-state-funding-for-school-facilities/>

the legislative analysis accompanying AB 247 (2024), the bill to place Proposition 2 on the 2024 ballot:

“[State] K-12 allocations for new construction funds have been depleted since September 2018 while modernization funds were fully allocated in February 2019.

According to the Office of Public School Construction (OPSC), as of June 26, 2024, \$1.186 billion in new construction applications and \$2.282 billion in modernization applications have been submitted beyond Proposition 51 funding availability.”⁴⁶

Proposition 2, approved by the voters in 2024, provides for an additional \$10 billion in state-issued bonds, \$8.5 billion of which is for public school facilities, with \$4 billion of that \$8.5 billion allocated for renovation of existing buildings.

Napa County Office of Education

County offices of education, including the Napa County Office of Education (NCOE), have a narrowly defined role in overseeing district finances limited to ensuring school district fiscal solvency, with virtually no authority to manage local district bond funds. The “county superintendent of schools has fiscal oversight responsibility over school districts in the county... and authority to declare a district in jeopardy of being unable to meet its financial obligations through a qualified or negative certification at interim financial reporting periods or at any time during the year.”⁴⁷ The Civil Grand Jury heard testimony that NCOE provides technical assistance to Napa County districts only when asked to do so by any one of the five districts within its purview.

Napa Valley Unified School District

Established in 1965, Napa Valley Unified School District serves the communities of Napa and American Canyon and surrounding areas. The district is governed by a seven-member Board of Trustees, elected by the voters by district. The Board hires the Superintendent, who in turn oversees the activities of the district, directly supervises district administrators, and makes operational recommendations to the Board for approval. Over 16,500 students attend twenty-seven schools in grades TK-12.⁴⁸ As set

⁴⁶ Assembly Floor Analysis, “AB-247 Education finance: school facilities: Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Schools and Local Community College Public Education Facilities Modernization, Repair, and Safety Bond Act of 2024”, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB247

⁴⁷ California Department of Education, “Criteria and Standards for Fiscal Solvency”, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/fi/ss/csoverview.asp>

⁴⁸ “About NVUSD”, <https://www.nvUSD.org/about>

forth in Table 1 below, the NVUSD budget⁴⁹ for 2024-25 totals over \$264 million, and as indicated in Table 2 below, it maintains reserves above state minimum requirements. According to district officials, NVUSD currently has a \$40 million balance in “Fund 40” for facilities, in addition to the General Fund reserves.

TABLE 1: NVUSD GENERAL FUND BUDGET, 2024-25

	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total
REVENUES			
LCFF Sources	\$209,518,337	\$12,639,019	\$222,157,356
Federal Revenue ⁵⁰	\$0	\$9,004,431	\$9,004,431
Other State Revenue	\$3,822,933	\$25,163,576	\$28,986,509
Other Local Revenue	\$1,949,250	\$2,255,643	\$4,204,893
TOTAL REVENUE	\$215,290,520	\$49,062,669	\$264,353,189

⁴⁹ The 2024-25 budget report is 124 pages, from which the details presented here are extracted. The NVUSD budgets for the past several years are found at <https://www.nvusd.org/about/contact/business-services/financial-reporting>.

⁵⁰ “Federal Revenue” includes restricted COVID-related federal funding which will expire at the end of the current budget year, as well as restrict funds for special education as projected when the 2024-25 budget was created. As of the writing of this report, federal education funding is under review by the federal government and the availability of it is the subject of litigation.

EXPENDITURES

Certificated Salaries ⁵¹	\$88,508,844	\$30,844,605	\$119,353,449
Classified Salaries	\$28,873,947	\$15,635,557	\$44,509,504
Employee Benefits	\$38,472,601	\$24,081,877	\$62,554,478
Books and Supplies	\$3,831,738	\$13,651,005	\$17,482,743
Services and Other Operating Expenditures	\$25,347,625	\$16,479,119	\$41,826,744
Capital Outlay	\$207,000	\$71,385	\$278,385
Other Outgo - Transfers of Indirect Costs	\$12,200	\$0	\$12,200
Other Outgo (Transfers of Indirect Costs)	\$(6,996,580)	\$6,321,617	\$(674,963)
TOTAL	\$178,257,375	\$107,085,165	\$ 285,342,540

TABLE 2: NVUSD GENERAL FUND RESERVES, 2024-25

Non-spendable	\$220,658
Restricted	\$2,325,366
Committed	\$48,414,093
Economic Uncertainty	\$31,782,505

⁵¹ “Certificated” are district employees such as teachers who require a valid credential/permit to qualify for the position, and classified are the non-certificated employees.
<https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/certification-glossary/certificated-staff>.

In 2016, the district identified over \$500 million in capital project needs, stating:

“the majority of Napa’s schools were built more than 60 years ago and are falling behind basic standards. As a result, our classrooms, labs, and school facilities face numerous challenges, including roofs that leak, unreliable heating, cooling, and ventilation systems, and safety hazards such as asbestos. Additionally, we have over 100 temporary structures that have exceeded their intended lifespan, posing safety risks such as water leakage, necessitating their removal.”⁵²

The NVUSD Board of Trustees placed a bond measure (Measure H) for \$269 million on the 2016 general election ballot, which exceeded the 55% supermajority requirement by 350 votes, passing with 55.99% in favor.⁵³ Measure H did not fund all of the capital needs of the district, and costs continued to increase. The district placed two separate measures on the 2022 general election ballot: Measure A1 for issuance of \$200 million in bonds for schools in Napa and surrounding areas, and Measure A2 for \$25 million for schools in American Canyon. Measure A2 passed with 65.68% in favor. However, Measure A1 with 54.62% in favor failed by 130 votes to reach the 55% approval threshold. In the 2024 election, the district tried again with Measure B for \$230 million in bonds specifically for Napa schools, which narrowly passed the 55% threshold by 37 votes.

Citizen Bond Oversight Committees

Citizen Bond Oversight Committees (“BOC”) were created for Measure H and Measure A2, and recruitment began for a committee following the 2024 passage of Measure B. Members of the Civil Grand Jury reviewed minutes and recordings of BOC meetings, reviewed Measure H BOC annual reports and audits, attended meetings of the Measure H and Measure A2 BOCs, and interviewed members of both BOCs. Because the Measure A2 committee has been active only since 2023, no audit or annual reports were available to review.

The Civil Grand Jury’s investigation found that appointments to the BOCs have fulfilled the required categories of membership. Also, those committee members have engaged in thoughtful questioning and discussions about the bond funded projects within their authority. Of note, BOCs are not engaged in planning or prioritizing projects, though

⁵² Facilities Master Plan, and “Measure B”, <https://www.nvusd.org/about/contact/school-planning/measure-b>.

⁵³ Napa County current election results are found at <https://www.countyofnapa.org/402/Election-Results> and historical election results from 2016 onward are found at <https://www.countyofnapa.org/DocumentCenter/Index/1083>.

members have expressed a willingness to do so. Their roles have been limited to reviewing spending only after it has occurred.

BOC members reported initial training and understanding of their authority has been limited, with members initially unclear about the scope of work and extent of their responsibilities. As noted in recommendation R5, the Civil Grand Jury concludes that the BOCs would benefit from thorough, independent training, both upon the formation of the committees and when any new members are added. Organizations such as the California Association of Bond Oversight Committees can provide appropriate training.

Allocation of Bond Funds

The Civil Grand Jury has found that all but a small percentage of bond funds expended since the passage of Measure H have been used for capital expenses, which is consistent with the measures' ballot language. Nearly all of the Measure H funds have been expended, and approximately one half of the Measure A2 bonds have been sold to generate funds, with many projects underway. Measure B bonds are scheduled to be sold in the spring of 2025, and the district has begun recruitment for a Measure B Bond Oversight Committee.⁵⁴

The ballot language for Bond Measure H (passed in 2016) included the following provision consistent with Proposition 39 (ALL CAPS as in original text):

“NO ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES: PROCEEDS FROM THE SALE OF THE BONDS AUTHORIZED BY THIS PROPOSITION SHALL BE USED ONLY FOR THE ACQUISITION, CONSTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION, OR REPLACEMENT OF SCHOOL FACILITIES, INCLUDING THE FURNISHING AND EQUIPPING OF SCHOOL FACILITIES, AND NOT FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE, INCLUDING TEACHER AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES AND OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES.”

Similar ballot language was included in Bond Measure A2 (passed in 2022) and Bond Measure B (passed in 2024). Although this language would appear to prohibit expenditure for NVUSD employee salaries, the district relied on Attorney General Opinion 04-110 creating an exception for salaries for work related to bond-funded projects.

⁵⁴ NVUSD Board of Trustees Resolution 25-17, January 16, 2025, found at <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=36030213&AID=990540&MID=34993>

Proponents of NVUSD bond measures - including district officials - have campaigned on the basis that bond funds are used exclusively for capital projects, not administrative salaries. In the Measure B campaign, the Registrar of Voters published the proponents' "Rebuttal to Argument Against Measure B" that stated: "Yes on B stays local. Accountability measures keep Measure B funds locally controlled, for Napa schools only. No money for administration. Funds are for voter-approved projects, with independent oversight and annual audits."⁵⁵ Despite these statements, the Civil Grand Jury found that a small percentage of bond funds have been used by NVUSD for salaries. Measure H BOC annual reports and audits are available to the public⁵⁶ and were reviewed in detail by the Civil Grand Jury. As outlined in Table 3 below, each year the district allocated from .08% to 1.15% of bond proceeds to salaries and benefits.

⁵⁵ "Rebuttal to Arguments Against Measure B", found at Napa County Elections website <https://www.countyofnapa.org/DocumentCenter/View/33464/November-5-2024---Measure-B---Rebuttal-to-the-Argument-Against---Napa-Valley-Unified-PDF> (emphasis added).

⁵⁶ The Measure H audits are found via the NVUSD Measure H Bond Oversight Committee site at <https://www.nvUSD.org/bond-oversight-committee-measure-h> and directly online at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16yZgrWfo8Nj704CKk6d8pO9T78rmPZu0>.

**TABLE 3:
NVUSD SALARIES AND BENEFITS AS PERCENTAGE OF
TOTAL MEASURE H EXPENDITURES**

Category	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Classified Salaries	\$203,043	\$339,179	\$376,281	\$86,548	\$4,129
Classified Benefits	\$67,334	\$115,501	\$119,135	\$35,003	\$396
Total Expenditures	\$79,154,27	\$65,490,430	\$43,111,051	\$24,304,585	\$6,024,184
% Expenditures for Salaries & Wages	0.34%	0.69%	1.15%	0.50%	0.08%

As of the writing of this report, the 2023-24 fiscal year audit was not yet published, and the district reported that no salaries had been charged to Measure H bond funds during that or the current fiscal year.

The Measure H Bond Oversight Committee inquired about the practice of using some bond funds for salaries related to bond projects and was informed by district staff that bond counsel and auditors have approved such expenditures as consistent with the Attorney General’s opinion.⁵⁷

Charging employee salaries against the funding source may be appropriate practice in project management in the private sector. However, the Civil Grand Jury concluded that while minimal and possibly permissible in limited circumstances, charging NVUSD employee salaries against bond funds may reduce public trust by contradicting public pledges and bond ballot language that states, “no funds for administrators.” In its current practice, NVUSD has stopped charging any salaries to bond funds, and the Civil Grand Jury recommends that it continue to avoid charging any salaries to bond funds.

⁵⁷ Measure H Bond Oversight Committee Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2022-2023.
<https://www.nvusd.org/bond-oversight-committee-measure-h>

Public Outreach

Tight bond election results in recent years suggest that NVUSD can and should do more to inform citizens about district fiscal needs in general and bond financing in particular. Detailed information regarding bond spending is available online, but it can be difficult to find on the district's complex website and requires reviewing lengthy documents.

NVUSD should proactively distribute information and updates to inform the general public on how bond funds are being allocated and used. The Civil Grand Jury notes that the district recently engaged a communications consulting firm to assist with this work.⁵⁸ The district could publish periodic reports, send information to parents through district communication channels, use social media for information directed to the general public, and post signage at project sites where bond-funded work is in progress. NVUSD should maintain an ongoing campaign using multiple media outlets and distribution tools to inform stakeholders and the general public on the details and progress of the projects associated with bond fund allocations. The Measure A2 Bond Oversight Committee page reports expenditures by school, updated approximately every two months⁵⁹. Such regular updates, by school and by project, are appropriate and beneficial to all interested parties. The district is also encouraged to publish such regular reports for the recently passed Measure B.

Public Participation in Capital Projects Facility Master Plan Development

The Civil Grand Jury found that public participation in facilities planning is limited, with the process being primarily driven by NVUSD staff and approved by the district Board of Trustees. The district developed a 10-year Capital Projects Facilities Master Plan in 2016, which has been described as a living document updated during that period based on Measure H implementation plans. A new Facilities Master Plan will be required to update the 2016 plan and to comply with state requirements. NVUSD Policy 7110: Facilities Master Plan provides relevant language that directs this effort:

“The district's facilities master plan shall be based on an assessment of the condition and adequacy of existing facilities, a projection of future enrollments, and alignment of facilities with the district's vision for the instructional program.

To solicit broad input into the planning process, the Superintendent or designee may establish a facilities advisory committee consisting of staff, parents/guardians, and

⁵⁸ Item 2.4, Agreement with Q Communications, NVUSD Board of Trustees meeting packet, January 16, 2025.

https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/SB_Meetings/ViewMeeting.aspx?S=36030213&MID=34993&Tab=Agenda&enIID=gjJx9jDUJbWMCRT0zEIOjA%3D%3D

⁵⁹ <https://www.nvusd.org/about/contact/school-planning/measure-a2>

business, local government, and other community representatives. The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that the public is informed of the need for construction and modernization of facilities and of the district's plans for facilities.”⁶⁰

The district does not have a Facilities Advisory Committee as contemplated by the policy, but with a new or updated Facilities Master Plan being required for eligibility for state matching funds⁶¹, this is an opportunity to expand public participation by creating such a committee. The Civil Grand Jury heard testimony that BOC members and others are ready, willing and able to participate in the planning process. As noted in our recommendation R6, the Civil Grand Jury recommends full implementation of the Facilities policy by creating a Facilities Advisory Committee before a new Facilities Master Plan is developed.

FINDINGS

The Civil Grand Jury finds:

F1: Bond financing is the primary source of funding for addressing the capital needs of the Napa Valley Unified School District.

F2: The NVUSD website is complex to navigate making it difficult to find bond financial data and reports.

F3: Charging NVUSD employee salaries against bond funds, while permissible in limited circumstances, may reduce public trust by contradicting public pledges and bond ballot language that states, “no funds for administrators”.

F4: NVUSD does not adequately inform the general public that the Citizen Bond Oversight Committees play critical roles in satisfying California’s Proposition 39 (2000), which requires school boards to establish independent oversight committees and conduct annual financial and performance audits until all bond funds have been spent.

F5: NVUSD’s Citizen Bond Oversight Committees lack thorough and independent training on the roles, scope of work, relationship with school district personnel, and authority of its members.

F6: The creation and execution of NVUSD’s 2016-2025 Facilities Master Plan had only limited public participation.

⁶⁰ NVUSD Policy 7110: Facilities Master Plan is found at the NVUSD Policies website, <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Policy/PolicyListing.aspx?S=36030213>.

⁶¹ Education Code § 17070.54.

COMMENDATION

The 2024-25 Napa County Civil Grand Jury commends the volunteer members of the NVUSD Bond Oversight Committees for their monitoring spending of Measure H and Measure A2 bond funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Civil Grand Jury recommends:

R1: NVUSD should maintain an ongoing campaign using multiple media outlets and distribution tools to inform stakeholders and the general public on the details and progress of the projects associated with bond fund allocations, and do so by September 30, 2025.

R2: Narrow bond measure election results strongly suggest that NVUSD should build community trust by proactively distributing information and updates to inform the general public on how bond funds are being allocated and used, and do so by September 30, 2025.

R3: NVUSD should continue its current practice to refrain from using bond funds for any district salaries, operating expenses or other administrative activities.

R4: NVUSD should inform the general public about the role of bond oversight committees and actively encourage stakeholder groups, especially community members and parents of students, to participate on such committees, effective no later than 90 days after the publication of this 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury report.

R5: NVUSD should arrange for independent training of Citizen Bond Oversight Committees, starting with the new Measure B committee, and do so by September 30, 2025.

R6: NVUSD should implement fully its existing facilities planning policy by establishing a Facilities Advisory Committee consisting of staff, parents/guardians, and business, local government, and other community representatives, and do so before a new Facilities Master Plan is created and no later than June 30, 2026.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Napa Valley Unified School District Board of Trustees is *required* to respond to F1-F6 and R1-R6 within 90 days of receipt of this report.

INVITED RESPONSES

The Civil Grand Jury invites, but does not require, the Napa County Superintendent of Schools to respond to F1-F6 and R1-R6 within 60 days of receipt of this report and invites, but does not require, the Measure H Bond Oversight Committee and the Measure A2 Bond Oversight Committee to respond to F1-F6 and R1-R6 within 90 days of receipt of this report.



A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service

NAPA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY 2024-2025

April 23, 2025

FINAL REPORT

Pope Valley Union Elementary School District Overcoming a Troubled Past

SUMMARY

Located in northeastern Napa County, the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District (PVUESD) is a small, rural public school offering Transitional Kindergarten (TK) through eighth grades. With an enrollment of approximately 50 students, PVUESD faces unique challenges. Its remote location, small student population, staffing challenges, and a history of leadership struggles underscore the pressing need for transformative, sustainable solutions to secure the school district's future.

Last year, the community was impacted by the trial and conviction of a former school employee for sexual abuse, involving both current and former students. The abuse, which spanned over a decade, created significant rifts within school personnel and among student families. After receiving and evaluating a citizen complaint alleging discrimination and unequal treatment by the school administration against Hispanic or Spanish-speaking families, the 2024-2025 Napa County Civil Grand Jury conducted an 8-month investigation into the allegations which uncovered widespread issues with district leadership and school operations.

The Civil Grand Jury made several key findings and recommendations about PVUESD, related to systemic issues involving governance, management of school operations, and community engagement.

- PVUESD failed to provide a safe learning environment and requisite education for its students.
- The PVUESD Board of Trustees (School Board) failed to deliver the necessary oversight and direction for PVUESD operations and academic performance. At this time, the School Board appears to be focused on addressing past deficiencies and committed to providing the necessary oversight and direction to improve PVUESD operations and academic performance. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the School Board develop and implement a long-term strategy for the school district, prioritizing operational effectiveness and significant improvements in academic outcomes.
- Prior school superintendents/principals failed to ensure student safety, address academic instruction and student performance gaps, or manage the school and staff effectively. The Civil Grand Jury recommends the School Board ensure that school leadership possesses the necessary qualifications and experience to effectively prioritize student safety and educational excellence.
- The Superintendent/Principal, who held the position during this Civil Grand Jury investigation, implemented policies and procedures to stabilize and build sustainable long-term operations, enforce student safety protocols, and improve academic instruction and student performance. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Superintendent/Principal continue to monitor and refine these policies and procedures regularly to ensure their effectiveness.

- While the Civil Grand Jury investigation found no evidence of discrimination or unequal treatment by the school administration against Hispanic or Spanish-speaking families, the past lack of bilingual support revealed communication gaps, leaving Spanish-speaking parents and English Second Language learners feeling isolated and disconnected. The Civil Grand Jury strongly recommends continued school administration efforts to foster greater inclusivity within the community.
- Inadequate communication by district and school management following the trial and conviction of a former school employee for student sexual abuse left parents feeling disconnected and frustrated. The Civil Grand Jury recommends regular and consistent updates to inform the public, rebuild trust, promote inclusivity, and improve transparency in decision-making to strengthen the relationship between the school and the community.
- School bus transportation service was found to be inadequate to serve the district, with persistent equipment problems undermining reliability. The Civil Grand Jury recommends the School Board and Superintendent/Principal develop and execute a permanent solution to provide safe and reliable transportation for students.
- The school community is divided, with one group of parents and teachers supporting changes in the school and another favoring a return to prior practices and personnel. The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the School Board and Superintendent/Principal take deliberate steps to promote open and constructive dialogue among all stakeholders.

Pope Valley Union Elementary School has faced many challenges over the past decade, and district and school leadership have implemented changes to improve school operations and student outcomes. Increased involvement by parents and the community will increase School Board and Superintendent/Principal accountability regarding academic performance, measurable student development, and on-campus safety. The Civil Grand Jury believes this commitment, along with continuity and consistency in school operations, will promote long-term success for both the students and the community of Pope Valley.

BACKGROUND

Napa County has five public school districts: Napa Valley Unified, St. Helena Unified, Calistoga Joint Unified, Howell Mountain Elementary, and Pope Valley Union Elementary. Among these, Howell Mountain and Pope Valley have the lowest enrollments, each with fewer than 100 students.

Pope Valley is a small, rural, unincorporated community in northeastern Napa County with a residential population of approximately 673 people.⁶² The demographics are diverse, with approximately 49.8% of the population identifying as Hispanic and 43.4% as White. Many residents work in agriculture, particularly in vineyards and wineries.

The average annual household income is \$102,242 with a median household income of \$71,250. Several families have deep, generational roots in the area.

According to the Napa County Historical Society, the first Pope Valley School was founded in 1859⁶³. In the 1940's, five one-room schoolhouses were combined into the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District (PVUESD). PVUESD is now one campus, Pope Valley Elementary, serving TK through eighth grade.

The Pope Valley Union Elementary School District has received significant media attention in recent years due to the trial and conviction of a former employee for sexual abuse involving current and former students. This case has led to ongoing feelings of distrust towards school leadership and staff among some residents.

The Civil Grand Jury received a citizen complaint alleging instances of misconduct by teachers and staff at the school, unrelated to the resolved criminal abuse case. The complaint also alleged mistreatment of Spanish-speaking parents and students. In response, the Civil Grand Jury initiated a comprehensive investigation of the complaint and the school's overall operations. Although the criminal case is outside the scope of the Civil Grand Jury, the Civil Grand Jury noted the profound impacts of the conviction on the school staff and local community.

⁶² Point2Homes: www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/CA/Pope-Valley-Demographics.html

⁶³ Napa Historical Society: <https://napahistory.org/pope-valley-schools-a-primer/>

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on comprehensive Civil Grand Jury interviews and reviews of school, state, federal, and local materials.

Civil Grand Jury interviews included management and staff from Pope Valley Union Elementary School District and Napa County Office of Education, management from Howell Mountain Elementary and St. Helena Unified school districts, and parents of students in Pope Valley Union Elementary School.

Documents from the following sources were reviewed:

- Pope Valley Unified Elementary School District
 - Website (www.pvk8.org)
 - Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)
 - Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)
 - School Accountability Report Card (SARC)
 - Audit reports
 - School Board meeting minutes
 - 2024 Revitalize and Rebuild Plan
- California Department of Education
 - California Education Code
 - California School Dashboard
 - District Profile
- US Department of Education
- Napa County Office of Education (NCOE)
- California School Board Association (CSBA)
- Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT)
- Press coverage
- Court transcripts

DISCUSSION

School District

Pope Valley Union Elementary School, located at 6200 Pope Valley Road, features three main buildings. The older building, constructed in 1969, includes the main school office for the Superintendent/Principal, and two rooms for small group work, a first aid room, and staff room. The newer building, completed in 1982, houses four classrooms: a Learning Center, TK-2 classroom, 3-5 classroom, and a 6-8 classroom. Additionally, there is a new Multipurpose Room (MPR) building, and a portable classroom used as the school library on the west side of the school. The MPR serves as a multi-purpose room for art, music, indoor physical education, and rainy-day lunches.

The California Department of Education School Dashboard provides historical information about the Pope Valley school demographics and performance. School enrollment has fluctuated over the years but generally has been about 50 students. About 70% of the students are of Hispanic heritage.

Pope Valley Elementary School Enrollment by School Year⁶⁴

	<u>2019-20</u>	<u>2020-21</u>	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>	<u>2023-24</u>	<u>2024-25</u>
Students	50	46	50	57	55	48

Students are taught in small, mixed-grade classrooms with a student-to-teacher ratio of about 12:1. This high-touch learning environment allows for individualized attention and support.

³ California School Dashboard, <https://www.caschooldashboard.org>. Enrollment and financial data are from School Accountability Report Cards found at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/sa/index.asp>.

**2024-25 Pope Valley Elementary School
Student Enrollment by Grade Level**

GRADE LEVEL	NO. OF STUDENTS
Kindergarten	4
Grade 1	5
Grade 2	6
Grade 3	4
Grade 4	4
Grade 5	5
Grade 6	6
Grade 7	5
Grade 8	9
Total Enrollment	48

Pope Valley’s school district appears to have more funding than most California school districts. It is a basic aid district, meaning it retains revenue from local property taxes that exceed the state’s funding formula requirements. Additionally, it receives constitutionally guaranteed state basic aid funding. Property tax revenue accounts for approximately 80% of the district’s revenues. Per-pupil funding is \$33,092, compared to Napa Valley Unified School District per-pupil funding of \$10,328.⁶⁵

At the start of the 2024-2025 school year, there were four full-time credentialed classroom teachers and a part-time Special Education teacher on the school payroll. Prior to the completion of this report, adjustments were made in the teaching staff,

⁶⁵ NVUSD Financial Hub, <https://nvusdk12caus-25-us-west1-01.preview.finalsitecdn.com/about/departments/business-services/financial-hub>.

including shifts in grade assignments and the non-renewal of several teachers' contracts for the 2025-26 school year due to performance issues.

Positions at the school historically have been difficult to fill primarily due to its rural location. As a result, teacher and staff salaries are comparatively higher than other schools in California. A limited number of job applicants resulted in a small pool of candidates which contributed to the hiring of staff who were related by family. A number of past and present school employees are from two local families, which has raised concerns about conflicts of interest.

Student academic achievement data is evidence of poor performance in the Pope Valley district. Pope Valley student academic scores in math and reading are consistently below grade-level standards. PVUESD has an average math proficiency score of 25% (versus the California public elementary school average of 35%) and reading proficiency score of 15% (versus the 45% statewide average).

The school has a high percentage of socially disadvantaged students (95.8%) and English learners (39.6%), factors which have been shown to influence academic success. Overall, school class performance has been well below state standards and often rated as “red,” the lowest rating on the California School Dashboard. Records reinforcing low performance levels existed prior to and since impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Academic Performance by Year
(point scores compared to standard)⁶⁶**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
English	-31.4	No data	Very Low	-103.3	-77.8	-81.5
Math	-36.4	No data	Low	-81.3	-62.1	-67.6

The school has faced challenges serving special needs students due to a lack of an appropriately credentialed teacher, resulting in difficulties executing statutory requirements such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In California, special needs students are those with disabilities that negatively impact their education and require special education services. An IEP is a written annual statement outlining a child's current performance levels, learning goals, school placement, and services.

⁶⁶ The California School Dashboard reports that state law suspended reporting of data for 2020-21, and allowed reporting of data using one of five status levels (ranging from Very High, High, Medium, Low, and Very Low) for 2021-22 due to COVID.

Additionally, students often face difficulties securing reliable transportation due to the considerable distance between their homes and the school, as well as the work commitments of their parents and caregivers. To address this challenge, the school provides bus transportation for its students.

School Board

The PVUESD Board of Trustees (School Board) consists of five elected officials, with one member newly elected in 2024. Many Board members have served multiple terms, with one trustee having served over 25 years. The current President, a former student of the school, has served for approximately two years, first as Secretary and then as President.

None of the trustees have prior experience in public education. They are generally long-term community members, some of whom have children or grandchildren who attend or have attended the school. Filling School Board positions has been challenging, as few community members have applied, and candidates often run unopposed.

The School Board appoints and evaluates the district Superintendent/Principal. It oversees the establishment of the district's budget, curriculum, policies, and academic achievement standards.

The School Board plays a critical role in student and district performance. The California School Board Association (CSBA) states that for a school board to operate effectively they must “maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress” while involving the community, including parents, students and staff. CSBA⁶⁷ outlines the main functions of a School Board as follows:

- Setting Direction by establishing a long-term vision for the school district
- Establishing Structure with an effective and efficient organizational framework
- Providing Support for the superintendent and staff in demonstrating professional behavior, making informed decisions, and effectively allocating resources
- Ensuring Accountability to the public by monitoring and evaluating the district's performance
- Providing Community Leadership by advocating for children, the school district, and serving as leaders within the community

⁶⁷ CSBA, “Roles and Responsibilities”, <https://www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources/EffectiveGovernance/RoleandResponsibilitiesofSBMs.aspx>

Based on interviews with the school staff and parents, the Civil Grand Jury concluded that before 2023, the Pope Valley School Board was inadequately performing these functions. The Board did not have a well-defined vision to guide the school's future direction. The Board had taken a hands-off approach to academic performance, failing to monitor or improve student outcomes. As a result, students graduating from Pope Valley were underprepared for high school and often required special attention to succeed in high school. The previous Superintendent/Principal was not held accountable by the School Board for the poor academic instruction and performance of the students and operated with almost complete autonomy from the Board. Although Board members stated that they raised concerns about academic performance with the previous Superintendent/Principal, no follow-up action appears to have been taken when improvements did not occur.

The Board stated that they were unaware of the ongoing abuse at the school until it became public knowledge with the indictment of an employee for child abuse including past and current PVUESD students. While it is understandable that legal confidentiality was necessary during the criminal investigation, parents reported that the overall communication from the Board was poorly managed. This has resulted in community distrust and division.

In 2023, the School Board hired a new Superintendent/Principal. She is a PhD candidate with a background in education and change management. The new Superintendent/Principal is receiving Board support for key initiatives to implement changes to the curriculum and school management. In interviews with the Civil Grand Jury, School Board members expressed a determination to improve academic performance and rebuild community trust.

Several critical areas are still to be addressed by the School Board. There is no district strategic plan to guide the long-term improvement of the school and ensure this progress is sustained. Additionally, the Board has yet to communicate a plan to rebuild community trust in the school following the abuse case and to enhance parent engagement moving forward.

The Civil Grand Jury learned from Board members that there are no training standards for Board members, even for the newly elected/appointed. Moreover, Board members claimed it had been years since they have taken any training. In California, new school district board members undergo specific training to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively oversee school operations and support student success. The CSBA offers many school board training programs including ethics, board orientation and governance, and fiscal responsibility.

Superintendent/Principal

The District Superintendent/Principal undertakes broad leadership duties for the district, including managing budgets, formulating policies, collaborating with the Board and community, and providing comprehensive reporting, while also overseeing day-to-day operations of the school. This includes guiding curriculum development, supervising staff, ensuring student welfare, and fostering engagement within the community.

The Superintendent/Principal role for the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District is a combined position, a common practice for small school districts in California. The Superintendent/Principal reports to the School Board while teachers and classified staff report to the Superintendent/Principal.

Over the past five years, PVUESD has seen three different people in the Superintendent/Principal role. The former Superintendent/Principal served for over seven years, resigning in winter 2022 and officially departing in April 2022 to lead another district. Subsequently, a Napa County Board of Education (NCOE) employee was contracted by the School Board as interim Superintendent/Principal for one year (2022-2023) as they searched for a permanent replacement.

The Superintendent/Principal, as of this report, is in year two of a three-year contract with PVUESD.

Through interviews with PVUESD staff and parents, the Civil Grand Jury was told previous superintendents lacked focus on student academics and safety, demonstrated little accountability for the behavior of teachers and classified staff, and mismanaged school operations. The current Superintendent/Principal is focused on these critical areas, according to interviews with school staff and parents.

Some parents interviewed by the Civil Grand Jury expressed concerns regarding the quality of teaching, citing a need for educators to increase focus on student achievement, establish clear lesson plans, set measurable goals, and improve instructional techniques. These concerns align with the fact that student achievement scores have remained flat and below average.

Until recently, teachers operated independently, without a structured curriculum, policies, or goals to guide their activities. There were no measures in place to evaluate teacher performance or hold them accountable for poor academic outcomes. In at least one incident, a teacher engaged in corporal punishment without facing any consequences. Teachers and staff were not provided with clear guidelines on appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior, particularly regarding having one-on-one interactions with students. School staff also informed the Civil Grand Jury that the

former Superintendent/Principal allowed the convicted former school employee to be alone with individual students in a manner that the school staff thought was concerning.

At this same period, all school employees were to complete their annual mandated reporter training on child abuse and neglect reporting and identification. This training is mandatory for all employees, including teachers, teacher's aides, and classified employees. However, the Civil Grand Jury learned that documentation of this training may have been falsified. The Civil Grand Jury found no reports by school employees of incidents of concern or suspected abuse, despite the activities occurring over many years.

Keeping the school premises secure is an expectation for all campuses. The Civil Grand Jury learned there was a lack of oversight regarding visitors on school property in the past. The campus was easily accessible, with no gate around the property, and parents and other visitors roamed the grounds unmonitored and unaccompanied.

Despite having an English learner population of 39.6%, there were no bilingual teachers on staff prior to January 2024. The school relied on a Spanish-speaking school secretary to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents, although the individual did not perform this function in an official capacity.

Special needs students were underserved with no certified special needs teacher on staff for several years.

The Civil Grand Jury acknowledges the current Superintendent/Principal commitment to restoring trust and ensuring accountability in the school community. Efforts are underway to establish foundational standards, policies, rules, and a curriculum aimed at enhancing academic achievement while strengthening overall school operations. These changes are outlined in the long-range Revitalize and Rebuild Plan for the school.

The school has experienced positive changes during the 2024-2025 academic year, marked by key personnel adjustments that indicate a commitment to holding teachers accountable for their performance and student outcomes.

- A bilingual teacher has been added to the staff, providing support for Spanish-speaking students.
- Teachers were reassigned to different teaching assignments to mitigate use of long-term substitute teachers with Grade 7/8 students and to ensure that the youngest students receive instruction from a bilingual teacher to help bridge cultural gaps and improve foundational learning and academic performance.
- A Learning Center model was established to enhance teaching and learning practices for both special and general education students by offering hands-on,

personalized learning experiences that foster collaboration, independence, and academic growth.

- To better serve the school's Hispanic community members, the school offers a certified interpreter and on-demand access to the Language Line translation service.
- The school has a part-time Special Education teacher who holds a Master of Science in Special Education and is a former SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area) director.

Beyond these changes, the current Superintendent/Principal has also increased financial reserves over the past two years. The school received positive certifications from NCOE and the California Department of Education in their Interim Financial Reports indicating that the school district is projected to meet its financial obligations for the current and the next two fiscal years. This evidences financial health and stability, showing that the district is managing its budget and resources.

To enhance communications, the school's website has been updated and improved, now providing content in Spanish, and expanded to include school reports, student events, board meeting information, as well as helpful resources for students, parents, and teachers. School announcements and updates also are available in Spanish. Additionally, a contract has been signed to upgrade the student information system, providing real-time access to grades, attendance, and other student-related information for parents, students, and educators.

To enhance parental engagement within the school community, a Parent Advisory Council was established in October 2024. This council complements existing school-parent collaboration efforts, such as the Pope Valley English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) and the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting nights.

School Transportation

The challenges involving the school's bus transportation system have impacted operations and community trust for an extended period. A driver shortage, persistent mechanical failures, extended repair times, and unreliable service have hindered the school's ability to maintain consistent transportation for students. Resolving this concern has become a top priority for the Superintendent/Principal and Board, reflecting their commitment to provide reliable, safe, and efficient transportation options for students.

The Civil Grand Jury learned the school district completed the legal process for the disposal of its two oldest buses during the 2024 calendar year.

Two propane buses purchased in 2021 have not solved the ongoing transportation challenges. The Civil Grand Jury learned that the buses have been frequently out of

operation. Repair times are lengthy and frequently unsuccessful, leaving the school without bus service for extended periods of time. Negotiations with bus companies for repairs or leasing alternatives have proven unsuccessful, particularly due to complications related to propane bus designs and driver requirements. While regular maintenance costs over the past year have not been excessive at \$7,726, the disruptions have damaged community goodwill and trust.

The two current buses transport about 20 children, about half of the student population, during the school week. The Civil Grand Jury learned that one or both buses have been out of service for nearly one out of every four days. It is not uncommon for only a single bus to be available when two are required to cover the school geography. This results in extended travel times of up to one and a half hours for some students, as the single bus covers two routes before arriving at the campus destination.

The Board recently purchased a 14-passenger minibus equipped with a gas engine. Combined with an existing nine-passenger van, transportation operations comply with California school transportation regulations, meet field trip needs, and offer a cost-effective temporary solution.

California school districts are not required to provide transportation, but many like PVUESD provide bus service to offer students safe and reliable access to school. Transportation must be provided for students with disabilities if it is necessary for them to benefit from special education.⁶⁸

Community Relations

The Pope Valley school community is small, comprised of between 20 to 30 families. Many working parents face schedules that start early, limiting their ability to attend school meetings or events. Monthly School Board meetings are typically sparsely attended by the public. Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings often have low parent participation. Some parents interviewed by the Civil Grand Jury expressed concerns about insufficient advance notice of meetings and activities, which has additionally hindered engagement.

The Civil Grand Jury interviewed PVUESD parents to gain an understanding of their perspectives on the school, its teachers, and staff. The Civil Grand Jury found no evidence to substantiate the original complaint's claims of mistreatment of students or disrespect toward family members based on their Hispanic heritage. Some examples of communication issues were raised, primarily stemming from errors in the electronic notification system. Despite this, Hispanic parents told the Civil Grand Jury that they

⁶⁸ Federal Regulation "Individuals with Disabilities", 34 CFR §300.34 (c)(16)

and their children felt welcome at the school. Although the inconsistent translation services prior to 2023 may have caused Spanish-speaking families to feel excluded, translation issues appear to have been resolved under the current school leadership.

The Civil Grand Jury found general agreement among interviewees that the community is divided. Many parents have maintained personal relationships with teachers and staff over the years and do not wish to see personnel changes at the school. Some teaching staff have contacted parents directly to express their opposition to changes being made at the school. Some families appear resistant to additional changes at the school, such as the implementation of new safety protocols, adjustments to teaching staff, and curriculum enhancements aimed at improving student instruction and performance. Conversely, other parents embrace these changes and express a desire to collaborate more closely with the school to support students' success.

The School Board and the School Superintendent/Principal should proactively attempt to unite the community and rally them behind improving the school for the sake of the students. The Board should coordinate with the Supervisor/Principal to send out regular, bilingual notifications, both electronically and in writing, to the school community regarding dates, agendas, and announcements for all Board meetings. The Superintendent should enhance community trust and transparency by continuing to provide regular updates in a bilingual format about the school's progress, challenges, and the reasons behind decisions and staffing changes.

Resources for School Districts

Enhancing the overall management and performance of a school is a multi-faceted challenge. The Civil Grand Jury has identified several resources to offer PVUESD with meaningful support and guidance throughout this process:

- The Napa County Office of Education (NCOE). The NCOE's mission is to provide leadership to support the success of public education. Their responsibilities include assuring appropriate educational environments and curricula for students in Napa County. They provide direct oversight and approval of local school district budgets, but do not directly oversee school performance and operations. They do provide a wide variety of support services upon request, including student education programs, administrative services (district audits, attendance auditing, teacher credentialing), and instructional services (local educator professional development and assistance with curriculum development, student assessments, library and technology services). NCOE also provides student literacy and math programs, mental health services, and cultural diversity training.

- California's Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT). Although its primary mission is to help resolve school district financial issues, it also can provide services such as management assistance, professional learning opportunities, intervention identifying specific district issues, strategic planning, and comprehensive school assessments. Civil Grand Jury members attended a FCMAT presentation and determined the services available are relevant to Pope Valley's needs.
- The California School Boards Association (CSBA) provides standard and customizable training programs for school boards and members, including hosting an annual educational symposium.

FINDINGS

The Civil Grand Jury finds:

F1. The Pope Valley Union Elementary School District failed to provide a safe learning environment and requisite education for its students.

F2. The PVUESD Board of Trustees (School Board) failed to deliver the necessary oversight and direction for PVUESD operations and academic performance. At this time, the School Board appears to be focused on addressing past deficiencies and committed to providing the necessary oversight and direction to improve PVUESD operations and academic performance.

F3. Prior school superintendents/principals failed to ensure student safety, address academic instruction and student performance gaps, or manage the school and staff effectively.

F4. The Superintendent/Principal, who held the position during this Civil Grand Jury investigation, implemented policies and procedures to stabilize and build sustainable long-term operations, enforce student safety protocols, and improve academic instruction and student performance.

F5. While the Civil Grand Jury investigation found no evidence of discrimination or unequal treatment by the school administration against Hispanic or Spanish-speaking families, the past lack of bilingual support revealed communication gaps, leaving Spanish-speaking parents and English Second Language learners feeling isolated and disconnected.

F6. Inadequate communication by district and school management following the trial and conviction of a former school employee for student sexual abuse left parents feeling disconnected and frustrated.

F7. School bus transportation service was found to be inadequate to serve the district, with persistent equipment problems undermining reliability.

F8. The school community is divided, with one group of parents and teachers supporting changes in the school and another favoring a return to prior practices and personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Civil Grand Jury recommends:

R1. The School Board develop and implement a long-term strategy for the school district, prioritizing policies and procedures to ensure academic performance and operational effectiveness, and do so by the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.

R2. The School Board ensure that school leadership possesses the necessary qualifications and experience to effectively prioritize student safety and educational excellence and do so by the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.

R3. The Superintendent/Principal continue the ongoing improvement process at Pope Valley Union Elementary School and ensure that changes instituted continue should school management change and do so by the 2025-2026 academic year.

R4. Regular updates by the School Board and Superintendent/Principal to inform the public, rebuild trust, promote inclusivity, and improve transparency in decision-making to strengthen the relationship between the school and the community, and do so by the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.

R5. The Board of Trustees and Superintendent/Principal develop and execute a permanent solution to provide safe and reliable transportation for students by the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.

R6. The Board of Trustees and the Superintendent/Principal use the various resources, training, and support opportunities available through the Napa County Office of Education (NCOE), Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), California School Board Association (CSBA) and other educational and leadership resources and implement plans by the start of 2025-2026 academic year.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District Board of Trustees is required to respond to F1-F8 and R1-R6, within 90 days of receipt of this report.

INVITED RESPONSES

The Civil Grand Jury invites the Pope Valley Union Elementary School District Superintendent/Principal to respond to F4-F8 and R3-R6, within 60 days of receipt of this report.

The Civil Grand Jury invites the Napa County Superintendent of Schools to respond to F1-F8 and R1-R6, within 60 days of receipt of this report.