

# Safety First: How Our Schools Prepare for Emergencies

Released June 17, 2026

## SUMMARY

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury reviewed school safety plans throughout the county, focusing specifically on preparedness for natural disasters. Our review examined how schools respond to earthquakes and tsunamis. We found that all reviewed schools met California requirements for safety plans, but we also identified several schools and districts that exceed minimum standards through innovative and effective practices. This report highlights some of those best practices and encourages their adoption by other schools. Because we did not interview every school district in Humboldt County, there are likely additional schools with exemplary safety programs that are not mentioned in this report. Our primary recommendation is that the Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) continue what we started and identify notable safety practices and facilitate sharing this information among schools and districts.

Natural disasters cannot be prevented, but schools can prepare to respond to an emergency while it is happening and to recover once it is over. Developing a comprehensive safety plan is an essential first step. Equally important is ensuring that everyone involved understands the plan and knows their specific responsibilities when it is activated. In a school setting, this includes three key groups: students, staff, and parents.

Some schools have developed safety plans that are both comprehensive and easy to understand, making critical information readily accessible rather than buried within lengthy documents. Laurel Tree Charter School provides an excellent example of a clear and concise safety plan. This plan clearly outlines roles and responsibilities, includes an emergency response organizational chart, and features a dedicated section on parent communication during emergencies.

Other schools have created brief, user-friendly materials for parents that complement their full safety plan. Fortuna Elementary School District distributes a trifold pamphlet titled *Emergency Preparedness and School Safety*. The pamphlet explains who is involved in school safety decisions, outlines the frequency and types of emergency drills and notifications, and describes what occurs during lockdowns, evacuations, and reunification procedures. One particular school district stood out for its approach to emergency preparedness. Eureka City Schools, which serves 3,537 students across eight schools, has implemented consistent safety procedures across all campuses. The district conducts rigorous emergency drills, utilizes a modern communication and tracking system, and maintains a comprehensive emergency operation plan.

The Eureka City Schools district employs a dedicated Safety and Security Coordinator. Having a district-wide safety coordinator promotes continuity in emergency preparedness efforts and strengthens partnerships with local emergency agencies, enabling timely and effective responses to a wide range of incidents. The district's multi-pronged approach to communication helps build trust and confidence among staff, parents, and the broader community.

Ultimately, every parent wants assurance that their child will be safe at school. Parents play a critical role in emergency preparedness by understanding their school's safety plan, knowing their own responsibilities, and being prepared to take appropriate action when emergencies occur. Clear and consistent communication between schools and families is essential. By fostering collaboration among schools, parents, students, staff, and community partners, schools can bolster their preparedness efforts and improve outcomes when disasters strike.

## **GLOSSARY**

- CDE California Department of Education
- CSSP Comprehensive School Safety Plan
- EOP Emergency Operations Plan
- HCOE Humboldt County Office of Education

## BACKGROUND

Disaster preparedness is an ongoing process, whether it's for a home, a business, or a school. Emergencies are frightening and stressful; having a plan is beneficial for everyone involved. Emergency planning is essential for schools and student safety. Having staff who quickly respond and students who know the drill can make a lifesaving impact.

Earthquakes are high on the list of potential north coast disasters for which we need to prepare. Humboldt County has high seismic activity due to its location along the Cascadia Subduction Zone. The United States Geological Survey database estimated a 96% chance of a large earthquake in the next 50 years.<sup>1</sup> In December of 2022, Rio Dell was hit hard by a quake along the Mendocino Triple Junction. The quake had a magnitude of 6.4 on the Richter scale, which compares earthquake sizes. However, the Mercalli scale is a 12-point scale that measures the intensity of a quake's energy. The Rio Dell earthquake had a maximum Mercalli intensity of VIII, a severe rating.<sup>2</sup> Severity refers to the release of energy over a longer period, which leads to higher velocities, greater ground displacement, and more shaking.











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<sup>1</sup> [Earthquake Information for Humboldt County](#)

<sup>2</sup> See Figure 1. Also at: [USGS - Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale](#)

Figure 1. USGS Mercalli scale

## Earthquake Intensity Scale Modified Mercalli Intensity (MMI)

	INTENSITY	SHAKING	DESCRIPTION
	I	Not Felt	Not felt except by a very few under especially favorable conditions.
	II	Weak	Felt only by a few persons at rest, especially on upper floors of buildings.
	III	Weak	Felt quite noticeable by persons indoors. Many people do not recognize it as an earthquake. Standing cars may rock slightly, vibrations are similar to a passing truck.
	IV	Light	Felt indoors by many, outdoors by few. At night, some are awakened. Dishes, windows, and doors are disturbed. Sensation like a heavy truck striking a building. Standing cars rock noticeably.
	V	Moderate	Felt by nearly everyone; many awakened. Dishes and windows are broken. Unstable objects are overturned. Pendulum clocks may stop.
	VI	Strong	Felt by all; many frightened. Some heavy furniture moved. A few instances of fallen plaster. Damage is slight.
	VII	Very Strong	Negligible damage to buildings of good design/construction. Slight to moderate damage in well-built/ordinary construction. Considerable damage in poorly built/ordinary structures. Some chimneys broken.
	VIII	Severe	Slight damage to specially designed structures. Considerable damage to ordinary construction, including partial collapse. Damage is great in poorly built structures. Fall of chimneys, columns, monuments, and walls. Heavy furniture overturned.
	IX	Violent	Considerable damage to specially designed structures; well-designed frame structures are thrown out of plumb. Damage is great in substantial buildings, with partial collapse. Buildings shifted off foundations.
	X+	Extreme	Some well-built wooden structures destroyed; most masonry and frame structures with foundations are destroyed. Rails are bent.

As a result of the December 2022 earthquake, the people of Rio Dell experienced widespread and substantial damage; some suffered the loss of their homes. The earthquake occurred on a Tuesday morning at 2:34 am. Due to structural damage to the gymnasium/cafeteria, the Rio Dell School District closed schools for the rest of the week, and the two weeks that followed were part of the scheduled winter break. Structural engineers and inspectors quickly assessed both Eagle Prairie Elementary and Monument Middle Schools. Classroom buildings received the all-clear, but the gymnasium/cafeteria required further repairs. The schools reopened on January 10, 2023, but without access to the gymnasium/cafeteria. As the Rio Dell schools are often a hub for the community, the middle school dedicated its multipurpose room as a disaster relief center, offering food, clothing, cleaning supplies, and personal items, as well as counseling. Staff from different agencies were available to offer advice and help to the community.

Emergency planning covers what needs to be done both during the event (response) and after the event (recovery). Because the Rio Dell quake happened in the middle of the night, the schools didn't have to use their response plan, but they played a key role for the community during the recovery.

Emergency planning is important for school safety and can reduce the impact of an emergency, such as an earthquake. Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSP) are a key component for facing a disaster, along with an Emergency Operation Plan (EOP).

Education Code Sections 32280-32289.5<sup>3</sup> requires local education agencies and the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop and maintain a CSSP to address risks, prepare for emergencies, and create a safe, secure learning environment. This applies to all K-12 schools, including charter schools. The law also required the CDE to develop and post best practices for reviewing and approving CSSPs.<sup>4</sup> The law requires that each school update its plans annually, with review and approval by the school board.

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<sup>3</sup> [California Education Code Sections 32280-32289.5](#)

<sup>4</sup> [CDE: CSSP Best Practices](#)

Developing a CSSP and an EOP should be a collaborative effort to ensure the most effective response to emergencies. Having a planning team, such as a site council or safety team, work with community partners like fire and police helps align strategies, resources, and responsibilities. The CSSP and EOP should describe actions to be taken before, during, and after an event.

'Prepare', 'Respond', and 'Recover' are the three words often associated with an emergency event. Preparation begins with a well-thought-out plan with defined roles and responsibilities. Training and drills are included in the preparation phase. School staff are considered safety workers during a disaster, so first aid training and simulated disaster drills are important. Some schools have CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) certified staff who can enhance the safety and support of emergency operations.

The Response Phase refers to the actions taken by staff and students immediately after the emergency has been identified. Response drills are crucial because they make the necessary procedures familiar to the students, reduce panic and reveal weaknesses in current plans.

'Duck, cover, and hold on' is the usual response to an earthquake, but there are other procedures for anyone who is outdoors.

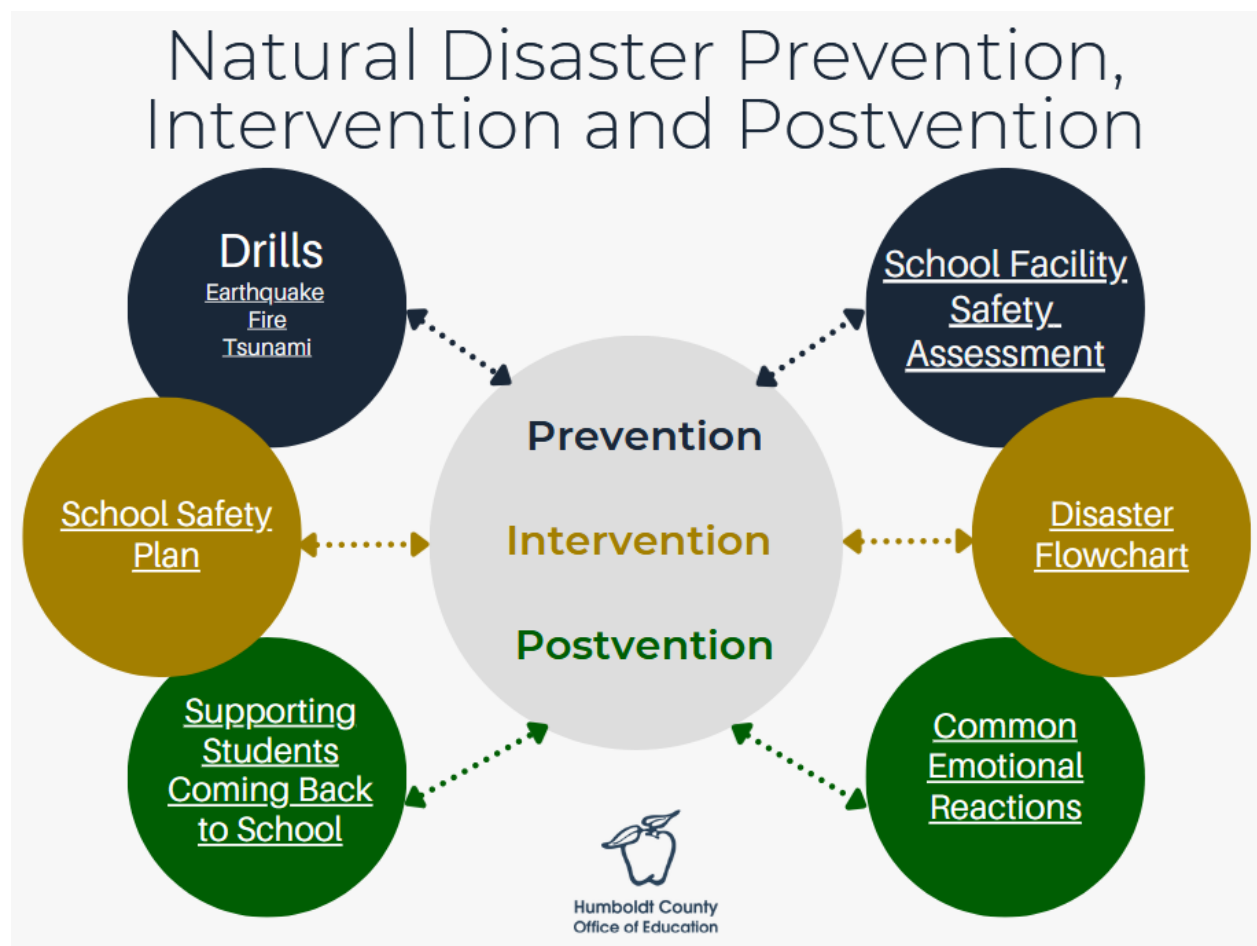
What happens when the shaking has stopped? What's the next step for students and staff? What about worried parents? All of these need to be addressed in the plans.

Recovery is the last phase. What is the plan once the students are safe? How does the school recover if there is damage to school buildings or the community? Does the school have emergency supplies for the students? Does the school need to provide shelter? Disasters can have a dramatic effect on people; are those needs being addressed? A Comprehensive School Safety Plan, as its name states, means looking at all aspects of a disaster.

## Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE)

The Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) has several safety-related resources on their website. Some are products developed by HCOE, and some come from external sources. HCOE has a crisis response-natural disasters page on their website showing ways that a school community can prepare for emergencies. This web page includes the following diagram (Figure 2), which contains several links to outside resources.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2.



Specific examples of HCOE resources include a webinar on school safety plans developed by the CDE,<sup>6</sup> a podcast entitled “What is School Safety”<sup>7</sup> by the National

<sup>5</sup> This clickable diagram is at: [HCOE: Natural-Disasters.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> Webinar is on: [HCOE - School Safety Plans](#)

<sup>7</sup> Podcast link is on the left at: [HCOE - School Safety Plans](#)

Center for School Safety, and a sample safety plan from Glen Paul School (Glen Paul is one of five alternative schools that are HCOE's responsibility).

HCOE provides information on safety plans (e.g., changes in requirements and submission reminders) directly to schools in a variety of ways, including annual Zoom training. All school district superintendents and charter directors are invited to monthly cooperative meetings, at least one of which covers CSSPs. Quarterly forums with school administrators may or may not cover safety. HCOE also hosts a quarterly School and Law Enforcement Network meeting in conjunction with the Sheriff's Office.

### **California Department of Education (CDE)**

The CDE offers safe school planning on its website.<sup>8</sup> The required Education Code and legal requirements for Comprehensive School Safety Plans are listed, as well as help in identifying elements and resources for improving school safety. The site offers suggestions on how to collaborate with parents, the community, and law enforcement. It also offers a compliance tool to make sure schools address the necessary requirements of Education Code sections and are kept up-to-date on any new regulations.

The CDE provides a comprehensive list of best practices for schools and school districts. Districts having fewer than 2,500 students on average need just a single district plan, not individualized school plans. Safety plans that include best practices are important because they provide evidence-based strategies that can be tailored to each school or district's needs.

In summary, the CDE<sup>9</sup> recommends the following:

#### **Schools**

- Have a safety leader who collaborates with a safety committee and a county office of education safety leader

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<sup>8</sup> [CDE: Safe Schools Planning](#)

<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive list is at: [CDE: CSSP Best Practices](#)

- Encourage student participation in the safety committee
- Discuss and role-play possible scenarios at staff meetings
- Conduct drills with students and staff
- Create a crisis response kit
- Create an emergency response kit
- Develop a partnership with first responders
- Establish a reunification location and procedures (to ensure parent awareness)
- Ensure substitute teachers and staff are aware of emergency plans

### **School District**

- Provide training, support, and oversight to schools
- Coordinate emergency response drills
- Establish a district safety committee and hold regular meetings
- Employ a tracking system to ensure plans are completed, updated, and adopted
- Provide a template, training, and support for CSSP
- Encourage teacher/student participation in curriculum-based safety planning programs
- Require schools to conduct site assessments
- Participate in the Great California Shake Out

### **County Office of Education**

- Provide support, training, and oversight
- Liaison with emergency agencies
- Ensure school coordination with agencies in the development of CSSPs
- Assemble county-wide safety committee meetings, and communicate with the safety director/coordinators in schools and districts
- Host county-wide trainings
- Participate in the Great California Shake Out

## Other Resources

The California School Board Association publishes a seven-page informational packet called the Safe School Toolkit. The packet provides a governance brief on CSSPs, including components and requirements, sample questions, and guidance for school board members.<sup>10</sup>

The California Office of Emergency Services offers a fact sheet for school safety assessments after a disaster which highlights best practices, contact lists and instructions for processing a request.<sup>11</sup>

The federal government, through [SchoolSafety.Gov](https://www.schoolsafety.gov), offers emergency planning strategies and resources, specifically to develop an Emergency Operations Plan. Their Five Preparedness Mission Areas address the greatest risks during an emergency event. The site focuses on guidance for best practices and high-quality safety plans.<sup>12</sup>

Several safety-oriented organizations offer templates for schools to develop their safety plans. Hour Zero<sup>13</sup> is a school safety organization that offers a CSSP tool specifically geared towards California Education Codes, plus online training for not only school staff but also for parents and students in case of a disaster. PrepareEd<sup>14</sup> offers a checklist, resources, and links for the CSSP. Keenan Insurance is a private company providing comprehensive insurance and risk management solutions to many California schools and other organizations. They provide safety plan templates and training. Their 'Keenan Safe Schools' has an extensive list of online training courses for school employees.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [CSBA: Safe Schools Toolkit](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Cal OES: School Safety Fact Sheet](#)

<sup>12</sup> [SchoolSafety.Gov: Emergency Preparedness and School Safety](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Hour Zero resources page](#)

<sup>14</sup> The checklist is offered at no cost at: [PrepareEd: products](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Keenan-Training and Compliance](#)

Charter schools have the support of the HCOE and access to their resources. In addition, several charter school associations can help them develop a school safety plan appropriate to their schools' needs.

Laurel Tree Charter is one school that has a clear school safety plan<sup>16</sup> outlining emergency procedures and responsibilities, as well as special parent communication. A system organization chart defines each job, the staff person (and the backup person) responsible for the job. The chart also identifies the staff who are Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) certified. Food and supplies, and the student release protocol are covered on their chart.

### **Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs)**

Although Comprehensive School Safety Plans are important, California Education Code Section 35294 also requires schools to have a separate Emergency Operations Plan. While CSSPs cover *all* possible safety issues (including suicide prevention and harassment policies), EOPs focus specifically on emergencies. An EOP will outline actions that students and school staff need to take before, during, and after an emergency.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) calls EOPs “living documents that define who does what, when, and how.”<sup>17</sup>

- Who - during an emergency, which individuals take action?
- What - what individual capabilities, resources, and tools are available?
- When - under what conditions are certain actions triggered?
- How - step-by-step, in real time, how do the actions occur?

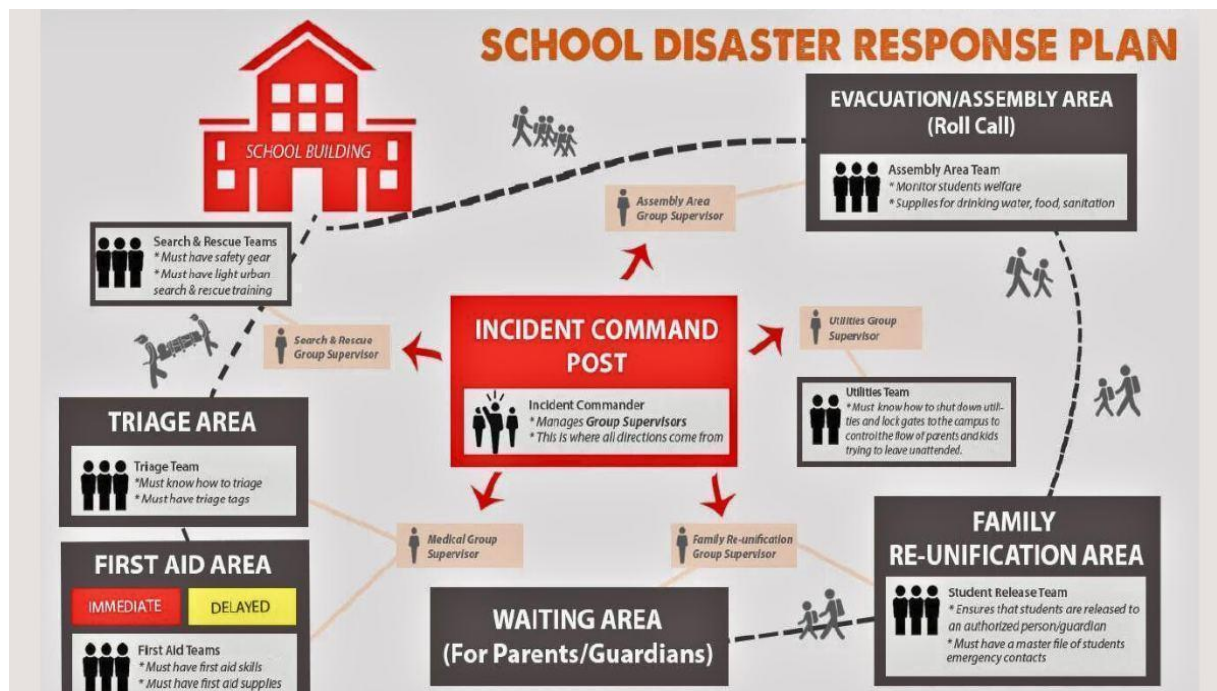
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<sup>16</sup> [Laurel Tree Charter: Student Safety](#)

<sup>17</sup> [FEMA: Comprehensive Preparedness Guide for Planning and Developing EOPs](#)

The graphic (Figure 3) illustrates responsibilities during a disaster, and identifies areas that will need to be clearly marked during an event. It provides a framework for allocating staff, equipment, and supplies efficiently during a disaster.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 3.



EOPs follow a structured planning process that includes hazard identification, role definition, resource mapping, and regular planning exercises.

A key step is identifying who will be responsible for preparing for an emergency. This designated safety person should collaborate with agencies, plan and coordinate drills and simulations, and organize training for students and staff to promote awareness and preparedness. Who fills this role varies from school to school. It could be a principal, the head of a safety committee, or a staff member designated to have safety responsibilities. Eureka City Schools benefits from having a dedicated Safety and Security Coordinator. This is possible in a large school district; most smaller districts cannot afford such specialization. For any school, a Preparedness for Schools

<sup>18</sup> [SMSCountry: Emergency Response Plans for Schools](#)

Checklist<sup>19</sup> created by the International Federation of Red Cross provides a guide for coordinators, teachers, and administrators.

As is the case with CSSPs, there are several resources available to guide schools as they create their EOPs.

A collaboration of six federal agencies created a 72-page guide called “Developing High Quality School Emergency Operation Plans”<sup>20</sup> that outlines steps to form a collaborative team, develop goals and objectives, plan, prepare, and implement the plan. FEMA also offers a sample EOP and online training.<sup>21</sup>

The United States Department of Education offers an eight-page resource called “Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools” to assist in developing high-quality school EOPs.<sup>22</sup> It offers a school guide, the district’s role, interactive tools, and training on developing an EOP.

Cal OES has created the “California Emergency Management for Schools” guide. This guide was developed to improve emergency preparedness and response in schools based on what was learned from previous disasters. The idea of “Whole Community Planning” is emphasized by the guide because schools are often the hub of a community. It’s a handbook for schools on strengthening partnerships with emergency management and first responder agencies.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to understand that EOPs should only be shared with authorized personnel because they contain sensitive information that would compromise the integrity and safety of the plan. In particular, nobody would want an aspiring school shooter to know exactly what the school plan is for a lockdown. Understandably, this is the reason why EOPs are not posted on schools’ websites.

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<sup>19</sup> [American Red Cross: How to Prepare for Emergencies](#)

<sup>20</sup> [FEMA Guide for Developing High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#)

<sup>21</sup> [FEMA: Sample School Emergency Operations Plan](#)

<sup>22</sup> [US Department of Education: Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Cal OES: Emergency Management for Schools](#)

The communication section of an EOP outlines how the school will manage internal and external communication during emergencies. It ensures that staff, students, parents, and emergency responders are informed quickly, accurately, and consistently about the situation and next steps.

### **The Threat of a Tsunami**

A tsunami can occur on the heels of an earthquake, depending upon seismic activity and ocean conditions. Just two schools in the county are located within a tsunami hazard zone: Peninsula Union School and Redwood Coast Montessori School - Manila campus. Both schools have been noted for their tsunami preparedness.<sup>24</sup>

Students from Redwood Coast Montessori were evacuated to their safety zone upon receiving local earthquake and tsunami warnings on December 5, 2024. The staff and students felt the ground shaking, performed the 'duck, cover, and hold on' routine, and when the shaking stopped, immediately grabbed backpacks and emergency kits, did a student check, then headed to the safety zone. The students practice this drill monthly and this real-life event proved that practice makes perfect.

Peninsula School in Samoa also has plans in place for earthquakes and tsunamis. These plans include designated safety routes and specify that emergency kits be located in every classroom and the office. The school requests that parents follow their tips (clear dos and don'ts) when emergencies happen at the school, as posted on their website. Drills are conducted, but because most students travel through their designated safety zone (the tallest sand dunes) while walking to school every day, they are well aware of where to go when evacuating.

### **Parental Communication**

Parental communication before, during, and after an emergency is essential to any plan. The first instinct of a parent is to retrieve their children during an emergency, or at least call the school. Either action by parents can disrupt the plan and slow the response to

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<sup>24</sup> [Kudos from Dr. Lori Dengler](#)

the emergency by first responders and staff. Parents need to know what *to do* and what *not to do* in an emergency, and they need to understand the reunification process. Utilizing an effective communication protocol is instrumental for safety and security.

The majority of schools use some type of all-call system for communications with parents. Some schools use a communication platform called “Parent Square.”<sup>25, 26</sup> This service connects schools, teachers, staff, and parents quickly and efficiently. Parents can elect to receive text, email, voice or in-app messages in their preferred language.

The Eureka City School District uses Parent Square to communicate with parents. They are also implementing the Catapult Content Management System to improve communication for staff across the district. It also allows every campus to instantly update information such as student absences. This is a clear, reliable communication system for all district staff. Catapult delivers messages within seconds via Wi-Fi or cell data and plays emergency sound alerts even if your phone is on silent. Incident Command Staff receive up-to-date information on the safety and welfare of students and staff and can respond quickly to issues that arise during an incident.<sup>27</sup>

Comprehensive School Safety Plans and Emergency Operation Plans are required for disaster preparedness. Some schools take extra steps to ensure that parents know what to expect during an emergency. The Fortuna Elementary School District provides a pamphlet located on each school’s website. This Emergency Preparedness and School Safety pamphlet<sup>28</sup> identifies the people and agencies involved in emergencies and their responsibilities. It explains drills, notifications, actions taken in different emergencies, and the reunification process. Most importantly, it details parental responsibility and actions. At just two pages long, the pamphlet is more likely to be read

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<sup>25</sup> [Parent Square](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Forbes: Parent Square](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Catapult](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Example of Fortuna Elementary School District Safety Pamphlet](#)

before an emergency. The pamphlet can also be easily printed prior to an event to make sure it is always available (access to the internet may be lost during a disaster).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury conducted a series of interviews about school disaster preparedness with the Humboldt County Office of Education, school staff and administrators, and individuals responsible for safety measures at the district and school level.

The Grand Jury reviewed online safety resources for all public schools in Humboldt County, including charter schools. Extensive research on Comprehensive School Safety Plans, Emergency Operation Plans, and best practices was conducted at the local, state, and federal levels. School and parental communication protocols, systems, Comprehensive School Safety Plans templates, and emergency management practices were researched.

## **DISCUSSION**

One common theme in this year's Grand Jury reports is the state of disaster preparedness in Humboldt County. Preparedness is a critical component of school safety that increases a school's ability to protect students, staff, and the broader community. The Grand Jury looked at school disaster safety planning, response, and recovery.

There are almost 90 public schools in 31 school districts in Humboldt County,<sup>29</sup> including alternative and charter schools. The Grand Jury inspected every school's website<sup>30</sup> because a website is often the most direct line of information people can

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix A, and its source: [HCOE fast facts](#)

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix B for our review of school websites

access. It is usually the first resource that parents and the public use to seek school information.

We checked to see if schools posted their Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP), and if they posted safety information and responsibilities specifically for parents. The Grand Jury acknowledges that websites may have changed since the time of our investigation and, therefore, we may have missed any subsequent changes. It is also important to note that schools may provide this safety-related information to parents in hard copy format rather than online.

In general, most school CSSPs reviewed by the Grand Jury were template-driven with the bare essentials necessary to meet State CDE requirements. CSSPs are important and should be thorough and tailored to the needs of individual schools. They are legally required and need to be updated every year. EOPs are also required, and together with the CSSPs, provide schools with a coordinated, comprehensive safety strategy. Together, these plans promote compliance and accountability.

Emergency Operations Plans are the foundational backbone of disaster planning because they outline exactly who does what, when, where, and how during an emergency. It also needs to be understood that these plans contain sensitive information that ensures the safety of students and staff and, as such, a complete EOP cannot be publicly shared like a CSSP. An edited version of the EOP that omits the sensitive operational information might be publicly posted.

Recommended best practices provided by state and federal entities were taken into consideration when we reviewed the information in school CSSPs and EOPs. These practices and procedures are proven to be effective in times of emergencies and yield commendable results.

During our review of CSSPs, we noticed that several school plans have a section on tsunamis even when the school is not in a tsunami hazard zone (Peninsula Union and Redwood Coast Montessori are the only two in the county that are in a tsunami hazard zone). The notion of planning for tsunamis in all the other schools that are on higher

ground is not as far-fetched as you might initially think. School plans should establish procedures for bus drivers/teachers/students traveling to or engaged in offsite activities (field trips, athletic events, or other gatherings) that *are* in tsunami hazard zones.

We learned that a few schools and/or school districts have exemplary components in their overall disaster management plan. Some schools may have very helpful practices or resources for disaster preparedness that cannot be found (or are extremely difficult to find) on their website.

### **Eureka City Schools**

Eureka City Schools District has a Safety and Security Coordinator. While disaster preparedness is just one component of the job, the coordinator has ensured that a district-wide continuity plan keeps everyone on track with the same information. Simulations are part of preparation, along with liaising with Eureka police and fire departments and other local agencies. The District will complete its implementation of the Catapult Content Management System by the end of this school year. Catapult will provide instantaneous updates on emergencies and ensure consistent communication with everyone responding to the event.

### **Fortuna Elementary School District**

Each Fortuna elementary school has a useful Emergency Preparedness and School Safety pamphlet<sup>31</sup> posted on its website under the parent/guardian section. This pamphlet clearly outlines the roles and duties of parents during an emergency. It explains the evacuation and reunification process so parents and guardians are aware of each step that needs to be taken. This concise document augments the multi-page CSSP; it allows parents to quickly see what they need to do (or *not* do) in the heat of an emergency.

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<sup>31</sup> [Example of Fortuna Elementary School District Safety Pamphlet](#)

## **Peninsula Union and Redwood Coast Montessori Schools**

When students grow up learning to recognize and respond to emergencies, they can lead others to safety. Thus, children play an important role in disaster preparedness, a known fact from previous major earthquakes and tsunamis.<sup>32</sup> They share their information with peers, parents, and neighbors, helping to spread awareness and safety information. Both Peninsula Union and Redwood Coast Montessori have effective planning and drills in the event of an earthquake/tsunami. Students know exactly what their route to safety is, as many of them travel through it daily on their way to school.

Peninsula Union regularly educates parents and students about safety. One monthly family night event each year is dedicated to tsunami education. Safety days are held periodically during which the Samoa Peninsula Fire District volunteers and Sheriff's Office staff visit the school to give students and staff familiarity with first responders.

## **Laurel Tree Charter School**

The "C" in CSSP stands for comprehensive, and most school CSSPs cover every aspect of safety (not just disaster safety) in great detail. From the time-sensitive perspective of responding to a disaster, the easier it is to find that information in the CSSP, the better. Laurel Tree Charter has addressed this need in their plan. They do not use the typical longer CSSP template; their plan is clear, concise, and understandable.

Laurel Tree Charter has a communication protocol in place, and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Staff are cross-trained so that everyone can perform any of the roles. Laurel Tree Charter has plans to shelter in place if needed. The school also provides first aid training for the older students.

## **Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE)**

HCOE provides a guide for natural disasters for schools under the direction of its Crisis Prevention and Intervention Department and the School Safety Director. They also

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<sup>32</sup> [Japan Schools: How Disaster Preparedness Education Builds the Ability to Protect Lives](#)

provide training, safety plan templates, and technical assistance. HCOE collaborates with local and state agencies and community organizations, which can be helpful before, during, and after an emergency. School administrators look to HCOE and those organizations for guidance and resources. Administrative meetings are held monthly and quarterly to provide information on new regulations, training, teaching practice, and other relevant items.

The school staff that the Grand Jury interviewed for this report were invariably appreciative of the services provided by HCOE (and not just the safety information). Individual consultations, training sessions, and regular meetings help the schools to create/update their safety plans. There is, however, an extra step that could be taken by HCOE to go beyond what they are required to do for the schools individually. In this report, we have identified a few particularly good disaster preparedness practices, while noting that there are likely other good practices. HCOE could encourage the schools to share best practices or success stories at one of the quarterly meetings each year. Ideally, it would be the meeting held just prior to the time of year that all of the schools are preparing their annual CSSP updates.

## **CONCLUSION**

Local public schools meet the minimum standards for safety plans, but there is always room for improvement.

Even when a school meets or exceeds the standard requirements for its CSSP, this may not be evident to the public. The CSSP disaster information might be in the mound of papers that schools send to parents, but the better way to provide this information to parents, staff, and students is posting on the school's website. An added benefit of having very concise disaster information on the website is that it can be easily printed as a backup in case the internet is down. The key audience should be parents; they need to know their roles and responsibilities in an emergency.

In an emergency, parents may feel an urgent need to reach their children as quickly as possible. It is important that schools clearly communicate that rushing to school or a disaster area should not be their course of action. This message is most effective when it's presented in a concise, easy-to-find format on a school website.

Timely communication through text messages, emails, and phone calls is critical in an emergency. These communications can direct parents to emergency procedures and reunification information that is available on the school's website or a dedicated disaster preparedness pamphlet. Schools can also reinforce key messages and actions that parents may have learned at annual disaster preparedness and awareness events.

Students need to be prepared for emergencies not only on campus but also when they are traveling through or visiting tsunami hazard zones. Safety plans should include clear procedures for staff, bus drivers, and students in these situations.

Emergencies can unfold quickly and confusion can make a dangerous situation worse. Preparedness, planning, and training - not panic - is what saves lives.

Sharing best practice information among schools can help everyone. Education is about learning and sharing. Acknowledging the work of one can help many and save lives, which is the point of every plan.

## **FINDINGS**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury finds that:

- F1:** Eureka City School District serves as a strong example of how comprehensive emergency preparedness protocols and coordinated districtwide procedures can foster consistency, operational continuity, and a shared understanding across schools, therefore enhancing student safety.
- F2:** Fortuna Elementary Schools provide an exemplary, clear, and informative pamphlet on emergency preparedness for parents to understand their role in a school disaster, reducing fear and maintaining consistency across the district.

- F3:** Laurel Tree Charter School has a commendable safety plan that is simple and concise, delivering important information for staff and parents so they can act quickly and correctly.
- F4:** The two schools actually in the tsunami hazard zone (Peninsula Union and Redwood Coast Montessori schools) have effective plans and regular drills, keeping students and staff safe.
- F5:** Humboldt County Office of Education offers substantial support and resources to individual schools for CSSPs and disaster preparedness, better preparing schools for emergencies.
- F6:** Humboldt County Office of Education does not currently review school safety plans to identify specific best practices, therefore, missing an opportunity to improve safety plans throughout the county. **(R1)**
- F7:** Humboldt County Office of Education does not use its regular forums for the schools and districts to share best practices, therefore, missing an opportunity to improve safety plans throughout the county. **(R2)**
- F8:** Many schools located outside tsunami hazard zones do not include tsunami preparedness measures in their safety plans for school activities or field trips that require travel through or into tsunami hazard areas. This lack of planning can place students and staff at increased risk during a tsunami emergency. **(R3)**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

**R1** The Superintendent of the Humboldt County Office of Education direct staff to review schools' safety preparedness plans and identify effective disaster safety practices, particularly those that clearly communicate parents' roles and responsibilities during emergencies. These best practices should be shared with school districts countywide by no later than December 31, 2026. **(F6)**

**R2** The Superintendent of the Humboldt County Office of Education direct staff to expand at least one forum a year to allow the schools to share disaster preparedness best practices, information and ideas. This forum is to take place before the 2027-2028 school year. **(F7)**

**R3** The Superintendent of the Humboldt County Office of Education direct staff to encourage schools and districts to include tsunami preparedness for offsite school activities in their 2027 safety plans. **(F8)**

## **RESPONSES**

Pursuant to California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, each entity or individual named below must respond to the enumerated Findings and Recommendations within specific statutory guidelines.

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- The respondent agrees with the finding; or
- The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action; or
- The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation; or
- The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency where applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the Grand Jury report; or

- The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSE – WITHIN 60 DAYS**

The Superintendent of the Humboldt County Office of Education

**(F5, F6, F7, F8) and (R1, R2, R3)**

### **Invited Responses**

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury also invites the following entities or individuals to respond:

The Superintendent of Eureka City Schools

**(F1)**

The Superintendent of the Fortuna Elementary School District

**(F2)**

The Administrator of the Laurel Tree Charter School

**(F3)**

The Superintendent of the Peninsula Union School District

**(F4)**

The Director of Redwood Coast Montessori - Manila

**(F4)**

### **Responses are to be sent to both:**

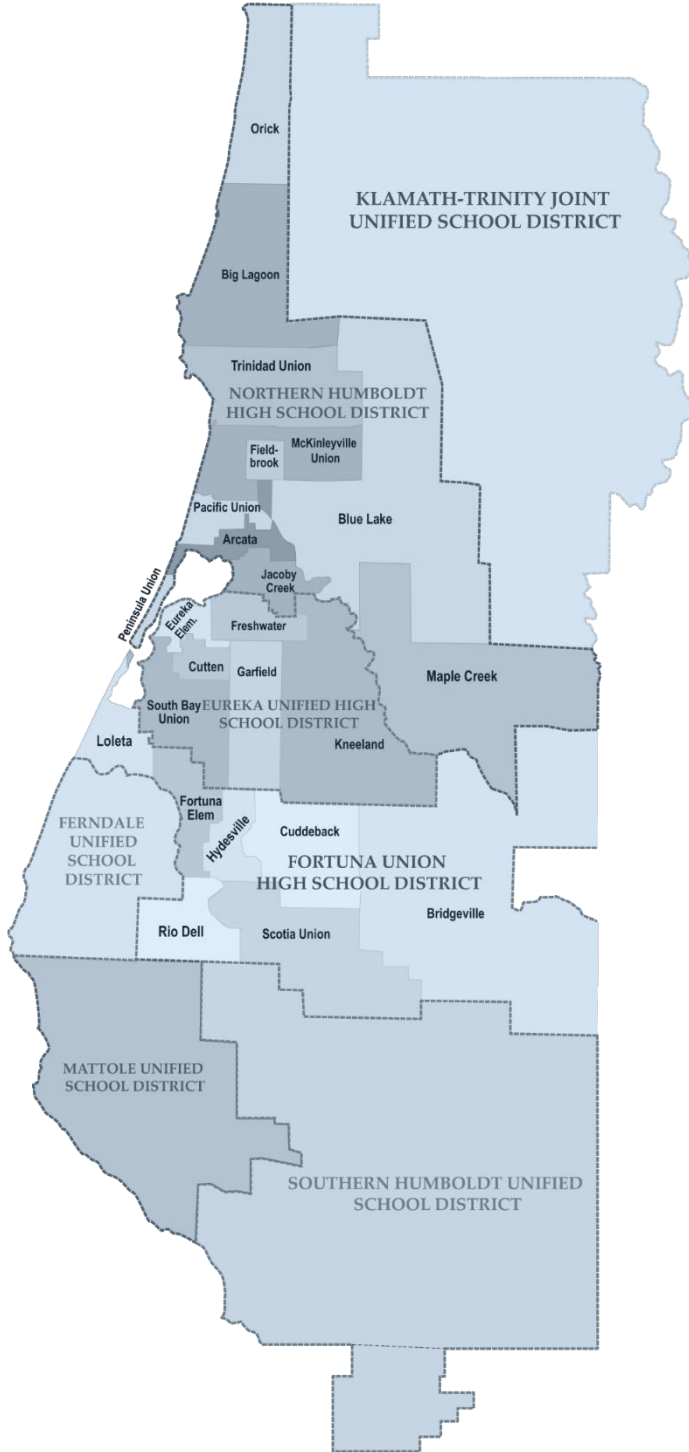
The Honorable Judge Timothy A. Canning  
California Superior Court for Humboldt County  
825 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Eureka, CA 95501

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury  
PO Box 657; Eureka, CA 95502 A

*Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.*

# APPENDIX A

## School Districts in Humboldt County



### Number of Districts

Elementary School District	24
High School District	2
Unified School District	5
County Office of Education	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

### Number of Public Schools

Elementary Schools	42
Middle Schools	8
Comprehensive High Schools	9
Alternative Schools	12
Charter Schools	15
Special Education School	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>

Source: <https://hcoe.org/fast-facts/>

## APPENDIX B

### Website Availability of Safety Related Documents

(More ✓✓✓ means easier to find, no ✓ means could not be found)

Enrollment 2025-26	District School	CSSP	Other safety info
8	<a href="#">Orick Elementary SD</a> Orick Elementary	✓	
14	<a href="#">Big Lagoon Union Elementary SD</a> Big Lagoon Elementary	✓✓	Some tsunami info
161	<a href="#">Trinidad Union Elementary SD</a> Trinidad Union	✓	Transportation safety plan covers quakes
22	<a href="#">Klamath-Trinity Joint (Unified SD)</a> Captain John Continuation High		
258	Hoop Valley Elementary		
349	Hoop Valley High		
23	Jack Norton Elementary		
61	Orleans Elementary		
202	Trinity Valley Elementary		
22	Weitchpec Elementary		
73	<a href="#">Fieldbrook Elementary SD</a> Fieldbrook Elementary	✓	
141	<a href="#">Blue Lake Union Elementary SD</a> Blue Lake Union Elementary	✓✓✓	

CSSP: Comprehensive School Safety Plan

SD: School District

Enrollment data is from the California Department of Education

Most table entries are clickable (for some schools there is just a single site for the entire district)

✓✓✓ Plan is prominent on home page    ✓✓ takes a few clicks    ✓ hard to find

## Website Availability of Safety Related Documents

Enrollment 2025-26	District School	CSSP	Other safety info
366	<u>McKinleyville Union Elementary SD</u>	✓✓	
302	<u>Dow's Prairie Elementary</u>		
170	<u>McKinleyville Middle</u>		
	<u>Morris Elementary</u>		
	<u>Northern Humboldt Union High SD</u>		Transportation safety plan in handbook covers quakes
972	<u>Arcata High</u>	✓✓✓	
24	<u>Pacific Coast High (Continuation)</u>		
107	<u>Six Rivers Charter High</u>		
574	<u>McKinleyville High</u>	✓✓✓	
20	<u>Mad River High (Continuation)</u>		
192	<u>Laurel Tree Charter</u>	✓✓✓	Plan identifies several CERT-trained staff
	<u>Pacific Union Elementary SD</u>	✓	
535	<u>Pacific Union Elementary</u>		
48	<u>Trillium Charter</u>	✓✓	
	<u>Arcata Elementary SD</u>		Some tsunami info Some tsunami info Some tsunami info
228	<u>Arcata Elementary</u>	✓	
214	<u>Sunny Brae Middle</u>	✓	
262	<u>Coastal Grove Charter</u>		
158	<u>Fuente Nueva Charter</u>	✓✓✓	Clear emergency response plan
96	<u>Union Street Charter</u>		
205	<u>Redwood Coast Montessori</u>	✓✓✓	Detailed tsunami info
	<u>Peninsula Union SD</u>	✓✓✓	Detailed tsunami info
75	<u>Peninsula Union</u>		
	<u>Jacoby Creek Elementary SD</u>		Transportation safety plan in handbook covers quakes
458	<u>Jacoby Creek</u>		

✓✓✓ Plan is prominent on home page    ✓✓ takes a few clicks    ✓ hard to find

## Website Availability of Safety Related Documents

Enrollment 2025-26	District School	CSSP	Other safety info
287 48	<a href="#">Freshwater Elementary SD</a>	✓	
	Freshwater Elementary		
	Freshwater Charter Middle		
85	<a href="#">Garfield Elementary SD</a>	✓✓✓	
	Garfield Elementary		
25	<a href="#">Kneeland Elementary SD</a>	✓✓✓	
	Kneeland Elementary		
10	<a href="#">Maple Creek Elementary SD</a>	✓✓✓	Some tsunami info
	Maple Creek Elementary		
357 381 1,159 265 308 426 426 49	<a href="#">Eureka City Schools (Unified SD)</a>		ESD Parent handbooks say CSSP is available at each school office
	<a href="#">Alice Birney Elementary</a>		
	<a href="#">Catherine L. Zane Middle</a>		
	<a href="#">Eureka High</a>		
	<a href="#">Grant Elementary</a>		
	<a href="#">Lafayette Elementary</a>		
	<a href="#">Washington Elementary</a>		
	<a href="#">Winship Middle</a>		
	<a href="#">Zoe Barnum High</a>		
	<a href="#">Pacific View Charter 2.0</a>	✓✓	
130	<a href="#">Cutten Elementary SD</a>	✓	
	Cutten Elementary		
269	Ridgewood Elementary		
196 124 62 503	<a href="#">South Bay Union Elementary SD</a>		Have to sign in to ParentSquare to access CSSPs
	<a href="#">Pine Hill Elementary</a>		
	<a href="#">South Bay Elementary</a>		
	<a href="#">South Bay Charter</a>		
503	<a href="#">Alder Grove Charter School 2</a>	✓✓	

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## Website Availability of Safety Related Documents

Enrollment 2025-26	District School	CSSP	Other safety info
65	<a href="#">Loleta Union Elementary SD</a> Loleta Elementary	✓✓✓	
351	<a href="#">Ferndale (Unified SD)</a> <a href="#">Ferndale Elementary</a>	✓	
145	<a href="#">Ferndale High</a>	✓	
151	<a href="#">Fortuna Union High SD</a> <a href="#">Academy of the Redwoods</a>		
74	<a href="#">East High (Continuation)</a>		
832	<a href="#">Fortuna Union High</a>		
244	<a href="#">Fortuna Elementary SD</a> <a href="#">Fortuna Middle</a>		School Safety Pamphlet "
242	<a href="#">Linell K. Walker Elementary</a>		"
303	<a href="#">Norman G. Ambrosini Elementary</a>		"
200	<a href="#">Toddy Thomas Middle</a>		"
235	<a href="#">Redwood Preparatory Charter</a>	✓✓	
226	<a href="#">Rio Dell SD</a> <a href="#">Eagle Prairie Elementary</a>		
95	<a href="#">Monument Middle</a>		
190	<a href="#">Scotia Union SD</a> Stanwood A. Murphy Elementary	✓✓	Detailed emergency response procedures
227	<a href="#">Hydesville Elementary SD</a> Hydesville Elementary	✓	
138	<a href="#">Cuddeback Union Elementary SD</a> Cuddeback Elementary	✓	Safety topics in separate short policies
40	<a href="#">Bridgeville Elementary SD</a> Bridgeville Elementary		

✓✓✓ Plan is prominent on home page    ✓✓ takes a few clicks    ✓ hard to find

## Website Availability of Safety Related Documents

Enrollment 2025-26	District School	CSSP	Other safety info
9	<u>Mattole (Unified SD)</u> Honeydew Elementary		
25	Mattole Elementary		
5	Mattole Triple Junction High		
	<u>Southern Humboldt Joint (Unified SD)</u>		
22	<u>Casterlin Elementary</u>	✓✓✓	
5	<u>Casterlin High School</u>	✓✓✓	
77	<u>Miranda Junior High</u>	✓	
2	<u>Osprey Learning Center</u>	✓	
281	<u>Redway Elementary</u>	✓✓✓	
220	<u>South Fork High</u>	✓✓✓	
9	<u>Whitethorn Elementary</u>	✓✓✓	
	<u>Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE)</u>		
39	<u>Arcata Educational Resource Center</u>		
55	<u>Eel River Valley Community</u>		
74	<u>Eureka Community</u>		
135	<u>Glen Paul</u>	✓✓✓	
8	<u>Von Humboldt Court School</u>		
109	<u>Northcoast Prep. and Perf. Arts Academy</u>	✓✓✓	
349	<u>Northern United - Humboldt Charter</u>	✓	EOP details are masked

✓✓✓ Plan is prominent on home page   
 ✓✓ takes a few clicks   
 ✓ hard to find