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# K-12 School Safety and Emergency Plan Audit

## Are we ready?

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### Summary

Santa Cruz County schools must ensure the safety of 40,000 students in its seventy-two public K-12 schools. School safety plans, mandated by state law, are of paramount importance, must be in compliance with the law and updated annually. The Grand Jury queried each public school as to the existence of its safety plan and whether it was up-to-date.

The Grand Jury found that not all plans were up to date, accessible to the public and staff, or available at school district offices.

### Background

Each year there is potential for natural or man-made emergencies to impact our schools. This demands that our schools exercise foresight and planning for school safety.

The purpose of this investigation is to determine if all K-12 Santa Cruz County public schools have comprehensive school safety plans. California Education Code §32280-89,<sup>[1]</sup> requires all California K-12 public schools have school safety plans. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education has an *Emergency Response/Crisis Management Manual*<sup>[2]</sup> that the schools can use as a template to develop their individual plans. The plans are to be updated yearly, be readily available to the public at each school, and be forwarded to each district office or the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. Annually by October 15 the school district or the Santa Cruz County Office of Education is to notify the State Department of Education of any school not in compliance with the requirements for an updated and available school safety plan.

### Scope

The scope of this investigation was to survey the schools to:

- Determine that state-mandated school safety plans exist and are updated annually for every Santa Cruz County K-12 public school.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Ascertain whether each plan is readily available to the public, either at the school or on the school's website.
- Confirm that a plan copy is filed with the district office or the Santa Cruz County Office of Education.
- Determine whether the schools felt that they had an appropriate amount of emergency supplies.<sup>[3]</sup>

Our survey<sup>[4]</sup> focused on the existence of a plan, whether the plan was up to date, and that the plan was readily accessible to the public. Plan content as defined by the County Office of Education<sup>[2]</sup> and California Education Code §33280-89<sup>[1]</sup> was beyond our scope.

## Investigation

The Grand Jury surveyed all seventy-two public K-12 schools. We visited all ten school district offices and the County Office of Education to confirm school safety plans were on file.

All schools did have a safety plan although many were not up to date. The responses also drew our attention to several other compliance and implementation issues.

A few respondents indicated that they had their plan available on the school website. A Grand Jury search for these website plans turned up inconsistent results: some were available, some pointed to a district plan, some were hard to find, and some were never found. There was no hard copy safety plan for each school that will ensure that the safety plan will be available in the event of loss of power or other outages.

The survey results<sup>[4]</sup> also indicated that most schools reported that they did not have sufficient emergency supplies.

## Findings

- F1.** All schools had a plan. However, not all schools were current with the required yearly updates.
- F2.** Few schools had any reference to a Safety Preparedness Plan on their websites.
- F3.** Most schools had insufficient emergency supplies.
- F4.** At some district offices the existence of the safety plan was unknown, at other district offices the location of the plan was unknown.
- F5.** Some district offices had only online versions of their schools' plans and no printed copies.

## Recommendations

- R1.** All schools should have a plan that is reviewed and updated yearly. (F1)
- R2.** Publicly available school safety plans should be on all school websites. The location of this information should be prominently and uniformly displayed on the homepage of each school's website. (F2)
- R3.** The County Office of Education should ensure that schools have sufficient and appropriate emergency supplies. (F3)
- R4.** All schools and district offices should have a printed copy of the school safety plan readily available. (F5)
- R5.** All district and school staff members should know about the existence of the safety plan and should know the exact location of their printed safety plan. (F4)

- R6.** County Office of Education should require a yearly report from each district superintendent certifying the existence and annual update of each school's safety plan. (F1)

## Responses Required

| <i>Respondent</i>                                             | <i>Findings</i> | <i>Recommendations</i> | <i>Respond Within/<br/>Respond By</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Santa Cruz County<br>Office of Education<br>Board of Trustees | F1–F5           | R1–R6                  | 90 Days<br>August 22, 2016            |

## Definitions

- **K-12:** All School grades from Kindergarten through twelfth (12th) grade.
- **School Safety Plan:** A plan to develop strategies aimed at the prevention of, and education about, potential incidents and emergencies.<sup>[1] [2]</sup>

## Sources

### References

1. California Education Code § 32280-89. Accessed April 11, 2016.  
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2. County Office of Education. 2005. *Emergency Response/Crisis Management Manual*. Accessed April 11, 2016.  
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4. Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury. Fall, 2015. Confidential K-12 School Preparedness Survey and Results.

**Websites**

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3. California Government Code § 8607. Accessed April 11, 2016.  
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