

February 22, 2018

Dear Community,

This is a challenging time for us as a nation, as a state, as a community, and as a school district. The recent school shooting in Florida has understandably resulted in grief and outrage felt by students, teachers, and families there. As a result, there is an increased level of collective action in that state, in Washington DC, and in Alameda schools as well. Just this past week we saw a small number of AUSD students walking out a week after the massacre in Florida, and we can expect more students to walk out on March 14<sup>th</sup> when a national student walkout is planned.

So what does it all mean? What is the takeaway message? Already parents are asking how the district will both keep our students safe from gun violence and support our students who want to express their political concerns. I write today to describe actions we have taken and actions we have planned going forward.

### **Emergency Protocols**

I cannot emphasize enough how seriously AUSD takes student and staff safety. Every year our schools run earthquake drills, fire drills, and lockdown drills so that if and when threats to our safety arise, both staff and students know what to do. AUSD has partnered actively and well for years with the Alameda Police Department and other community organizations on these drills – including creating and practicing reunification plans in case students need to be moved off their campus during an emergency. (Our next reunification drill will take place this May.) AUSD also has had two full-scale active shooter drills (with staff, law enforcement, and student participation) in recent years and is planning another for 2020.

That said, we also aim to review our emergency preparedness training protocols with our families, our students, and our staff in weeks and months ahead so everyone understands the protocols. Please take the time to read the [hand-out](#) that AUSD schools provide every year to describe these protocols, as well as details on how AUSD communicates in the event of an emergency. The more prepared we all are, the safer we all will be.

### **Facilities**

The key focus of our Measure I facilities bond is safety and security. Steps that are being taken to improve safety and security at our school sites include perimeter fencing, new door locks in classrooms, and reconfiguring school offices where necessary so as to better log and monitor visitors. You can see AUSD's Safety and Security standards [here](#). These safety standards were drafted by a committee that included law enforcement personnel, principals, and district office

staff, and they were based on state-of-the-art, “best practice” recommendations from school safety experts.

### **Emotional and Social Wellness**

As we have discussed several times in Board of Education meetings and community newsletters, AUSD is in the process of strengthening its anti-bias, anti-bullying, and social-emotional curricula to help students learn to relate to each other in healthier, more inclusive ways. At the same time, we are adjusting how we work with students with behavioral challenges and assessing the mental health needs of students in our schools. Taken together, we believe this work will help us better identify and counsel students who need support as they learn how to manage their emotions and relationships with others.

### **Supporting Walkouts**

I want to acknowledge and praise actions taken by students to make themselves heard and raise their voices as young citizens. This past Wednesday — the same day groups of students walked out of our high schools — I was scheduled already to speak with Leadership students at Alameda High School about how they can frame issues and lead collective action. That same day, I also had opportunities to hear the concerns of students who marched to City Hall, witness EHS students gathering in their front quad, and attend the “Political and Proud” rally that students organized that evening there as well. As an educator, it was incredibly gratifying to have these opportunities to watch students act and lead locally in response to national events.

I know that we can count on students to continue to speak their minds. We appreciate this opportunity to partner with students and with other community agencies to help ensure students have the opportunity to participate in non-violent social activism and collective action efforts. We also appreciate our students’ passion for making progressive change in the world we share with them. Please know that we will continue to support the students as they share in, fight for, and realize the AUSD vision of an “inclusive, safe, and secure learning environment” that prepares them to be responsible citizens.

Sincerely,



Sean McPhetridge, Ed.D