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**California Department of Education
Official Letter**

February 1, 2018

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

**Comprehensive School Safety Plans: Annual School
Safety Plan Update Reminder and New Guidance**

The California Department of Education (CDE) is committed to helping you and your schools become as prepared as possible for emergencies and to maintain safe and secure school environments year-round. This message includes reminders and new direction for enhancing comprehensive school safety plans and the planning process.

The safety of our children and education communities is our greatest responsibility. Thank you for all you do to make our schools safe, secure, and welcoming for all students, families, and educators. It is essential to reflect on accomplishments and lessons learned last year and to implement new and improved actions this year. It is also time to ensure that comprehensive school safety plans are revised, updated, and approved by March 1, 2018.

In light of the increase in serious school and public safety concerns and emergency events and to inform safety plan revisions and updates, school leaders should ask:

- Did our local educational agency (LEA) conduct drills and exercises effectively, and what did we learn from them?
- Has our LEA developed and maximized relationships with first responder agencies and community partners?
- Are all of our educators and school staff trained and prepared for emergencies?
- What areas need plan improvement and what resources do we need to build capacity?

**Comprehensive School Safety Plan Revisions and Approval
due March 1, 2018**

Schools and districts must comply with California *Education Code (EC)* sections 32280–89. It is your responsibility to ensure ongoing compliance with requirements including the development, revision, and updating of comprehensive school safety plans through a collaborative process and that plans be approved annually by the school district or county

office of education by March 1. School site councils or designated safety committees must work with educators, classified staff, parents, and community leaders; they must consult with law enforcement to ensure these plans are effective and current. The safety plans must comply with all requirements, and counties must notify the CDE by October 15, 2018, of any schools that have not complied.

EC Section 32281(a): States that each school and county office of education is responsible for the overall development of all comprehensive school safety plans for its schools operating kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive.

EC Section 32288(a): Requires that each school forward its comprehensive school safety plan to the school district or county office of education for approval.

EC Section 32288(c): Requires that each school district or county office of education annually notify the State Department of Education by October 15 of any schools that have not complied with Section 32281.

I encourage the inclusion of policies and practices that go beyond *EC* requirements, including, but not limited to, threat assessment protocols, mental health policies, bullying prevention policies, active aggressor/shooter protocols, lockdown and shelter-in-place procedures, and regular drills and exercises for all staff.

Discrimination and Harassment Policy

It is imperative that school safety plans present clear policies to address hate crimes, acts of violence, and their perpetrators. In accordance with *EC Section 32282(a)(2)(E)*, the comprehensive school safety plan shall include a discrimination and harassment policy consistent with the prohibition against discrimination.

We know that a positive school climate is the most important factor in increasing safety, security, social-emotional growth, and academic achievement. According to the U.S. Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center, "Positive school climates enhance safety in the school and community by increasing communication between students, families, and school personnel." Focus on a positive school climate has the potential to reduce violence, bullying, and even suicides. For more information regarding positive school climate and resources to improve school climate, please visit the CDE Positive School Climate Web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/schoolclimate.asp> or visit the REMS School Climate and Emergencies Web page at <https://rems.ed.gov/K12SchoolClimateAndEmerg.aspx>.

School Safety Plan Approval Process Guidelines

A key recommendation in the California State Auditor (CSA) Report 2016-136, *School Violence Prevention*, is that school districts and county offices of education should monitor and approve their schools' comprehensive school safety plans. In the report, Rocklin Unified School District and Placer County Office of Education were identified as having implemented best practices to help ensure that safety plans are updated and approved annually.

For more information on CSA Report 2016-136, please visit the California State Auditor Web page at <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2016-136/introduction.html>.

Effective practices identified in the report include:

- LEA distribution of a safety plan template to school sites for schools to modify and include site-specific procedures.
- LEA use of a document-tracking system to ensure that its schools submit safety plans in a timely manner so that the district can review and approve them before the March 1 deadline.
- County office of education requirement that districts in its jurisdiction certify that they have reviewed and approved all of their schools' safety plans each year.

I encourage you to review and revise your monitoring and approval processes to ensure compliance with *EC* requirements.

For comprehensive school safety planning resources, please visit the CDE Safe Schools Planning Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/vp/safeschlplanning.asp>.

You may also visit the CDE Resource: Local Education Agencies' Responsibility to Students Web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/di/eo/dutytoprotect.asp>.

Building Disaster Plans

CSA Report 2016-136 recommends that, in addition to earthquake evacuation and fire drill procedures that are required specifically, general direction be provided to schools on what to include in their school building disaster plans as required by *EC* Section 32282(a)(B)(I).

Emergency procedures and drills for the following situations should be considered when developing school building disaster plans; these may include but are not limited to:

- Fire
- Relocation/Evacuation
- Bomb Threat
- Bioterrorism/Hazardous Materials
- Earthquake
- Flood
- Power Failure/Blackout
- Intruders/Solicitors
- Weapons/Assault/Hostage
- Explosion

- Gas/Fumes

Emergency procedures should be developed and adapted to each school's needs and circumstances in collaboration with first responders and community partners.

State Compliance Audit Guide

Beginning in the 2018–19 school year, comprehensive school safety plans will be audited through the annual audits required by *EC* Section 41020 to ensure that comprehensive school safety plans are updated and approved by March 1 of each year. Compliance with the following *EC* sections will be audited:

EC Section 32286(a): Each school shall adopt its comprehensive school safety plan by March 1, 2000, and shall review and update its plan by March 1, every year thereafter.

EC Section 32288(a): In order to ensure compliance with this article, each school shall forward its comprehensive school safety plan to the school district or county office of education for approval.

EC Section 32288(c): In order to ensure compliance with this article, each school district or county office of education shall annually notify the State Department of Education by October 15 of any schools that have not complied with Section 32281.

Training for School Behavioral Threat Assessments

To assist schools and districts in assessing behavioral threats, and in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education REMS Technical Assistance Center, the CDE sponsored two statewide trainings recently, titled: *School Behavioral Threat Assessments: An Introduction*.

If you were unable to attend this training, I encourage you to review the REMS Use of Social Media in Behavioral Threat Assessments Webinar at <https://rems.ed.gov/SocialMediaThreatAssessment2016Webinar.aspx>.

For additional emergency services resources for schools and educators, please visit the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services Resources for Schools and Educators Web page at <http://www.caloes.ca.gov/for-schools-educators>.

If you have any questions regarding this subject, please contact Nancy Zarenda, Education Policy Consultant, Coordinated School Health and Safety Office, by phone at 916-445-8441 or by e-mail at nzarenda@cde.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Tom Torlakson

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