

Winters Joint Unified School District
Response of the Board of Trustees and the Superintendent
August 3, 2023
to Yolo County 2022-2023 Grand Jury Report:
“Are We There Yet? On the Road to School Safety”

Response to Findings

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *Each school district has implemented school hardening measures to some degree in addition to those discussed in the 2019-20 Yolo County Grand Jury report. The measures in place at school sites vary and can be improved. While some schools in each district have their sites enclosed or have security cameras, others do not. Fences may not be high enough to prevent students or intruders from jumping over them. In addition, gates at schools are sometimes not closed, locked or are in disrepair.*

The District agrees with this finding and is pleased to share that progress has already been made in enhancing the security infrastructure. Currently, we have security cameras installed at two of four schools, and we are committed to installing cameras at the remaining two schools in the 2023-2024 school year or potentially as part of our Facilities Master Planning (FMP) process that is currently underway. This will provide comprehensive surveillance coverage across all sites, further enhancing the safety of students and staff.

Moreover, we are actively working on upgrading security and facilities as part of our Facilities Master Plan process. This comprehensive plan ensures that security considerations are integrated into our overall efforts to improve the learning environment. We understand the importance of addressing concerns such as fencing height, gate functionality, and overall site enclosure to prevent unauthorized access and potential intrusions.

Finding 2: *Each school district conducts California Healthy Kids Surveys, while some use additional methods for assessing student mental health. The response rate of students completing such surveys, however, may not be enough to generate reliable conclusions about student mental health.*

The District partially agrees with this finding. To address this concern, we have taken proactive measures. In addition to utilizing the CHKS, Winters JUSD implemented the PASS Survey during the 2022-23 year to ensure we have comprehensive climate and social emotional wellness data to support our students. Furthermore, in the upcoming 2023-24 school year, we plan to continue using the CHKS while incorporating the

Youthtruth survey as well. Youthtruth is a nationally normed assessment that will help us compare results with similar communities as well as provide longitudinal data in the years to come. These additional measures will help us gather a more comprehensive understanding of student mental health.

While we have seen good student participation in the surveys, we recognize the need to continually improve participation rates, especially for families. We are committed to working diligently to enhance student engagement and ensure that a broader representation of students participate in these assessments. By doing so, we aim to gather more reliable data to inform our efforts in supporting the mental health needs of our students.

Finding 3: *California Education Code mandates that all school districts require visitors to go to a school's office upon arrival and wear identification while on site. At some Yolo County schools, however, the location of the school's office is not clear. Better signage is needed to direct visitors to the office. This is particularly important for schools, such as in the Davis, Winters and Woodland school districts, where sharing open space or parking lots can make clear signage and prevention of intruders from entering school grounds more challenging.*

The District partially agrees with this finding. In response to the findings of the grand jury from the school district regarding the need for better signage directing visitors to the school's office, the district acknowledges the importance of complying with California Education Code regulations. We are pleased to inform you that in three out of the four sites, visitors are required to enter the campus through the office or encounter the office immediately upon entering. However, we recognize that there is room for improvement, specifically at Winters Middle School Campus, where the office's visibility could be enhanced. We agree with the grand jury's recommendation for clearer signage to denote the location of the office, and we are committed to implementing this change to ensure the safety and security of our schools.

Winters JUSD is also working closely with the Winters Police Department on a community traffic study that will include recommendations on signage for traffic safety and campus navigation.

Finding 4: *Each school district appropriately uses a web-based third-party provider for safety training modules. Annual training related to violent threats, such as active shooter, is not required at this time by the Davis, Esparto, Washington, and Woodland school districts, although Esparto and Woodland plan to add such trainings at the start of the 2023-24 school year. Ensuring staff are trained in how to respond appropriately to threats of violence would lessen the chances of another tragedy similar to that in Uvalde, Texas.*

In Winters Joint Unified, we have taken the initiative to require yearly web-based training on Active Shooter/violent events. Furthermore, we are actively collaborating with our local police department to facilitate an in-person Active Shooter training. This

comprehensive approach aims to equip our staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to respond appropriately to this potential danger.

By prioritizing the safety and well-being of our school community, we are taking important steps to minimize the chances of another tragedy occurring. We remain committed to providing a secure learning environment for our students and fostering a culture of preparedness.

Finding 5: *The Esparto and Woodland school districts have assessed the effectiveness of their school safety training through surveys, as recommended by the 2019-20 Yolo County Grand Jury, while Davis, Washington and Winters districts have not. Assessing effectiveness based on quantifiable data can provide more accurate guidance for decisions about training.*

The District disagrees with this finding. While the Yolo County Grand Jury's recommendation focused specifically on using surveys to assess effectiveness, it is important to note that there are multiple methods to gather feedback and evaluate training outcomes. The approach taken by the Winters JUSD for gathering feedback is through direct communication channels and adjusting training needs accordingly, which demonstrates a proactive effort to address concerns and enhance the effectiveness of our safety training.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff members. As long as Winters JUSD's communication and outreach effectively addresses the objectives of the training and leads to continuous improvement, our alternative method of assessing effectiveness through direct feedback should be recognized and considered as a valuable component of our safety training evaluation process.

Finding 6: *Each school district has contracted with a web-based third-party provider to notify parents of emergencies. The providers report on how many parents or guardians were reached per technology (e.g., email, text, app, or voice/phone). All school districts' providers, except Washington, reach 90% or more of their students' parents or guardians. Ensuring that virtually all parents or guardians can be reached when needed is desirable.*

Winters Joint Unified School District has reached 99.4% of our families. Our commitment to strive for 100% contact demonstrates our dedication to ensuring that virtually all parents or guardians can be reached when needed.

Efficient communication plays a vital role in emergency situations, and by reaching such a high percentage of families, Winters Joint Unified School District have shown our commitment to the safety of our students.

Finding 7: *Some high school students in the Davis, Esparto, Winters and Woodland school districts are allowed to go off campus during lunch break. Should an emergency arise on campus, it is not possible for the schools to know how safe those students are, and the students may not receive timely emergency notifications if their school is on lockdown or evacuated.*

Winters Joint Unified disagrees with the finding of the grand jury regarding the off-campus lunch break for high school students. Our district utilizes a comprehensive communication system called Parent Square, which enables us to promptly notify both students and parents in case of an emergency.

Through Parent Square, notifications can be sent directly to students' phones via email or the app, ensuring that they receive timely information even if they are off-campus during lunch break. This system also allows parents to receive notifications simultaneously through the app and an "all call," enabling them to inform their child about any necessary actions.

We understand the concerns raised by the grand jury regarding the safety of off-campus students during emergencies. However, we have taken proactive measures to ensure that our students are well-informed and prepared. Our communication channels are designed to reach students wherever they are, allowing us to provide the necessary instructions and updates to guarantee their safety.

Winters Joint Unified remains committed to the safety and well-being of all our students, both on and off-campus. We will continue to evaluate and enhance our emergency response protocols to ensure that every student is adequately informed and protected during any unforeseen circumstances.

Response to Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The Grand Jury recommends that, prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year, each school district identify additional hardening approaches and develop a plan to further protect areas of its schools that remain vulnerable.

Winters JUSD is taking deliberate strides to enhance the safety of our schools through additional hardening approaches. We understand the urgency of safeguarding our students and staff members, making this issue one of our top priorities. We are engaging in the following activities to ensure the safety of our students and staff:

1. **Vulnerability Audit:** Working in collaboration with the Winters Police Department, we conducted a thorough security audit of all of our school premises. This will enable us to identify areas that need further security hardening and mitigation strategies.
2. **Developing a Comprehensive Security Plan:** Based on the results of the audit, we will develop a comprehensive security plan. This will detail how we intend to address vulnerabilities, including proposed physical hardening changes, technology enhancements, and policy updates.
3. **Facilities Master Planning:** The implementation of the hardening approaches and security enhancements will be incorporated as a component going forward in our

facilities master planning process. By doing so, we will ensure that security improvements are not afterthoughts, but fundamental elements in the design and improvement of our facilities.

4. Training and Awareness: We will also invest in regular training and awareness programs for our staff and students. The purpose of these sessions is to ensure that should an unfortunate incident occur, our staff and students are prepared to respond promptly and effectively. The District is currently in the process of revising our Emergency Operations plan in an effort to ensure that procedures to be followed in an emergency are as updated, accurate and efficient as possible.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular implementation checks and feedback loops will be put in place. This process will help us continually evaluate and adapt our plans, and ensure the measures implemented are serving their intended purpose adequately.

6. Open Communication: Throughout this process, we will maintain transparency and open lines of communication with our community. We believe that by sharing our intentions, progress, and obstacles, we can work together to contribute to the safety of our educational environment.

Recommendation 2: Prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year, each school district should develop a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) plan to encourage all students to complete the *California Healthy Kids Survey* and similar surveys to produce meaningful data. Each school district should act on survey findings, especially those related to potentially violent actions.

Winters JUSD has a goal to increase student participation in the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) by increasing participation indicators on the California School Dashboard and data from WestEd by from 85% to 95% by June 2025. Currently, each site allots time during the school day in the participation window for this task and will continue to do so to ensure maximum participation. Winters JUSD will also be implementing a secondary survey, which includes a comprehensive assessment of each school's climate and student perception data about their feelings of connectedness to adults and peers on campus.

Recommendation 3: Prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year, each school district should evaluate and improve signage for all of its schools, so that visitors can easily find the school's office to register upon their arrival.

At all schools with the exception of one, the entrance point of the school is at or near the office, with clear signage. Winters Middle School is the one site where entrance into the site is at a distance from the office, creating possible confusion and lack of clarity on the office location.

Winters JUSD is going through the Facilities Master Plan process and has taken this under advisement for planning purposes and will review all options for improved signage.

Recommendation 4: Prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year, each school district should require and document that training related to threats of violence is completed by its teachers (regular and substitute), staff and administrators every year.

Winters JUSD includes various safety training for all staff (including substitutes) at the start of each school year, including topics such as Mandated Reporter Training, Hazardous Materials, and Active Shooter training. Completion of these required training is already maintained by our Human Resources Department. Additionally, we are updating and revising our Emergency Operations Plan District-Wide, updating safety procedures and are holding regular Emergency Operations Committee Meetings to ensure student and staff safety.

Recommendation 5: Prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year and each subsequent school year, Davis, Washington and Winters school districts should identify and document a statistically reliable method or tool for measuring the effectiveness of school safety training, including an annual survey of teachers, staff and administrators.

The Human Resources Department in Winters JUSD takes seriously the obligation to provide meaningful and relevant training to ensure the safety of staff and students. In order to ensure that staff voices are heard, we solicit feedback in the form of surveys following professional development opportunities. We will continue this practice to ensure that the training provided is relevant and useful.

Recommendation 6: Prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year and each subsequent school year, each district should achieve and maintain an emergency notification contact rate of at least 95% with parents or guardians, as verified by their third-party emergency notification providers.

Winters JUSD is proud to say that we currently reach 99.7% of all enrolled families. The few families which we cannot reach digitally are known by sites and additional efforts such as personalized calls and letters are made to ensure equitable access.

Recommendation 7: Prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year, Davis, Esparto, Winters, and Woodland school districts should develop, implement and maintain a plan for contacting at least 95% of students who may be off-site if an emergency occurs during regular school hours.

Through Parent Square, Winters JUSD is able to reach 100% of High school students all of whom have off campus lunch, receive Parent Square messages sent to their email. In the event of an emergency, Parent Square, public social media including Facebook and Instagram, as well as Parent Square messages sent to parents via text, email, and app notifications would be utilized.