

# **Solano County Office of Education**

## **2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury**

### **Reason for Investigation**

The 2006-2007 Solano County Grand Jury chose to investigate the Emergency Safety Plans for three schools and Transportation Services under the jurisdiction of the Solano County Office of Education and schools under its jurisdiction. This investigation stems from concerns regarding the safety and security of students in the event of an emergency at school or while being transported to and from school.

### **Grand Jury Actions**

- Interviewed the Solano County Office of Education Superintendent
- Reviewed Emergency Safety Plans for Solano County Office of Education schools
- Reviewed relevant portions of the California Education Code; California Code of Regulations Title 5 (Education) and “Uniform Fire Code”
- Toured schools and interviewed the principals and staff
- Interviewed the County Office of Education transportation supervisor and staff

### **Background / Summary**

The Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) joins the other 57 counties in California as partners with parents and schools to prepare our children for life in the current and future job market. SCOE serves approximately 83,000 of the five million students in California. County services play a crucial role in helping to educate children of vastly different backgrounds and widely different needs. SCOE services include the operation of special programs for more than 9,675 children and adults.

SCOE operates programs for students with unique needs including special education for disabled students, court and community schools for incarcerated and expelled youth and programs for pregnant or parenting students.

The individual schools responsible for these programs are as follows:

**T.C. McDaniel Center, Fairfield** – This center is a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) facility for children from birth to five years.

The program is divided into three age groups: birth to 18 months, 18 months to age three and three to five year-olds. Parent participation is mandatory. Long-term volunteers are fingerprinted and have their backgrounds checked. Interaction between main stream children and the special needs students is beneficial to the development of all students. At age five, students attend public schools in their district or other county schools depending on their needs.

**Irene Larsen Center, Vacaville** – This facility mirrors the T.C. McDaniel Center with a few exceptions. The Life Skills program for 18-20 year olds affords them an opportunity to work for local businesses and live independently. The swimming pool, spa and the facility’s main building were built by the parents and community.

Golden Hills Education Center, Fairfield – The Regional Occupational Program (ROP) at Golden Hills Education Center provides workforce development classes for students in grades 7-12 who have been expelled or have attendance issues. The Program is available for adults as well as physically and mentally challenged students ages 18 to 22. Courses of study are Health Career, Auto Technology, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), Welding, Para-educator/Instructional Assistant, Computer Lab and Pre-Apprentice: Introduction to Construction Trades.

The Office of Education Transportation Services – This office is responsible under the California Education Code, section 39831.3, to prepare a Transportation Safety Plan. The plan should contain procedures to ensure the safe transport of pupils. Twenty-three school buses provide transportation service for 240 special education students, roundtrip from their homes to school.

As a result of our interviews and visits, we determined that Emergency Safety Plans are written by the site administrator at each school. These plans are created in accordance with California statutes, regulations and local School Board policy.

SCOE has a safety committee that assists in the writing of the school safety plan. Safety committee members include the Solano County Office of Education Superintendent of Schools and the Associate and Assistant Superintendents representing various departments. The committee meets with the schools monthly. The school's Emergency Safety Plans were approved in September, 2006.

The Emergency Safety Plan for the county schools varied in content and instructions. We were informed that all teachers under SCOE supervision are aware of what to do in an emergency. This would include their respective sites in addition to those at shared sites. The schools also coordinate their procedures with county Transportation Services.

At the T.C. McDaniel Center, safety is a major concern. The first two fire drills each year are announced in advance and used as practice and critique. The remaining drills are unannounced. The scenarios created include the absence of the Principal, search and rescue and a drill coordinated with E. Ruth Sheldon School located next door. Each class has an emergency backpack equipped with medical supplies, water, etc.

At the Irene Larsen Center, fire drills are unannounced. The Principal is working with Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) schools to use the same forms and have a consistent basic safety plan. Additionally, the Center is working with county Transportation Services to communicate by two-way radios during emergencies. The Center's Emergency Safety Plan includes bins equipped with tents, blankets, water, food, first aid and a backpack to use during drills or actual emergencies. The Principal has written and received grants to assist in the maintenance and upgrade of supplies.

At Golden Hills Education Center, an unannounced fire drill is conducted once a year. The designated evacuation site is behind one of the main buildings. The Education Code has fewer requirements for older students. The fire department reviews their safety procedures and makes recommendations. Student backpacks are not allowed on campus for personal safety concerns. Staff members are equipped with long distance two-way radios.

Records of all drills are kept on file. The attendance roster must be with each teacher to take roll during a drill. All students must be accounted for before a drill is considered completed. Each school has a lockdown plan for emergencies and works closely with the local police and Probation Department to coordinate safety. The "Connect ED" telephone emergency number allows schools to communicate simultaneously with parents and guardians during emergencies. SCOE has endorsed "211," developed by United Way, which gives residents a single point of reference contact telephone number. Residents calling "211" will have the ability to get information about county services such as Health and Social Services, Education and public financial assistance.

The Transportation Services department Emergency Safety Plan met or exceeded State code requirements. SCOE school bus drivers are highly qualified and trained to operate a bus. After their initial training, they are required to do follow-up in-service training on a continual basis. Each bus driver must account for each student they transport by keeping a log book on the bus. This log book is updated as needed.

The following observations and areas of concern were noted by the Grand Jury during our tours and conversations with staff of the T.C. McDaniel Center, Irene Larsen Center and Golden Hills Education Center:

- The inability to lockdown classrooms in the event of an intruder alert. (School Administration has submitted a request to identify an appropriate locking system)
- Parents blocking the bus loading zone create a traffic and child safety problem.
- Safety plan information had not been received by the staff until recently.
- Some fire alarm pull stations were blocked.
- Unsafe areas were observed on the playground at one Center.
- All doors to the outside were not clearly marked with an Exit sign.
- All passageways to exits were not clear and unobstructed.

Additional observations and areas of concern noted by the Grand Jury and staff at Transportation Services were:

- Not all school bus drivers were aware of the Emergency Safety Plan and their responsibilities in the event of an emergency.
- Difficulty in obtaining parts for older school buses.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 1** – The basic overall Emergency Safety Plans were not consistent.

**Recommendation 1** - Emergency Safety Plans should be consistent throughout the Solano County Office of Education district schools.

**Finding 2** - Some staff were not familiar with their school's Emergency Safety Plan.

**Recommendation 2** - All staff must be trained on an ongoing basis.

**Finding 3** - Several fire code violations were found, such as blocked access to fire alarm pull stations and fire extinguishers. Some passageways to an exit were obstructed.. Some doors to the outside were not marked with an exit sign.

**Recommendation 3** – Keep the fire alarm pull stations and fire extinguishers easily accessible. All passageways to an exit shall be clear and unobstructed. All doors leading to the outside shall be marked with an exit sign.

**Finding 4** - Parking rules regarding drop off and pick up of children are not being followed. This is a safety hazard.

**Recommendation 4** - Have random visits by local police to enforce traffic and parking rules.

**Finding 5** - Not all bus drivers were aware of the Emergency Safety Plan.

**Recommendation 5** - Ensure all bus drivers are trained on the Emergency Safety Plan.

**Finding 6** - Maintenance of older buses is becoming difficult.

**Recommendation 6** - Schedule purchases of new vehicles to replace the older buses.

### **Comments**

At the time of our inspection, the Solano County Office of Education Emergency Safety Plan contained incorrect references to the California Education Code.

The Grand Jury was impressed by the professionalism of the district and school staff.

### **Affected Agencies**

- Superintendent of the Solano County Office of Education  
Principal of T.C. McDaniel Center  
Principal of Irene Larsen Center  
Principal of Golden Hills Education Center
- Director of Solano County Office of Education Transportation Service
- Solano County Office of Education School Board

### **Courtesy Copy**

Solano County Board of Supervisors