



**2011 - 2012
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Minarets Charter School**

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Introduction:

Minarets High School opened for classes in September, 2008, and Minarets Charter School (MCS) began operation in August, 2011. MCS is a dependent charter school which is governed by the Chawanakee Unified School District Board of Trustees and the State Board of Education, as is the high school.

As neither of these schools has been examined since opening, the Grand Jury selected MCS for review. In conducting the review, the Grand Jury met with the district superintendent, administrators of both schools, MCS students, and a parent, and toured the campus with MCS students as guides.

The two schools co-exist in a \$70 million facility located on 340 acres, of which 240 are preserved. The campus is located on Road 200 east of Highway 41. Enrollment is approximately 280 students for the high school and 140 for the charter school. Students of both schools are co-mingled in the classes.

Findings:

1. The Grand Jury found the campus to be well-maintained, clean, and free of all graffiti.
2. The Grand Jury found that approximately 4 acres are designated for a farm and barn for FFA students.
3. The Grand Jury found that the farm currently houses pigs, chickens, and rabbits, and the greenhouse has been completed.
4. The Grand Jury found that construction is expected to start soon on a \$4 million agriculture facility.
5. The Grand Jury found that the student eating area is open-air, without walls or roof.
6. The Grand Jury found that the two schools share a combined staff of twenty-one certificated and eight classified staff members.
7. The Grand Jury found that all MCS teachers are appropriately credentialed by the State of California.
8. The Grand Jury found that a counselor meets with each MCS student four times a year.
9. The Grand Jury found that MCS teachers are readily available to parents and students by

cell phone and email. They also are available before and after school to provide students with extra help.

10. The Grand Jury found that MCS strives to prepare students for the workforce and that the rules emulate the standards found in most employers' policy handbook.
11. The Grand Jury found that MCS focuses on career options in media, arts, science, agriculture, military science, and fire science.
12. The Grand Jury found that student assignments are project-based using modern technology.
13. The Grand Jury found that MCS students are able to take online college classes.
14. The Grand Jury found that all MCS students are provided with an Apple laptop computer, to be used for school work.
15. The Grand Jury found that hours of use of the laptops are limited to 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. weekdays and five hours per day on weekends.
16. The Grand Jury found that school hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a 45-minute lunch break.
17. The Grand Jury found that students take eight classes on an odd/even schedule with four 85-minute classes each day.
18. The Grand Jury found that students from throughout the valley attend MCS.
19. The Grand Jury found that transportation is not provided for students outside the district attendance boundaries.
20. The Grand Jury found that the MCS student attendance rate is 96%, much higher than that of traditional high schools.
21. The Grand Jury found that parent involvement is required at MCS.
22. The Grand Jury found that MCS receives annually from the State approximately \$1,000 less per student than traditional schools receive.
23. The Grand Jury found that MCS receives monetary and other forms of support from businesses, organizations, and residents within the district.
24. The Grand Jury found that MCS is scheduled for review by Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) to begin the accreditation process.
25. The Grand Jury found that graduation from a WASC-accredited school is required or

preferred for matriculation to higher level institutions.

26. The Grand Jury found that MCS students are courteous, enthusiastic, and show pride in their school.

Conclusions:

1. The Grand Jury concluded that MCS has appropriate rules and regulations for student use of the laptops provided.
2. The Grand Jury concluded that students may be exposed to adverse weather conditions when using the unprotected eating area.
3. The Grand Jury concluded that MCS administration has developed a good working relationship with the community.
4. The Grand Jury concluded that MCS achievement of WASC accreditation will benefit graduating Seniors who are college-bound.
5. The Grand Jury concluded that administration and staff have created a learning environment which meets the needs of MCS students.
6. The Grand Jury concluded that the operational integration of MCS with Minarets High School is a good fit.

Recommendations:

1. The Grand Jury recommends that students be provided with an eating area that is protected from the elements.
2. The Grand Jury recommends that MCS pursue WASC accreditation for the current school year.
3. The Grand Jury recommends that the student guides be commended for sharing their excitement, pride, and sense of ownership in their school.

Respondent: written response required pursuant to PC 933(c)

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Informational: response optional

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