

Soda Springs Joint School District No. 150

Caribou, Bear Lake and Bonneville Counties
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Soda Springs, Idaho 83276

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Representative Horman,

I am writing to express my support for the addition of an office of school safety within the Department of Building Safety as outlined in RS24518. I am the Superintendent of Soda Springs Jt. School District 150. I began my tenure as a substitute teacher in our district over 25 years ago and now serve as superintendent. I am heavily vested in our school district as well as the community of Soda Springs.

Soda Springs School District is located in southeast Idaho where we educate just over 800 students and employ approximately 100 staff members. Deep in the heart of the phosphate mining industry, we have a very conscientious community who is supportive of our safety efforts. We have tried to keep up with the fast changing face of school safety: from a variety of emergency drills, bullying reporting, and drug awareness, to shelter in place, hazard spills, non-custodial parents and intruder issues. Our buildings are inspected annually and we make the adjustments as recommended by our inspector. We are a district who takes our building inspections seriously and see the Division of Building Safety as a valuable resource in our risk management efforts.

Two years ago, two of our three buildings were involved in the threat assessment project through the State Department of Education (SDE). The team reviewed safety aspects in regard to School Community Factors, Operational Factors, and Facilities Factors. They explained, "The number one asset of the school to be the *School Community* as it represents the climate and culture of your school. Not only is climate and culture the most important factor in student success, it is also the first line of defense against campus threats. The second group of assets fit within *Operational Factors*, the daily practices and procedures. One important consideration when thinking through your *Operational Factors* is whatever you practice daily that keeps you safer, also prepares you for times of emergency. The third group is *Facilities Factors*. Everything from the parking lot to the cafeteria is covered under facilities. Not only are facilities the most difficult to change, they are typically the most expensive to change as well. "

After the initial evaluation, we met with the team where they highlighted areas of concern as well as areas of success. We were very impressed with the thoroughness of the assessment. We found many of the recommendations well within our means financially. The team not only identified areas of concern,

but offered reasonable suggestions for improvement. Through this process, we were able to add the responsibility of safety manager to the Safe and Drug Free School Coordinator. In addition, templates provided to us from both the SDE and the assessment team allowed us to update a much outdated Emergency Operation Plan. Upon their recommendation, we finally required our staff to wear identification badges. We have inexpensive means of ensuring that classroom doors are locked quickly. We have additional safety drills, shelter in place training for staff, as well as other necessary trainings. We have expanded our character education efforts, and instigated an online bullying prevention reporting system.

In this age of accountability, we of course do not want to set up a useless layer of bureaucracy which would foster unfunded mandates. However, making way for a non-binding assessment which offers sound recommendations and a resource center where we can go for the latest information would be invaluable. I have been working with a focus group who is currently streamlining the threat assessment to make it more useful to Idaho schools. I feel an abridged version or a 15 point safety check list added to our annual building inspection, as well as a three year review would be "doable" for most districts. Soda Springs School District gained many helpful strategies from these assessments. However, the most important resource we obtained was access to the latest safety information customized to rural schools in Idaho.

I realize the addition of personnel for this purpose would add a fiscal burden to the state coffers. I hope the legislature will find the addition to the Division of Building Safety a worthy investment on behalf of Idaho's children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly M. Stein

Molly M. Stein, Ed. D.
Superintendent