

HOW PREPARED IS YOUR SCHOOL?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Grand Jury report is to examine the readiness and administrative procedures of San Luis Obispo County schools' Emergency Crisis Response Plans.

AUTHORITY

California Penal Code: §933.5 states:

“The grand jury may at any time examine the books and records of any special-purpose assessing or taxing district located wholly or partly in the county or the local agency formation commission in the county, and, in addition to any other investigatory powers granted by this chapter, may investigate and report upon the method or system of performing the duties of such district or commission.

METHOD

As part of its investigation, the Grand Jury:

- Requested and evaluated school Emergency Crisis Response plans for:
 - Arroyo Grande High School
 - Atascadero High School
 - Nipomo High School
 - Paso Robles High School
 - Templeton High School
 - Shandon High School/Unified School District

- Interviewed the following:
 - Superintendent, Paso Robles Joint Unified School District
 - Superintendent, Atascadero Unified School District
 - Interim Superintendent, Lucia Mar Unified School District
 - Superintendent, Templeton Unified School District
 - Principal, Paso Robles High School
 - Vice-Principal, Paso Robles High School
- Received documentation and correspondence from the Principal of Atascadero High School
- Attended and observed actual lock-down drill at Paso Robles High School
- Researched on-line publications dealing with the Safe Schools Initiative.
- Reviewed the Safe Schools Initiative written by the Secret Service in 2002. The publication, “Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climate”, is a resource for constructing an Emergency Crisis Response plan. This Guide is available on line at:
http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac_ssi.shtml

INTRODUCTION

San Luis Obispo County schools have written Emergency Crisis Response plans and maintain a zero tolerance for violence on campus.

While some plans are more inclusive and sophisticated than others, their fundamental purpose is to quickly identify, assess, monitor, and manage various school emergencies. As required by law, these school plans include fire and earthquake drills. Some area school administrators are now recognizing the need to take serious steps to assess and effectively manage new risks. For example, schools practice lock down drills to prepare for the possibility of an intruder on campus. This drill requires that all persons on campus literally hide themselves in locked rooms and remain silent until security personnel determine they can either be evacuated or safely

resume normal activities. These intruder drills are the result of a process meant to identify, assess and manage this situation. In some cases there is a real possibility an intruder may be armed.

School administrators are also recognizing the need to take risk-reduction measures that include:

- Development of a comprehensive organizational structure
- Determine role-assignments for key personnel
- Development of decision-making processes to prepare for and respond to any crisis.

Administrators also agree that everyone in the school system including students, parents, teachers, security personnel and other staff should be included in formulating a comprehensive plan.

BACKGROUND

In some large cities, the sound of gunfire is now a frequent reminder that organized gangs are engaging in what seems to be arbitrary and senseless violence. These incidents appear frequently on the national news and have dominated headlines since at least the 1960s. A more recent nightmare is the emergence of armed adolescent combatants calmly strolling through neighborhood schools passively selecting targets, shooting and killing them. Violence can be random.

Schools are meant to be one of the safest places for children in the community. Recent shifts in school violence are causing even the safest schools to reevaluate their procedures and add more specific strategies to safety plans while trying to avoid turning our schools into fortresses.

NARRATIVE

There are approximately 35,000 students enrolled in San Luis Obispo County schools. Emergency responses in county schools vary depending upon location and include various site specific hazards such as floods, earthquakes, fire, and the death of a student/faculty member. By definition, emergencies are unanticipated, unique and infrequent. While no two emergencies are the same, experience has taught us that there are effective, generalized response plans to address most occurrences. Because emergencies are infrequent it is easy to be lulled into a false sense of security and not bother to remain prepared. For this reason it is important that schools have regularly scheduled and random drills so that students and on-campus adults can practice and become familiar with what procedures they must follow. The purpose of a drill is to reassure children and staff so they know what is supposed to happen.

Security measures to guard against more violent hazards such as student shootings require a comprehensive plan. There is no simple answer to this kind of school violence. The Grand Jury received testimony relating to a specific lock down drill at Paso Robles High School. This drill demonstrated weaknesses in the execution of their crisis plan. As a result, the school reevaluated its plan and provided additional training in preparation for a second lock down drill. The Grand Jury participated in and observed the second drill on April 1st, 2008. Prior to the actual drill the Grand Jury was briefed on procedures that were to be implemented. The second drill was performed in a professional manner.

Based upon a review of various Emergency Crisis Response plans, the Grand Jury found that the quality and comprehensiveness of Plans that the Grand Jury reviewed from County schools varied considerably. Atascadero High School has the most comprehensive plan. They have included individual action plans to address medical emergencies, violence and criminal activities, shelter in place/evacuation, facility emergencies, weather disasters and student welfare problems. The original plan was written in 1999.

FINDINGS

1. Comprehensive Emergency Response Plans are critical to providing a safe environment for schools in San Luis Obispo County.

2. The Grand Jury found that the quality and comprehensiveness of Emergency Crisis Response Plans were not consistent among the schools reviewed.

RECOMMENDATION

The Grand Jury recommends that all County schools re-evaluate their Emergency Crisis Plans with input from parents, staff and local fire and law enforcement departments. This process of re-evaluation should be ongoing. (Findings No. 1 & 2)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

A Response to the recommendation is required from each of the following:

- San Luis Obispo County Superintendent of Schools
- Superintendent of the following School Districts:
 - Lucia Mar Unified - Shandon Unified - Templeton Unified
 - Atascadero Unified - Grizzly Challenge Charter - San Miguel Joint
 - Cayucos Elementary - San Luis Coastal Unified - Bellevue - Santa Fe Charter
 - Coast Unified - Paso Robles Joint Unified - Pleasant Valley Joint Union

All responses shall be submitted to the Presiding Judge at the San Luis Obispo Superior Court by **October, 28, 2008**. Please provide a copy to the Grand Jury as well. The mailing addresses for delivery are:

Presiding Judge	Grand Jury
Presiding Judge Martin Tangeman Superior Court of California 1035 Palm, Room 385 San Luis Obispo, CA 93408	San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury P.O. Box 4910 San Luis Obispo, CA 93403