

West Side Union School District


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Rhonda Bellmer, Superintendent/Principal

TO: The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury

FROM: Rhonda Bellmer, Superintendent/Principal 
 West Side Union School District

RE: **Response to Grand Jury Report**
Disaster will Strike! Are Schools Ready?

DATE: September 8, 2008

Recommendation 5: Superintendents must require that each school develop a disaster emergency plan designed for their school, and assure that the principal has approved the plan.

The West Side Union School District agrees with this recommendation. WSUSD operates one school, so the Superintendent/Principal is responsible for the school's plan.

West Side School experienced a significant fire on October 7, 2007. Prior to the fire, the new administrator was in the process of updating the district's Comprehensive School Safety Plan. The district's safety committee had attended several inservice trainings sponsored by Sonoma County Office of Education for developing NIMS/SEMS compliant plans. The drafts of the plan were destroyed in the fire. Immediately after the fire, a temporary disaster emergency plan was put in place with assistance from Redwood Empire Schools Insurance Group (RESIG). Due to the increased demands for time and energy due to the fire, we are presently behind on the annual update on the written plan. We do, however, update annually at the beginning of the school year all relevant emergency documents for the Emergency Folder kept in each emergency backpack. When the reconstruction is completed in December 2008, the district will need to update all plans reflecting changes in the school's physical layout and site plan, location of fire extinguishers, and revised plan for safe egress and ingress.

Recommendation 6: SCOE, Superintendents and Principals must consider disaster preparedness a top priority.

The West Side Union School District agrees with this recommendation.

Our district has always treated disaster preparedness as a high priority, and the fire reinforced our awareness of the importance of our practices. Our recent safety inspection by RESIG reflects our

school's commitment and attention to campus safety for our students. Each classroom is equipped with emergency backpacks and handbooks. Earthquake tie-downs are in place in all locations. All drills are conducted monthly and quarterly as mandated. Several years ago, we established a format for receiving feedback from all staff after each drill. This has enabled the district to fully benefit from drills and practice. Since the fire, our school has had to utilize several temporary bell systems, and each system presented unique challenges. Our safety committee's current goal is to provide 72 hours of food and a blanket for each student, and to revise our lock-down procedure in light of temporary changes to the campus as a result of the fire.

Recommendation 7: All schools must train their personnel in disaster preparedness.

The West Side Union School District agrees with this recommendation.

The recommendation has been implemented. Each year, prior to the start of school, all employees receive update training in emergency preparedness--Safety in the Workplace, Bloodborne Pathogens, Mandated Reporting, and preventing sexual harassment. RESIG's Schoolguard Emergency Plan Quick Reference Guide is reviewed. The district's Emergency Reponse Team (ERT) Chart of Responsibilities is reviewed and updated. Key staff walk through all gas and power shut-off routines. Our school nurse provides our annual update on Anaphylaxis and use of the Epi-Pen. CPR and First Aid training and certification is offered every two years, and new hires are referred to training when hired without certification. Two employees have been through CERT training. Our staff desire more in-depth training on each of the various ERT roles. This year, our entire safety committee will be attending the SCOPE/ERT training offered through RESIG.

Recommendation 8: Annually, all schools must check emergency supplies to assure that they are adequate. Consumable supplies must be checked for freshness and safety.

The West Side Union School District agrees with this recommendation.

The recommendation has been fully implemented. Prior to the start of school, employees receive updated emergency documents for their classrooms and other locations. Each location has a supply of emergency water. The emergency backpacks and first aid supplies are inventoried and replenished before the first day of school. As mentioned, after the completion of our reconstruction this December, we will have room to stockpile 72 hours worth of food and one blanket for each child.

In conclusion, I must admit that keeping up on the plans and paperwork end of disaster and emergency preparedness can be challenging. Although the plan document is important, it is equally important that it is not just a binder on the shelf with no practical application in the school setting. The attitude and approach to awareness and commitment to school safety and preparedness starts at the top with the administrator. It is important to continually refine and improve the practices and procedures, and to have them in every ones head. In a real emergency, there is no time to look for the binder and plan, and the organization of the staff into the emergency team is possibly the most important element of the plan.

Presented to the West Side Union Board of Trustees for review, September 11, 2008.