



Santa Barbara County Education Office

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Keeping schools safe

Keeping schools safe is of the utmost importance for all of us. Following the horrific shooting in Parkland, Florida, school leaders across Santa Barbara County convened to strategize safety measures and preparations. We are also working closely with members of law enforcement, who are remarkable partners—as they repeatedly demonstrated during the recent Thomas Fire and floods. We are so fortunate to have the best of the best working together in our county.

Many of us in our community are anxious. We worry: what's next? What storm, emergency, or unthinkable situation is coming? These thoughts make some of us nervous, fearful, and restless, while others may become angry and upset. We all want answers.

One group—the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida—has turned emotion into organized action. In doing so, they have demonstrated the strength that comes with conviction and passion. Anyone who has worked with youth in high schools, or has teenagers of their own, can tell you that young people can organize and make change happen.

The students in Parkland have shown the nation that they require answers and deserve change. Their advocacy efforts show no signs of slowing. These students are fearlessly exercising their freedom of speech to address issues of school safety, gun violence, and the need for legislative action. It is a testament to their resolve that, less than a month after the tragedy inflicted on their school, the Florida House and Senate voted to pass new firearms regulations, and the governor signed it into law.

Together, we can affect change. When car accidents increased because drivers were texting while driving, laws changed. When waste from industrial facilities began polluting local waters, laws changed. When individuals faced discrimination in hiring or housing, laws changed.

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The need is the same with school safety. When school shootings occur, we certainly need to address school policies, but we also need bipartisan legislative action. We are in this together.

We as school leaders will continue to do all in our power to ensure the safety of children within our school perimeters. Off-campus, we have work to do to address the issues. As we have witnessed too many times, social media can be destructive when used inappropriately or for negative ends, especially by young people not yet aware of the impact they are having, or groups wishing to stir up trouble or hatred. It is imperative that we provide young people with the tools to use social media responsibly.

Keeping schools safe cannot be achieved by one or two actions alone. Success will involve partnerships among schools, children, families, community members, law enforcement, and legislators. The approach must be multi-faceted, systematic, and address short-term and long-term factors.

We also need to ask our teachers for their input about school security. They are the ones in the classrooms with students every day. They are tasked with the most important job of educating our youth.

We need to arm our teachers with resources for teaching and the means to connect with students. Let us not haphazardly propose arming them with anything other than the resources they need to be instrumental and purposeful in working with our children every day.

All our actions matter. The students at Parkland set an inspiring example of what can occur when people identify an urgent problem and address it with purpose and passion. We at the county education office, alongside educators at school districts countywide, are committed to working tirelessly on issues related to safety for all students, and to collaborating with law enforcement, county agencies, and legislators toward effective solutions.

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