

SCHOOL SAFETY – A PRIORITY

June 3, 2020

SUMMARY

In recent years, the issue of school safety has risen to a high priority locally, statewide and nationwide. According to the 2018 report of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 79% of public schools recorded one or more incidence of violence, theft, or other crimes. The NCES is a branch of the US Department of Education, and the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Also, according to NCES, in 2017 across the nation, students ages 12-18 experienced approximately 827,000 non-fatal victimizations such as theft. During the same year, 20% of the same students reported being bullied at school.

Teen suicide is a growing health concern. It is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 15-24, surpassed only by accidents, according to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. According to June 18, 2019 report, suicide rates for teens and young adults have reached their highest point since 2000, totaling 6,241 in 2017.

Addressing the school safety concerns, the California State Legislature updated the Education Code effective January 1, 2019, to direct all public schools, from K-12th grade, to develop and implement comprehensive school safety plans.

In order to comply with this directive, school districts solicited the input from local law enforcement agencies, community leaders, parents, pupils, district staff, and other persons interested in prevention of campus crime and violence.

As a result of increased safety concerns, the Mendocino County 2019-2020 Grand Jury (GJ) reviewed school safety policies and procedures of a cross section of Mendocino County school districts.

The GJ concluded that school district policies are up to date and in compliance with the California Education Code. Students in this County currently feel safe on their campuses.

GLOSSARY

AIR – American Institute for Research

BJS – Bureau of Justice Statistics

CDOE – California Department of Education

CGC - Section 3100 - CA Government Code Section 3100 states that all school employees are considered disaster service workers

CDE – CA Education Code: Title 1 General Education Code, Division 1 General Education Code Provisions (1-32500); Part 19 Miscellaneous. CDE Article 5 School Safety Plans – Article 5 addresses school safety plans sections (32280–32289) effective January 1, 2016.

KD – Kids Data.org – funded by LFP programs children’s health information included school safety information through educational surveys

LCAP – Local Control and Accountability Plan – Developed by the California Department of Education, the plan is a tool for educational agencies to establish goals, action plans and utilization of resources to meet goals to improve student outcomes. Every School District is required to submit an LCAP to CDOE. The plan is updated every three years.

LPF – Lucille Packard Foundation Children’s Health, sponsor of Kids Data.org

MCOE – Mendocino County Office of Education

NCES – National Center for Education Statistics

SB – School Boards

SD – School Districts

SSP – School Safety Plans. Each SD is required to annually submit an approved SSP to the California State Department of Education

BACKGROUND

In a 2015-2017 www.kidsdata.org, survey of Mendocino County, 9th grade students 53% felt safe or very safe in school. Ten percent of the students surveyed reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe in school. Thirty-six percent of the student had no opinion.

Nationally, NCES *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, reported between July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016, thirty-eight school associated violent deaths: 30 homicides, seven suicides and one legal intervention.

The April 2019 survey by the NCES reported the percentage of public schools that had a School Safety Plan in place in the event of a shooting rose from 79% in 2003-2004 to 92% in 2015-2016, an increase of 13%.

Also, according to NCES in 2017 across the nation, students ages 12-18 experienced approximately 827,000 non-fatal victimizations such as theft. During the same year, 20% of the same students reported being bullied at school.

Teen suicide is a growing health concern. It is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 15-24, surpassed only by accidents, according to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. According to June 18, 2019 report, suicide rates for teens and young adults have reached their highest point since 2000, totaling 6,241 in 2017.

METHODOLOGY

The GJ conducted interviews of district superintendents, district personnel, and collected data from research which included various California Education Code mandates, various reports and research on the safety of students in schools, safety plans in place in districts.

DISCUSSION

Each Mendocino County School District surveyed complies with the California State Education Code (CSEC) by annually updating their School Safety Plan. Plans are reviewed and approved by respective school district boards of trustees and are made available to the public.

Safety plans are collaborative efforts with Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE) staff and law enforcement agencies.

Response times for emergencies can vary depending on school location and type of incident. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in September 2019, the national average police response time varies based on the type of crime. Unfortunately, active shooter situations have become far too common. Because of this, police departments have made responding to active shooter lock downs an extremely high priority, and response times around the country average three minutes.

There are no written Mutual Aide Agreements between safety personnel and school districts. In the event of an incident, safety services personnel in the affected area respond.

The GJ found multiple resources supporting the importance of a quick response time to school emergencies. In a May 2, 2018 report by Total Security Solutions in their publication *TSS Bullet Proof*, the standard response time for emergency and rescue services in the US is on average four to 11 minutes. According to a 2013 FBI study, almost 70% of gun related active assailant events, last **just five minutes**. A third of those last **fewer than two minutes**.

The importance of short notification times in these situations cannot be overstated. Shaving even seconds off the notification and response times can result in vastly different outcomes in these situations.

School districts function independently of MCOE, utilizing MCOE's available resources as needed.

School districts employ a variety of Information Technologies (IT) to monitor online activities for students and staff.

Other safety procedures include staff training for incidence response, mandatory drills, and installation of physical barriers to deter and respond to school site occurrences. Annual drills include fire, earthquake and lockdown drills.

School districts bear the costs of equipment and personnel to address safety issues on campuses. Apart from staff assistance, MCOE provides no funding for safety services.

Most school districts have online safety services information available for public viewing. Some school districts prepare handouts/notebooks that are grade level appropriate and are provided for the students.

In a 2017 survey conducted by www.kidsdata.org about feeling safe at school, 68% of Mendocino County Schools' 11th graders felt "safe or very safe." The average California 11th graders' rating was only 60%, a difference of 8%.

According to superintendents interviewed, the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) has been and is negatively impacted by mental health pressures on students.

In comparison to students in surrounding counties, Mendocino County students rated their schools **No. 1** for feeling safe or very safe.

Monthly meetings with the MCOE Superintendent and district superintendents ensure that lines of communication and information are open and current.

FINDINGS

- F1. School safety is a high priority for MCOE and the school districts.
- F2. Standard operating procedures for emergency services personnel is an "All Hands-on Deck" response.
- F3. Links of communication and resources are shared between MCOE and the districts.
- F4. Due to the County's geographic challenges, including cities and remote rural areas, there is no optimum incident response time by emergency services personnel. **According to a 2013 FBI study, almost 70% of gun related active assailant events, last just five minutes. A third of those last fewer than two minutes.**
- F5. Response time to an incident of five minutes or more is not acceptable. **According to a 2013 FBI study, almost 70% of gun related active assailant events, last just five minutes. A third of those last fewer than two minutes.**

F6. According to superintendents interviewed, the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) has been and is negatively impacted by mental health pressures on students.

F7. The MCOE does not track the County school districts' compliance with the Education Code directive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. the BOS work with the County Sheriff's Department to develop a plan inclusive of law enforcement agencies (city, county, state) to place an officer in a locale where the average campus incident response time should be no greater than five minutes, (F1 – F2, F4 – F5)

R2. the MCOE work with the BOS to develop a strategic plan for the most expeditious response time to any school site incident, (F1– F5)

R3. ongoing lines of communication among MCOE, school districts and first responders be maintained, (F2 – F4)

R4. the MCOE consider providing support for enhanced crisis intervention for mental health counselors to be available to school districts at a reasonable ratio of one counselor per 500 students. This action would address the need for post incident counseling and pro-active intervention with student issues, (F6)

R5. school districts be encouraged to provide staff and IT to monitor student and staffs' online communications, (F1, F6)

R6. the MCOE annually maintain a master copy and track the submittal of school safety plans to ensure compliance with the California Education Code. (F7)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses as follows:
From the following elected County officials within 60 days:

- MCOE Superintendent (F1, F3, F6-F7) and (R2-R4, R6)
- Mendocino County Sheriff (F2, F4-F5) and (R1-R3)

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses as follows:
From the following City officials within 60 days:

- Fort Bragg Chief of Police (F2, F4-F5) and (R1-R3)
- Ukiah Chief of Police (F2, F4-F5) and (R1-R3)
- Willits Chief of Police (F2, F4-F5) and (R1-R3)

REQUESTED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:
From the following governing bodies within 90 days:

- Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (F2, F4-F5) and (R1-R2)

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:
From the following County officials within 90 days:

- Mendocino County Chief Executive Officer (F2, F4-F5) and (R1-R3)

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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DEFINITIONS

School safety includes natural disasters, violent crimes and health issues

ADA – Average Daily Attendance. School Districts Report Attendance Data Three Times Per Year. California requires school districts to track the average daily attendance (ADA) of their students. If a district's school year is 180 days, and an average of 1,000 students attend each day, its ADA is 1,000.

Katz Act – State law that requires schools to establish an earthquake emergency system to include periodic drop and cover drills.

Law Enforcement Personnel – Any sworn peace officer (including state, county and municipal law enforcement officers)

SP – Safety personnel: including law enforcement, fire, and school staff

HYPERLINKS

Bureau of Justice Statistics	www.bjs.gov
Lucille Packard Foundation	www.lpfch.org
Kids.org	www.kidsdata.org
California Education Code	www.cde.ca.gov
Mendocino Office of Education	www.mcoe.us
Education Week	www.edweek.org
	(www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/schoolshootingsof2019behndthe numbers)