

Safety Measures in Petaluma City Schools

Every year, each school in the Petaluma City Schools District creates a **Safe School Plan**. This document contains details for staff and student behavior expectations in the event of a site emergency such as an earthquake. School staff conducts drills so that students can practice the expected behavior, and these drills are evaluated by staff and, at times, by public safety officials, for efficiency and best practices. The Safe School Plan also contains information regarding student supervision practices, safe drop-off and pick-up procedures, and inspection of the facility for potential hazards. Staff, parents, students, and public safety officials participate in the creation of these annual plans. An additional measure added at the district level is an emergency phone dialer. This system allows us to call every family and staff member in the district in less than an hour with a short message. During the 2009-2010 school year, PCS was the lead agency in the creation of the **Petaluma Region Emergency Preparedness** consortium to improve school emergency readiness and response to crises. This consortium, comprised of all Petaluma area school districts, community safety, and mental health partners, applied for and received a two-year \$585,000 grant for staff training, creation of regional infrastructure, emergency/evacuation plan evaluations, and after effect preparations

The issues that are addressed for each site as they create their Safe School Plan are based on data collected during the previous year. Statistics detailing student behaviors, surveys of staff, parents and students, and information from the **California Healthy Kids Survey** (a state survey given every other year to 5th, 7th, 9th, and 11th graders) are among the many sources sites use as they prioritize the use of resources to maintain campus safety. School staff consults with other schools, district office staff, and attend training and seminars to stay current with new trends and current techniques and incorporate applicable information into their annual plan.

The Safe School Plan is one of many practices schools perform to increase the safety of all students in our schools. Among the preventative measures in place is information shared with students and parents regarding expected and accepted campus behavior. Referencing the behavior sections of the **California Education Code**, our schools detail student behavior “do’s and don’ts” on an annual basis in registration information, student handbooks, and in newsletters. Many of our campuses use the **BEST (Building Effective Schools Together) Program** philosophy of focusing campus behaviors with three guidelines: be safe, be respectful, be responsible. Students are encouraged to ask themselves if the behavior they are planning or participating in is safe, respectful, or responsible. If not, they should stop or consider another behavior. To address Internet safety, district-wide, our students and their parents receive information about how to safely navigate the “net” and use technology as a positive tool based on the **Internet Safety Standards** that are part of our Technology Plan and reinforced by our librarians. Parents are required to provide signed permission before students are allowed to use the Internet at school.

Also directed at student behavior is the **Caring School Communities** program. Our elementary principals participated in a training for this program in 2007, and all elementary sites, using grant funding, have implemented this program. The program encourages class discussion regarding behavior expectations and empathy focusing on classroom issues such as interrupting the teacher, teasing, and bullying. The program not only leads to more positive school behavior, it also builds students’ social skills and commitment to responsibility helpfulness, and respect. The Caring School Community program is a nationally-recognized, research-based K-6 program that builds classroom and school wide community. The classroom meetings are designed to provide teachers and students with a forum to get to know one another, discuss issues, identify and solve problems, and make

decisions that affect the classroom climate. A positive school culture gives students the academic edge and the prevention edge.

Annually, the Director of Student Services meets with every teaching staff in the beginning of each school year to review safe classroom practices. This training includes discussion on PFT contract, Board Policy, and Education Code stipulations for accepted practice in creating safe and productive classrooms environments. In 2009, this training also included the implementation of a common referral form and process for using disciplinary referrals as an intervention tool and as a form of data collection.

In addition to programs focused on social behavior, there are many programs at each level focused on trying to prevent student use of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol. **Project Alert**, and **Toward No Drugs** are in place at the junior high, and high school levels respectively. The junior high and high school programs are researched-based and are taught by teachers that have received program training. Junior high teachers and high school Human Interaction teachers have incorporated these programs into their curriculum for the year. At the elementary level, the **DARE and Red Ribbon Week** programs not only delivers information on the perils of smoking, drinking alcohol, and drug use, but also provides the outstanding opportunity for our students to have contact with members of the **Petaluma Police Department** on a regular basis. **Project Success** is in place at both comprehensive high schools, both junior highs and San Antonio, providing on site screening, group counseling and referral services for substance use as well as mental health issues. The **McDowell Drug Task Force, Courage to Live, Every 15 Minutes, Alive at 25, DUI Sentencing Program** and a multitude of additional rallies and presentations add to the prevention activities used in our schools.

To support the programs that are in use, our district has a variety of counseling and support staff in place to work with individuals and small groups. Site administrators are knowledgeable about site supervision techniques and preventative practices. Principals and Assistant Principals at all of our schools are constantly attentive to reducing or eliminating uninvited campus visitors as well as being skilled in conflict remediation and investigations of reported inappropriate behavior or objects on campus. Administrators on each campus are charged with the daily responsibility of ensuring that students are in a safe learning environment. They rely on teachers and other staff, parents, and students to share in this responsibility by alerting them of potentially dangerous situations. Many sites have anonymous tip lines and other techniques for keeping the identity of information sources confidential.

Using a mix of General Fund and grant monies, we have four **Lead Guidance Specialists** providing support for our K-12 schools. Two of these Specialists are supporting the Caring Schools Community Program, BEST, and Tool Box programs in our elementary schools as well as providing students one-to-one and small group counseling, classroom presentations, parent education, and professional development opportunities for school staff addressing mental health concerns. For our 7-12 schools, one of the Specialists is coordinating the Project Success program as well as spear-heading other substance use intervention activities. The fourth Specialist is providing mental health support for our 7-12 students and their families, including one-to-one and small group services as well as working with parents. All of the Specialists are supervising a cadre of MFT Interns, more than 15 placed throughout the district providing supervised mental health and substance use intervention services. All four Specialists are also trained in Crisis Response techniques and are available to support site staff when necessary.

During the 2008 – 2009 school year, the elementary principals drafted and adopted a common **K-6 discipline guideline rubric** and a **common discipline referral form**. These tools have been in place for over a decade at the 7-12 level and are continually revised and updated as improvements are identified and as laws change. This allows to standardize dispositions, intervention and prevention strategies. Also, all district schools are using the same series of truancy letters to address attendance issues, and common language for behavior contracts has been adopted and is in place.

Our schools also use resources or interventions directed at students who need more support to be successful at school. **Small Learning Communities** in our high schools, **Counselors, District Guidance Specialist, Project Tuff, Mentor Me, and Petaluma People Services, Counseling Interns, Speak Up, and Challenge Day** are among a variety of programs, services and direct contact available for students and their families to promote safe and productive behavior. Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, the **Safe School Ambassador Program** was added at three school sites as a pilot follow-up to Challenge Day activities. Staff has worked with law enforcement, mental health, school staff, and many other sources to develop a **Threat Assessment** process and document to give us a systematic method for evaluating student behavior. At each of our alternative school campuses, we maintain smaller student teacher ratios and increased counseling support. All of our district staff and the community resources we utilize use the **40 Developmental Assets** as an intervention strategy. **The Search Institute's** 40 Developmental Assets are concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young people. These assets have the power during critical adolescent years to influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults.

Other specific programs that we utilize include the **Sonoma County Office of Education Clean and Sober Classroom** (which provides academic and counseling services for students dealing with substance use/abuse and working at staying clean and sober) and **Court and Community School Classroom**, the **Adolescent Expansion Program** which provides counseling for teens struggling with substance use as well as a **Parent Support Group for parents of Teens**. **The Parent Project** is offered through Petaluma People Services which is a program to assist parents in parenting challenging teens.

At our junior high and high school campuses, we have campus supervisors that patrol our campuses during the day (including several former police officers). Our campus supervisors, student advisors, and secondary AP's participate in an **Annual Campus Supervisor Training** focus on peer conflict intervention, safety, and identifying signs of substance use. We are in the second year of a **Parent Volunteer Program** at one campus for 2011-2012 that will support campus staff in campus supervision and classroom assistance; it is the intent that this program will serve as a model of best practice to be replicated throughout the district. During the current economic downturn, the **Petaluma Police Department** has removed the School Resource Officers from our sites; however, we continue to work closely with PPD for ongoing campus safety, incident response, and planning for crisis situations. Site staff members are supported at the district level by administrators with connections to other community services such as the **Sonoma County Juvenile Justice** system, the **District Attorney's Office**, and the **Sonoma County Mental Health Department**.

While these programs and staff are very effective, the most important component of campus safety is the parents and guardians of our students. Parents and guardians who engage their student in conversation about the details of their school day, their social interactions, their experiences, and what they see and hear are the most effective tactic in keeping our campuses safe. Talking with children about what they see, hear, and do at school yields the wonderful behavior we see during the vast

majority of our school hours. Families that discuss with their children the specifics about what types of objects can and can't go to school keeps dangerous items off of our campuses. And children who practice kindness and respect at home are obvious as they display the same behaviors in the classroom. If you are a parent or guardian and would like some suggestions regarding how you can support student safety, contact your school's office and ask to speak to a counselor or administrator.