

2022-2023 San Joaquin County Grand Jury



School Safety in San Joaquin County: Developing a Culture of Safety Case #0322



Summary

The 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury examined, through the lens of a layperson, the safety measures in place at the 14 public school districts and the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE). These safety measures are mandated by California Education Code 32280-322895.5. Through multiple interviews, site visits, and expert witness testimony, the Grand Jury found while many protocols have been established in the County, there is no unified approach to school safety. Rather, safety planning often consists of a patchwork of policies and procedures and

many of the Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs) required by law are boilerplate documents that are rarely specific to school sites.

Schools in San Joaquin County are safer because of recent efforts by school districts, but more can be done. Districts can create more opportunities for meaningful involvement by parents, students, and staff in safety planning efforts. Parents/guardians can ask school officials about safety at their child's school site.

Law enforcement must be more involved in the process of development, implementation, and annual updates of the CSSP, including participation in safety training/drills, building relationships with students and staff, and helping to create a culture of safety.

While the issue of school safety is vast, the 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury review focused on the following areas:

- Comprehensive School Safety Plans.
- Observations during school site visits.
- Safety training.

The 2022-2023 Civil Grand Jury found CSSPs were not school site-specific and displayed a lack of parental and law enforcement agency involvement, safety training was intermittent, and drills were predictable. The Grand Jury also found a lack of meaningful staff and student discussion regarding school safety, school sites that were inconsistent in visitor check-in procedures, and evacuation maps missing or lacking clarity.

Glossary

- **AED:** Automated External Defibrillator.
- **Average Daily Attendance:** The total days of student attendance divided by the total days of instruction.
- **CDE:** California Department of Education.
- **Certificated Employee:** Certificated school employees are employees of a school, district, or county office of education who are in a position that requires the employee to have a credential from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC).
- **Charter School:** A charter school is a public school that may provide instruction in any combination of grades (kindergarten through grade 12). Parents/guardians, teachers, or community members may initiate a charter petition, which is typically presented to and approved by a local school district governing board.
- **Classified Employee:** Classified employees are employees of a school, district, or county office of education who are in a position not requiring certification.
- **COE:** County Office of Education.
- **Common Areas:** Common areas are defined as auditoriums, multipurpose rooms, gymnasiums, cafeterias, wellness centers, and any other area that may be used by both the public as well as

students and staff. Pursuant to Education Code Sections 38130-38139, public schools are required to offer the use of school facilities by non-district public groups.

- **CSSP:** Comprehensive School Safety Plan. Safety plan required by California law for each school site operating kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive.
- **Dependent Charter School:** A dependent charter school is a charter school that has been authorized and is governed by the district's school board and is an integral part of the district's portfolio of schools.
- **First Responder:** The term includes a firefighter, law enforcement officer, paramedic, emergency medical technician, or other individual who, in the course of his or her professional duties, responds to fire, medical, hazardous material, or other emergencies.
- **Flip chart:** Emergency response flip charts are an effective way of referencing important contacts and actions to be taken in an emergency. Having clearly defined procedures to deal with emergencies that may occur in your workplace and making sure your workers are familiar with these procedures may save lives.
- **Independent Charter School:** A school that, although authorized by a school district board, is governed by a separate governing board, and is operated independently from the other schools administered by the district.
- **Lock Block System:** A simple device that prevents locked doors from completely closing, allowing the handle to stay locked and students or adults to quickly lock doors without the need for keys in the case of danger on campus.
- **Raptor:** Raptor Technologies is a company that has developed integrated school safety software that allows schools to screen and track school visitors.
- **School Safety Culture:** Campus climate and culture are foundational in the creation and maintenance of a safer and more secure school for both students and staff. Keeping students safe both physically and emotionally requires an atmosphere in which parents/guardians, students, and staff are all working together to protect the learning environment.
- **SJCOE:** San Joaquin County Office of Education.
- **SRO:** School Resource Officer.
- **Tabletop Exercise:** Small group discussions about an emergency and the courses of action a school will need to take before, during, and after an emergency to lessen the impact on the school community. Participants analyze the problem together and discuss detailed roles, responsibilities, and anticipated courses of action.

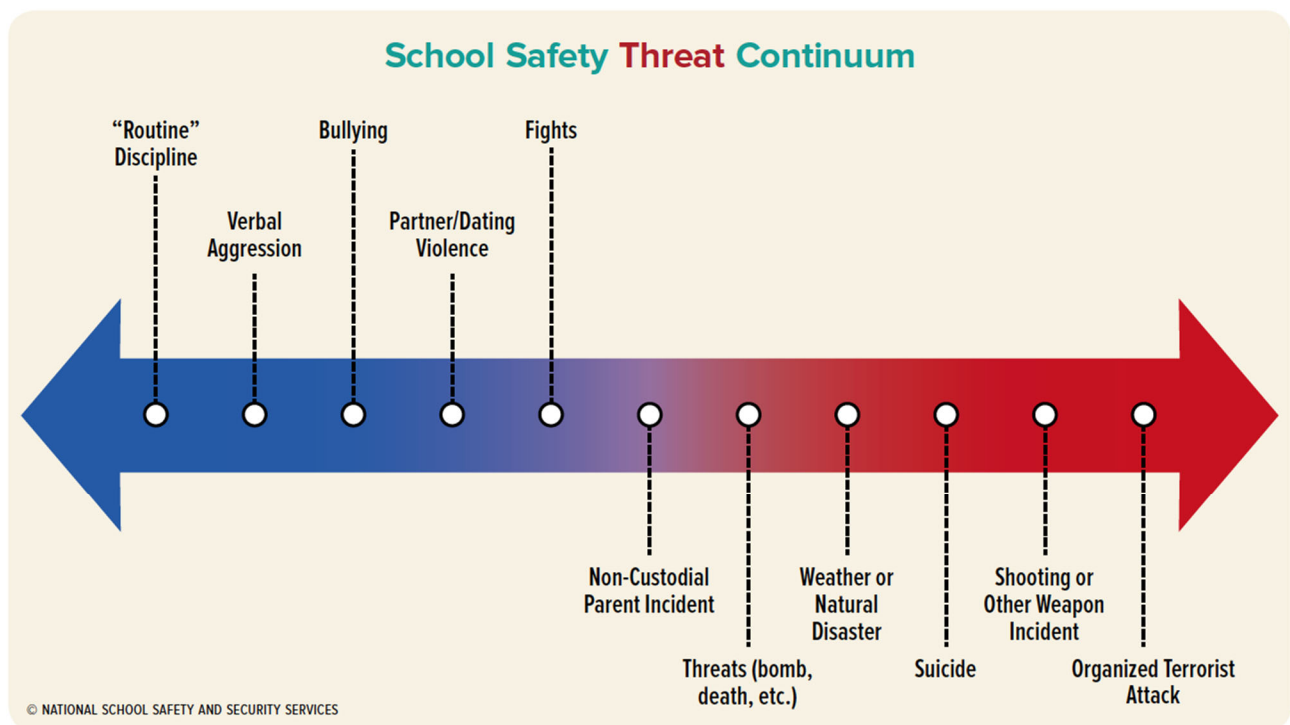
Background

Recent media reports of tragic and all too frequent shootings on school campuses across the country have heightened community concerns about school safety and security, but school violence is not a new or recent concern. In fact, school shootings have been part of our nation's history since Colonial days. During the 19th century, multiple shootings occurred on school campuses involving intentional and accidental gunshots and other forms of violence by students and outside intruders.

Early in the 20th century the frequency of school violence diminished, but one of the earliest examples of mass school fatalities occurred in 1927 in Bath, Michigan, where 44 people, including 38 students, died when a former school board member dynamited the district school. In the middle of the 20th century school attacks, bombings, and riots by individuals and mobs were often fueled by racial and religious animosity.

The modern school violence trend toward mass casualty shootings began in San Joaquin County in 1989. The Cleveland School shooting occurred ten years before the more frequently referenced Columbine High School shooting in Colorado. Although the 1990s and early 2000s saw an overall trend toward fewer deaths from school shootings in the United States, the public's perception of unsafe schools was shaped by numerous high-visibility shooting incidents that led to the belief that our schools have become increasingly dangerous places.

School shootings are the focus of discussions in the media, however, school safety concerns range across a continuum, from routine discipline to bullying and fighting, weather and natural disasters, nearby transportation and industrial accidents, and shootings, as illustrated below.



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School safety planning requires careful thought, preparation, and training to avoid or mitigate the consequences of all threats across this continuum. These include not only high-consequence threats that have a low probability of occurrence (school shootings) but also lower-consequence threats that have a much higher probability of occurrence (bullying).

Reason for Investigation

Creating a safe and healthy learning environment is a top priority shared by parents/guardians, educators, policymakers, and the community. The importance of safe schools is reflected in Article I, Section 28(f) of the California Constitution, which states: “All students and staff of public primary, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, and community colleges, colleges, and universities have the inalienable right to attend campuses which are safe, secure and peaceful.” Furthermore, California Education Code Sections 32280-32289.5 mandate an annual update of each school site’s Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) by March 1 of each year.

The Grand Jury concluded that recent events in San Joaquin County and elsewhere raised the question of whether the schools in our County were taking appropriate steps to protect students and staff.

The Federal government does not maintain a database of school shootings, but several other entities do attempt to compile that data. For example, *Education Week* reports 2022 had the most school shootings in the nation (51) and the highest number of casualties (40 killed and 100 injured) in the past five years; 21 of those deaths occurred in the Uvalde school shooting in May 2022. San Joaquin County did not experience any school shootings in 2022, although one Stockton high school student was fatally stabbed when a man entered the campus through an unattended security checkpoint. Local media reported several instances of students being arrested for alleged threats of violence at schools in the County. Tragically, during the Grand Jury investigation, two students were attacked at Unity Park near Chavez High School; one student was shot and killed and the other student was pistol-whipped.

Rather than focusing the Grand Jury’s investigation on one type of school safety threat, such as school shootings, or on school safety planning at one school or district in the County, the Grand Jury concluded it would best serve San Joaquin County citizens to review emergency preparedness planning for threats across the school safety continuum. The Grand Jury evaluated school safety planning from a layperson’s perspective by measuring each district’s preparedness against best practices as identified through research and expert testimony. This report shares with the public the results of that evaluation. Due to the complexity of governance and the large number of independent charter schools (32), the Grand Jury focused its investigation on traditional and dependent charter schools.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury conducted an extensive literature review and interviewed several school safety experts to identify consensus among experts on best school safety practices and where there were differences of opinion. The Grand Jury also surveyed each district about school safety preparation and planning. The Grand Jury compared the responses received from each school district against the best practices recommended by school safety experts. Follow-up interviews were conducted with representatives from each district. Grand Jury members visited one school from each district to confirm the information received and to observe safety preparation at the individual school level.

Materials Reviewed

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Websites Searched

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- “New Jerusalem Elementary School District Home Page.” *Home - New Jerusalem Elementary School District*, www.njesd.net/en-US. Accessed March 4, 2023.
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- “Tracy Unified School District Home Page.” www.tracy.k12.ca.us, www.tracy.k12.ca.us. Accessed March 3, 2023.

Interviews Conducted

- District Administrators.
- Representatives from all County and Local Law Enforcement Agencies.
- San Joaquin County Office of Education Administrators.
- School Safety Consultants.
- School Safety Experts.
- School Site Administrators.
- School Site Certificated Personnel.
- School Site Classified Personnel.

Sites Visited

- Banta Elementary School (Banta Unified School District).
- Hazelton Elementary School (Stockton Unified School District).
- Lodi High School (Lodi Unified School District).
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- New Hope Elementary School (New Hope Elementary School District).
- New Jerusalem Elementary School (New Jerusalem School District).
- Oak View Elementary School (Oak View Elementary School District).

- one. Charter Academy of Visual and Performing Arts (San Joaquin County Office of Education).
- Ripon High School (Ripon Unified School District).
- Tom Hawkins Elementary School (Jefferson School District).
- Tully C. Knoles School (Lincoln Unified School District).
- Veritas Elementary School (Manteca Unified School District).
- Vista High School (Escalon Unified School District).
- Waterloo Middle School (Linden Unified School District).
- Williams Middle School (Tracy Unified School District).

Discussions, Findings, and Recommendations

1.0 School Safety Fundamentals

When asked, school officials, families, policymakers, and the community agree school safety is a top priority, but often there is a disconnect between safety practices and that priority. There is disagreement about what steps should be taken to make our schools safer or how much time, energy, or money should be devoted to school safety efforts. The recent uptick in gun-related incidents at schools across the country has created what some school safety experts believe is a skewed focus on target hardening. Physical security measures, security hardware equipment, cameras, access control, and other forms of safety technology can be useful in the school safety tool bag but are only as valuable as the weakest human link supporting them. As one school safety expert advised the Grand Jury, “Beware of school safety consultants with something to sell.” The emphasis on physical security measures has created a failure to focus on human factors and the fundamentals of school security and culture.

From interviews with school safety experts and a review of publicly available literature, the Grand Jury learned that the best safety plans focus on fundamentals such as:

- Site-specific emergency plans.
- Creating a culture of safety.
- Lockdown drills and sheltering in place.
- Evacuation and reunification.
- Identifying and assigning incident command roles.
- Recognizing abnormalities.
- Having situational awareness at all times.
- Empowering staff to make decisions during emergencies.

The focus of any school safety program should be on training to prepare people with the skills necessary to take proper action when confronted by an emergency. An emergency by its very nature is a time of extreme stress that often short-circuits rational thought and action. Available

data indicate lockdown drills (close and lock the door, turn off the lights, close blinds and curtains, move into a hardened corner that is out of sight of an intruder, and keep quiet) work best to prepare staff and students to respond effectively to emergencies. Options-based training (run, hide, and fight) is recommended by some safety experts, but such training is controversial and is discouraged by other experts. Basic, age-appropriate drills should be the focus of any safety training involving students. Overly dramatic drills that create student anxiety should be avoided.

Safety training for school employees must be more than a once-a-year event; it must be integrated into staff meetings throughout the school year and must include not only teachers and administrators but also support staff. Safety drills for staff and students must be diversified in the type and timing of the drills.

In addition to safety training, school climate and relationships are keys to school safety.

“Schools should address climate along with security and emergency preparedness, not one or the other. Too often climate is pitted against security, instead of focusing on both. Schools can be warm, welcoming, and trusting environments and still have balanced security measures and comprehensive emergency preparedness guidelines.”¹

A positive school culture is one in which students and staff feel respected, supported, and connected to each other and to the school community. In such a culture, there is a greater sense of shared responsibility for the well-being and safety of everyone in the school, and students are more likely to report concerns or potential safety issues.

In contrast, a negative school culture, characterized by bullying, harassment, discrimination, or general facility disrepair, can contribute to a lack of trust and support among students and staff. This makes it more difficult for students to feel comfortable reporting safety concerns and contributes to a sense of isolation and disengagement that increases the risk of violence or other safety issues.

Creating a positive school culture that promotes respect, inclusivity, and collaboration helps to foster a sense of community and shared responsibility leading to a safer school environment. This includes initiatives such as anti-bullying and anti-harassment programs, positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), and efforts to promote diversity and cultural sensitivity.

Safety culture is a topic to be revisited throughout the school year to build upon overall school safety. As an expert witness noted:

“...the key thing is really creating a culture of safety and a culture for reporting. Where safety is everyone's job from the custodian, your school secretary, [your] food service worker, your bus drivers, the first and last people to see kids during the day, to encourage not only see something and say something, that catchphrase that has been used since 9/11, but training people on how to do something. [If] someone sees something, they say something, then what are you trained to do. Because if someone reports it and you don't

¹ Trump, Kenneth S., *Proactive School Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning*. Thousand Oaks, Calif., Corwin, 2011, page 182.

act and it's not acted in a timely appropriate manner, it's not going to really carry this all the way through.”

A school safety culture is encouraged by involving parents/guardians, students, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel in a school’s safety planning process. It also is encouraged by creating an overall positive climate at the school. Is there school engagement, school ownership, school pride, and student artwork present and visible in the school? Is the school clean and well-maintained? Do students and school employees have an open and trusting relationship?

2.0 Comprehensive School Safety Plan

“The California Constitution guarantees California children the right to attend public schools that are safe, secure, and peaceful. The CDE, public school districts, county offices of education (COEs), and schools and their personnel are responsible for creating learning environments that are safe and secure. First responders, community partners, and families play an essential role, as well. Schools must be prepared to respond to emergencies including natural and man-made hazards and strive to prevent violence and behavior issues that undermine safety and security. CSSPs include strategies aimed at the prevention of, and education about, potential incidents involving crime and violence on the school campus and aspects of social, emotional, and physical safety for both youth and adults.”²

According to California Education Code Section 32281(a), every school district and County Office of Education (COE) in the State is responsible for developing a Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP). For each of its school sites and the site council or safety planning committee for each site is required to write and develop a CSSP that is relevant to the specific needs and resources of that site. In school districts with fewer than “2,501 units of average daily attendance,” there may be one CSSP for all schools within the district.

Every year, each school is required to adopt an updated CSSP by March 1. Before adopting its CSSP, the school site council or safety planning committee must hold a public meeting at the school site to allow members of the public the opportunity to express an opinion about the school safety plan. State law includes a list of individuals and entities that must be notified in writing of these public meetings. These opportunities for meaningful public input on safety plans and goals help build a strong school safety culture.

Each school’s CSSP must be designed to address campus risks, prepare for emergencies, and create a safe, secure learning environment for students and school personnel. The CSSP must include adaptations necessary for the safety of students with disabilities. The school site council is required to consult with representatives from the law enforcement agency, the fire department, and other

² California Department of Education, “Comprehensive School Safety Plans – Violence Prevention (CA Dept of Education).” www.cde.ca.gov, www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/vp/cssp.asp. Accessed May 2, 2023.

first responder entities in the writing and development of the CSSP and to share any updates to the CSSP with those entities. An updated file of all safety-related plans and materials also must be readily available for inspection by the public.

Administrators of a school district or COE may elect to develop those portions of a CSSP that include tactical responses to criminal incidents and to develop those portions of the CSSP themselves, in consultation with law enforcement and a representative of an exclusive bargaining unit of employees. The governing board of a school district or COE also can confer in closed session with law enforcement officials prior to the approval of a tactical response plan. Any vote to approve the tactical response plan would be announced following the closed session.

The CSSP must include provisions for:

- (1) assessing the status of crime on school campuses and at school functions and
- (2) identifying appropriate strategies that will provide or maintain a high level of school safety and address the school's procedures for complying with existing laws related to school safety.

The SJCOE and all districts in the County have approved CSSPs for their schools. The State CSSP requirements are lengthy and plans that attempt to discuss in detail all required elements can become unwieldy. Some of the CSSPs reviewed by the Grand Jury were several hundred pages long and generally included the major elements required by State law, but only a few appeared to have been drafted to address issues unique to an individual school site. Only a few indicated there had been any significant opportunity for public input during the drafting or approval stages of the annual CSSP updates. Even fewer included an assessment of the status of crime at the school and school-related functions. The Grand Jury also found plans contained only limited mention of the unique needs during emergencies of students with disabilities. Interviews and conversations with district administrators and school personnel often indicated limited knowledge of the safety information within these lengthy plans or even where the plan was physically located.

Most districts asserted that local law enforcement had been involved in the preparation or update of district CSSPs, but the nature of that involvement varied widely and seldom was documented in a manner that would allow the public to conclude that the involvement was meaningful. Some school officials commented that law enforcement agencies seemed reluctant to collaborate. Fewer districts asserted the local fire district had been involved in the preparation or update of district CSSPs, although some schools reported during site visits that the fire marshal had assisted in the preparation of current evacuation maps. The Grand Jury could not conclude from available information whether law enforcement and first responders had been given the information about the specific circumstances at individual school sites necessary for an appropriate response to a school safety emergency.

Several districts and schools made lengthy CSSPs more useful by creating concise flip charts identifying key steps to be taken during a range of anticipated emergencies. Most schools using these flip charts posted them in classrooms, but only a few schools posted them in other rooms frequented by students, such as libraries, cafeterias, multipurpose rooms, and other school resource rooms. Many of these rooms are used by the general public during non-school hours, in accordance with the California Education Code.

Some districts keep the entire CSSP confidential. Others make public most of the CSSP but keep some portions of the plan confidential to avoid providing useful information to potential criminal perpetrators. A few districts make the entire CSSP public. As noted above, the California Education Code requires an updated file of all safety-related plans and materials to be readily available for inspection by the public, but school administrators are authorized to keep confidential the portions of safety plans that include tactical responses to criminal incidents. The Grand Jury considers the better practice is to keep these sensitive provisions confidential but to make the rest of the CSSP and other safety-related information readily available to the public and school employees.

The CSSP must include a clear description of incident command and communication roles, together with associated duties. It also must identify the individuals responsible to perform those roles as well as alternate individuals if the primary individual is not available to perform the role. Some of the CSSPs reviewed by the Grand Jury identified the incident command roles, but only a few of these identified the individuals responsible for those roles and the alternates who would assume those roles if the primary individual was not available. None of the CSSPs reviewed by the Grand Jury provided evidence that the individuals responsible for incident command roles had received appropriate training to properly perform those important roles.

Some districts include meaningful information about safety measures taken by the district and its schools through the district website and other communications with parents/guardians. Other districts have little or no information about safety measures on their websites and appear to have only limited communication with parents/guardians about safety measures.

The CSSP should describe the system to reunite parents/guardians with their children in the event of a campus-wide evacuation or emergency and parents/guardians must be made aware of how they can reunite with their children. Only some of the CSSPs reviewed by the Grand Jury contained a detailed description of the reunification system and how parents/guardians will be advised of the relevant details of that system.

Findings

F2.1 A review of CSSPs demonstrated many districts have failed to create a CSSP that addresses safety issues unique to the individual school sites, and rather use a template and/or boilerplate language, leaving the school site unprepared in an emergency.

- F2.2** Many districts have not involved teachers, support staff, students, and parents/guardians when updating each school site’s CSSP, missing an opportunity to create a culture of school safety.
- F2.3** Many districts have not collaborated with local law enforcement and other first responders during the annual process to update the CSSP, which could result in a prolonged and inefficient emergency response.
- F2.4** Many district CSSPs show a lack of meaningful collaboration between districts and local law enforcement agencies, causing confusion and chaos during an emergency.
- F2.5** Many districts do not offer an opportunity for public input during the drafting or approval stages of the annual CSSP, which renders the districts out of compliance with State law.
- F2.6** Most districts do not include an assessment of the status of crime at the school and school-related functions in their CSSPs, which renders the districts out of compliance with State law and causes potential harm and liability.
- F2.7** Many districts do not adequately address the unique needs of students with disabilities during emergencies. The lack of planning for the most vulnerable students can cause harm during a time of confusion and crisis.
- F2.8** A few districts do not make any part of the CSSPs available to the public, withholding important information about steps taken by the district to reduce the probability and impact of safety risks. Other districts post the CSSPs in their entirety, failing to keep confidential information about tactical responses, potentially revealing sensitive information to the public.
- F2.9** Many districts have CSSPs that fail to identify incident command roles and the individuals who are to perform those roles in case of an emergency, exposing students and staff to the potential for confusion and increased risks during an emergency.
- F2.10** Many districts have CSSPs that fail to describe the system to reunite parents/guardians with their children in the event of a campus-wide evacuation, creating confusion and additional anxiety in the event of a safety emergency.
- F2.11** Many school site CSSPs do not account for specific dangers unique to the school site (e.g., train tracks, flooding, freeways).

Recommendations

The 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the County Office of Education, the 14 school districts, and law enforcement agencies in the County implement school safety programs that require the following actions:

- R2.1** By March 1, 2024, the annual updates for each school site’s CSSP address safety issues unique to the site.

R2.2 By December 15, 2023, while updating the school’s CSSP, each school site collaborate and receive input from representatives of teachers, support staff, students, and parents/guardians.

R2.3 By December 15, 2023, while updating the school’s CSSP, each school site collaborate and receive input from the appropriate emergency response agencies.

R2.4 By December 15, 2023, each law enforcement agency in San Joaquin County meaningfully collaborate and approve the updated CSSP for school sites within that agency’s jurisdiction.

R2.5 By February 1, 2024, each school site council or safety planning committee hold an advertised public meeting at the school site to allow members of the community an opportunity to express an opinion about the school’s proposed CSSP as required by California Education Code Sections 32288(b)(1) and (2).

R2.6 By March 1, 2024, each school site’s CSSP include the State mandated assessment of the status of crime at the school and school-related functions.

R2.7 By March 1, 2024, each school site consult with the appropriate professionals to address the unique needs of students with disabilities when updating the CSSP.

R2.8 By March 1, 2024, each school site’s CSSP be available to the public with the exception of confidential information about tactical responses.

R2.9 By March 1, 2024, each school site’s CSSP identify the incident command roles and the individuals who are to perform those roles and their alternate in cases of an emergency.

R2.10 By March 1, 2024, each school site’s CSSP describe the system to reunify parents/guardians with their student in the event of a campus-wide evacuation, including how parents/guardians are informed of reunification details.

R2.11 By March 1, 2024, each school site’s CSSPs account for dangers unique to the specific school site (e.g., train tracks, flooding, freeways).

3.0 Training

On November 11, 2022, the San Joaquin County Office of Education offered a free half-day School Safety Summit for the first time. The purpose of the summit was to bring stakeholders together in a forum that could address school safety Countywide. All but three of the 14 districts in San Joaquin County attended the event with one or more representatives. As one attendee noted on a feedback form, “Thank you for starting this conversation. Safety should be something we talk about more often. Consider making this a topic that gets revisited multiple times a year.” Another attendee noted, “Thank you for taking the lead on this important topic.” The Grand Jury agrees.

The purpose of the summit was to try to bridge the service gap by bringing to light the differences and the similarities of need while at the same time illustrating the importance of school culture

insofar as school safety is concerned. As noted by a witness interviewed by the Grand Jury, San Joaquin County is unique in the districts that service the County students. Some districts have school resource officers (SROs) or their own sworn law enforcement department, while more rural and smaller districts may have to wait an extended period of time for law enforcement response.

One of the experts interviewed by the Grand Jury observed, “The first and best line of defense is a well-trained, highly alert staff and student body in a school.” Recent school tragedies in the news have received attention in the media that sometimes focuses on technology to make school sites more difficult to access rather than the failure to focus on the human factors and fundamentals of school safety. The same expert also noted a common thread across many, if not most of these tragedies, is “they involve allegations of failures of human factors, not allegations that some type of security hardware equipment failed. So we are moving and seeing this effort to have a skewed focus on target hardening. Physical security can play a tool, any type of technology is only as good as the weakest human link behind it.”

Repeated training for school staff and students is the best way to reduce the likelihood that people will “freeze” during an emergency. Not only is training required by State law, but it is also an important way to help make safety part of a school’s culture.

To be most effective, training of teachers, administrators, and support staff should include training at the beginning of each school year but also throughout the year during regular teacher and staff meetings. Tabletop exercises provide a cost-effective way to train in a variety of emergency scenarios. Appropriate training for substitute teachers is an important element of school safety, but few districts have taken steps to assure they have received emergency information in a timely, effective, and usable manner.

Training is best reinforced by drills. Drills are most effective if the types and timing of the drills are varied throughout the school year including drills at times such as lunch, recess, or passing periods when students are not in a classroom. Students' involvement in drills, however, must be limited to age-appropriate activities and be designed to avoid the creation of potentially harmful anxiety. Special consideration should be given to drills that reinforce training related to the needs of students with disabilities. Tabletop exercises are an effective way for staff to drill and prepare for a variety of emergency scenarios.

Safety emergencies can be confusing and traumatic, making effective communication and incident command vitally important. Breakdowns in communications or response coordination can have catastrophic consequences. Schools and school districts will be responsible for notifying first responders and commanding the early stages of response to the emergency. They will be communicating with employees, students, and parents/guardians during and after the emergency while also being confronted with demands for information from the media and concerned community members. When first responders arrive on the scene of the emergency, they typically will take over command of the incident response, but at many schools, especially in rural areas,

there may be an extended delay before appropriate professional responders can arrive at the scene. The school and the district must be prepared to command the response to the incident during this delay. The yearly schedule of drills should include drills that reinforce communication and incident command readiness.

The Incident Command System 100 (ICS-100) training is a course provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that covers the basics of the Incident Command System (ICS), which is a standardized system used by emergency response organizations to manage incidents and emergencies. The ICS-100 course is designed to provide an introduction to the principles and structure of ICS, including key roles and responsibilities, and the process of establishing a unified command during an emergency. The focus of ICS-100 training is fourfold:

1. **Improving communication:** ICS-100 training teaches responders how to use a common language and communication system to ensure that everyone is on the same page during an emergency.
2. **Enhancing coordination:** ICS-100 training clarifies how responders work together and coordinate their efforts to respond effectively to an emergency.
3. **Promoting safety:** ICS-100 training emphasizes the importance of safety during an emergency and informs responders how to prioritize safety when responding to incidents.
4. **Reducing confusion:** ICS-100 training provides a clear structure and framework for responding to emergencies, reducing confusion and ensuring that everyone knows their role in an emergency.

The Grand Jury discovered that within the County, while some school districts utilize ICS-100 training, many do not, causing a security gap. When the Grand Jury inquired about ICS training with expert witnesses, the answer was universally in support of such training, tailored to the specifics of school sites. "I think it's useful. I think it's useful to understand how it all works in the big picture," said an expert.

While the Grand Jury recognizes that annual training can be overwhelming to school staff, not all school site personnel require ICS-100 training as much as those personnel identified in the CSSP incident command roles on school campuses (including classified employees).

While ICS-100 training is focused on a school site, ICS-402 training is directed towards executive-level leadership (district cabinet-level employees). ICS-402 training is designed to provide education and training for those who may be responsible for managing large-scale incidents or emergencies. ICS-402 training for senior-level district staff members is important for several reasons:

1. **Preparedness:** School districts are responsible for the safety and well-being of students and staff members. In the event of an emergency, having trained staff members who understand

ICS and implement it effectively is crucial in minimizing damage, preventing injuries, and saving lives.

2. **Coordination:** Large-scale emergencies involve multiple agencies and organizations, making coordination and communication critical. ICS-402 training helps school district staff members understand how to work with other agencies and organizations during an emergency, ensuring that everyone has the same understanding and that efforts are coordinated effectively.
3. **Legal compliance:** In some states or jurisdictions, ICS training is required for emergency responders and other people who may be involved in emergency management. Providing ICS-402 training to school district executive staff members will ensure that the district is compliant with these regulations.
4. **Flexibility:** The ICS system is flexible and scalable, which means that it can be used to manage emergencies of various sizes and types. By providing ICS-402 training to district executive staff members, districts ensure that they have a framework in place that can be adapted to different scenarios, from minor incidents to major disasters.

Overall, ICS-402 training assists school district leadership to prepare for emergencies, coordinate response efforts effectively, comply with regulations, and be flexible in their response to emergencies.

Interviews with district administrators and discussions with school staff during site visits indicated a limited understanding of the material in a school's CSSP. Many districts discuss safety at the beginning of the year during in-service training and rarely return to the topic.

All districts presented evidence of monthly drills involving teachers and students throughout the year. Few districts, however, included utilization of communication and incident command structure (ICS) identified in their CSSPs during drills. Many districts informed the Grand Jury that they varied the day and time for scheduled safety drills, but only a few districts indicated they had intentionally scheduled drills during times such as lunch, recess, or passing periods when students were not in their classrooms. This is when incident command structures are most critical. Drills are made more effective by presenting unexpected complications during the drill. One cost-effective variation recommended by experts is for an administrator to stand in a doorway typically used during a fire evacuation and inform students that the exit is blocked, forcing them to find another exit.

Many districts time evacuation drills, but the Grand Jury found limited evidence that drills typically are followed by an analysis of what went well, what went wrong, and what needs to be changed in the future to improve plans and drills.

Findings

F3.1 Feedback forms completed by attendees of the San Joaquin County Office of Education School Safety Summit and reviewed by the Grand Jury demonstrate the value and necessity of a Countywide School Safety Summit.

F3.2 Some of the districts failed to send representatives to the 2022 School Safety Summit, thereby missing an opportunity to work together to make schools safer.

F3.3 The Grand Jury learned through interviews, surveys, and site tours that many districts fail to include safety topics during regular meetings with teachers and support staff throughout the school year, minimizing the importance of safety.

F3.4 The Grand Jury learned through interviews, surveys, and site tours that many school sites fail to assure substitute staff receive the information they will need in the case of a school safety emergency, leaving the substitute staff ill-prepared for an emergency.

F3.5 Many districts fail to include the utilization of communication and incident command protocols (ICS-100) during safety drills throughout the school year, causing miscommunication in an emergency.

F3.6 Many district cabinet-level positions (e.g., Superintendent, Chief Business Officer) are not trained in ICS protocols (ICS-402), causing a lack of unified response to districtwide emergencies.

F3.7 Many school sites do not vary the time of day when routine safety drills are conducted or when students are not in classrooms, making drills predictable and leaving students unprepared for emergencies that may occur at any time.

F3.8 Many school sites fail to include support staff (classified personnel) in probable real-life roles during safety drills, leaving them unprepared to assist students in emergencies.

F3.9 Most school sites fail to conduct a post-incident report after drills analyzing what went well, what went wrong, and what needs to be changed in the future to improve plans and drills, undermining the effectiveness of drills.

Recommendations

The 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the County Office of Education and the 14 school districts in the County implement school safety programs that require the following actions:

R3.1 By December 1, 2023, the San Joaquin County Office of Education and the San Joaquin County Office of Education Board of Trustees develop, adopt, and host an annual School Safety Summit.

R3.2 By December 1, 2023, each school district send one or more representatives to the annual School Safety Summit hosted by the San Joaquin County Office of Education.

R3.3 By September 1, 2023, safety topics be an agenda item at all school site staff meetings with teachers and support staff throughout the school year.

R3.4 By September 1, 2023, districts develop, adopt, and implement written procedures for school sites to provide substitute staff with the information they will need in case of a school emergency.

R3.5 By October 1, 2023, personnel identified in the school CSSP for incident command roles be trained and certified in ICS-100 protocols.

R3.6 By October 1, 2023, ICS-402 training be completed for all district-level executive leadership.

R3.7 By October 1, 2023, scheduled safety drills be conducted on different days throughout the school year and at various times throughout the school day, including when students are not normally in their classrooms.

R3.8 By October 1, 2023, scheduled safety drills include support staff (classified) in probable emergency roles during the year and document their participation.

R3.9 By October 1, 2023, administrators create a post-incident report after all safety drills.

4.0 School Site Visits

The Grand Jury visited 15 school sites and observed and reviewed safety protocols. One school was chosen from each of the 14 districts and one dependent charter school from the San Joaquin County Office of Education. At each site, the following safety components were evaluated and observed:

- Access Control - including entry procedures and perimeter fencing or barricades.
- Classrooms - including door locks, window coverings, emergency procedures and evacuation route postings, and any emergency supplies.
- Common Areas - evacuation routes posted at all entry/exit doors.
- Overall condition of the campus.
- Special Considerations - including transportation corridors, train tracks, or topography.
- Relationships between students, staff, and parents.

Access Control

Three schools utilized the Raptor system, which takes a picture of the visitor's identification and prints the ID picture onto a customized name badge. The system also screens and tracks all visitors. Only one of the three schools utilizing this system had the Grand Jury visitors return their badge at the end of the tour, which would prevent re-entry. Six schools performed some form of identification check, either with a driver's license or the Grand Jury Identification, and/or required a sign-in. Six schools did not ask for any identification and no sign-in was required.

Perimeter fencing at a school is a complicated issue. It is costly to install perimeter fencing around a school and it can make the campus seem and look like a prison. However, fencing can be an effective means of controlling who comes onto campus. It can also give a false sense of security and unless all gates are monitored and remain locked, the end result can be the same as if there were no fencing. Of the 15 sites visited, three did not have any or had very little perimeter fencing. One of those sites had conducted a parent survey regarding the issue and the results were closely divided between those who wanted the fencing and those who did not.

Commendations

Lincoln Unified utilized the Raptor system at the site visit and took our badges at the end of the tour, utilizing best practices in visitor sign-in procedures.

Banta Unified employed the best physical barrier system. Their check-in procedure involved being buzzed in through a half-door to a small waiting area where identification was checked and the sign-in form was completed with both time and date before being buzzed into the office.

Classrooms

At least one classroom was toured at each school. Evacuation routes were posted in all classrooms visited. Some maps were better than others. Some maps were too small, and one school posted a campus map in every classroom but didn't mark the classroom's location or what route to follow for evacuation.

There were inconsistencies across the school sites visited regarding door-locking procedures. The schools visited by the Grand Jury usually kept doors locked at all times. While one school said that it kept doors locked and closed, the Grand Jury observed a classroom door propped wide open. Many schools utilized a lock block system, which allowed the door to be opened while quickly returning to a locked position with a slide or flip of the switch. Some schools utilized a standard key system for locking doors.

Some schools used flip charts with summaries of what to do in different types of emergencies. The schools that do utilize this form of emergency procedures communication did not always post them in the same area of each classroom or notify all staff that they had them. One school's Assistant Principal conducting the Grand Jury's tour was unaware of the flip charts, what they were, or where they were located.

About one-half of the classrooms visited had some form of an emergency information packet (folder/binder) and a few classrooms had emergency backpacks or tubs with paperwork and supplies to be taken in the event of an emergency.

A majority of the schools visited had window coverings, consisting of vertical or horizontal blinds, but some were old and in disrepair. If the classroom had uncovered door windows, they would

need to be shielded in the event of a lockdown. Two of the schools utilized a magnetized shield that was the same size as the window to slide over to cover.

Commendations

New Hope Elementary School District covered its windows with magnets that had emergency procedures printed on them, serving two purposes.

Jefferson Unified utilized very creative ways to obscure windows with the use of long roller shades installed above the double glass doors to the library. They also used emergency kits in the classrooms and found an inexpensive and effective way to use a magnet to allow the door to be open while still locked.

Common Areas

The Grand Jury considered the common areas (cafeterias, gymnasiums, libraries, and multipurpose rooms) to be the most dangerous place to be during an emergency. The majority of the common areas lacked adequate evacuation route signs. Some schools had no evacuation route signs, some had one or two posted near a door, but not consistently at every door. Most had other safety equipment available, such as fire extinguishers and Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs). One school's AED box was open and empty. These observed deficiencies are particularly significant when the public is using the space during non-school hours.

Campuses Overall

One expert emphasized the importance of campus culture, “[a]nd just looking at the overall climate of the school...school engagement, school ownership, school pride, school artwork and items that children make and contribute that are part and present in the overall school.”

Most schools visited were well-maintained and tidy. Whether they were built recently or decades ago, the majority of campuses toured showed the care and pride of the staff that worked there and the students who attended. Some were freshly painted, had newly planted landscaping, new bark spread out, new picnic tables, and new shade structures, or were very neatly maintained. One older campus desperately needed attention. The ramps to the portable classrooms were in disrepair, and the playground was in poor condition, with uneven surfaces creating puddles and tripping hazards. However, the campus that was in this state of disrepair had the best and brightest bulletin boards scattered throughout campus, each with a different theme, showing pride in their campus.

Special Considerations

Of the school campuses toured, there were several special considerations that should be addressed in the individual site's CSSP. Several school sites were rurally located, resulting in emergency responders having a much longer response time. One campus was located in an area prone to flooding. Another campus was located much lower than the adjacent interstate, and a vehicle accident on the interstate could become airborne, potentially landing on the field of the school.

One campus was located directly next to a major train track, and while the tour was being conducted, two trains went by. The Grand Jury asked the tour leader about planned emergency responses to train derailments and was informed that none existed.

Relationships

The campuses visited represented a spectrum of relationship-based leadership and school culture. A majority of the campuses visited appeared to have a positive school culture. Many administrators knew one or more children's names and conversed with them, sincerely engaging with students. At one campus of 700 students, the Principal knew the staff, students, and parents/guardians. At the other end of the relationship spectrum, an Assistant Principal leading the Grand Jury tour seemed disinterested and disengaged with both the tour and student interactions, only stopping to ask a student why she was out of class.

Findings

F4.1 Not all school sites have check-in procedures in place that were followed consistently, posing serious security threats.

F4.2 Perimeter fencing or an "open" campus each pose security challenges and require careful consideration to mitigate security shortcomings.

F4.3 Evacuation maps that are posted inconsistently or do not adequately illustrate evacuation routes cause confusion and prolonged evacuation times, making staff and students vulnerable to harm in both classrooms and common areas.

F4.4 Inconsistent door-locking policies and failure to follow policies create opportunities for perpetrators to enter classrooms and common areas.

F4.5 Most school sites utilized flip charts that identify steps to be taken in case of emergencies, however, none of the sites posted them in all rooms used by students, staff, parents/guardians, and the general public.

F4.6 Insufficient window coverings give perpetrators a clear line of sight, creating risk for students and staff.

F4.7 Most school sites, regardless of age, were well maintained and showed school pride. One school site demonstrated multiple maintenance shortcomings, which can negatively impact safety.

F4.8 Good relationships among administrators, certificated and classified staff, parents, and students are vital to promptly identify and address areas of concern, particularly regarding student behavior. Relationships varied greatly from campus to campus.

F4.9 The culture of safety is best developed by public transparency and involvement by all parties. Few of the school sites visited by the Grand Jury demonstrated meaningful public engagement in safety planning.

Recommendations

The 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Grand Jury recommends that the County Office of Education and the 14 school districts in the County implement school safety programs that require the following actions:

R4.1 By October 1, 2023, each school site implement an access control program that consistently includes verifying visitors' identity and collection of any issued badge before the visitor leaves the school site.

R4.2 By March 1, 2024, districts develop, adopt, and implement a plan for effective perimeter control of access at all school sites.

R4.3 By September 1, 2023, all school sites post evacuation maps clearly showing routes from the “You Are Here” perspective be prominently posted at each entry or exit door location in both classrooms and common areas.

R4.4 By March 1, 2024, districts develop, adopt, and implement a plan for door-locking policies to secure classroom and common area doors.

R4.5 By March 1, 2024, all school sites post flip charts or similar summaries of emergency procedures be posted in all classrooms and common areas.

R4.6 By March 1, 2024, all school sites ensure window coverings are provided for all windows, thereby not allowing a perpetrator a clear line of sight into a classroom or common area.

R4.7 By October 1, 2023, the Board of Trustees, during a public meeting, review and discuss the findings and recommendations of the 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury report, *Case #0322 – School Safety in San Joaquin County: Developing a Culture of Safety*.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury appreciates the cooperation of all public school districts in San Joaquin County, along with the San Joaquin County Office of Education.

School districts in San Joaquin County have taken important steps to make schools safer, but more can and should be done to reduce safety threats. While no one can predict an emergency, proper training, drills, plans, and creating a positive school culture, including a strong safety culture, can best mitigate tragic outcomes from those emergencies.

Parents/guardians can help make schools safer by:

- Asking if school emergency guidelines are tested and exercised.
- Determining whether your school has policies and procedures on security and emergency preparedness.
- Examining access to school campuses.

- Making sure accurate and timely safety information is shared.

Disclaimers

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code Section 911, 924.1(a) and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code Sections 924.2 and 929).

Response Requirements

California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court within 90 days of receipt of the report.

Note: If the responder is an elected official, the response must be sent within 60 days of receipt.

Public School Boards and Law Enforcement

RESPONDING AGENCY	RECOMMENDATIONS
Superintendent, San Joaquin County Office of Education	F2.1-2.11, 3.1-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.1-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Banta Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Escalon Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Jefferson School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Lammersville Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Lincoln Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Linden Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Lodi Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Manteca Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7

RESPONDING AGENCY	RECOMMENDATIONS
New Hope Elementary School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
New Jerusalem School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Oak View Elementary School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Ripon Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Stockton Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Tracy Unified School District	F2.1-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.9 R2.1-2.3, 2.5-2.11, 3.2-3.9, & 4.1-4.7
Escalon Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
Lathrop Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
Lodi Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
Manteca Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
Ripon Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
Stockton Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
Tracy Police Department	F2.4 R2.4
San Joaquin County Sheriff	F2.4 R2.4

Mail or hand deliver a hard copy of the response to:

Honorable Michael D. Coughlan, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
180 E Weber Ave, Suite 1306J
Stockton, California 95202

Also, please email a copy of the response to Mr. Irving Jimenez, Staff Secretary to the Grand Jury, at grandjury@sjcourts.org.