

**A Report to the Governing Board
Of the
William S. Hart Union High School District**

**“Recommendations to the District:
Enhancing Plans and Procedures for the Prevention of
Targeted Campus Violence”**

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Prepared by:
Prince/Kallin Consultants
Patrick Prince
Joseph Wright
Benjamin Kallin
princekallinconsultants.com

Purpose:

Student safety has been a pillar of public education for many decades. Policy is written and procedures developed to ensure, to the extent possible, student safety and wellbeing. A new dimension was added to campus safety programs in the aftermath of the mass casualty shooting at Columbine High School in 1999. Educators and school administrators were forced to address the potential for active shooters and lethal, targeted violence within the educational community. After the tragic events at Saugus High School in November, 2019, the William S. Hart Union High School District initiated a process to review their safety and security processes. The purpose of this review was not to determine root cause or pertinent facts related to the November shooting. That is being addressed separately. Rather, this review was requested to provide objective recommendations to the District for enhancing District wide safety processes focusing on industry standards, best practices and evidence based research. To that end, the District collaborated with a small group of threat assessment professionals, who are nationally recognized as experts in campus violence prevention, to

1. Summarize research and best practices in the area of school safety and threat assessment,
2. Participate in community meetings to provide a framework to discuss current District processes,
3. Evaluate District plans, policies and procedures related to targeted violence prevention, and
4. Provide recommendations to the District for enhancing plans and procedures for campus violence prevention.

It is important to note that the assessment team recognizes that the District has had systems in place for quite some time that have been effective for the protection of students and staff. As well, initial reviews indicated that much of the District's work in this area has been determined to be appropriate and necessary for maintaining campus safety. It is the belief of this team that while there are areas where early identification and intervention with students experiencing crises or simply those with unmet needs can be improved upon, the District as a whole has policies and practices in place that create a solid foundation that the District can build on moving forward.

What follows are the summary of information gathered and recommendations determined after two community meetings, review of literature and interviews with District staff.

Community Meeting and Literature Review:

Summary of Town Hall Meetings

The Hart District hosted community meetings at the Santa Clarita Activities Center on February 24, 2020 and March 3, 2020. Three threat assessment professionals spoke about school safety prior to a listening session that lasted the rest of each evening. During each assembly, attendees rotated among four different stations to share their ideas and express their concerns with District and community representatives. Although the participants were encouraged to speak about any matter they cared to discuss, each of the four stations had a separate focus: communication, mental health and wellness, physical security and safety policies and procedures. These domains will be used to present recommendations for District improvement.

During the February meeting, participants praised the Saugus High School and Hart District response to the tragedy. Many of the parents and community members present asked for a more robust communication strategy to be put into place that is layered across several different platforms. Several people at this meeting asked for more connectivity to mental health supports outside of the district. Parents made it clear that they want the Districts' School Resource Officers to be as visible as possible, others ask for a consistent visitor management protocol for all of the schools. A common theme at this meeting was for the district to invest in student supports and be proactive with behavioral interventions.

The March meeting identified similar strengths of the district and many of the same suggestions. Many parents asked for information resources about emergency procedures so they would know what to expect if any of the schools experienced a critical incident in the future. Numerous suggestions related to strengthening the capacity to assist students with mental health supports. A record of notes taken at each meeting is attached to the end of this document.

Summary of Literature

There is a growing body of literature that examines the best practices for campus violence prevention. In addition to literature on anti-bullying, recognition of mental illness and psycho-social development, the assessment team considered research on best practices for preventing targeted violence. A short list of the more important and relevant articles is provided in the Appendix.

Central to research on school violence prevention is the recognition that violence prevention occurs long before a person is on campus with a lethal weapon. Put quite bluntly, armed personnel, metal detectors and safe rooms all are predicated on the failure to prevent. Many plans are designed with an acceptance of the horrible act and the goal becomes the intent to reduce the impact ("reduce casualties"). We believe that it is more important and more effective to have as our goal that the District take appropriate measures to prevent the act and have, to the best of our ability, no traumatic impact. This is not so much a philosophical perspective, it "is a painful, but nonetheless true fact, that once an attacker has entered a targeted school building with the intention of shooting someone, there is practically nothing, or very little, that can be done to avert the attack."¹

School districts are urged to create and implement effective threat assessment and management teams. "This approach is intended to identify students of concern, assess their risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and implement intervention strategies to manage that risk. The threshold for intervention should be low, so that schools can identify students in distress before their behavior escalates to the level of eliciting concerns about safety."²

The goal of threat assessment and violence prevention is more than deterrence of harm, it is the restoration of wellbeing and healthy functioning for both the persons of concern and those impacted by them. District teams co-headed by District mental health and student services professionals are key. Law enforcement does play a valuable role, but they cannot be seen as the only intervention option. While many will espouse physical security, on-site guards and law enforcement as the central features of the district planning, these are often found to be less practical than hoped for. “Because most of these attacks ended very quickly, law enforcement rarely had the opportunity to intervene before serious harm was caused to students or staff. Additionally, many of the schools that experienced these tragedies had implemented physical security measures (e.g., cameras, school resource officers, lockdown procedures). Prevention is key.”³

Prevention is the key. Effective threat assessment teams coupled with community wide involvement to provide a wide array of intervention options is the most effective approach to reducing the potential for targeting campus violence.

1. PASS Safety and Security Guidelines, 2012
2. Protecting America’s Schools: USSS Analysis of Targeted School Violence, 2019
3. Protecting America’s Schools: USSS Analysis of Targeted School Violence, 2019

Recommendations:

Mental Health and Wellness

1. Establish a **District Threat Assessment Team (DTAT)** that brings together appropriate resources to identify persons of concern, assess potential risk of violence and develop violence mitigation strategies. This team should meet bi-weekly during the academic year. The team should include:
 - Director of Student Services
 - Director of Counseling
 - Sheriff Department Representative
 - Member of LACDMH START

District Threat Assessment processes should be based on established, evidence based assessment and intervention approaches such as NaBITA, PBIS and/or MTSS-B. Training should be consistent with District approach and should include opportunities for case review and table top exercises.

The District Threat Assessment Team should adopt a violence assessment tool such as SIVRA or WAVR-21 to guide data gathering and risk mitigation strategies.

The District should utilize a system wide case management system for effective intake, assessment, mitigation response and case outcome documentation.

The District should provide on-going training (including table top exercises) to DTAT members.

2. Establish **School Care/Student Needs Teams** at each school site within the district to identify and refer students with unmet needs to early intervention resources as appropriate to reduce the risk of targeted violence. The “Needs Team” should meet, at a minimum, every other week for no less than one hour. The needs team should include:
 - Assistant Principal to act as head of the team.
 - Experienced state licensed therapist who can facilitate clinical discussion, identify and assist with intervention planning and case management.
 - Academic advisor
 - School Resource Officer

Provide training to all teachers and classified staff to identify and refer students with unmet needs to the “Needs Team” including topics such as youth mental health first aid, implicit bias, diversity and cultural awareness, trauma informed intervention.

3. Develop and implement a social and emotional learning modules as components of the existing health curriculum that is required for all incoming freshmen. This will aid in developing a culture of reporting while simultaneously ensuring that students, teachers and classified staff are aware of resources and reporting mechanisms while creating a culture of care and connection.

4. Where possible, assign an experienced licensed therapist, at the Masters or Doctoral level, to each school site for continuity of site awareness, ability to support “Needs Teams” and expansion of mental health capacity.
5. Consider District wide opportunities to provide trainings such as Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) or Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) which support a consistent framework for intervention across the district.
6. Develop and maintain relationships and communication with community resources such as Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, School Threat Assessment and Response Team (START) and other local mental health resources.
7. In order to maximize the effect of early intervention, it is recommended that the district engage in a Santa Clarita Valley-wide School Based Counseling (SBC) program that includes all the elementary school districts within the Santa Clarita Valley. By establishing a valley wide SBC program, it will enhance the ability for early identification and intervention for challenged students and create a continuity of care throughout the student’s matriculation from elementary school to junior high and high school.

Site Security

1. Partner with Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to provide School Resource Officers to the District
 - District should participate with Sheriff's Department in selection and training of SRO's.
 - All SRO's receive NASRO training
 - SRO's participate in District training for threat assessment, trauma informed response, emergency planning and related topics.
2. Develop Parent and Visitor Management Systems for each site within the District. Considerations should include identified access points, badging or similar identification mechanism, and escort protocols.
3. Enhance and maintain perimeter security for all District sites. All boundaries should be clearly marked with visible signage articulating District rules for entry and use.
 - Provide adequate fencing or appropriate barriers to secure all facilities.
 - Conduct regular, periodic maintenance checks.
4. Obtain and integrate camera systems into District schools.
 - Include ability of Administrators and Law Enforcement to view live feeds.
 - Assess scope of camera coverage to maximize effectiveness.
 - Maintain ability to record and store feeds.
5. Apply bullet resistant glass or glass covering to school windows.
 - Primary focus should be on outward facing windows (windows facing street and other public sight lines into school).
 - Secondary focus should be on internal (campus) facing windows.
6. Review signage within all school sites to insure consistency of message and accuracy of directions. Signs should indicate expectations for on campus conduct, emergency resources and routes for emergency evacuation.
7. Conduct an annual safety audit of each District site. The audit should include a check of the integrity of site perimeters and a review of safety plans and policies.

Policy and Training

1. The District should create policy that emphasizes that safety is a shared responsibility between all members of the educational community. The policy should reflect expectation of “upstanders” versus bystanders, as well as key behaviors such as “shelter in place”, “evacuate” and “lockdown”.
2. The District should implement District wide training for all staff to review “behaviors of concern” and appropriate reporting and intervention options.
3. Provide de-escalation and physical restraint training for all Administrators, Campus Security/SRO and Special Education Staff
 - Consider Mandt System, Handle with Care, or similar programs.
 - Identified personnel should be trained together to enhance teamwork and inter-reliance.
4. Provide District wide training on Trauma Informed Response and Diversity/Cultural Awareness. Ensure attendance by staff and teachers, as well as volunteers or others who will have campus presence.
5. Establish a cyber security capability. The District should develop the resources to monitor social media, screen for messages of concern and manage responses in coordination with local law enforcement.

Communication

1. Obtain a communication platform which allows emergency communications to potentially impacted groups (students, family, staff) both site specific and District wide.

Key areas for consideration are:

Ongoing Communication

- Mechanism for reporting a threat, threatening behavior or other safety concerns.
- Consider multiple modes of reporting including an anonymous line to the District.
- Mechanism for reporting concern for students in need (psycho-social resource).

Communication During an Incident

- Communication *format* needs to reflect a variety of media to maximize reach. Examples include Text, email, telephone, Facebook, Twitter, and Blackboard.
- Communication *source* needs to be clear and appropriate. Sources of communication include the District, school, and SCV Sheriff.
- Communications need to be appropriate for the *audience* of impacted community members. Separate strategies may be needed for students, staff, and/or parents.
- Consideration need be made for *type* of messages. Assess value of pre-recorded with simple instructions and balance with need for live situation updates.
- *Frequency* of messages must be considered. The District must navigate the challenge of providing periodic, on-going messages versus communicating when new information is learned.

Post Incident Communication

- Information regarding event *investigation* needs to be shared while balancing desire for information, privacy and ability to verify accuracy.
 - Information regarding resources for support and assistance must be communicated to students, parents, teachers and staff.
 - Creating consistent message for teachers and staff to share with students upon return to school.
2. Adopt a District wide reporting mechanism for students, faculty, staff and community to provide information regarding unmet student needs which may impact their and District safety.
 3. Re-brand Text a Tip. Text a Tip has been demonstrated to be an effective way for reports of potential threats to be shared directly with student's school administration. Enhance recognition of this tool as appropriate for situations beyond threats to safety.

Appendix

A. Town Hall Notes



CSD Meet
2-24-20.docx



CSD Meet
3-3-20.docx

B. List of Key Publications

- a. Protecting America's Schools: United States Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence; 2019
- b. Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence; 2018
- c. Final Report and Findings of the Safe Schools Initiative; 2002
- d. PASS Safety and Security Guidelines; 2018
- e. Early Warning; Timely Response (US DOE and US DOJ), 1998
- f. Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing and Managing the Threat of Targeted Violence, 2015
- g. Assessing Student Threats: A Handbook for Implementing the Salem-Kaiser System, 2011
- h. Lincoln Public Schools: District Threat Management, 2020