



# Summerville Elementary

18451 Carter St. Tuolumne, CA 95379

209-928-4291 Fax 209-928-1602

Dr. Benjamin Howell, Superintendent

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*"Together, we can make a difference."*

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September 18, 2023

Judge of the Superior Court  
Honorable Laura L. Kriege, and  
Tuolumne County Grand Jury  
12855 Justice Center Drive  
Sonora, CA 95370

**RE: 2022-2023 TUOLUMNE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT, June 26, 2023**  
**Summerville Elementary School District: Response to "Tuolumne County School Safety Report"**

To the Honorable Judge Laura Kriege and the Representative of the 2022-2023 Grand Jury:

On behalf of the Governing Board of Summerville Elementary School District, I would like to express our thanks to Mr. Robert Canavan, Foreperson for the Grand Jury, as well as the entire membership of the 2022-2023 Tuolumne County Grand Jury for the report dated June 26, 2023, which included an investigation of school safety in Tuolumne County. The Governing Board of Summerville Elementary School District has reviewed the report and wishes to respond, as requested by the Grand Jury, on items related to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury School Safety Committee.

As superintendent of Summerville Elementary School District, I am proud of the tireless and dedicated work of our school staff as they work each day to promote the growth and development of our students. In this work, our staff seeks to establish our students as life-long learners equipped to make a difference in our community and the world. Each day, the teachers and support staff of Summerville Elementary School dedicate themselves to ensuring that students are provided with a robust education while maintaining a school environment that is safe and structured for the well-being of all students. Summerville Elementary staff members prioritize school safety and are diligent in ensuring that the school environment is designed to support the well-being and safety of our students. A well-developed and well-planned school safety response is the foundation of a robust educational experience for our students.

The following is our school district's response to the Grand Jury "Tuolumne County School Safety Report," specifically addressing Chapter 10, findings and recommendations for Summerville Elementary School.

## **District's Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations**

***F10.1: Staff training occurs before the start of the school year and includes two ALICE training courses annually.***

**District's Response:** The district agrees with this finding. Summerville Elementary places emphasis on school safety and annually schedules safety training with all staff members to communicate the school's response, address staff questions, and create efficiencies in safety responses. In addition to school safety training, Summerville Elementary offers two ALICE trainings for school staff. The district is investigating further ALICE training avenues in conjunction with the Tuolumne County Joint Powers Authority to provide members of the school staff with more ALICE training in addition to the two in-person ALICE trainings conducted each year.

***R10.1: Continue to prioritize and investigate regular safety drills and staff training, including ALICE training. Given the comprehensive nature of this training, consider extending this training to substitute teachers to ensure a uniform response to potential emergencies across all staff. (F10.1)***

**District's Response:** Summerville Elementary School will continue to prioritize regular safety drills and staff training (including the ALICE response). Summerville Elementary School will undertake further analysis to determine how training of substitute teachers can be completed to ensure a uniform response to potential emergencies across all staff. The Summerville Elementary School administrative team will commence conversations with county personnel to extend important safety training information to substitute teaching staff.

***F10.2: Summerville Elementary School places emphasis on preparedness for a potential lockdown. Classrooms are equipped with flip charts for substitutes, and each room has emergency and water supplies.***

**District's Response:** The district agrees with this finding. Classrooms are equipped with school safety plan flipcharts, and emergency response supplies.

***R10.2: The presence of flipcharts for substitutes and emergency supplies in classrooms indicates commendable preparedness. However, it may be beneficial to include a wider range of emergency supplies, including first aid kits, in each classroom.***

**District's Response:** Summerville Elementary School will continue to keep flipcharts and emergency supplies available in classroom spaces for teachers and substitute teachers to use in the event of an emergency response. Summerville Elementary School will conduct further analysis is needed to understand what additional first-aid materials will

be appropriate to include with these classroom emergency supplies. School administration will investigate further items and will consult with the Tuolumne County JPA and emergency response personnel to understand what additional supplies will be appropriate to add to classroom emergency supply kits.

**F10.3: The school has ceased locking its gates and fences based on county advice to facilitate emergency response and to allow children access in the event of a shooter. However, this practice appears to be a point of concern for school administration.**

**District's Response:** Summerville Elementary School District disputes this finding. Summerville Elementary School campus is fenced around the entire perimeter of the property. Fencing also exists across the campus to create separation between areas of the campus for student use, operations, and specific grade levels (for example, transitional kindergarten and kindergarten classes are separated from other areas of the campus). The administration and operations team has carefully analyzed which gates are appropriate to remain locked during the school day and which gates are appropriate to remain closed and unlocked to facilitate evacuation in the event of an emergency. The gates designed to be locked and the gates designated to be closed and unlocked during the day have been selected in conjunction with law enforcement, fire, and emergency response partners. Further evaluations of locking and closing gates are completed each year, and modifications are made based on recommendations from emergency response personnel. During the 2023-2024 school year, Summerville Elementary has modified its gate locking and closing procedures based on these recommendations. Communication and training have been provided to the school staff. Training with the school's gate locking and closing procedures will be drilled throughout the year during the school's monthly safety drills. Modifications to the schools locked gates will be made annually based on emergency response partners' recommendations and the safety response needs of the school.

**R10.3: Engage in a dialogue with county officials to gain clarity on the policy regarding the locking of gates and fences. Exploring options for gates that allow emergency access while maintaining a secure perimeter could be a potential solution.**

**District's Response:** Summerville Elementary will continue to analyze its campus fences and gate access points to ensure campus security while maintaining accessible and appropriate evacuation spots in the event of an emergency. Further analysis is needed annually to assess the school's secure perimeter while balancing emergency access and points of evacuation. Summerville Elementary School administration and campus operations personnel will investigate consultation opportunities with Tuolumne County emergency response personnel to understand best practices for campus security that provide evacuation and emergency access according to the set-up of the school's safety plan and response options, such as ALICE.

***F10.4: The student-to-adult ratio during recess at Summerville Elementary School is 12:1, which is a reasonable ratio that allows for adequate supervision during these periods.***

**District's Response:** The district strives to maintain a safe and reasonable student-to-teacher ratio in the classroom and during recess times. Classroom ratios for the 2022-2023 school year averaged 19:1. Recess and lunchtime supervision averaged 45:1. Summerville Elementary School District believes these ratios are adequate to maintain reasonable and safe supervision during class and recess time. These ratios are annually re-evaluated by the school administration.

***R10.4: Maintain the commendable current student-to-adult ratio during recess. Regularly evaluate this ratio to ensure it continues to provide adequate supervision. (F10.4)***

**District's Response:** Summerville Elementary continues to provide lower-than-average student-to-staff ratios in the classroom and during recess. During the 2023-2024 school year, the school has maintained a class size average of 20:1 in grades 5th-8th and 18:1 in grades TK-4th. During the 2023-2024 school year, staffing ratios during recess and lunch recess have been established to maintain a 45:1 student to staff ratio.

***F10.5: The school has mechanisms in place for students to report safety concerns, including options to send an email or talk to a teacher.***

**District's Response:** The district agrees with this finding.

***R10.5: While the existing channels for reporting safety concerns are good, introduce an anonymous reporting system to encourage more students to report any safety issues without fear of being identified. (F10.5)***

**District's Response:** Summerville Elementary works hard to address the safety concerns of students, staff, and parents and provides various reporting avenues, including phone calls, voicemails, emails, and in-person appointments. During the 2023-2024 school year, Summerville Elementary has implemented a new, anonymous reporting system for all students, staff, and parents that will allow all school members to report issues anonymously via phone app, web app located on the school website, text message, and voice message. Promotion and training for the new anonymous reporting system were provided to all members of the school community during the Fall of 2023.

School safety is a priority and should be considered as a primary element in the school's educational process. Summerville Elementary is proud to focus on the ways the school can be a safe and structured environment for all students and staff. The importance of school safety must be considered in this day and age.

I would like to thank the Grand Jury for their work in fulfilling their service to the Court and the citizens of Tuolumne County. Please contact me if you have any questions about our school or should you want to discuss our response options outlined here further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Howell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

**Benjamin Howell, EdD**  
**Superintendent and Principal and Secretary to the Governing Board**  
**Summerville Elementary School District**