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Moraga Campus & Gun Safety event held at Campolindo

By Vera Kochan

Campolindo High School served as the venue for an Oct. 16 Moraga Campus and Gun Safety program that was geared toward informing parents of children going to school within the town's system about gun safety in the home, and what is being done to keep their kids safe from gun violence.

Concerned parents Liz Tausend, Liz Goulding and Stephanie Gleason Bickham organized the event which featured presenters and panelists: Moraga Mayor Renata Sos, Moraga Police Chief Jon King, Moraga School District Superintendent Julie Parks, Acalanes Union High School District Superintendent John Nickerson, and Campolindo High School Principal Peter Alvarez.

Bickham kicked off the discussion before a crowd of approximately 50 people with sobering statistics: 393 million civilians own firearms in the United States; firearms are the leading cause of death for kids in the U.S.; 4.6 million kids in the U.S. live in a home where the guns are not locked; and 1 in 5 high school students have contemplated suicide.

Sos stated, "Everyone in this room has two things in common. One, we love our children, and two, we want to keep them safe. When people in this town see an issue, they tackle it." She also reminded attendees that the Town Council had recently passed two ordinances that involved safe gun storage, and banning the sale of guns within town limits.

According to King, each MPD officer is issued a gun lock box for use in storing their weapon at home. He explained that safe storage is a critical issue since often guns are stolen from homes and used by criminals during residential burglaries. King added that in California, anyone who purchases a gun is entitled to a lock box from the seller, and if anyone in Moraga wishes to get rid of their gun, MPD will collect it. The Department also offers free gun locks/cables that can stop a gun from operating while under lock and key. King added that MPD is working on Campus Active Shooter training exercises with the other Lamorinda agencies, as well as with the Moraga school system, to develop school safety. The next training exercise is scheduled for Veterans Day when the schools will be closed. He also stressed the importance of the phrase, "If you see something, say something" with regards to students reporting anything suspicious to their teachers.

"Safety is the center of what we do," stated Parks. She went on to explain the three Moraga Safety Plan goals for the current year. The Moraga School District will utilize best practices for securing the physical safety of students and staff and will continue to prioritize mental health and wellness practices for social-emotional safety (this includes ensuring inclusive campuses for all students). It will also institute restorative practices to assist in positive behavior intervention systems (PBIS) and student discipline.

The MSD also follows through with extensive safety training for staff which includes regularly scheduled emergency drills, response to emergencies (through MPD or 911), staff training in child abuse reporting, youth suicide awareness and prevention, as well as standard response protocol, seizure, Epipen, CPR/First Aid training, crisis prevention intervention, threat assessment training and PBIS.

? MSD also makes certain to have counselors and Wellness Centers at each school, suicide prevention education and training for Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School staff; and a Sandy Hook Promise Anonymous Reporting System.

? Nickerson explained that during the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) for 2021, when it came to the question asking how safe do students feel in their school, only 77% of ninth-graders felt safe, and 75% of 11th-graders felt safe. He did point out that students were coming back from at-home learning during COVID that year, so they may have been responding to the mask mandates. The AUHSD has a Wellness Center at each high school, and it had been reported that over half of the students in the district have received some type of service through them. "When kids are in distress, the clues are there on their social media sites." He also felt that it is important to de-stigmatize mental health.

? The AUHSD strives to offer campus safety through a District Safety Committee that examines preventative measures, response to crisis and communication systems and consults with law enforcement. The committee also creates school facilities improvements, has increased collaboration/standardization across school sites, monitors school climate, mental health support and crisis prevention, and approves school safety plans on an annual basis.

Alvarez stated, "I am very pro-relationship with our police officers. It's also important to have a good relationship with parents and students in order to truly be safe." Campolindo's Wellness Center offers crisis support and intervention, short-term individual and group counseling, case management, parent/guardian consultation, as well as staff training and consultation.

With regards to all around campus safety, staff has been trained in suicide prevention, incident training and response, and safety drills for staff and students. Staff was also trained to utilize targeted/redundant communication systems, coordinate with local law enforcement; and use anonymous reporting. There are plans in the works to also provide fentanyl overdose training.

The evening's presentation was filmed for the public's future viewing, however the editing was still in progress as of Lamorinda Weekly's press time. For gun safety tips visit: besmartforkids.org or www.moraga.ca.us/police.

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