

Ventura County Grand Jury 2012 - 2013



Final Report

School Security

May 15, 2013

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School Security

Summary

The 2012-2013 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury), pursuant to its responsibility for government oversight, chose to evaluate the security of public elementary schools in Ventura County (County).

The California Education Code 35294.2 requires crisis response procedures that encourage schools to consider emergency management in the context of its four phases. They are: mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The preparedness phase involves developing policies and protocols for multiple hazards, adhering to the established Incident Command System, conducting training and exercises, and ensuring that necessary resources are available should an emergency occur on campus.

The Grand Jury examined the current status of safety programs chosen randomly in each of the school districts in the County. The main emphasis was safety from violent behaviors by outside persons and the proactive strategies that can be used to reduce potential injury or death.

The goal was to evaluate the systems and methods for the safety of the elementary school students given the recent events at other schools, such as Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. The Grand Jury evaluated the safety with on-site visits equipped with a list of criteria for security. The security criteria are:

- point of entry: gates open or closed, entry monitored
- personnel: clearly visible ID badges
- visitors are required to sign in and out at the office
- visitor badges for all persons on campus except students
- visitors without a visible badge should be questioned and escorted to the office
- security officers must be identifiable
- campus volunteers should wear identifiable clothing
- adequate perimeter fencing to deter unauthorized entry
- buildings clearly marked on all walls and roof

Background

On December 14, 2012, the nation was shocked with the events that occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut. Twenty children and six adult staff members were murdered by a lone gunman. As first responders arrived, the gunman committed suicide. This incident is one of the deadliest school shootings in American history.

The Grand Jury initiated this investigation into school security based on events and several newspaper articles pointing out that schools need to know how to identify warning signs and assess risks. The Grand Jury reviewed the physical site security of various elementary schools in the County.

The County has 21 school districts. There are 129 public elementary schools within the County with a total student count of 68,096. The school sites vary in size and location within communities.

Methodology

The Grand Jury conducted on-site observations of several County elementary schools within the 21 districts. Most visits were conducted prior to the noon hour. Several elementary schools from various County districts were chosen on a random basis. The Grand Jury developed a survey based on the Ventura County Sheriff's Office Threat Assessment Workshop, in which all Ventura County district schools were represented. The Grand Jury used a predetermined list of criteria to develop the survey which was used. These criteria included:

- arrival time and departure time
- gates open or closed
- entries monitored
- visible ID badges
- visible visitors' badges
- visitors signing in and out
- visible campus security
- perimeter fencing

The Grand Jury also reviewed significant current literature on the recommended steps to take for the explicit goal of keeping children secure in the case of man-made emergencies. Also, the Grand Jury interviewed security experts and officials.

Facts

FA-01. The County has 21 school districts:

- 11 elementary – kindergarten through eighth grade
- 8 unified – kindergarten through twelfth grade
- 2 high school – ninth through twelfth grade

[Ref-01]

FA-02. The County has 210 schools within the 21 public school districts:

- 129 elementary schools
- 27 junior high/middle schools
- 20 high schools
- 21 alternative schools
- 13 charter schools

[Ref-01]

FA-03. The California Education Codes state the following:

Section 32281 states “. . . that all California public schools, in kindergarten, and grades 1 to 12 . . . develop a comprehensive school safety plan that addresses the safety concerns identified through a systematic planning process.” [Ref-01]

FA-04. The Grand Jury developed a criterion for a survey that was used at all locations. (Att-01)

FA-05. County school districts sent representatives to a Threat Assessment Workshop sponsored by the Ventura County Office of Education which was conducted by the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office. [Ref-06]

FA-06. District representatives were trained in:

- responsible, prudent and effective response to threats
- behaviors that raise concern about potential violence
- risk assessment
- identification of warning signs, physical and behavioral clues
- courses of action or strategies to control the threats
- effective threat assessment in a larger context of school safety

[Ref-02]

FA-07. On 2/19/2013, an elementary school in the Oxnard Elementary School District was visited and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; There was no campus security visible, side gate was opened and no visitor badges visible. The principal did approach us and asked if he could be of assistance. (Att-01)

FA-08. On 2/20/2013, an elementary school was visited in the Ventura Unified School District and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; there was no campus security visible, no visitor badges visible, no enforcement of sign-in sheet and no monitoring of the unlocked gate from 7:20-7:45 AM. (Att-01)

- FA-09.** On 2/21/2013, an elementary school was visited in the Ventura Unified School District and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; there were no visible staff badges, no visitor badges, and no campus security visible. (Att-01)
- FA-10.** On 2/22/2013, an elementary school was visited in the Pleasant Valley School District and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; the school gate was open, but not monitored, visitors did not sign in or out, the crossing guard wore an orange vest and had a radio but no ID badge. School personnel did not wear badges. The secretary did inquire as to the nature of our visit.
- FA-11.** On 2/25/2013, an elementary school in the Hueneme Elementary School District was visited and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; there was an unlocked gate to the playground area and no campus security visible. (Att-01)
- FA-12.** On 2/25/2013, an elementary school in the Mesa Unified School District was visited and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; there were no visible campus security or visitor badges. (Att-01)
- FA-13.** On 2/25/2013, an elementary school in the Oxnard Elementary School District was visited and found to have the following opportunity for improvement; there was no campus security visible. (Att-01)

On 2/25/2013, an elementary school in the Oak Park Unified School District was visited and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; there was no campus security visible, the gates were open with no monitor, visitors were allowed on the school grounds without ID badges. School personnel did inquire as to the nature of our visit. (Att-01)
- FA-14.** On 2/25/2013, an elementary school in the Conejo Valley Unified School District was visited and found to have the following opportunities for improvement; the gate was open and not monitored, school personnel did not wear ID badges and no school security personnel were visible. (Att-01)

Findings

- FI-01.** The Grand Jury found that all school districts were trained in school security and threat assessment by the Ventura County Office of Education and conducted by the Ventura County Sheriff’s Department. (FA-04-06)
- FI-02.** The Grand Jury found that there were no ID badges on some staff, campus personnel and visitors. This does not comply with the Threat Assessment Training. (FA-01-14)
- FI-03.** The Grand Jury found that gates were open and unmonitored. This does not comply with the Threat Assessment Training. (FA-01-14)

- FI-04.** The Grand Jury found no visible campus security. This does not comply with the Threat Assessment Training. (FA-01-14)
- FI-05.** The Grand Jury found that some schools have no perimeter fencing. This does not comply with the Threat Assessment Training. (FA-01-14)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that each school district conduct a realistic threat assessment review as addressed in the training workshop. The assessment should determine the facility’s vulnerability. All districts should send a representative to meet and discuss threat assessment for each school in the respective district. (FI-01-05)
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends that each school district in cooperation with law enforcement should consider instituting a training program based on threat assessment for all classified and non-classified personnel. Policies and practices should be implemented to identify warning signs, and create effective communication among all levels of school personnel. (FI-01-05)
- R-03.** The Grand Jury recommends that each school building be easily identified from the air and street. Each school district should consider incorporating the use of volunteers who will act as school safety agents and be so identified with unique vests properly identifying persons as a school safety agent. Such vests should be uniform throughout the county. (FI-01-05)

Responses

Responses Required From:

Board of Trustees, Hueneme Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Oxnard Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Oak Park Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Ventura Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Pleasant Valley Elementary District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Conejo Valley Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Rio School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Mesa School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Responses Requested From:

Ventura County Office of Education
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Briggs Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Fillmore Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Moorpark Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Mupu Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Ocean View Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Ojai Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Santa Clara Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Santa Paula Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Simi Valley Unified School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

Board of Trustees, Somis Union Elementary School District
(FI-01, 02, 03, 04, 05) (R-01, 02, 03)

References

- Ref-01.** Ventura Office of Education, "2012-2013 Ventura Public Schools Directory" <http://schooldirectory.vcoe.org/directory.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2013)
- Ed-Data, Fiscal, Demographic, and Performance Data on California's K-12 Schools, <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/> (accessed March 19, 2013)
- Ref-02.** Ventura Office of Education, School Districts in Ventura County, <http://www.vcoe.org/Districts.aspx> (accessed March 19, 2013)
- Ref-03.** Leung, Wendy, "Educators hope to avoid, prevent tragedy", Ventura County Star, (Ventura, CA), January 10, 2013, page B 1.
- Ref-04.** California Education Code Section 35294.2, http://www.legaltips.org/california/california_education_code/35294.20-35294.25.aspx

Attachments

- Att-01.** School survey form

Disclaimer

This report is issued by the 2012-2013 Ventura County Grand Jury. Due to a potential conflict of interest, a member of this Grand Jury was excused from participating in any aspect of the production of this report.

Glossary

TERM

County

Grand Jury

DEFINITION

Ventura County

Ventura County Grand Jury

Attachment 01

School Survey Form

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District:	School	
Time:	arrival time and time end.	
Single point of entry?	Gate is it Open or Closed? Is the entry monitored?	
Personnel	Have clearly visible ID badges	Do visitors have badges?
	If no, are they being challenged?	
	Do visitors sign in and out?	
	Is there campus security visible	
Fenced	The school have good perimeter fencing to deter unauthorized entry?	
Remarks:		