

This Month's Topics: Child Abuse Prevention / Screening Volunteers



COLORADO LEAGUE of
CHARTER SCHOOLS
focus on achievement

Charter School Safety Awareness Newsletter April 2017

The School Safety Awareness monthly newsletters are designed to provide charter leaders with the knowledge and resources necessary to continuously improve the safety of their school environments. By both federal and state law, charter public schools are required to perform specific safety duties and administer certain responsibilities. The **CO School Safety Act, C.R.S. 22-32-109.1** is Colorado law. View the law here: http://www.lpdirect.net/casb/crs/22-32-109_1.html

Each issue features a specific topic to inform and guide readers along the ever-evolving journey of school safety compliance and practices. Read this publication to stay abreast of your obligations and implement the proven practices and procedures shared here by government agencies, safety experts and fellow charter school operators.

This month we focus on two important topics: **1) Preventing Child Sexual Abuse and Assault, and 2) Volunteer Screening Practices.**

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month!

April has been recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month since 1983. It is a perfect time to reflect on where we've been and where we are headed, and to assess both points of praise and areas for improvement. As the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Specialist for the [Colorado School Safety Resource Center](#), Margaret M. Ochoa, J.D., has observed two potential gaps in the present state of prevention work. Below, she shares her insights and recommendations for reporting and prevention programming.

The Gaps:

1. Well-intentioned professionals often lack the training to identify child abuse, or to properly report it when they do.
2. Schools often lack the funding and/or the time to integrate good body safety programming into their curricula for their students.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

In mid-March, a bright light shown once again on Penn State University when two top administrators pled guilty to charges related to their **failure to report** suspected abuse to law enforcement. The case highlights the importance of understanding our obligations as mandated reporters-both in identifying the signs of abuse, and in reporting them when we see them.

How to Report

Colorado law requires a prescribed list of reporters (including all school staff at public and nonpublic schools) to report when they have reasonable cause to know or suspect that abuse has occurred, or observed conditions that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect. The statute requires them to immediately report such conditions to 1) their county department of child protection services, 2) Law enforcement, or 3) the statewide hotline set up for that purpose: 1-844-CO-4KIDS.

1. As the statute notes, a call to your county department will satisfy your mandate. If you have a good relationship with your local county agency, that's a great way to ensure that services will be provided or offered, and affords you the ability to follow up. The county can assist with intra-familial abuse and will refer the family for services in collaboration with law enforcement in the event of 3rd party abuse. County records are, in theory, confidential.
2. A call to your local law enforcement agency also satisfies your mandate. Police records are not confidential. It is appropriate to call law enforcement in any situation, but especially if the allegation is made about a person outside the child's family.
3. Dialing 1-844-CO-4-KIDS is always the right call, regardless of the relationship between the alleged perpetrator and the child. Trained professionals on the other end of the line will talk the situation through with you if you aren't certain whether what you are observing is abuse, and will refer your concerns to the appropriate county or law enforcement agency. They are also well situated to put community-based services in place to help families even if the case is screened out. Additionally, calls to the hotline are tracked and recorded, providing evidence that you met your obligation under the law.

Note: An entire column could be devoted here to the indicators of each of the types of child abuse: neglect, physical, emotional, and sexual. If it would benefit the professionals at your organization to receive training on how to recognize child abuse, contact Margaret at Margaret.ochoa@state.co.us or 303-239-4439 to schedule a no-cost workshop.

Stop the Myths

1. ***"If I report to my supervisor, he/she can make the call."***
Nope! You are both mandated reporters and both have a separate, non-delegable responsibility to report. (See above regarding Penn State.)
2. ***"My obligation to report ends at the schoolhouse door."***
No, again. Mandated reporters are always mandated reporters for so long as they fit into a named category-at the grocery store, church, even your family reunion.
3. ***"There is no consequence for my failure to report."***
Wrong. Failure to meet your obligation is a 3rd degree misdemeanor, carrying a potential sentence of up to 6 months in jail and/or a \$750 fine. Mandated reporters who have failed to report have been prosecuted in the past. This doesn't even take into consideration potential civil penalties sought by outraged families who trust you to protect their children.

Body Safety Programming

Data shows that children who understand that parts of their bodies are private and who are empowered to exercise control over their own bodies are more resistant to the efforts of sexual predators. Colorado law encourages school districts to implement body safety programming into curricula to promote this messaging and deter abuse. Colorado law also provides a partial waiver of schools' sovereign immunity in cases of sexual assault, with a damage provision up to \$350,000 per individual and \$990,000 per event, commencing July 1. Despite this landscape, many schools and districts across the state have not yet adopted sexual abuse prevention curricula. The realities of the scarcity of funding and time play a large part in this decision, but many evidence-based and research-informed programs are available at little cost, many online. Contact the Colorado School Safety Resource Center for a Resource Guide to help inform your decision.

[Webcast: Reminder of Child Abuse Reporting Responsibilities](#)

Volunteers: Screening Practices

Why Screen Volunteers?

- **Protect Students and Staff:** As a public school, you are responsible for the safety of students and staff. Adults who work with PK-12 youth should always be screened. Vetting volunteers underscores your school's commitment to providing a safe environment for all of your stakeholders.
- **Protect Your Reputation:** Volunteers represent your school to the public, even though they are not paid employees. Their behaviors reflect upon your organization. Understanding past experience and conduct of volunteers helps school leaders choose their helpers wisely.
- **Limit Liability:** Screening volunteers mitigates your risk. It can demonstrate due diligence or prove preventive practices are in place in the event an accident or harm to others occurs while a volunteer is representing your school. School insurance providers typically urge background checks on volunteers.
- **Deter Predators:** A posted volunteer screening policy acts to discourage predators from targeting your school's students or staff. Offenders tend to seek easy opportunities and to avoid situations where they can be detected.

[Volunteer Screening Trends & Best Practices Report 2016](#)

Case Example: Legacy Academy

Legacy Academy is responsible for ensuring the safety and security of its students while they are at school. Each of Legacy Academy's volunteers is required to have a background check prior to being allowed to work with students. Visitors are asked to present their driver's license at the school's front desk when they enter the building. The front office staff scans the licenses using their Raptor system to check against databases containing individuals with felony records, sex offender, and/or child predator convictions.

- Parents or volunteers who will have direct contact with students while helping with field trips or other activities in the school building are asked to give permission for Legacy Academy to run a simplified background check through the Colorado Bureau of Investigations.
 - From Legacy Academy's website: <http://www.legacyk8.org/volunteer-info>
- All visitors to the building are screened through The Raptor System

- The local Sheriff's office helped to start the program by donating the equipment and subscription for the first year of service.
- Each visitor's driver's license is scanned, which generates a background check through a database containing information about individuals with significant records, or who have been convicted of major offenses that would be concerning in our environment.
- The system also allows school office staff to utilize an 'emergency' button to send an alert to key personnel, and their school resource officer.

[Volunteer Screening Requirements - A Sample from Peak to Peak Charter School](#)

Research Study for High Schools Measuring the Impact of Sources of Strengths

The Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment is launching a new research study, measuring the impact of Sources of Strength, a youth suicide prevention program, on sexual violence and bullying prevention markers. This new study is funded by the CDC, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the University of Rochester, and the University of Florida.

Schools that are interested in implementing the program and being part of the study, will receive the program for free for two years. The program and the study will launch in the fall of 2017, however, the Department is currently trying to recruit 24 Colorado High Schools to be part of the study. There are 12 spots remaining. The deadline for schools to apply is Saturday, May 13.

[Sources of Strength: Invitation to Apply](#)
[Sources of Strength: School Application](#)
[Sources of Strength: Survey](#)

Free Resources

These links will provide you tools to begin your journey in creating a safer school environment in your community.

[Colorado School Safety Resource Center](#)

[Online Training for Front Office Staff: Course ID 1051152](#)

Sign in or create a new account at www.co.train.org

[CSSRC April 2017 Newsletter](#)

[Safe2Tell Colorado](#)

[Child Abuse & Neglect: An Introductory Manual for Schools](#)

[Child Abuse and Prevention CDE Guidelines \(2004\)](#)

[Campus Safety Magazine](#)

Upcoming Safety Events

2017 Rural Safe Schools Summits for Staff and Students

Date: Thursday, April 27

Location: DoubleTree by Hilton, 743 Horizon Drive, Grand Junction

Cost: No cost. Supported by a grant from the Gay & Lesbian Fund for Colorado of the Gill Foundation

Description: All workshops are designed for student and staff interaction. Staff may include administrators, mental health professionals, SROs, teachers and support staff. Schools are urged to select students recognized as leaders by their peers, not necessarily by the staff. We encourage student teams - middle school through Grade 11. Come learn together and from each other. We are looking for a balance between staff and students. We will accommodate 14 people per school; a ratio of 1 adult to 6 students. Also, we urge you to be sure to have written guardian permission for students attending. Students are the sole responsibility of district staff during the Summit.

Registration: [Click here to register.](#)

Questions? Contact the Colorado School Safety Resource Center at 303-239-4435.

Save the Date for these future events:

Once again the Center will sponsor a **Child Sexual Abuse Prevention & Intervention Symposium** on Thursday, September 28 at the Adams 12 Five Star Conference Center. We have a plenary line-up of workshops presenters. Please view [this flyer](#) for more information and to register.

The **2017 Colorado Safe Schools Summit** is scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, October 18 and 19 at the Adams 12 Five Star Conference Center in Thornton. Registration will open in May. The organizers already have a slate of wonderful keynoters to enlighten and entertain you. [The call for proposals is currently open through May 19.](#)

School Safety Advisory Committee Members

Thank you to the 2016-17 School Safety Advisory Committee Members who have volunteered their time and resources to help the League produce this newsletter. School leaders are invited to contact any of the members below for additional assistance and insights relating to your school safety efforts.

The overarching objective of the School Safety Advisory Committee (SSAC) is to advise the Colorado League of Charter Schools on how to build the capacity of Colorado charter public school leaders to provide safe and secure school environments.

2016-2017 Committee Goal: The SSAC and the League seek to instill a culture of safety amongst all Colorado charter school board members and administrative leaders by launching a monthly messaging campaign to prompt safety awareness and actions.

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Vendor Spotlights

Verified Volunteers



VV's volunteer screening services are designed to fit the unique needs of today's service sector. They understand that not all nonprofits and service organizations are alike-in mission or structure-so a "one size fits all" volunteer background check won't work. VV's online platform lets you and your volunteers control the volunteer screening process, making it as simple, fast, and cost-efficient as possible. Best of all, the straightforward nature of their background checks ensure your volunteers are not inconvenienced in any way. With Verified Volunteers, you can rest assure you'll get the right people to work right away.

Contact:

www.verifiedvolunteers.com

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**Next Month's Topic: Safe Schools Act: Reporting,
Requirements, and Funding**

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