

# Folsom Cordova Unified School District



## Unity Toolkit

Where there is unity there is always victory.  
– Publilius Syrus



## Table of Contents

- I. [Introduction](#)
- II. [Supporting Students Amidst Global Conflicts](#)
  - A. Educator's Role in Supporting Students**
    - 1. Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment
      - a) Establishing Trust and Safety
      - b) Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity
    - 2. Recognizing Signs of Distress
      - a) Behavioral Indicators
      - b) Emotional and Psychological Symptoms
    - 3. Providing Emotional Support
      - a) Active Listening
      - b) Empathy and Compassion
    - 4. Implementing Conflict Resolution Strategies
      - a) Mediation Techniques
      - b) Peer Support Programs
  - B. Curriculum Integration**
    - 1. Incorporating Global Awareness
      - a) Teaching About Global Conflicts
      - b) Encouraging Critical Thinking and Discussion
    - 2. Developing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs
      - a) SEL Competencies
      - b) Activities and Exercises
    - 3. Fostering Global Citizenship
      - a) Community Projects
      - b) Cross-Cultural Exchanges
- III. [Impact on Educators](#)
  - A. Emotional and Psychological Strain
  - B. Strategies for Self-Care and Support
- IV. [Informational Resources](#)
- V. [Contact Information for Support Services](#)

# Introduction

As we embark on the 2024-2025 school year, we are presented with challenges and opportunities to foster a sense of unity and safety within our educational community. This toolkit has been thoughtfully compiled to assist teachers and staff in navigating the complexities of responding to traumatic and polarizing current events. Folsom Cordova Unified School District (FCUSD) understands that such incidents require our attention and sensitivity. These resources are intended to be a living document that will be modified and added to as needed.

Our role as a public school system extends beyond mere academic instruction; we are entrusted with the well-being of all members of our school community—students, colleagues, families, and various community members. In light of the heightened emotions and trauma resulting from the continuous violence reported across multiple media platforms, it is essential to recognize that some of our students and staff may be directly or indirectly impacted.

As educators serving a diverse population, we must create physically and emotionally or psychologically safe spaces where all students, faculty, staff, and families feel supported and respected. Students who don't feel safe are less likely to learn, retain, and apply knowledge needed to meet our district's Vision of educational excellence. To discuss challenging current events requires us to approach topics with utmost care and empathy. Many of our students and staff have cultural and religious ties, and their unique experiences must be acknowledged and respected.

The resources in this toolkit aim to provide you with tools and information to address students' inquiries and concerns effectively. They are not exhaustive, nor does their inclusion constitute an endorsement of a particular political viewpoint. These materials are intended to offer access to information and facilitate informed and respectful discussions when appropriate. However, it is crucial to remember that you, as site administrators and teachers, are best positioned to determine the appropriateness and relevance of these resources for your students at any given moment throughout the school year.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to fostering a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all the students and families we serve.

## **Supporting Students Amidst Global Conflict**

Educators stand at the forefront of fostering resilience and promoting well-being among students, especially those impacted by conflicts around the world. The classroom is not just a place for academic learning; it is a sanctuary where students can find safety, understanding, and support. In a world increasingly marked by turmoil and strife, the role of educators extends beyond traditional teaching methods to encompass the holistic development of students.

This section explores the multifaceted responsibilities of educators in creating a supportive environment that addresses the emotional, psychological, and social needs of students affected by global conflicts. It highlights the importance of establishing a safe and inclusive classroom, recognizing signs of distress, providing emotional support, and implementing effective conflict resolution strategies.

By embracing these roles, educators can significantly influence the well-being and development of their students, helping them navigate the challenges posed by their experiences and fostering a sense of unity and hope within the classroom. The strategies outlined in this section aim to equip educators with the knowledge and tools necessary to make a positive and lasting impact on their students' lives.

### **Essential Questions:**

1. How do I support all students to feel safe and supported socially, emotionally, and physically? ([Refer to the Recognize, Interrupt, Repair \(RIR\) protocol](#))
2. How do I support students to engage in discourse that is respectful and thoughtful of other perspectives?
3. What are some signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety that I need to look for and how do I get help for myself, students, and colleagues who are experiencing these symptoms?
4. How can educators maintain their well-being and professional effectiveness while supporting students affected by global conflicts and emotional distress?

### **Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment**

Educators play a crucial role in fostering a safe and inclusive learning space in the classroom and on campus. This foundational aspect is essential for students to feel secure and valued, especially those affected by conflicts around the world and here at home

## **Establishing Trust and Safety**

- **Clear Communication:** Set clear expectations for behavior and respect in the classroom. This helps create a predictable environment where students know what to expect.
- **Consistent Routines:** Maintain consistent routines to provide a sense of normalcy and stability. This can be particularly comforting for students whose lives have experienced disruption.
- **Safe Spaces:** Designate areas in the classroom where students can go if they need a moment to themselves. Ensure that these spaces are welcoming and free from judgment.
- **Support:** Identify neutral support staff that can provide additional assistance and a listening ear to those in need such as a Mental Health Specialist, School Social Worker, School Counselor, or School Psychologists.

## **Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity**

- **Celebrating Differences:** Encourage students to share their cultural backgrounds and experiences. This can be done through projects, presentations, or cultural exchange activities (See [Recognitions Months presentations](#) and the [FCUSD Cultural Observances Calendar](#)).
- **Inclusive Curriculum:** Integrate diverse perspectives and voices into the curriculum. This helps all students see themselves reflected in their studies and understand the broader world. See Re
- **Anti-Bullying Policies:** Enforce anti-bullying policies to protect students from discrimination and harassment. Communicate these policies to students, staff, and families, ensuring everyone knows how to report incidents and feels confident that concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly.

## **Recognizing Signs of Distress**

Understanding and identifying signs of distress in students is critical for timely intervention and support. If a student displays any of these signs of distress, please work with your site administrator and Social Worker, Mental Health Specialist, School Counselor, or Psychologist.

## **Behavioral Indicators**

- **Changes in Behavior:** Noticeable changes in behavior, such as withdrawal, aggression, or sudden changes in academic performance, can be indicators of distress.

- **Absenteeism:** Increased absenteeism or frequent requests to leave the classroom can signal that a student is struggling.
- **Social Isolation:** Students who suddenly isolate themselves from peers may be experiencing emotional or psychological distress.

### **Emotional and Psychological Symptoms**

- **Anxiety and Depression:** Look for signs of anxiety or depression, such as excessive worry, sadness, or hopelessness.
- **Trauma Responses:** Be aware of trauma responses like hypervigilance, difficulty concentrating, or being easily startled.
- **Physical Complaints:** Students may express emotional distress through physical symptoms like headaches, stomachaches, or fatigue.

### **Providing Emotional Support**

Emotional support is vital for students dealing with the effects of conflict. Educators can offer support through various methods.

#### **Active Listening**

**Presence and Attention:** Be fully present when listening to students. Show that you are paying attention through body language and verbal affirmations.

- **Non-Judgmental Attitude:** Create an environment where students can express themselves without fear of judgment.
- **Reflective Responses:** Reflect on the students' thoughts to show understanding and empathy.

### **Trauma-Informed Practices**

#### **Six Trauma-Informed Principles**

**1. Safety:** Ensuring that both physical and emotional safety are prioritized. This means creating an environment where individuals feel secure and free from harm. This includes maintaining a safe physical space and being sensitive to emotional triggers.

**2. Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Building and maintaining trust through clear, consistent, and honest communication. Ensuring that decisions and procedures are transparent and understandable.

**3. Peer Support:** Utilizing and valuing the role of individuals with lived experience to provide support and guidance. Peer support fosters a sense of shared understanding and validation.

**4. Collaboration, and Mutuality:** Emphasizing the importance of collaboration and mutual respect in relationships. This principle focuses on shared decision-making and ensuring that interactions are reciprocal and empowering.

**5. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:** Prioritizing individuals' autonomy by offering choices and respecting their voice. This principle supports individuals in taking an active role in their own recovery and decision-making processes.

**6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Consideration:** Being aware of and sensitive to cultural, historical, and gender-related factors. This principle involves understanding how these factors influence an individual's experience of trauma and their approach to healing.

Incorporation of these principles guides schools, organizations, and individuals in creating environments that are safe, supportive, empowering, and culturally responsive, thereby promoting healing, resilience, and well-being for all individuals affected by trauma.

[Trauma and the Nervous System](#) video was developed to give a basic introduction and overview of how trauma and chronic stress affect our nervous system and how those effects impact our health and well-being.

#### Educator Considerations

- Please refrain from showing graphic videos. Showing videos in class may trigger or re-traumatize students connected to the incident.
- Recognize your own reactions and biases. Attempt to use these reactions as entry points for deepening understanding of the topic. Remain curious.
- We do not have all the answers!
- Recognize the difference between opinions and informed knowledge.
- Recognize how your own positionality (such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability status) informs your perspectives and reactions.
- Differentiate between safety and comfort. Accept discomfort as necessary for growth.
- Establish classroom norms for discussing breaking news.

#### Empathy and Compassion

- **Understanding Perspectives:** Try understanding the student's perspective and acknowledge their feelings. This helps students feel heard and validated.

- **Supportive Actions:** Offer practical support, such as extra time for assignments or providing resources for additional help.
- **Building Resilience:** Encourage resilience by helping students focus on their strengths and coping strategies.

## Implementing Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict resolution strategies are essential for helping students navigate interpersonal conflicts constructively.

### **Mediation Techniques**

- **Peer Mediation:** Train students in peer mediation to help them resolve conflicts among themselves in a structured manner.
- **Guided Discussions:** Facilitate guided discussions where students can express their viewpoints and work towards a resolution collaboratively.
- **Problem-Solving Frameworks:** Teach students problem-solving frameworks to help them approach conflicts with a solution-oriented mindset.

### **Peer Support Programs**

- **Buddy Systems:** Implement buddy systems where students are paired to support each other, fostering a sense of community and mutual aid.
- **Peer-to-Peer Support:** *Coming to secondary sites in 2025*
- **Collaborative Projects:** Encourage collaborative projects that require teamwork and cooperation, helping students build positive relationships.

## **Anonymous Reporting App WeTip2.0**

WeTip 2.0 offers a comprehensive web-based reporting system that empowers the FCUSD community to proactively address various concerns, including bullying, mental health, harassment, vandalism, and criminal activities. The platform ensures anonymity and ease of use by providing a two-way text line and QR code, as well as a toll-free number enabling users to report incidents quickly and comfortably. FCUSD and WeTip continuously monitor and triage these reports, ensuring round-the-clock vigilance, 24/7/365. This reporting system not only keeps the reporter's identity confidential but also enables school site administration and District-level staff to promptly address and mitigate any concerns the school community raises..

[Report Bullying, Mental Health Concerns, Hate Speech, Crime or Misconduct](#)



# Curriculum Integration

Integrating global awareness and social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum is vital for equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to understand and navigate conflicts around the world. Through thoughtful curriculum design, educators can help students develop a deeper understanding of global issues, build empathy, and foster a sense of global citizenship. This section provides strategies for incorporating these elements into the classroom, ensuring that students are not only informed but also empowered to contribute positively to the world around them.

## Incorporating Global Awareness

Global awareness involves educating students about the complexities of global conflicts, cultural diversity, and the interconnectedness of the world. By integrating these topics into the curriculum, educators can foster critical thinking and encourage students to engage thoughtfully with global issues.

### Teaching About Global Conflicts

- **Contextual Understanding:** Provide historical context for current global conflicts to help students understand the roots and causes of these issues. This could include lessons on the geopolitical, economic, and social factors that contribute to conflicts.
- **Current Events Discussions:** Incorporate current events into the curriculum through regular discussions, encouraging students to stay informed and critically analyze global news. Use reputable news sources and foster an environment where diverse perspectives are respected.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Engage students in research projects that explore specific global conflicts. This approach allows students to delve deeper into a particular issue, analyze different viewpoints, and present their findings to the class.

### Encouraging Critical Thinking and Discussion

- **Debates and Dialogues:** Organize debates and classroom discussions on global issues, where students can express their opinions, challenge each other's ideas, and develop their reasoning skills. Encourage respectful discourse and an open-minded approach to differing viewpoints.
- **Role-Playing Exercises:** Use role-playing to help students understand the perspectives of different stakeholders in a conflict. This can build empathy and encourage students to think critically about the motivations and challenges faced by others.
- **Critical Media Literacy:** Teach students to critically evaluate the information they encounter in the media. Discuss the role of bias, propaganda, and misinformation, and equip students with the tools to discern credible sources.

## **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a crucial component of education that helps students manage their emotions, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. Integrating SEL into the curriculum supports students in developing the skills they need to cope with the challenges posed by global conflicts.

As the school year begins, faculty must build relationships with students and nurture their SEL competencies. This creates a classroom and school climate where students feel safe to take academic risks and can engage with controversial or emotionally charged topics productively and respectfully.

Reviewing and revisiting [The CASEL 5](#) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies before and during discussions of potentially controversial or contentious topics are foundational strategies. This approach encourages students to reflect on their feelings, presence, and behavior in the learning environment while fostering openness to diverse perspectives and mindsets that others may bring to the same topic or event.

The following prompts, while not exhaustive, are one strategy that can help you guide students through the SEL competencies before a classroom discussion:

1. **Self-Awareness:** Help students develop self-awareness by encouraging them to reflect on their own emotions, strengths, and values. Activities like journaling or mindfulness exercises can support this process.
  - a. What emotions am I currently feeling, and what might be causing these emotions?
  - b. How do my personal beliefs and experiences shape my perspective on this topic?
  - c. Do I have all the facts, is the information I am consuming coming from reliable sources?
  - d. How might my body language and tone of voice affect how others perceive my contributions?
  - e. How might my reactions influence the dynamics of the discussion or group activity?
2. **Self-Management:** Teach students strategies for managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating themselves. Role-playing scenarios and guided discussions can help students practice these skills in a safe environment.
  - a. How can I regulate my emotions to respond calmly and constructively during discussions?
  - b. What strategies can I use to stay focused and engaged, even if the topic becomes challenging or uncomfortable?

- c. How do I prioritize my tasks and manage my time effectively to balance this discussion with other responsibilities?
  - d. How can I set and maintain personal goals for participating respectfully and thoughtfully in this conversation?
- 3. Responsible Decision Making:** Encourage responsible decision-making by teaching students to consider the ethical implications of their choices and the impact of their actions on others. Case studies and moral dilemmas can be useful tools for exploring these concepts.
- a. What are the potential consequences of my actions or decisions on myself and others in this situation?
  - b. How can I gather and evaluate relevant information to make an informed and ethical choice?
  - c. What are the possible alternatives, and which option aligns best with my values and the safety of my community?
  - d. How can I anticipate and address any potential conflicts or challenges that arise from my decision?
- 4. Relationship Skills:** Support students in developing relationship skills, such as effective communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution. Collaborative projects and group activities provide opportunities for students to practice these skills.
- a. How can I actively listen to others to ensure I understand their perspectives and feelings?
  - b. What are good strategies to communicate my thoughts and emotions effectively and respectfully?
  - c. How can I show empathy and support to my peers, especially those with different viewpoints or experiences?
  - d. How can I resolve conflicts constructively and maintain positive relationships with others?
  - e. How can I collaborate and work effectively with others to achieve common goals and foster a sense of community?
- 5. Social Awareness:** Foster social awareness by helping students recognize and empathize with the emotions and perspectives of others. This can be achieved through storytelling, exposure to diverse cultural narratives, and discussions about global humanitarian issues.
- a. How can I recognize and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of my peers?
  - b. What are the social dynamics at play in this group, and how might they influence our interactions?
  - c. How can I identify and understand the emotions and perspectives of others in this discussion?

- d. What impact might my words and actions have on the feelings and well-being of those around me?
- e. How can I contribute to creating an inclusive and respectful environment for everyone involved?

Engaging students in the five SEL competencies before discussing controversial topics, or emotionally charged national or world events, is crucial. It helps students develop self-awareness and self-management, fostering empathy and social awareness. This promotes respectful communication and conflict resolution, lacking in current media discourse. Ultimately, these skills enable responsible decision-making and create a

### **Building relationships by using the 6 principles of compassionate instruction**

- 1. Always empower, never disempower-**avoid power struggles, discipline must never resemble the trauma, and discipline should be consistent, respectful, and non-violent.
- 2. Provide unconditional positive regard-** genuine respect, sustained kindness, and empathy.
- 3. Maintain high expectations-**consistent high expectations and limits, set limits and rules that keep students safe and protect their well-being using a calm and respectful voice.
- 4. Check assumptions, observe, and question-**avoid acting on our assumptions. Ask questions and listen to the responses.
- 5. Being a relational coach-** teachers can help students mend their perceptions of others.
- 6. Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation-** carefully plan, model, and observe ongoing interactions. Not dependent on behavior or academic performance.

### **Activities and Exercises**

- **Mindfulness Practices:** Incorporate mindfulness exercises into the daily routine to help students manage stress and develop focus. These practices can include breathing exercises, guided imagery, and meditation.
- **Emotion Regulation Activities:** Provide students with tools to manage their emotions, such as emotion regulation charts or "feelings journals" where they can track and reflect on their emotions.
- **Team-Building Exercises:** Engage students in team-building activities that promote cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. These activities help students build strong, supportive relationships with their peers.

- **Community Circles:** Implement community circles as a regular classroom practice. In these circles, students and educators come together to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a structured and respectful setting. Community circles help build a sense of trust, belonging, and empathy among students. They provide a space for open dialogue, allowing students to express themselves, listen to others, and work through conflicts collaboratively.

## **Fostering Global Citizenship**

Global citizenship education aims to prepare students to be active and responsible members of the global community. By fostering a sense of global citizenship, educators can empower students to contribute positively to society and take action on global issues.

### **Community Projects**

- **Service-Learning Initiatives:** Integrate service-learning projects into the curriculum that allow students to apply what they've learned in the classroom to real-world challenges. This might involve partnerships with local organizations working on issues related to global conflicts, such as refugee support services or human rights advocacy groups.
- **Global Collaboration Projects:** Encourage students to collaborate with peers from other countries on projects that address global challenges. These collaborations can be facilitated through digital platforms and can include activities like joint research, cultural exchange, or virtual discussions.
- **Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns:** Support students in developing and implementing advocacy campaigns on global issues they are passionate about. This could involve creating awareness materials, organizing events, or engaging in letter-writing campaigns to policymakers.

### **Cross-Cultural Exchanges**

- **Pen Pal Programs:** Establish pen pal programs that connect students with peers in other countries. This allows students to build cross-cultural relationships and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of others.
- **Virtual Cultural Exchanges:** Use technology to facilitate virtual cultural exchanges where students can interact with peers from different parts of the world. This can include video conferences, shared projects, or online forums where students can discuss global issues and cultural differences.
- **Global Classroom Projects:** Develop classroom projects that involve exploring different cultures, languages, and traditions. Encourage students to present about a country or culture they are interested in, fostering a sense of curiosity and respect for diversity.

# Impact on Educators

As educators take on the vital role of supporting students through the challenges posed by global conflicts, it is important to recognize the profound impact this responsibility can have on their well-being. Educators are not only tasked with imparting knowledge but also with providing emotional and psychological support to students, often in situations that are emotionally charged and complex. This section explores the various ways in which educators are affected by their roles, the potential challenges they may face, and strategies for maintaining their well-being while supporting their students.

## Emotional and Psychological Strain

Supporting students who are affected by global conflicts can be emotionally taxing for educators. The continuous exposure to students' stories of trauma, fear, and uncertainty can lead to what is often referred to as "secondary trauma" or "compassion fatigue."

### Secondary Trauma

- **Emotional Exhaustion:** Educators may find themselves emotionally drained by the weight of their students' experiences. Listening to stories of trauma or witnessing the emotional struggles of students can take a significant toll over time.
- **Heightened Anxiety:** The responsibility of providing support in such challenging circumstances can lead to increased anxiety. Educators may worry about saying the right thing, making the right decisions, or meeting the needs of all their students effectively.
- **Sense of Helplessness:** Despite their best efforts, educators may sometimes feel helpless in the face of the complex and overwhelming issues their students are dealing with. This sense of powerlessness can contribute to feelings of frustration and burnout.

## Strategies for Self-Care and Support

To sustain their ability to support students effectively, educators must prioritize their well-being. Self-care is not a luxury but is necessary for educators working in emotionally demanding environments. This section outlines strategies for self-care and professional support that can help educators maintain their health and well-being.

### Self-Care Practices

- **Mindfulness and Stress Reduction:** Incorporate mindfulness practices into daily routines to manage stress and maintain focus. Techniques such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation can help educators stay grounded.

- **Setting Boundaries:** Establish clear boundaries between work and personal life to prevent burnout. This might include setting limits on work-related tasks outside school hours and taking breaks regularly.
- **Physical Health:** Prioritize physical health by regularly exercising, maintaining a balanced diet, and getting adequate sleep. Physical well-being is closely linked to emotional and psychological resilience.

### **Professional Support Networks**

- **Affinity Groups:** Participate in FCUSD affinity groups where educators can share experiences, discuss challenges, and offer mutual support. These groups provide a safe space for educators to express their feelings and gain insights from colleagues facing similar challenges. *More information to come in Fall 2024.*
- **Supervision and Counseling:** Seek supervision or counseling ([Employee Assistance Program](#) or [Care Solace](#)) to process the emotional and psychological impacts of the work. Professional support can provide educators with coping strategies and emotional relief.
- **Ongoing Professional Development:** Engage in ongoing professional development opportunities to build skills in trauma-informed teaching, SEL, and global education. Continuous learning can help educators feel more confident and competent in their roles.

# Informational Resources

- [Classroom Deliberations](#) (Street Law)
- [Conducting a Civil Conversation in the Classroom](#) (Constitutional Rights Foundation)
- [Facilitating Dialogue with Compassion](#) (San Diego County Office of Education)
- [Fostering Civil Discourse: How Do We Talk About Issues That Matter?](#) (Facing History and Ourselves)
- [Teaching Controversial Issues: A Framework for Reflective Practice](#) (Judy Pace)
- [Responding to Civil Unrest in Schools: Prevention to Response](#) (National Association of School Psychologists)
- [Resilience in a time of war: Tips for parents and teachers of elementary school children](#): This article from the American Psychological Association can help adults guide their young children beyond fear and to resilience.
- [Resilience in a time of war: Tips for parents and teachers of middle school children](#): The American Psychological Association provides tips and strategies for parents and teachers of middle school-aged children.
- [Difficult Conversations in the Classroom \(PDF\)](#) (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning)
- [Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or High-Stakes Topics](#) (Center for Research on Learning & Teaching at the University of Michigan)
- [10 Principles for Talking About Race at School](#) (National Education Association)
- [Racial Justice in Education Resource Guide](#) (National Education Association)
- [Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism, and Other Difficult Topics with Students](#) (Learning for Justice)
- [Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful \(FAIR\) Education Act FAQ](#) (California Department of Education)



# Support Services Contacts

FCUSD Resources	Community Resources
<p><b>Mental Health and Community Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carla Davis Community School Coordinator <a href="mailto:cgaymondavis@fcusd.org">cgaymondavis@fcusd.org</a></li> <li>• Kate Hazarian Director, Strategic Initiative &amp; Support <a href="mailto:khazarian@fcusd.org">khazarian@fcusd.org</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Care Solace</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">211 Essential Community Services</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Rancho Cordova Food Locker</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Twin Lakes Food Bank</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Folsom Cordova Community Partnership</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Dignity Health-Children's Behavioral Health Center</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sacramento Mental Health Urgent Care Clinic</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Crisis Text Line</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">CA Youth Crisis Line</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Suicide and Crisis Helpline</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Attendance &amp; Due Process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scott Meyer Director, Behavior Intervention &amp; Student Services <a href="mailto:smeyer@fcusd.org">smeyer@fcusd.org</a></li> <li>• DT Martin Coordinator of Safe Schools <a href="mailto:dmartin@fcusd.org">dmartin@fcusd.org</a></li> <li>• Maggie Cunin Child Welfare &amp; Attendance Specialist <a href="mailto:mcunin@fcusd.org">mcunin@fcusd.org</a></li> </ul>	
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