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November 30, 2011

Thomas J. Borris
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Thomas:

In compliance with the Grand Jury's request, please find responses to findings and recommendations regarding the OC Grand Jury report, "**Orange County Schools: Are They Prepared for Emergencies?**" This is in response to the Grand Jury's second request for more detailed data regarding actual emergency management programming.

Specific consideration was given to each of the two findings and two recommendations that our organization was requested to resubmit. It is our intention to inform members of the Grand Jury of our interoperability with school districts across Orange County in support of emergency management. OCDE is a support agency that intends to provide service to all schools to ensure safe learning environments.

Thank you for an additional opportunity to respond to your inquiry regarding emergency preparedness in Orange County schools. Should you have further questions, please contact Dr. Arthur A. Cummins, Administrator, Safe & Healthy Schools-Instructional Services Division.

Sincerely,

Lynn April Hartline
Deputy Superintendent

LAH:AC:dn

Enclosure

cc: Orange County Grand Jury

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OCDE Second Response to the Grand Jury:

Finding 2:

Six (of 17) school districts have managed to apply for and receive relatively large grants from governmental agencies to greatly enhance their emergency planning efforts, while others have not.

The Orange County Department of Education has received two REMS grants from the Department of Education, Office of Safe & Drug Free Schools (FY 2008 and 2010). These dollars were used to support emergency services within our ACCESS alternative schools, enhance communication with local response agencies, and develop training modules for all existing K-12 public and private schools. Areas of focus include; 1) safe school planning, 2) purchase of emergency supplies for classrooms, 3) development of crisis response protocol, 4) multi-agency collaboration to increase capacity for emergency response, 5) coordination with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and 6) outreach to private schools to support emergency response capability. OCDE also collaborated with several school districts in securing REMS grant funding to support local emergency management activities. As a result of funding, several schools districts, including OCDE, have benefited greatly. The REMS grant program has since closed. OCDE will continue to conduct outreach to school partners to support all measures of emergency management planning.

Finding 4:

School districts develop plans with respect to a number of different, but overlapping regulations and standards, including those required by the county, state, and the federal government.

The Orange County Department of Education will assist school districts in developing school safety plans under Education Code. School districts are required to comply with state and federal emergency management frameworks such as Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS). OCDE will also assist school districts with safe school practice as mandated by Education Code. OCDE will continue to support local public and private schools in the area of emergency preparedness and crisis response. Our agency can provide specified training upon request, or refer to local emergency response agencies to identify qualified training personnel. OCDE will continue to hold a seat within the Orange County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to assist in the coordination of services for all schools.

Recommendation 1

Those districts which have yet to identify disaster grant opportunities, especially from governmental agencies, investigate the availability of potential resources. Forming inter-district collaborative, learning from districts in the county that have been successful, pooling resources, and asking for consultation from the Orange County Superintendent of Schools/OCDE may help in these efforts.

The Orange County Department of Education will continue to support school districts in identifying funding for safe school practice. The federal REMS grant program is no longer available. OCDE will encourage districts to identify local community partner resources to support matters of emergency management. OCDE can provide specified training upon request, or refer to local emergency response agencies to identify qualified training personnel. OCDE convenes the Orange County Emergency Management Organization (OCEMO) Schools subcommittee once each quarter to support emerging needs for schools. This group is comprised of school personnel who serve as emergency managers for their respective districts. The intent of these meetings is to inform, coordinate, and advise school personnel in the area of emergency management. OCDE is the Regional lead for the School and Law Enforcement Partnership, which supports collaboration between school personnel and local law enforcement officials. This mission is to ensure coordination between first responders as a primary measure of school safety.

Recommendation 3

Districts review their level of compliance with various existing codes, regulations, and liability insurance issues that pertain to emergency preparedness in public schools.

The Orange County Department of Education will assist school districts in implementing this recommendation by assisting schools with the development of school safety plans in conjunction with local, state, and federal guidelines. OCDE will continue to offer support, guidance, and training to meet this requirement. Our agency will remain a resource to all public and private schools as a provider of consult and training to meet all state and federal mandates as it pertains to safe school practice. We currently support Standardized Emergency Management Systems (SEMS) certification and National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) certification for all school partners. OCDE Legal Services often provides guidance and direction regarding matters of Education Code.