

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EDUHSD Community Forum on School Safety

The safety of our students and staff is our top priority. We are committed to a consistently proactive approach to fulfilling our highest responsibility, which is ensuring the well-being, safety and growth of our school community. At a recent Board Meeting that was held at Ponderosa High School on March 13, 2018, the El Dorado Union High School District held a Community Forum on School Safety designed to share current safety practices and protocols and discuss how school officials, community agencies, parents/guardians, and students can work together to further strengthen school safety.

Superintendent Stephen Wehr thanked everyone for attending the meeting to discuss a very important topic, school safety within our community. He shared that when he walked through the halls of Ponderosa High School forty-five years ago as a sixteen-year-old student, safety was a very different conversation. "The world has since changed and we are responding to this change. For years, our schools have developed safety plans, strategic communication plans, and our crisis intervention teams have worked hard to ensure that our safety plans are implemented. We are always monitoring, growing, and learning from these processes to make sure that we are doing the very best that we can. We also collaborate with a number of agencies within the County to help to ensure that our schools are safe. Our partners including Dr. Ed Manansala (County Superintendent of Schools), Kevin Pebley (Sheriff's Office), Vern Pierson (District Attorney), Addison Randall (Placerville Police Department), Brian Richart (Chief Probation Officer), Todd Crawford (Office of Emergency Services), and Barry Harwell & Kim Hughes (Sierra Child and Family Services). We work together to ensure that our schools are as safe as possible. We are always trying to learn, ensuring that our plans are in place to address potential safety concerns. When people leave tonight, one of the things we would like you to think about is the partnership that we have with these folks and the incredible work and first response that they provide for us. The things that our schools did within our safety plans two or three years ago are different from the things that they are doing today. In the early days of our District's efforts, we had lockdown drills, shelter in place, and evacuations; all depending on what the circumstances were. Today, we know that there are nuances to all of those things. When we do our safety drills, one of the things that is an important part of the process is the debriefing afterwards with law enforcement and other partners who help us to understand if our processes are efficient. This is the start to an ongoing conversation because part of the outcome from tonight's meeting is that any new thoughts or ideas will go to a District Action Safety Committee for the purpose of making recommendations to the Board. People that have professional expertise in these areas

will help support us in these conversations to ensure that our schools are as safe as possible.”

Mr. Todd Crawford, Deputy at the Sheriff’s Office, is currently assigned at the Office of Emergency Services (OES). Specifically with schools, they do many site safety assessments, review safety plans, and coordinate with all of the other agencies to make sure that the plans that they have in place make sense and work well. They are constantly evaluating the plans and doing exercises with the schools and public agencies.

Mr. Vern Pierson, El Dorado County District Attorney, shared that many people ask the same question “Why are we seeing this phenomenon of mass school shootings here in the United States and why are we not seeing it in other parts of the world? We see repeatedly that the individuals perceive themselves to be completely isolated; lacking relationships or a connection to an adult figure in their life. It can manifest itself in a number of different ways, but we have to start changing the conversation and ask ourselves why is it that our kids feel alone growing up in a community such as ours?”

Mr. Kevin Pebley, Administrative Sergeant at the Sheriff’s Office, also oversees the School Resource Officer position at the schools. He said “Every day when parents drop their kids off at school, they should know that the safety plans for the high schools are being implemented. When schools hold safety and fire drills, the SROs and his team are there to assess the drills, make recommendations on whether or not they were effective, and make recommendations of change as needed.”

Dr. Ed Manansala, County Superintendent of Schools, shared “In El Dorado County, there is a tremendous amount of strength when it comes to the relationships, the partnerships, and the level of communication. The level of reflection, the level of practice, and the level of communication across law enforcement and the fifteen School Districts in El Dorado County. Unique to El Dorado County is the Law Enforcement Memorandum of Understanding, which is an agreement with the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office, the Placerville Police Department, the South Lake Tahoe Police Department, El Dorado County Probation Department, El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office, the El Dorado County Health and Human Service Agency, the Shingle Springs Tribal Police, and the El Dorado County Office of Education. It is not only the level of formal partnerships of leaders and educators in the room and beyond, but it is the level of partnership even personally that we have that stands out.”

Mr. Brian Richart, Chief Probation Officer for El Dorado County, said, “The role of the probation department includes prevention, intervention, and to work as a force multiplier. As Superintendent Wehr stated, the most important aspect is developing positive relationships with our youth. The Probation Officer intervenes and tries to offer their assistance with guiding youth peoples through the issues that they are experiencing. Isolation is a big problem. Probation Officers are highly trained in identifying what the youth’s needs are, identifying the level of risk the kids are to the community and to themselves, and applying appropriate interventions in order to try to correct the behavior and circumstances that the youth are struggling with.”

Mr. Barry Harwell is the Director for the Sierra Child and Family Services and Ms. Kim Hughes is the Clinical Director. This last semester they worked with over 250 kids on

our campuses. The EDUHSD schools have made a huge commitment to these services. They have been trying for the past few years to build a culture on mental health at all of the campuses. They are available 24/7 if there is a crisis.

Mr. Addison Randall is the School Resource Officer (SRO) at the Placerville Police Department and supports El Dorado High School.

Jolynne Alger, EDUHSD parent, thanked the group for their high level of communication and collaboration between all of the partnerships. She inquired how the mental health referral works. Mr. Barry Harwell shared, "Most of the kids with higher needs have been identified by school psychologists, they have had assessments, and they have individual education plans. When it is a school-based need, our partners are able to help families and the child work through their situation." Additionally, Mr. Brian Richart, Chief Probation Officer, said, "The good news is that juvenile crime is at an all-time low."

Christopher Myer, EDUHSD parent, thanked all of the speakers for being here for the evening and shared that it's great to see all of the partnerships in the County. He inquired if schools could provide parents with information on how to teach their kids to be contributing citizens.

Denise Shemenski, EDUHSD parent, shared her concerns on the frequency of trainings the schools provide every year. She said, "Equipping and training our students and teachers so that they can better respond during an emergency is very important. We need to be continually asking ourselves if we are doing things in the most effective way and re-familiarize ourselves with the differences in sounds of a fire drill versus an incident bell. Additionally, teachers and students need to be properly trained."

Danica Schultz is a mother to two students at UMHS. She inquired why schools don't practice lockdown drills when the kids are outside and about communication. Superintendent Wehr shared "We have had schools that have done lockdown drills during passing periods. It's something that we are implementing District-wide. Per our policies/practices, communication goes out to parents when we have a viable threat confirmed by law enforcement, as was done at Oak Ridge High School in November 2017 and Union Mine High School in 2018." Mr. Kevin Pebley from the Sheriff's Office said "We provide training to the schools. We also do an hour-long presentation talking to the staff and employees about options during these situations in addition to teaching Run, Hide, and Fight."

Ken Wong, EDUHSD parent, spoke about the importance of the schools coming up with solutions and preventive measures for mental health issues in El Dorado County. He said "Teachers, staff, and parents need to be trained to recognize mental issues early. How we can wrap around them early in that process is imperative." Mr. Barry Harwell shared "EDUHSD and *Sierra Child and Family Services* is one of the largest providers of school-based mental health services within the County. It's a great partnership."

Jose Garcia, EDUHSD parent, suggested that the schools change their infrastructure by changing building code and update emergency kits to include special bandages to stop bleeding. He did research on what our first aid kits should have in them and provided a copy to the Board.

Beth Boozer, EDUHSD parent, spoke about the importance of educating our youth on anti-bullying and updating training so kids feel safe at school.

Julie Strickler, EDUHSD parent, has looked into the District's LCAP processes for school safety and school climate data and inquired about the California Healthy Kids Survey as well as when and how communication occurs from the sites. Superintendent Wehr shared "Student voices are an important part of this process and the LCAP Survey is sent out to get feedback. In addition, when we have circumstances that happen at our schools that we deem threatening, in conjunction with our law enforcement, we utilize ParentSquare to communicate with parents." He encourages everyone to look at those messages. Superintendent Wehr continued "Our threshold is making sure that we are making communication with parents when those types of situations occur. Part of the purpose of the investment of the communications system was to let parents know when there were any critical events happening at their student's campus. We have used it at every campus when those thresholds have been met."

Superintendent Wehr said "We have engaged in a wide variety of conversations about how we support our students when it comes to managing the challenges of the world in which they live. Open dialogue continues to be important."

The recommendations from the meeting were forwarded to the District Task Force on School Safety for review and refinement. Recommendations included an annual vulnerability assessment for each school, updated safety buckets/first aid kits, and ongoing best practice training/drills for staff and students. The outcomes from the District Task Force Meeting will be sent to the Board of Trustees for action at the April 24, 2018 Board Meeting.



Pictured: Stephen Wehr (Superintendent)
(Photo Credit: Olivia Baker)



Pictured: Kevin Pebley (Administrative Sergeant at the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office), Vern Pierson (El Dorado County District Attorney), and Todd Crawford (Deputy at the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office)
(Photo Credit: Olivia Baker)



Pictured: Brian Richart (*Chief Probation Officer*) and Dr. Ed Manansala (*County Superintendent of Schools*)
(Photo Credit: Olivia Baker)



Pictured: Addison Randall (*School Resource Officer*), Barry Harwell (*Director of Sierra Child and Family Services*), and Kim Hughes (*Clinical Director*)
(Photo Credit: Olivia Baker)



Pictured: Tim Cary (*Board Member*), David Del Rio (*Board Member*), Lori Veerkamp (*Board President*), and Stephen Wehr (*Superintendent*)
(Photo Credit: Olivia Baker)