

*Sent to employees via email on 2/27/18 on behalf of Superintendent Betando:*



Dear Morgan Hill Unified School District Families, Students, and Staff,

No words can comfort the nation or our individual communities after occurrences of tragic events where so many lose their lives at schools, churches, concerts, or tourist areas due to mass shootings. The most recent occurred in Parkland, Florida on February 14th. Through any such incident, whether involving one victim, seventeen, or dozens of victims, our entire society is violated. This is an impact on all of our communities and every school. Our schools must be a safe haven for students, staff, and volunteers.

On the day after the Parkland shooting, Officer Jeff Brandon of the Morgan Hill Police Department and I met with the principals of the Morgan Hill Unified School District schools. We discussed the circumstances about the Parkland incident known to us at that time. The group discussed our safety protocols, the site plans, and the intruder response training that was put in place in 2014. Site personnel have been or will be re-trained on this protocol this year.

Our group discussion led to ideas for enhancing the training while putting together a plan of action for more training and more standard procedures among the sites. The discussion was quite dynamic with good dialog on further suggestions from the principals and directors. We began the process to enhance our site safety team knowledge, inform parents about the content and process for student training, and implement enhanced student training.

We are deeply concerned that our society may adapt to this kind of violence as some kind of new normal. This is not normal and we must speak out to change laws that enable such devastation in our communities.

Each of us, as leaders, staff members, parents, students, and community members should be asking what the District, school sites, and each of us as individuals are doing to prevent school shootings. I propose **Five Powerful Strategy Fields to Improve Student Safety on Campus** throughout our school communities serving South San Jose, Morgan Hill, and San Martin:

## **1. Powerful Prevention Strategies**

- Identify students or community members associated with our schools who exhibit personal traits, behaviors, and trauma factors common to those identified in violent offenders. Communicate with school officials and support networks
- Create awareness of trauma factors or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in ourselves and others. Trauma factors are a significant risk factor for substance use and mental illness. Communicate with school officials and support networks
- Employ positive coping and intervention strategies and seek help for those at risk so that they can develop sustainable positive engagement activities. Communicate with school officials and support networks
- Continue improving perimeter fencing, video surveillance, and limit points of entry at school sites. In new buildings, continue installing intruder-defensible door locking systems as have been installed in all existing doors
- Create alert network for students, ex-students, or parents under duress and link through the District's Student Services Division to appropriate intervention agents

## **2. Powerful Policy Strategies**

- Continue with a zero tolerance for weapons policy in our schools
- Continue to have all employees and volunteers cleared through Department of Justice background checks
- Continue to prohibit visitations unless purposeful, legitimate, cleared, and escorted while requiring all visitors to check in through the office
- Consider proposed Governing Board Resolutions supporting legislation that results in safer communities and schools

## **3. Powerful Protocol Strategies**

- Study the circumstances leading to and surrounding various tragedies with law enforcement consultation to inform changes in site and District crises protocols
- Implement an ongoing vulnerability assessment using a third party agency
- In concert with the Morgan Hill Police, San Jose Police, Santa Clara County Sheriff, California Highway Patrol, CalFire, and other emergency services agencies, maintain and continually review the District's crisis response protocols including intruder on campus scenarios
- Refine internal and external communication systems to be used in the event of a campus crisis

## **4. Powerful Practice Strategies**

- Establish and train School Site Crisis Assessment and Intervention Teams

- Assess staff awareness and competence of site safety protocols
- Enhance protocol practice schedules based on staff awareness and competence
- Frequently review and practice situational strategy plans for crisis scenarios
- Schedule practice drills, including lockdown drills, for various possible scenarios. Debrief with staff at drill conclusion and adjust protocols as needed
- Maintain crisis training for all temporary employees and substitutes who join the school site mid-year

## **5. Powerful Public Information Strategies**

- Conduct trainings for parents to help them better understand and explore the training their children receive at school
- Identify key parent/guardian and staff workshops geared to develop positive, productive, industrious, and happy youth
- Offer information nights to parents and community members to educate them on how to identify signs of distress, trauma, and possible risk factors. Include options and steps for intervention
- Share non-confidential strategic safety procedures information with school site communities

We have set in motion plans for action that will enable some additional standard practices and training at sites, enhanced investigations to better identify symptoms and indicators related to trauma factors, and potential risk factors common among people compelled to harm others.

While the Parkland incident happened over 3,000 miles away, such horrid incidents can and have happened in schools, businesses, and public venues in any size community around the country. We have made a commitment to making school safety the first priority and worked hard over the past four years to make improvements in our school safety and security. We won't stop improving. In the coming weeks, we will provide you with an improved overview of the safety protocols we have in place to address emergency situations.

One of the best preventions is early warning. You and your child can help us in these efforts by informing school staff if you see or hear of students who might exhibit patterns of behavioral or mental health issues that could lead to acts of violence. It takes all of us working together to prevent a tragedy such as this from happening in our schools. Your support is critical and appreciated.

We must also remind ourselves and especially our small children that while one individual can do great harm, most people are kind, caring, helpful, and here to protect them. There are hundreds of thousands of people who are reaching out to the Parkland community in sympathy

and support. Such connections are the essence of humanity and what can help us all heal after such tragedy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Betando". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steve Betando  
Superintendent  
Morgan Hill Unified School District

Talking to Children About Violence

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/talking-to-children-about-violence-tips-for-parents-and-teachers>

Talking to Children after a Shooting

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/aftermath.aspx>

Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers and Administrators

[https://www.lacoe.edu/Portals/0/StudentServices/Addressing\\_Grief\\_Tips\\_for\\_Teachers\\_and\\_Administrators\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.lacoe.edu/Portals/0/StudentServices/Addressing_Grief_Tips_for_Teachers_and_Administrators_FINAL.pdf)

Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators

[https://www.lacoe.edu/Portals/0/StudentServices/helping\\_youth\\_after\\_community\\_violence\\_educators.pdf](https://www.lacoe.edu/Portals/0/StudentServices/helping_youth_after_community_violence_educators.pdf)