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CONTACT: Foreperson, Janice Feingold

Tel: 805/477-1600

Email: [Janice.Feingold@ventura.org](mailto:Janice.Feingold@ventura.org)

## Phoenix School Safety

**How safe are Ventura County's Special Education Schools? Are School Resource Officers necessary?** When parents send their children to school in the morning, they trust their children will have a productive day of learning in a safe environment. Similarly, when teachers report to work they hope to focus their efforts on teaching without fear for their safety and that of their students. Unfortunately, with the increase in school violence over the past several years, children, parents, and teachers no longer feel as safe as they once did.

The 2015-2016 Ventura County Grand Jury opened an investigation based on a public complaint about safety in the Phoenix schools in Ventura County. The Phoenix schools serve students with serious emotional disturbance from all of Ventura County and the Las Virgenes Unified School District.

From this investigation, the Grand Jury learned that Phoenix schools provide an intensive educational program for their students through low enrollment and high staff-to-student ratios. Although Phoenix students often act out in frustration, the staff is well trained in, and regularly uses, techniques to de-escalate hostile behavior at the earliest possible stage. Despite the consistent use of positive behavioral interventions, administrators at the Phoenix-Airport campus call law enforcement an average of two to three times weekly for situations they are unable to de-escalate. However, responding patrol officers may not have Crisis Intervention Team training to be able to deal effectively with these emotionally disturbed students. The Grand Jury also learned that it is the position of the Ventura County Office of Education that having a dedicated School Resource Officer would escalate rather than defuse volatile situations in the Phoenix schools.

The National Education Association has established best practices regarding school safety. These practices recommend that schools partner with law enforcement (and social service agencies) to promote a safe environment. Ideally, a sworn School Resource Officer should be dedicated to one school and work collaboratively with staff and students to build positive relationships and to support administration with crisis intervention.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Sheriff and the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools formalize a collaborative relationship to increase law



**Grand Jury**  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
(805) 477-1600  
Fax: (805) 658-4523

[grandjury.countyofventura.org](http://grandjury.countyofventura.org)

enforcement presence on all Phoenix campuses. Additionally, the Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Sheriff ensure that any patrol officers who may be called to respond to a Phoenix school have Crisis Intervention Team training. Finally, the Grand Jury recommends that the Ventura County Board of Education authorize and seek funds for a dedicated School Resource Officer for the Phoenix-Airport campus.

The complete report may be accessed at [www.ventura.org/grand-jury](http://www.ventura.org/grand-jury); click on the Annual Reports tab and consult "Fiscal Year 2015-2016."

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