



SCHOOLS LEGAL SERVICE

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ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: ARE THEY PREPARED FOR EMERGENCIES?

RESPONSE SUMMARY FROM THE WESTMINSTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

In accordance with California Penal Code section 933.05, a response is required from the Westminster School District to Findings 1-7 and Recommendations 1-5.

Finding 1:

With respect to reported constraints on emergency planning and preparation, over half of schools and almost three quarters of districts identified either limited time or funds.

The Westminster School District agrees with this finding. If school districts had more personnel and resources, districts would be able to move forward with emergency management planning. At present, limited state funds are available and a federal grant program to support emergency management planning will end in Fiscal Year 2012.

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 Westminster School District agrees that school districts should seek grant funding. The existing federal grant program will be phasing out in 2012 and other grant programs will need to be identified.

Finding 3:

Some schools anticipate responding to only a few emergency situations (e.g., earthquake and fire), while others have developed plans to respond to over a dozen different threatening situations.

The Westminster School District agrees with this finding. Our school district has developed information for the following potential emergency situations:

1. Plane crash on campus
2. Child Abuse and Neglect
3. Bus Incident
4. Hostage Situation
5. Weapons at School/Armed Student/School Shooting
6. Bullying and Cyberbullying
7. Suicide
8. Intruder/Trespassing/Animal Disturbance
9. Earthquake/Drop, Cover and Hold On
10. Accidents/Medical Emergencies
11. Fire/Explosion
12. Bomb Threat
13. Severe Weather
14. Shelter in-Place
15. Evacuation
16. Utilities Failures
17. Chemical Spill and/or Explosions
18. Lock-Down
19. Assessment Level of Student Threat Checklist
20. School Office Safety Protocols

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 Westminster School District agrees with this finding. School districts have developed school safety plans under the Education Code. School districts are also required to comply with state and federal emergency management standards, Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS). Efforts should be made to make these requirements consistent with each other.

Finding 5:

Some schools reported they have not adequately anticipated the needs of students taking prescription medications, or with specialized medical needs, in the event of some emergencies, such as an extended lockdown.

The Westminster School District agrees that this issue should be addressed and the Westminster School District is focusing on how to meet all students' needs during an emergency.

Finding 6:

School districts are in communication with a variety of local and county departments, agencies, and systems to help them prepare for and respond to disasters or emergencies;

not all districts access the same resources.

The Westminster School District agrees the different districts may access different resources. It is our understanding that different districts communicate in a variety of ways with first responders, local agencies, and other agencies to support matters of emergency management.

Finding 7:

Few schools have plans or emergency preparation information available in languages other than English.

Our school district has prepared emergency information in the following languages: Spanish and Vietnamese.

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 collaboratives, 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 Westminster School District has received grants for emergency preparedness. In the future, our district intends to implement Recommendation 1 by identifying disaster grant opportunities and investigating the availability of potential resources.

Recommendation 2:

Districts review their plans, and the plans specific to each of their campuses, with respect to emergencies or possible disaster situations they have not anticipated.

Each of our school sites has a written safe school plan drafted and submitted by March 1st of each year. Our schools also submit an annual action plan where they define three or more explicit goals-related to school climate, bullying prevention, and emergency preparedness. Each goal includes several objectives to be completed within the school year. The plan is reviewed each year and updated annually.

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 Westminster School District has implemented this recommendation by developing a school safety plan for each of its schools and working with federal, state and local emergency management agencies. The school district has sufficient liability insurance with respect to emergency preparedness.

Recommendation 4:

Districts review their plans, and the plans specific to each of their campuses, to ascertain whether the special medical and/or prescription medication needs of all students are adequately anticipated, especially during an extended disaster situation.

The Westminster School District is currently reviewing its plans with respect to the special medical and prescription medication needs of all students and is developing a plan to meet these needs, in the event of an emergency.

Recommendation 5:

Districts survey their campuses with respect to the needs of non- or limited-English-speaking parents and guardians, and develop outlines or summaries of critical emergency planning information in Spanish, Vietnamese, and other threshold languages prevalent in their local communities.

Westminster School District has surveyed campuses with respect to the needs of non or limited English speaking parents and guardians and has developed a summary of critical emergency planning information in their native language. We are in the process of completing our model emergency plan and will post in on the district and school websites, as well as, in the school offices in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

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