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Moraga School District to Implement Safety Curriculum

*Student Safety Committee presents recommendations to School Board**By Sophie Braccini*

In the aftermath of reports late last spring revealing that a Moraga School District principal had failed 16 years ago in his duty as mandated reporter, Superintendent Bruce Burns proposed the creation of a Student Safety Committee that was tasked with spending the summer reviewing existing policies and proposing improvements. Last week, on the eve of the first day of classes in the new school year, the committee presented its findings to the Moraga School District Governing Board. Among the committee's recommendations is the implementation of a safety curriculum for the District's most vulnerable population - the students themselves.

"The committee went through what happened 16 years ago to identify gaps and make recommendations," said Burns. The Board accepted, and has begun to implement, all of the recommendations, which include more training for staff and teachers, providing information to parents and the community, and the creation of a safety curriculum for all children enrolled in Moraga schools.

"A subcommittee is looking at what's being done across the country to teach children what is appropriate and what is not, and what their rights are," said Burns, who anticipates that a safety program for students will begin in early 2013.

Regarding additional training for adults, Burns explained, "Up to now we talked about mandated reporting, among other high profile issues, once a year with all District employees," he said. "The committee asked that the information be given twice a year." The first session with employees was held August 20; the second will happen before the end of January, 2013. A special workshop for the administrative team, at which barriers to reporting will be discussed, is scheduled for October.

The Board asked for clarification of what a teacher should do if a colleague tells her about a suspicion of abuse but doesn't know if that colleague has reported the suspicion. "The rule is, 'if in doubt, report,'" stated Burns.

Burns said the District is also trying to reach out to parents. "We organized an information session for parents on August 20," but although all District parents were invited, only eight attended. The timing of the workshop may have been the problem, he mused, adding, "That presentation was excellent, we might do it again later this year."

In addition, the District plans to add an information section to its website where elements such as "reasonable suspicion" and legal obligations will be defined. "We may also inform other community organizations who deal with children about this resource so they can take advantage of it," noted Burns.

The committee will continue to meet as needed and will report to the Board about the implementation of its recommendations before the end of November. Meeting agendas, minutes, a list of committee members, and additional resources can be found under the header Student Safety Committee on the District's website, www.moraga.k12.ca.us.

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