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June 23, 2014

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The Sonoma County Office of Education and Sonoma County Board of Education believe that firearm safety is of crucial importance for students, families, schools, and our communities. Between 1991 and 2011, Sonoma County lost 58 children and teens to firearm homicides, suicides, and accidents.¹ This is tragic and unacceptable. To help decrease the number of children and teen deaths and injuries caused by firearms, and to help keep our communities safe, we have prepared the attached Firearm Safety Fact Sheet. In preparing this Fact Sheet, we sought input from the firearm safety community.

The Fact Sheet includes simple and straightforward recommendations for parents, guardians, and gun owners to follow. It provides tips on safe storage of firearms, explains legal risks associated with keeping a loaded firearm, and offers suggestions for talking to children about firearms. The Fact Sheet also provides recommendations regarding imitation firearms, which may be viewed as less dangerous than firearms but can, in fact, sometimes cause serious injury and death. The Fact Sheet encourages parents and gun owners to practice safe gun handling. Finally, the Fact Sheet provides resources for you and your family to learn more about gun safety and preventing school violence.

We take the issue of firearm and imitation firearm safety very seriously. Keeping our students safe and in secure learning environments is very important. We strongly encourage you to read the Fact Sheet closely, take the time to educate yourself about guns and gun safety, and talk to your children about gun safety.

Thank you for your cooperation in this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Herrington".

Steven D. Herrington, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Willbanks".

Kathleen Willbanks
President, Board of Education

¹ California Department of Public Health Vital Statistics Death Statistical Master Files: <http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov>.

Firearm Safety Fact Sheet

Between 1991 and 2011, Sonoma County lost 58 children and teens to firearm homicides, suicides and accidents.¹ To help decrease the number of children and teen deaths caused by firearms and to keep all our children safe, parents and gun owners are encouraged to follow these simple recommendations.

- ▶ **Store Firearms Safely.** Always store firearms in a locked container or lock the firearm with a locking device to temporarily keep it from functioning. Ammunition should be stored in a location separate from the firearm. Firearm locking devices can be obtained through most local police departments.
- ▶ **Know the Legal Risks.** Under California law, you may be guilty of a misdemeanor or a felony if you keep a loaded firearm within any premises under your custody or control and a minor uses it, resulting in injury or death to another person, or carries it to a public place, unless you have properly stored the firearm.
- ▶ **Talk to Children about Firearms.** Children are naturally curious about things they don't know about or think are "forbidden." Parents and gun owners are encouraged to talk to children about gun safety, including the following rules:
 - **Stop.** If children find or see a firearm, they need to stop what they are doing.
 - **Don't Touch!** A child should never touch a firearm that he/she finds or sees.
 - **Leave the Area.** The child should leave the area immediately, even if the child is trying to stop someone else from using the firearm.
 - **Tell an Adult.** The child should immediately tell an adult about the firearm that he/she has seen.
- ▶ **Supervise Use of Imitation Firearms.** Imitation firearms, including non-powder and ball-bearing guns, should only be used under the supervision of an adult and should always be stored and carried in a carrying case. Imitation firearms can cause serious injury and death and children should be educated about the dangers of these firearms. Modifications to imitation firearms, such as the removal of the orange tip from the firearm, are strongly discouraged as such modifications can often make the imitation firearm appear real.
- ▶ **Be a Good Role Model.** Actions speak louder than words and children learn most by observing the adults around them. Parents and gun owners need to set a good example by practicing safe gun handling around children.
- ▶ **Educate Yourself.** Take the time to educate yourself about guns and gun safety. To assist you, here are a few great resources:
 - *Tips for Gun Owners* | oag.ca.gov/firearms/tips
 - *A Dozen Things Parents Can Do To Stop School Violence*
www.ncpc.org/resources/files/pdf/school-safety/12parents.pdf
 - *Gun Safety Tips for Parents* | kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/home/gun_safety.html



The Firearm Safety Fact Sheet is provided as a public service by the Sonoma County Office of Education and Sonoma County Board of Education ■ Steven D. Herrington, Ph.D., Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools Board Members ■ Gina Cudis, Jill Kaufman, Helga Lemke, Ray Peterson, Kathleen Willbanks, Lisa Wittke Schaffner