

May 14, 2018

### **RE: Safety Update**

Dear SDUHSD Families,

Throughout this school year, and well before the event in Florida, the San Dieguito Union High School District undertook a comprehensive, coordinated effort to improve safety and reduce violence at schools.

We believe this must involve a community-wide strategy involving parents, schools, districts, and elected officials to take meaningful action to enhance services to students, support physical, mental, and emotional health, and prevent violence at schools. Our Board of Trustees considered a [resolution to support student safety and prevent school violence](#) in March. This resolution was adopted by a majority vote and sent to state and federal elected officials.

I am working with several superintendents to build a common approach throughout the county in how we address and discuss these issues as we work to improve school climate, student connectedness, and physical safety.

Our teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other staff do an amazing job supporting the social-emotional wellbeing of our students. By identifying and supporting kids who need help, we can prevent tragedies and also reach the broader range of students who are struggling but would never commit an act of violence against themselves or others.

Our students often are aware of the problems their peers are facing, so we must empower them to know the danger signs and give them the tools to help each other with the assistance of trained and caring adults.

### **Sandy Hook Promise**

We are moving forward with a partnership with Sandy Hook Promise, a nation-wide organization that works to prevent school violence by building connections between students, teaching them the signs of potential harm, and empowering them to take action when they have a concern for one of their peers.

This program is already in place in all 50 states in schools serving over 3.5 million students. They have a track record, a reputation, and knowledge of how to work effectively with kids, parents, and teachers to improve school culture. The programs are age-appropriate, research-based, peer-reviewed and they have partnered with universities to study the short and long-term results. They also have funding to sustain the programs into the future.

These programs are about prevention with a focus on identifying and intervening with individuals who may be at-risk of hurting themselves or others. Unlike other programs that offer no ongoing support, Sandy Hook Promise offers training to students and staff at no cost to continually support the efforts of recognizing signs and signals of at-risk behavior.

- **Start With Hello** is an evidence-based program targeted at middle school students and offers a number of activities and practices to improve connection between students and reduce bullying and harassment. This also continues into the high school years.

- **Signs of Suicide** is a prevention program that is focused more on high school students that helps kids and staff recognize the warning signs in students and how to take action to get help.
- **Say Something** also educates on signs and signals of potential harm, particularly in social media, and educates students on how to take action to prevent violence
- **Say Something Anonymous Reporting System** is an app, website, and 24/7 crisis center that takes tips and responds to the information with mental health, law enforcement, and school officials to intervene as appropriate, with concern for both life-threatening and non-life threatening reports. The system tracks both reports and interventions.

As you can see, these are student-focused and student-led programs. Sandy Hook Promise works through existing clubs on campus to help spread their message and also offers presentations and resources for parents. The staff training component will supplement our existing suicide prevention policy and the work we already do to build student connectedness at each campus.

Our principals are working with Sandy Hook Promise to roll out these programs with students and staff next year. Look for more information from your school.

### **Visitor Access and Identification**

Another new innovation which will be implemented next year is a new visitor identification system. While we currently have a paper process for visitors to sign in with the front office, we will be requiring visitors to scan their driver license and wear a visitor ID badge which will also display their photo. This system checks the identification against national databases to ensure the visitor is not barred from entering a school campus.

The most important aspect of a good security plan is tight access control. Many of our schools are capable of securing their perimeters to limit the number of entrances during the school day, while others will require additional fencing and hardware to reach that goal.

The Board of Trustees authorized the issuance and use of bond funds for the purpose of improving the physical safety of our schools. The Board approved a contract with an independent school security consultant to conduct a comprehensive, district-wide assessment of our security practices and the physical security of each campus. They have also authorized contracts with architects to design improved fencing around our more open campuses and a contract to pilot a surveillance system which could be expanded to other schools.

As we move toward restricting access through securing perimeter gates during the school day and strengthening our visitor registration process, this may cause some inconvenience to staff, students, and parents. This will be a culture shift, but we can all agree that safety takes precedence over convenience.

### **Emergency Plans**

School emergency plans are living documents that evolve over time as new practices develop to improve school safety. Our Risk Management department is reviewing and revising our current school safety plans to update best practices in a number of areas and discussing the plans with public safety officials. These revisions will be complete before the end of the school year to be incorporated in next year's version of the plan. School staff will be trained on the emergency plans in the fall.

### **Active Shooter Protocol**

Our current plans to address intruders and active shooter events are focused mainly on lockdown procedures. The Department of Homeland Security recommends a "Run-Hide-Fight" strategy that recognizes that there are more options than to just lockdown. Our safety plans will be updated with this protocol this spring to be implemented at the beginning of the next school year.

These best practices were established after thorough, thoughtful discussion and research among education and law enforcement leaders in our community. This work was based on research and guidance from federal experts in law enforcement, education, and emergency management.

Run-Hide-Fight means:

- If you can do so safely, “run” to a safe location.
- If you can’t run, “hide” or lockdown in a secure location and barricade.
- If you have no safer option, “fight”, use violent force to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter.

The core focus of options-based responses is training the adults on campus to make these decisions. It does not mean training our students to fight an armed intruder. We have sent several administrators to Run-Hide-Fight training to become trainers in this protocol. Training will be offered to staff so they can be equipped to choose the response option that best protects students and staff.

While it is our hope that we will never need to respond to an armed intruder, we will support the actions our teachers and staff take as crisis situations unfold.

### **Social Emotional Learning Advisory Group**

The conversation on improving school climate and safety must always begin and end with student social-emotional learning and wellness. We are continually working to develop and refine our systems to support all students. We have convened a volunteer group of parents and student support staff to provide input and advice from their many perspectives on our efforts. We will meet with them several times a year as we implement and refine our support systems and student connectedness programs.

Thank you for your attention on these important topics. If you have ideas or concerns, I encourage you to raise them with your school administrators.

Regards,  
Eric Dill, Superintendent