

School Safety in Ventura County Public Schools

Introduction

School violence has become an increasingly serious national problem. The following list represents weapon incidents in each of the County's twenty school districts for the 1997-1998 school year as released by the California Department of Education:

DISTRICT	WEAPON POSSESSION	WEAPON ASSAULT
Briggs Elementary	0	0
Conejo Valley Unified	16	0
Fillmore Unified	5	0
Hueneme Elementary	4	1
Mesa Union	0	0
Moorpark Unified	5	0
Mupu Elementary	0	0
Oak Park	0	0
Ocean View Elementary	2	0
Ojai Unified	7	0
Oxnard Elementary	3	6
Oxnard Union High School	38	2
Pleasant Valley Elementary	1	1
Rio Elementary	2	0
Santa Clara Elementary	0	0
Santa Paula Elementary	1	2
Santa Paula Union H.S.	6	0
Simi Valley Unified	16	1
Somis Union Elementary	0	0
Ventura Unified	24	0
COUNTY TOTAL	130	13

A comparison of the figures released over the last three school years indicates an 11% county decrease in the incidents of weapon possession, but no change in the amount of weapon assaults. State figures for the 1997- 1998 school year indicate that Ventura County statistics are below state averages for both weapon possession and weapon assault (based on rates per 1000 students).

The Federal Gun Free Schools Act was passed in 1994 in response to the escalating problem of school violence throughout the nation. This act required every state to implement a law requiring local educational agencies to expel a student from school for not less than one year for bringing a weapon to school. In October 1997 the State of California complied by passing Senate Bill (SB) 187; the requirements of which were later codified into Educational Codes including EC 35294.2, EC 48915(a) and (c), and EC 48916(a). SB 187 required all school districts within the state to develop Comprehensive Safe School Plans for each of its schools by September 1, 1998, and set forth plan requirements (Figure 1). To assist the County's school districts in the development of their plans, the County Superintendent of School's office made training workshops available to all County districts (Figure 2).

Since the Grand Jury acts as an oversight agency for elements of local county government, a subcommittee was formed to investigate the safety of the County's children while in school and to determine how safe the students perceive themselves to be. From among the County's 20 school districts, three were selected at random and became the focus of this investigation.

Representative schools at the elementary, middle and high school level were visited within the Pleasant Valley, Fillmore Unified, and the Oxnard Union High School districts. In addition to reviewing each school's Safe School Plan and observing/evaluating physical security and safety practices in place, the subcommittee also inquired into existing school programs which offered assistance to troubled students as well as those considered "at risk."

At each of the six selected schools, the principal, assistant principal, two teachers, the school counselor and/or psychologist, campus security representative and custodian were interviewed using the same set of 126 questions. In addition, the students of a randomly-selected classroom anonymously completed a survey of ten safety-related questions and these results were analyzed and compared.

The outcome of each school visit, as well as the subcommittee's observations, separated by district, are presented below.

FILLMORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Piru Elementary

Background

Piru Elementary, located in an agricultural community nine miles east of the City of Fillmore, was built over 100 years ago. The school is admin-

istered by a principal and supported by a teaching staff of 30. It currently serves a student population of 362, and had no weapon possession or assault incidents during the 1997-1998 school year.

Interviews held with the principal, two teachers, yard aides, and a custodian disclosed the following:

- School security is handled by five yard aides provided by the District. These aides, with staggered shifts, are present when students arrive and depart, during morning and afternoon recesses, and over the lunch break.
- The principal has no assistant and relies upon a senior teacher as her administrative designee.
- Classrooms are connected to the main office by intercoms.
- The school switched to a mandatory uniform policy of dark skirts or pants and white tops approximately two years ago. Through the use of waivers, 20% of the students do not participate in the program.


SB 187 Comprehensive School Safety Plan Matrix <i>Requirements and Planning Responsibilities</i>			
✓	REQUIREMENTS: EC § 35294.2	SCHOOL	DISTRICT/COE
	Assessment of current status of school crime.	Review current CSSA reports or law enforcement statistics.	Provide crime data to schools.
	Child abuse reporting procedures pursuant to PC § 11164 et seq.	Insert into the plan procedures for notifying appropriate authorities.	Provide district- developed policies or procedures to schools.
	Disaster procedures, routine and emergency.	Obtain district disaster plans and include in plan.	Provide district disaster plan to schools that meet SEMS* requirements.
	Policies related to suspension, expulsion or mandatory expulsion and other school-designated serious act which would lead to suspension or expulsion.	Obtain district policy on student discipline and include in plan.	Provide district policies to schools.
	Notification to teachers pursuant to EC §49079.	Obtain district procedures for notifying teachers and include in plan.	Provide district developed procedures for notifying teachers.
	A sexual harassment policy.(EC § 212.6(b)).	Obtain policy from district and include in plan	Provide policy to schools.
	The provisions of any schoolwide dress code (EC § 35183).	School or district policies should be included in plan.	Provide district developed dress code policies to schools.
	Safe ingress and egress of pupils, parents, and school employees to and from school.	Include in plan any school-developed strategies or safe corridor maps for students and staff.	Provide schools with pre-determined evacuation routes.
	Safe and orderly school environment.	Develop a School Safety Plan using existing resources.	Provide statistical information, current statutes on school safety, and district policies.
	Rules and procedures pursuant to EC § 35291 and EC § 35291.5.	Update school rules and include in plan.	Review rules for compliance.
	Hold a public meeting (EC 35294.8 (g)).	Announce and conduct meeting at school site prior to submitting plan to district.	Develop a district calendar of dates and times of all school public meetings.

12/9/97-xi

* Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)

Attachment No. 1
Bul. No. 247
DESS-48-97/98

Figure1-SB 187 Comprehensive School Safety Matrix

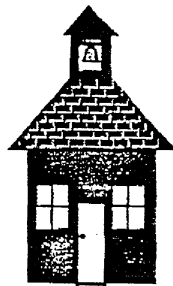


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SAFE SCHOOL PLANNING

May 5, 1998
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.



Cowan Conference Center
Camarillo Room
550 Airport Way, Camarillo, CA

PURPOSE

Senate Bill 187 was approved by the Governor 10/6/97 and filed as Ed. Code Section 35294.1 regarding comprehensive school safety plans. This bill requires school sites to develop and write comprehensive school safety plans that are adopted by September 1, 1998.

This workshop is a repeat of workshops offered during the past 1-2 years to acquaint participants with the seven step planning process and the four components of a comprehensive Safe School Plan as outlined in the CDE document *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action*. It is recommended that a team responsible for writing and working with the plan attend the workshop. It is helpful to bring a copy of your school mission statement to use during the workshop.

WORKSHOP CONTENT

- How to begin the school site process
- Practice writing your safety plan
- Further information about meeting Ed. Code requirements
- How to apply for Safe Schools Plan Implementation grants
- Discussion of the relationship of this requirement to other state initiatives

PRESENTERS

The trainings are provided and sponsored by the Departments of Education and Justice through the School/Law Enforcement Partnership using the training manual specifically designed for Safe School Planning. A copy of *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action* will be provided to all participants.

REGISTRATION FEE & INFORMATION

Registration is secured upon receipt of a check or Purchase Order for **\$15.00** per participant (includes all materials and lunch)

Make check payable to: **Ventura County Superintendent of Schools. Registration is limited to 40 participants.**

SAFE SCHOOL PLANNING • May 5, 1998 • \$15.00 • Camarillo Rm. • Cowan Conference Center • 550 Airport Way


NAMES	POSITION

Contact Person/Team Leader _____

School Name _____

School Address/Zip _____ **Phone:** _____

Please send payment and registration form to:



Judy Seyle, Director, Health Programs
Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Office
570 Airport Way, Camarillo, CA 93010
(805) 388-4412 • FAX (805) 388-4427

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: 4/28/98

NO PHONE OR AT-THE-DOOR REGISTRATIONS

NO REFUNDS

Figure 2-Safe School Planning Seminar Announcement

- A counselor, provided by the District, is available to provide academic as well as short-term personal/family counseling.
- The school has a Student Study Team (principal, counselor, three voluntary teachers, District psychologist, speech therapist and special education teacher) that meets weekly to identify and develop plans to assist students with early-warning behavioral as well as academic problems.
- A peer resolution program is currently being developed by the principal and District counselor.

Findings

- F-1 The school had an appropriate Comprehensive School Safety Plan in place which was developed by a School Site Council in 1997 and updated in 1998. Additionally, the school's plan was approved at a public meeting, as required by SB-187, prior to being submitted to the District.
Note: Records indicate that the school's principal attended one of the Safe School Planning workshops, available to all County school districts, in October 1997.
- F-2 The combined daily presence of the five yard aides represents a total of only 7.5 hours.
- F-3 Currently the school does no weapon monitoring. A student evaluation of school safety, however, revealed the following regarding weapons:
- The majority of students (62%) were aware they could be expelled for up to one year for bringing a weapon to school, yet 52% reported they didn't remember the rules being discussed.
 - Of the students, 13% reported they had either seen a weapon or had heard either bragging or threats about one being brought to school.
 - An overwhelming majority (90%) replied they would report knowledge of a weapon to those in charge.
 - Although 73% of the students reported feeling safe at school, 58% indicated they would feel even safer with a daily weapon check. Of the students, 57% offered suggestions for improving safety which included fencing, weapon checks, alarms and/or cameras.
- F-4 Night security currently consists of hall lighting in the main building, well-lit outside campus corridors, and motion detection or lighting in the parking lot. The main building and library are equipped with alarms, classrooms are not.

- F-5 School custodians have received no training in bomb recognition and proper handling of incendiary devices.
- F-6 The school campus is unfenced, and the school has no formal policy for visitor monitoring.

Conclusions

Piru Elementary is a clean and well-maintained, close-knit, rural community school managed by a dedicated staff. The school, however, is completely open to entry and located directly across from a vast orange grove which could harbor intruders. Its daytime and night-time security systems should be improved to better protect its students and staff as well as school property.

Recommendations

- R-1 School rules and all guides, student handbooks and parent contracts must be revised to reflect that expulsion for weapon possession may be for a duration of one year, and that the expulsion period may be in excess of one year if the weapon is a firearm, in accordance with EC 48915(a) and (c) as well as EC 48916(a).
- R-2 It is recommended that the combined daily coverage of the yard aides be increased by half to better protect the students, buildings, classrooms, boundaries and school property. Additionally, the aides and custodian should improve their radio usage.
- R-3 The results of the student survey indicated that the consequences associated with bringing weapons to school need to be re-emphasized to students. Additionally, 58% of students reported they would feel safer if "...everyone was checked for weapons when they walked in." The school, therefore, should develop a procedure for entry checks, possibly the inspection of backpacks in alternating classrooms on a daily basis.
- R-4 The absence of a night-time classroom alarm system places teachers at risk of an early-morning or weekend attack from an intruder lying in wait. It is, therefore, recommended that the District extend the current night alarm system into classrooms to protect the teaching staff as well as school property from vandalism.
- R-5 In light of the general increase of school bombing incidents and the availability of fertilizer and other chemicals in the immediate area, the custodial staff should be trained in bomb

recognition/handling to prepare them for the possibility of such incidents happening.

- R-6 To ensure student and staff security the Fillmore Unified School District should seriously consider securing school grounds with fencing, particularly the open ditch area at the rear of the school. Once the grounds are secured, it is further recommended that the school establish a visitor monitoring policy at the front entrance.

Commendation

Piru Elementary is commended for its local development of a Comprehensive Safe School Plan in conformity with all elements of SB 187 and EC 35294.2.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools, Fillmore Unified School District

Principal, Piru Elementary School

FILLMORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Fillmore Middle School

Background

Fillmore Middle School is an attractive, spacious, newly-constructed school located in an agricultural community twenty miles east of the City of Ventura. The school presently has a student population of 850 students. It is administered by a principal and an assistant principal who are both fluent in Spanish, and has a teaching staff of 30. During the 1997-1998 school year the school had two weapon possession incidents which led to suspensions but no expulsions, and no weapon assaults.

Interviews held with the principal and assistant principal, two teachers, counselor, campus supervisor, and custodian disclosed the following:

- School security is handled by a staff of two yard duty supervisors and two noon duty supervisors, supplemented by two administrators, a teacher and the school custodian.
- Classrooms are connected to the main office by intercom.
- Campus is closed during the lunch break, but students with parental permission are allowed to leave.

- The school has a uniform policy; however, through the use of waivers approximately 20% do not participate.
- The school's counselor offers students individual as well as group counseling and handles student conflict resolution problems. She also teaches a class in, and oversees, a student Peer Resolution program.
- The school offers special classes for academically-challenged students. Additionally, a team of educators identify and develop plans for students with academic/behavioral problems.
- Local law enforcement offers students a "We Tip" hot line for anonymously reporting weapon incidents.

Findings

- F-1 The school's Comprehensive Safe School Plan is missing the following elements which are required by SB-187:
- Discipline policy does not list the expulsion lengths for weapon possession as set forth in EC 48915(a) and (c) as well as EC 48916(a).
 - School rules are not included in the Safe School Plan.
 - There is no evidence that the plan was developed with the involvement of local law enforcement in compliance with EC 35294.1(b)(3).
 - There is no evidence that a public meeting was held prior to submittal to the district in compliance with EC 35294.8.
- F-2 Current school rules, Student Handbook, Teacher's Handbook, and Parent/Student/Teacher Agreement do not state that expulsion for weapon possession may be for a one-year duration, and that the expulsion period may be in excess of one year for firearm possession. Reference SB-187, and Education Codes 48915(a) and (c) as well as 48916(a).
- F-3 The combined security staff of four (two yard duty supervisors and two noon duty supervisors) have an on-campus presence of 4.5 hours a day. Two guards monitor student activity at entry, during the morning 6th grade and 7th/8th grade breaks, as well as during lunch. A single guard oversees school bus boarding at day's end. Job assignments do not include patrolling school grounds, bathrooms, buildings, athletic field, gymnasium, campus perimeter or parking lot.
- Conversely, Piru Elementary (grades K-5 with a student population of 362) has a District-provided security staff of five

members who collectively work 7.5 hours a day. Fillmore Middle School, which serves older students (grades 6-8), with more than double the population (850), and located in an area with an acknowledged gang presence is provided a staff of only two yard aides (supplemented by two noon aides) who work approximately half the time.

- F-4 The school does no formal weapon monitoring or locker checks without suspicion of a reason to do so. It does not plan to implement a monitoring system in the future “unless conditions change and a need is seen.” The student evaluation of school safety, however, revealed the following with regard to weapons:
- Of the students, 81% were aware they could be removed for up to one year for bringing a weapon to school.
 - Students reporting they had seen a weapon at school, or had heard another student either brag or make threats about bringing one, equaled 29%.
 - Of the students, 84% responded they would report a weapon incident to school officials.
 - Although 76% reported feeling safe at school, 73% indicated they would feel even safer if everyone was checked for weapons upon entering.
- F-5 Currently there is no formal visitor monitoring system.
- F-6 Night security currently consists of flood lights, hall lights, secured gates and an alarm system in the administration building and library. Classrooms are not equipped with alarms.
- F-7 Although it was reported that the school had received a bomb threat in the past, and that a student had brought a copy of Internet instructions for bomb building into a classroom, the school’s custodians have received no training in bomb recognition or the proper handling of incendiary devices.

Conclusions

The school’s Safe School Plan, as well as various guides and hand-outs, require revision to conform to the requirements of SB 187 (Figure 1) and provisions of Education Codes EC 48915(a) and (c) and 48916(a). Additionally, Fillmore Middle School’s security force requires expansion and a redefinition of duties. Currently a gross inconsistency in security protection exists within the Fillmore Unified District schools (F-3).

Recommendations

- R-1 The school's Safe School Plan requires revision as outlined in F-1.
- R-2 The Teacher's Handbook, Student Handbook, and Student/Parent/Teacher contract require revision at next printing to include the items noted in F-2.
- R-3 The security staff at Fillmore Middle School is inadequate to meet the school's size and its student population and age level. The District should add a minimum of two additional yard aides and increase the length of time they are present on campus. Additionally, their duties should be expanded to include campus patrolling/protection while school is in session. It is also recommended that the staff members use their radios more effectively.
- R-4 The school should institute an entry monitoring check, possibly confined to backpacks, in response to the student evaluation of school safety in which 73% reported they would feel safer if "everyone was checked for weapons when they entered." Representative students from alternating classrooms could be checked on a daily basis.
- R-5 The school should install a visitor monitoring system at both front locations which permit entry.
- R-6 It is recommended that the District utilize the services of the County's VCSSFA Safety Coordinator (805/383-1970) to assess the current night security of Fillmore Middle School, including the need for extending the current alarm system to include classrooms. The installation of alarms would protect teachers from the threat of encountering morning or weekend intruders lying in wait, as well as protect school property from possible vandalism. It is also recommended, when budget allows, that the District consider the installation of surveillance cameras at designated trouble areas throughout the campus.
- R-7 The school's custodial team should be sent to training seminars to prepare them for the possibility of discovering incendiary devices.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools, Fillmore Unified School District

Principal, Fillmore Middle School

FILLMORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Fillmore High School

Background

Fillmore High School, built in 1909, is located in an agricultural valley 20 miles east of the city of Ventura. It has an open, sprawling campus spread over 30 acres that is divided by a public-access road. The school currently serves a student population of 909, which is supported by three administrators and a teaching staff of 48.

The school had two weapon possession incidents (knife and pellet gun) during the 1997-1998 school year, one of which resulted in an expulsion. There were no weapon assaults.

Interviews held with the principal, two teachers, school psychologist, counselor, campus supervisor (security) and night custodian disclosed the following:

- Campus security is maintained by two campus supervisors and a lunch-hour monitor, and is supplemented by the school's administrators and two daytime custodians.
- The school recently acquired the previous site of the Fillmore Middle School ("Annex") which adjoins its northern border and provided 20 additional classrooms.
- Senior students with a 2.0 GPA and parental permission are allowed to leave campus during the lunch break.
- The District observes a Zero Tolerance policy on weapons.

Findings

- F-1 Although a representative from the school reportedly attended the County's seminar in plan preparation, a review of the school's Comprehensive School Safety Plan found it to be lacking in all major elements. Additionally, the school's plan was not approved by the District until January 1999, four months beyond September 1, 1998, the date the plan was required by SB-187.
- F-2 Review of the school's current Staff Guide and Discipline Code (school rules) revealed no reference to the fact that the offense for the brandishing of a knife could carry a one-year expulsion, and that possession of a firearm could carry an expulsion in excess of one year. Also, no reference was made regarding the consequences for introducing bombs. Reference SB-187 and Education Codes 48915(a) and (c) and 48916(a).

Additionally: 1) no mention is made in the Staff Guide, which lists the duties of the principal, assistant principal and teachers, of their responsibility for weapon awareness, and 2) no mention is made of suspension or expulsion requirements for weapon possession in the Athlete's Code Agreement.

It was also noted that the Staff Guide contains no Board Policies (BPs) or Administrative Regulations (ARs) regarding weapons, child abuse reporting, or notifying teachers of incoming violence-prone students transferring into their classrooms (SB-187).

Review of the Student/Parent Contract indicated that "firearms and explosives" are not included in the weapon definition under "Zero Tolerance Description."

- F-3 Currently, the sprawling, 30-acre campus is protected by three Campus Supervisors. Their combined daily work hours amount to 9.5 hours (the first working 8AM - 1PM, the second from 11:45AM - 3:15PM, and the third working only during lunch). A single supervisor is responsible for guarding the entire campus during the morning and afternoon hours. During the one-hour lunch break all three supervisors work together. During the morning and afternoon student breaks, the supervisor on duty is supplemented by two campus administrators and the daytime custodians. Teachers are required to monitor hallways by standing in their doorways when students change classes.

During the morning and afternoon hours the on-duty campus supervisor is responsible for providing security to the entire school's student population and staff. This sole guard is responsible for patrolling the entire 30-acre campus, all buildings, bathrooms, parking lots, open fields, the gymnasium, public-access road, and the school's open boundaries.

- F-4 Currently the school does no weapon or student locker checks without a suspicion to do so. The student survey evaluation of in-school safety, however, indicated the following regarding weapons:

- Students were well aware they could be expelled for up to one year for bringing a weapon to school (79%).
- Of the students surveyed, 54% reported they had seen a weapon at school, or that they either had heard another student brag about (43%), or threaten (36%) to bring one.
- Only 11% reported willingness to report information involving a weapon to school authorities (however, if provided the availability of anonymous reporting, the figure increased to 39%).

- When asked if they felt safe at school, 89% reported that they did; however, 39% reported they would feel even safer if security was increased to include entry weapon checks.
- F-5 At the present time the school has a good working relationship with law enforcement. An on-call officer assigned to the school also mentors at-risk students and mitigates gang problems. This arrangement ends June 30, 1999, because the city can no longer fund an expiring COPS Grant Program originally provided by the State and supplemented by matching funds shared by the Sheriff's Department and the City of Fillmore.
- F-6 Telephone connection to the main office is available in only every other classroom in the high school, as well as in the recently-acquired Annex.
- F-7 At night, hall lights illuminate the buildings but classrooms are unlit. The quad is lit at night, but unless in use, the parking lots are not. No surveillance cameras are present. While the administration building, computer classroom, and the Science and Arts buildings are equipped with night alarms, the classrooms are not.
- F-8 The school experienced a pipe bomb incident during the summer of 1997.
- F-9 Campus trouble spots were reported to be the bathrooms and the isolated area behind the gymnasium. These areas are vulnerable to student misconduct as well as property damage, especially graffiti.
- F-10 Second Street, a public-access road, cuts through school property, further placing the two elements of the campus at the risk of intrusion.
- F-11 The vast 30-acre campus is unfenced and completely open to the entry of intruders.

Conclusions

The school must develop a School Safety Plan meeting the requirements of SB 187 and EC 35294.2. It must also update its weapon/expulsion information in school policies, guides, and student-parent contract to conform to the provisions of EC 48915(a) and (c) as well as 48916(a).

Currently, Fillmore High School has inadequate security. Its vast size, open fields, unfenced perimeter, senior open-lunch policy, public-road-dividing-campus problem, limited classroom communication system, as well as night alarm and lighting systems all require improvement to properly ensure the safety of the school's students and staff.

The District must also address the potential for possible bomb incidents considering: 1) its schools are located within an agricultural community with ready access to fertilizer and other chemicals with which incendiary devices can be made, and 2) fireworks are legally available within the City of Fillmore.

Recommendations

- R-1 The District must direct school officials to develop a Comprehensive Safe School Plan complying with the requirements of SB 187 and EC 35294.2 (Figure 1).
- R-2 School policies, Staff Guide, Discipline Code (rules), Athlete's Code Agreement and Student/Parent Contract all require appropriate updating as outlined in F-2. As an aside, it is noted that the signature page of the Student/Parent contract is not offered in Spanish. Considering the school's 73% Latino population, some Spanish-speaking signers may not understand what they are being requested to sign.
- R-3 To ensure daytime campus security, it is recommended that the District add a minimum of two additional full-time campus supervisors (one morning duty and on afternoon). This addition will help alleviate the inadequacy of the present security system. With four campus supervisors present during the lunch break the campus, its parking lots, fields, and open perimeters will be better controlled/protected.
- R-4 In response to the survey indicating that 73% of students would feel safer if everyone was checked for weapons upon entry, it is recommended that the school institute a daily weapon monitoring program, possibly of backpacks in rotating classrooms.
- R-5 Once a Safe School Plan complying with SB 187 is in place, it is recommended that the District apply for a Safe School Plan Implementation Grant through the State to re-establish its expiring on-call law enforcement/mentor program.
- R-6 To ensure the security of students and staff, it is recommended that the District equip every classroom within the campus with direct access to the main office. To minimize cost, the additional phones could be set up as extensions of the existing lines in adjoining classrooms. If approached by the District, the phone company might consider donating the necessary equipment.
- R-7 The County has a Safety Coordinator (provided through the Self-Funding Authority) available, upon request, who will

provide a safety assessment of any County school and make recommendations for improvement (805/383-1970). This service should be utilized to obtain recommendations regarding the placement of additional lighting and/or surveillance equipment to protect the campus from night-time intrusion.

It is further recommended that the District extend the present alarm system to include classrooms to protect the teaching staff from the possibility of early-morning and weekend intruders lying in wait, as well as to protect school property from vandalism.

- R-8 Since Fillmore High School has already experienced a pipe bomb incident, the District should send the school's custodial team to training seminars to prepare the employees who would be most likely to discover such devices.
- R-9 To monitor inappropriate student activity and to control the school's present graffiti problem, the District should install, when budget permits, a surveillance camera behind the gymnasium.
- R-10 It is recommended that the District and City of Fillmore work together to close Second Street to block public access into school property.
- R-11 Although the school is located in a bucolic, close-knit community, it is not free of security concerns. Campus shootings often occur where they are least expected. Since ensuring student security is the responsibility of every School Board, it is recommended that the Fillmore Unified School District seriously consider fencing and securing the extensive, sprawling grounds of Fillmore High School to properly protect its charges.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools, Fillmore Unified School District
 Fillmore City Council
 Principal, Fillmore High School

PLEASANT VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT El Rancho Structured School

Background

El Rancho, a well-maintained 25 year-old school serving grades K-6, is located in central Camarillo, 15 miles southeast of the city of

Ventura. The school, administered by a principal and supported by a teaching staff of 22, serves a student population of 430.

While an elementary school within this District had a weapon assault incident during the 1997-1998 school year, that incident did not occur at El Rancho. El Rancho had no weapon-related possession or assault incidents during the 1997-1998 school year.

Interviews regarding safety issues, held with the principal, two teachers, a noon supervisor and custodian, indicated the following:

- For three years the school has had in place a voluntary school uniform policy to discourage a climate of violence through the control of gang attire. Program participation, however, is currently only 25% and basically centered within the lower grades.
- School has access to a District psychologist who serves as a member of the Student Study Team which assists students with academic and/or behavioral problems.
- Teachers are connected to the main office through the use of intercoms. The school has in place, and is using, an emergency code system.

Findings

- F-1 The school's Comprehensive Safe School Plan is missing the key elements required by SB-187 and EC 35294.2. While these elements are referred to within the school's plan Addendum as "being in place," or "pursuant to Education code," these various policies, procedures, and regulations are not "inserted into plan" or "included in plan" as set forth in SB-187.

In addition: 1) there is no evidence that the plan was developed with the involvement of local law enforcement in compliance with EC 35294.1(b)(3), or 2) that a public meeting was held prior to approval of the school's plan by the School Site Council in compliance with EC 35294.8.

The Pleasant Valley Elementary School District did not participate in the safe school planning workshops provided by the office of the County Superintendent of Schools (Figure 2); County records reflect no registration or seminar attendance.

Note: *It is acknowledged that in February 1998 the Pleasant Valley Elementary School District received a favorable Coordinated Compliance Review assessment by the California Department of Education as a Safe and Drug Free School. That review, however, was unrelated to the Comprehensive Safe School Program (involving the establishment of a Safe School plan meeting*

the specific requirements of SB-187, including defined weapon expulsion criteria) which was the focus of this investigation.

- F-2 The school's Parent Handbook does not list length of time that students can be expelled for weapon possession. Weapon possession expulsion may be for a year's duration, or in excess of one year for firearm possession, as set forth in EC 48915 (a) and (c) and EC 48916(a).
- F-3 School rules advise "...leave weapons, toy weapons, or any instrument that could be dangerous at home," but make no mention that a violation could result in a one-year expulsion (or in excess of one year if the weapon is a firearm), in accordance with EC 48915(a) and (c) and EC 48916(a).
- F-4 No reference to weapons or the consequences of bringing them to school is made in the Student/Parent/School Compact (agreement).
- F-5 The school's security staff (four noon aides) is present on campus a total of 1.5 hours a school day to monitor lunch-time activity only. Their job assignment includes no presence before or after lunch. Monitoring the entry and departure of students, as well as AM/PM recesses, is the responsibility of the principal and four alternating teachers.
- F-6 The school has no weapon monitoring program in place; yet 29% of the students surveyed reported they had either seen a weapon at school or had heard another student threaten or brag about bringing one. While 79% reported feeling safe at school, 50% responded they would feel even safer if "everyone was checked for weapons upon entry." Suggestions for improving school safety (such as "weapon checks" or "metal detectors") were also offered by 50% of the students.
- F-7 Of the students surveyed, 46% indicated that the rules regarding bringing weapons had not been discussed, or they didn't remember if they had been; and 33% were unaware a student could be expelled for up-to-one year for bringing a weapon to school.
- F-8 While the school is protected by fencing, its gates are unlocked while school is in session. This situation permits unmonitored visitor entry.
- F-9 No building or classroom is equipped with night alarms.
- F-10 The principal has no primary designee. Currently her assistant is another principal located five miles away.
- F-11 The school's custodian has received no training in the recognition and handling of bombs/incendiary devices.

Conclusions

The school's Safe School Plan and its various guidelines, as presently written, are incomplete and not in compliance with SB 187. Additionally, its daytime/night-time security systems are inadequate.

Recommendations

- R-1 The District must direct school officials to develop a Comprehensive Safe School Plan complying with the requirements of SB 187 and EC 35294.2. Planning information should be requested from the office of the County Superintendent of Schools.
- R-2 The Parent Handbook requires updating at next revision to include the consequence of student expulsion for bringing weapons to school as outlined in F-2.
- R-3 School rules require updating to include weapon expulsion consequences as outlined in F-3.
- R-4 The Student/Parent/School Compact requires, at next revision, the inclusion of "weapons" and the related expulsion consequences to students for bringing them to school in conformance with EC 48915(a) and (c) as well as EC 48916(a).
- R-5 The District should considerably increase the hours of the school's security force and redefine its duties to include patrol of buildings, the parking lot, and the school's perimeters. These aides should be provided with hand-held radios.
- R-6 Considering that half of the students participating in the representative survey indicated they would feel safer if "everyone was checked for weapons when they entered," the school should consider instituting a weapon monitoring policy. This could be accomplished on a daily basis by checking representative students, drawn by lot, from rotating upper-grade classrooms.
- R-7 Gates which presently allow campus entry should be secured during the school session to restrict visitor-monitored entry to the front entrance.
- R-8 Considering that the majority of students reported that school rules regarding weapons either weren't discussed or they were unsure if they had been, increased emphasis should be placed upon weapon discussions, including the associated consequences.
- R-9 Since the night alarm system was not reconnected after a building renovation of approximately two years ago, teachers and staff are presently at risk upon entry of encountering intruders

lying in wait and school property is subject to vandalism. The District must take immediate measures to correct this situation, and additionally, to expand the school's alarm system to include classrooms.

R-10 The District should either provide the principal with an assistant or provide a lead teacher as her resident primary designee.

R-11 The school's custodial staff should be provided with bomb education workshops to prepare the employees most likely to encounter such devices on campus.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools, Pleasant Valley
Elementary School District
Principal, El Rancho Elementary School

PLEASANT VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT Monte Vista Intermediate School

Background

Monte Vista Intermediate is a clean, well-controlled and well-administered middle school serving grades 6-8 located in central Camarillo, 15 miles southeast of the City of Ventura. The 32 year-old school supports a student population of 694 and reportedly has a very high graduation rate. It is administered by a principal and assistant principal and has a teaching staff of 25. During the 1997-1998 school year the school had one weapon incident which led to a student expulsion, but experienced no weapon assaults.

Interviews held with the principal, two teachers, counselor, campus supervisor, and the school's custodian indicated the following:

- The campus features a three quad-spoke design around the central quad. School is fenced and gates are locked during the school day. Visitor entry is monitored at the main office, and students are not allowed to leave campus during the lunch period.
- Campus security consists of three campus supervisors with a combined daily presence of 16.5 hours. During lunch they are joined by a lunch-time-only assistant. These guards patrol the campus checking gates, the bike rack, buildings and bathrooms.
- Classrooms are connected to the main office by intercom and the school has an established emergency code system.

- Local law enforcement provides an anonymous hot line to students for reporting weapon information.
- The school has a large community outreach program, including a Parent Institute which provides parent workshops in both Spanish and English for a variety of academic, behavioral, and family management issues.
- The school's counselor provides student counseling and also trains and oversees peer mediation groups formed to hear and resolve student behavioral problems.

Findings

F-1 The school's Comprehensive Safe School Plan lacks the key elements required by SB-187 and EC 35294.2. While these elements are referred to in the plan as "being in place," "in place at site," "pursuant to Education code," or "documented in handbooks on site," the referenced policies, procedures, and regulations are not "inserted into plan" or "included in plan," as required by SB 187. In addition:

- The plan was developed at the District level, not locally by a School Site Council or Safety Committee as required by EC 35294.2.
- The plan was not developed with the involvement of law enforcement local to the school in accordance with EC 35294.1 (b)(3).
- The plan was approved at a District Board meeting, not at the school site prior to School Site Council approval as required by EC 35294.8.

***Note:** It is acknowledged that in February 1998 the Pleasant Valley Elementary School District received a favorable Coordinated Compliance Review assessment by the California Department of Education as a Safe and Drug Free School. That review, however, was unrelated to the Comprehensive Safe School Program (involving the establishment of a Safe School Plan meeting specific requirements of SB-187, including defined weapon expulsion criteria) which was the focus of this investigation.*

F-2 The Student Agenda handbook's listing of the penalty for weapon possession (Page 16) makes no mention of the expulsion possibilities outlined in EC 48915(a) and (c) or EC 48916(a). The verbiage regarding possession of imitation firearms (page 17) as well as the expulsion statement on page 19, also do not include weapon expulsion possibilities. The School rules are also lacking weapon possession expulsion definitions.

- F-3 School does no weapon monitoring of students or lockers unless there is a suspicion to do so. The student survey, however, indicated the following regarding weapons:
- Weapons do have a presence on campus: 40% of students reported having seen a weapon at school, and 22% have heard another student either make a threat, or brag, about bringing one.
 - Although 76% of the students reported feeling safe at school, 48% reported they would feel even safer “if everyone was checked for weapons upon entering.” Of the written suggestions offered, 28% mentioned “metal detectors.”
- F-4 Of the students reporting, 64% were unaware a student could be expelled for up-to-one year for bringing a weapon to school.
- F-5 A campus trouble spot open to student misconduct was reported to be located behind Building R.
- F-6 The school’s custodial staff has received no training in the recognition and handling of bombs/incendiary devices.

Conclusions

The school’s Safe School plan and various guidelines as presently written are incomplete and not compliant with SB-187. In addition, weapon possession and the related expulsion consequences need to be clarified to both students and staff and included in the school’s handbooks, guides and rules.

Recommendations

- R-1 The District must direct school officials to develop a Comprehensive Safe School Plan in compliance with the requirements of SB-187 and EC 35294.2.
- R-2 Revision, at next printing, of the school’s Student Agenda to include weapon expulsion consequences as outlined in F-2.
- R-3 Considering that nearly half of the students participating in the representative survey indicated they would feel safer if “everyone was checked for weapons when they walked in,” the school should institute a policy of weapon monitoring. This could be accomplished on a daily basis by checking selected students, drawn by lot, from rotating classrooms.
- R-4 Since 64% of reporting students were unaware they could be expelled for up-to-one year for weapon possession, an increased emphasis should be made by the school to make

students fully aware of the serious consequences of bringing weapons to school.

R-5 The District should install, when budget allows, a surveillance camera at the rear of Building R to record student misconduct and protect school property from vandalism.

R-6 To better prepare the employees most likely to encounter such devices, the school's custodial staff should be provided with bomb education workshops.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools, Pleasant Valley
Elementary School District
Principal, Monte Vista Intermediate School

OXNARD UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT Oxnard High School

Background

In 1996 Oxnard High School moved into its new facility located approximately four miles southeast of the City of Ventura. The school is comprised of nine buildings: Performing Arts Center, library, Career Center, two gymnasiums (practice and competition), and four buildings which house classrooms. Its staff consists of a principal (a former graduate of the school) and four assistant principals, an on-site psychologist, counselors, and a teaching staff of 125.

The school supports a vast student population of 3,030. During the 1997-1998 school year Oxnard High experienced 11 weapon possession incidents (which resulted in six suspensions and five expulsions), but experienced no weapon assaults.

Interviews regarding issues of school safety held with the principal, two assistant principals, two teachers, school psychologist, counselor, campus supervisor, school resources officer, and a custodian disclosed the following:

- The school is fenced and gates are locked while school is in session.
- The school enforces a strict visitor monitoring policy which is controlled at front entrance.
- The campus has a closed-lunch policy.
- Oxnard High has participated in the Teen Court concept, which is available to all County middle and senior high schools, since

its introduction in 1995. Teen Court is a community-based early intervention program that directs minors who have not entered the Juvenile Justice System away from formal court while holding them accountable for their actions before a jury of their peers in a judicially-presided session. After hearing the facts of the case, a peer jury deliberates and determines sentencing. Sentencing includes restitution, victim apology, community service, educational/counseling programs, and serving in future Teen Court actions as a peer juror. Upon successful completion of peer sentencing the case against the accused is dismissed.

- The school has a 24-hour confidential hotline, accessed by campus law enforcement, which provides students the ability to report weapon information anonymously.
- For the last six years Oxnard High has actively employed a program of weapon monitoring, which was observed by the investigative subcommittee. Twice each day, an assistant principal randomly chooses a class and supervises a physical search of representative students. As letters of the alphabet are pulled from a container by a student of the class, students with surnames beginning with that letter rise, collect their personal items, and stand at the front of the room. When approximately ten students have been selected, they leave the room, accompanied by the assistant principal and the campus supervisors, and a search is conducted either in a hallway or an available bathroom. A male supervisor scans males, and a woman supervisor scans females by passing metal-detecting wands over each student's body. A search is also made of each student's backpack and/or personal belongings for any item that could be put to use as a weapon, and also for drugs.
- To improve campus safety the school has repeatedly applied for and been awarded various community, state and federal grants.
- As an outgrowth of community policing, for the past ten years Oxnard High School has had the presence of an unobtrusively armed School Resources Officer. This officer is identifiable, though not dressed in regulation uniform. In addition to law enforcement responsibilities, the officer also counsels students and parents and gives classroom presentations. This program is funded through a Partnership Grant with costs shared by the City of Oxnard and the school.
- The school's night security alarm system covers all buildings and classrooms and is monitored by a caretaker guard. Additionally, the campus and parking lots are well lit and classrooms are equipped with sensor lighting.

- The school has a custodial staff of nine that meets weekly with a District safety representative. The custodial staff recently received violence/anger management training.
- Classrooms are connected to the main office by an intercom system.

Findings

F-1 The school's Comprehensive Safe School Plan was developed at the school level with the active involvement of local law enforcement. The plan meets, in all respects, the requirements of SB- 187 and EC 35294.2; and evidence was provided that a public meeting was held prior to local approval. **Note:** *Three representatives of the District attended the safe schools training seminars provided by the County Superintendent of Schools.*

Various school guides and handouts, however, could better reflect and emphasize the intent of SB-187 regarding weapons and the consequences of bringing them to school as outlined in EC 48915(a) and (c) and EC 48916(a).

- F-2 The campus security force is comprised of a full-time lead (who briefs the staff daily and trains new employees) and a staff of eight with overlapping four-hour shifts. The total number of supervisors on campus at one time is five. Each supervisor is assigned to, and responsible for, a specific area including all buildings and bathrooms. Each carries a hand-held radio for communicating with one another and the School Resources Officer. During the lunch break the entire force is present and is supplemented by five administrators and up to five teachers.
- F-3 The school's custodial staff has not received formal bomb/incendiary recognition and handling training.

Conclusions

Oxnard High School is a well-run and well-administered school providing a safe environment for its students and staff. Considering its size and immense student population, however, its security staff needs to be expanded.

Student evaluation of school safety indicated the following:

- Students were well aware (77%) that a student could be removed from school for up to one year for bringing a weapon to school.
- Even with an on-going weapon monitoring system in place, 40% reported they had either seen a weapon at school, or had heard threats or bragging about bringing one.
- Even though provided with a mechanism for anonymous reporting, 80% of the participating students reported an unwillingness to report weapon information to authorities.

- While 75% reported they felt safe at school, 48% responded that they would feel even safer if everyone was monitored upon entry (indicating that a significant number of students would support an additional layer of security to ensure school safety).

Recommendations

- R-1 School guides and handbooks require revision at next printing as follows:
- **Student Planner** - Under “weapon discussion” on page 4, reword this reference to include “firearm,” and add the EC 48915(a) and (c) and EC 48916(a) expulsion requirement (in excess of one-year for firearms) in the expulsion discussion. These additions require emphasis, perhaps the use of **bold** print.
 - **Staff Guide** - Safe School Plan - Under “Discipline” add the expulsion requirements as outlined above in the discussion of weapon possession expulsion.
 - **Student Information Packet** - Reposition discussion of weapons to top of list, and emphasize zero tolerance, as is presently done for “fighting” (including page 13, Rules).
 - **School Rules** - Include “firearm” in the weapon discussion. Additionally, the weapons reference should be positioned closer to the top of the list, and emphasized by using either **bold** print, underlining, or placement inside a box.
- R-2 Currently, each member of the security force is responsible for guarding 375 students, a considerable assignment. It is therefore recommended that the District increase the security staff of Oxnard High School by the addition of a minimum of two additional guards to better protect the school’s students, staff and property.
- It is further recommended, when budget allows, that surveillance cameras be installed at the various blind spots located throughout the campus, and the school’s staff be provided with additional training in anger management.
- R-3 Considering the increased danger of explosives on school property, it is recommended that the District provide the school’s custodial staff (the employees most likely to encounter such devices) with bomb recognition and handling training.

Commendations

Oxnard High School, its administrators and staff, are to be commended for developing at the local level a Comprehensive Safe School Plan which meets the requirements of SB-187, as well as for the excel-

lent job they are doing in managing and protecting a campus and student population as large as is housed at this school. Based upon the evidence provided, as well as operational observations, the subcommittee concluded that the school and its district are thoroughly committed to the safety of their charges.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools,
Oxnard High School District

Principal, Oxnard High School

Summary Conclusion

Four of the six schools (67%) within the three County school districts visited had either incomplete or non-compliant Safe School Plans in place (based upon the requirements of SB-187 and EC 35294.2). This indicates a lack of commitment to the tenets of the Federal Gun Free Schools Act, Senate Bill 187, as well as the requirements of the educational code—which is both disappointing and disturbing.

A review of the combined results of all six student surveys revealed the following regarding Ventura County public schools:

- **Weapons have a presence on County school grounds:** 30% of the students from the combined six schools have actually seen a weapon at school, or have heard threats or bragging from another student about bringing one to school. Percentages by school level:
 - Elementary level = 22%
 - Middle School level = 23%
 - High School level = 44%

Obviously, weapon presence doubles at the high school level.

- With regard to reporting knowledge of weapons to either teachers or principal, 50% of the students would come forth. Percentages by school levels:
 - Elementary level = 70%
 - Middle School level = 62%
 - High School level = 18%

Obviously, willingness to report weapon incidents seriously decreases at the high school level.

Note: Willingness to report increased to 58% overall if anonymous reporting was available (“800” number).

- The overall percentage of students who reported feeling “safe” at school was 78%. Percentages by school level:
 - Elementary level = 76%
 - Middle School level = 76%
 - High School level = 82%

Note: *Even though 78% of the students at all school levels reported feeling safe, 58% of combined students also reported they would feel even safer if provided increased security (daily weapon checks, metal detectors, cameras and/or additional guards being the majority of write-in suggestions).*

No school within Ventura County can afford to assume an aura of false security based upon the events of the past. Children of today live in a gun-oriented society and are surrounded by violence exemplified in action movies, television, cartoons, video games, music lyrics and even the Internet. They are also struggling with the pressures of approaching adulthood, the unknown, fear of failure, sexuality, peer pressure and acceptance. It is a very difficult time.

While the County’s school children generally reported feeling safe while at school, a significant number of these same students also requested that additional security measures be provided at their schools. Beyond addressing physical security needs, County schools must also form partnerships with the community and local law enforcement (if they have not already done so) to offer such preventive programs as anger management and peer resolution for at-risk students and those poised at the edge.

It is imperative that all Ventura County’s public school districts accept the responsibility and challenge of providing the charges left in their care with the highest level of school security possible. They cannot afford to wait until circumstances compel them to act.

Summary Recommendations to all County School Districts

The investigation into the safety of County public schools did not, and could not, cover its 200+ schools. Districts which were not visited must assume the following responsibilities:

- R-1 Assess the Safe School Plans for all of their schools to determine that each meets the requirements of SB 187 (Figure 1). If school plans are found to be inadequate, material which was provided by the County Superintendent of Schools’ training seminars, or a rescheduling of the planning seminar, should be requested of that office.
- R-2 Every effort should be made to increase each school’s support services. The availability and presence of psychologists and

counselors at each school site should be increased in order to identify and treat students exhibiting early warning symptoms that may lead to school violence. Currently many schools have available only a rotating psychologist who serves all of the districts' many schools. Additionally, many counselors, who are responsible for their school's entire student population, are required to spend the majority of their time administering special education testing. They cannot, therefore, reasonably be expected to adequately identify and assist alienated and disaffected students.

- R-3 Utilize the services of the County's VCSSFA Safety Coordinator (800/383-1970) to evaluate the current effectiveness and adequacy of each school's daytime and night-time security systems.
- R-4 Administer at each of their schools a student survey similar to Figure 3 to gain insight into the presence of weapons, the level of student willingness to report weapons, the level of student understanding of weapon expulsion consequences, the degree of student perception of weapon safety, and to solicit student suggestions for improving school safety at all school sites.

Responses Required

Board of Trustees and Superintendent of Schools,
 Briggs Elementary School District
 Conejo Valley Unified School District
 Hueneme Elementary School District
 Mesa Union Elementary School District
 Moorpark Unified School District
 Mupu Elementary School District
 Oak Park Unified School District
 Ocean View Elementary School District
 Ojai Unified School District
 Oxnard Elementary School District
 Rio Elementary School District
 Santa Clara Elementary School District
 Santa Paula Elementary School District
 Santa Paula Union High School District
 Simi Valley Unified School District
 Somis Union Elementary School District
 Ventura Unified School District

STUDENT SURVEY SHEET (Grades 5 - 12)

1. Has your teacher discussed the school rules about guns and weapons with your class?
YES _____ NO _____ DON'T REMEMBER _____
2. Could a student be removed from school for up to a whole year for bringing a weapon (knife or gun) to school?
YES _____ NO _____ NOT SURE _____
3. Have you ever actually seen a student with a weapon at your school?
YES _____ NO _____
4. Have you ever heard another student brag about having a gun or knife at school?
YES _____ NO _____
5. Have you ever heard another student make threats about bringing a gun or knife to school?
YES _____ NO _____
6. If you knew or suspected that someone at-school had a weapon, would you report it to someone in charge?
YES _____ NO _____ NOT SURE _____
7. If there was a phone number you could call and leave a message without saying who you were, would you use it to report a weapon problem at school?
YES _____ NO _____ NOT SURE _____
8. Do you feel safe when you are at school?
YES _____ NO _____ NOT SURE _____
9. Would you feel safer at school if you knew there were no weapons because everyone was checked for weapons when they walked in?
YES _____ NO _____ NOT SURE _____
10. What do you think could be done to make school safer?

Figure 3-Student Survey

