



**Student Safety:
Why Are They Turning the Wrong Way?
2018-2019
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report 1819-05**

Published on June 28, 2019

SUMMARY

In recent years, both the Madera County Public Works Department (MCPWD) and the 2017-2018 Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) investigated safety issues concerning Madera County students. The responsibility for school safety, door to door, belongs to the school district of record. This obligation includes evaluating traffic flow in coordination with the local law enforcement and effectively educate drivers with safety procedures. Student safety and traffic congestion have been analyzed and recommendations have been put forth by both MCPWD and 2017-2018 MCGJ. The findings of these studies include specific issues pertaining to traffic congestion and communication with drivers regarding the safety of students. Since student safety continues to be a real concern, the 2018-2019 MCGJ has taken an additional look into the District's implementation of the 2017-2018 Recommendations.

BACKGROUND

In late 2014 and early 2015, the Madera County Public Works Department completed a study addressing traffic safety issues exclusively at Webster Elementary School. This study was developed into a Master Plan, which would change drop-off and pick-up locations for students at Webster Elementary School (Exhibit A). The implementation of the Master Plan languished due to lack of funding. Citizens expressed concern and annoyance regarding congestion and student safety.

The 2017-2018 MCGJ released a report on "School Transportation Safety." As a result of the report, Madera Unified School District (MUSD) and Golden Valley Unified School District (GVUSD) were required to submit responses to the report findings. The report included recommendation for Alpha Elementary School (MUSD). Both districts complied and responses were received. The response by MUSD indicates some of the recommendations had been implemented, others were in the process of being implemented, and others would be completed before the start of the 2018-2019 school year. The responses by GVUSD were a general acknowledgment of the findings.

Following is a list of selected 2017-2018 MCGJ Findings for both MUSD and GVUSD, which provide the driving force behind the current investigation and report:

- F1. Because senior management of MUSD and GVUSD was unaware of the requirement to provide written bus safety information for drivers, there is a potential violation of Education Code §39831.S (a) (A, B, C, D, and E) (2).*
- F2. Because the findings of the study done in 2014 and 2015 regarding Webster Elementary School have not been implemented, congestion problems continue and unsafe conditions persist.*
- F3. There is a need for a crossing guard on Ruth Avenue at Webster Elementary School to enhance student safety.*
- F7. Drivers turning left out of Alpha Elementary School onto Stadium Road create congestion problems and dangerous conditions for pedestrians.*

F8. Drivers turning left into Alpha Elementary School from Stadium Road create congestion problems and dangerous conditions for pedestrians.

METHODOLOGY:

For the purposes of continuity, the 2018-2019 MCGJ reviewed the Madera County Grand Jury Final Report 1718-06 School Transportation Safety and all of the responses received from the school districts and the Motor Carrier Specialist I of the California Highway Patrol. After reviewing the responses, the current MCGJ investigated the following:

- MCGJ members visited both John Adams Elementary School and Alpha Elementary School in the MUSD and Webster Elementary School in GVUSD multiple times to witness traffic congestion during student arrival and dismissal times.
- At the request of the MCGJ, the superintendents of MUSD and GVUSD observed student arrival and dismissal times at their respective schools.
- Subsequent to the superintendents' observations at their respective schools, the superintendents were interviewed by the MCGJ.
- The MCGJ requested the City of Madera Chief of Police personally observe the traffic congestion during the arrival and dismissal times for the students at both Alpha and John Adams Elementary Schools.
- Subsequent to his observation, the MCGJ interviewed the City of Madera Chief of Police.
- MCGJ interviewed senior school administrators, senior school transportation personnel, senior City of Madera administration, and senior City of Madera law enforcement personnel.
- MCGJ reviewed the Webster Elementary School Master Plan.
- MCGJ reviewed the newly revised MUSD transportation manual and other internal documents related to school transportation.

DISCUSSION

Madera Unified School District and GVUSD provided MCGJ the revised transportation documents. These documents included school bus emergency procedures, passenger safety, and walking routes. The same documentation should be provided annually to both students and those who transport students.

In response to the 2017-2018 Report Finding 1 (*FI*), the MCGJ obtained a revised policy and procedures manual. Distribution of this document to impacted individuals cures the potential violation of Education Code §39831.S (a) (A, B, C, D, and E) (2).

Many students are transported by private vehicles. The drivers of these private vehicles create unsafe traffic conditions. In some instances, drivers were observed following a consistent and organized process, while other drivers were making erratic and unsafe driving choices.

The traffic congestion and unsafe drop-off and pick-up conditions may not improve at Webster Elementary School until the GVUSD is successful in finding funds to implement the Master Plan. This plan, once implemented, will improve traffic flow on Ruth Avenue. In addition, there is a need for a crossing guard on Ruth Avenue. On the Webster Elementary School website, there is a "Student Pick Up & Drop Off.pdf" with a description of how drivers need to drop-off and pick-up students to lessen the traffic congestion and increase safety of both students and drivers (Exhibit B).

Until adequate funds are obtained, the GVUSD must try to reduce the traffic congestion and the unsafe conditions by continuing to educate drivers. Webster Elementary School provides printed handouts to students for the drivers to read, and has information available on their website. However, given the ease and wide use of social media, it is surprising that schools have not been taking advantage of platforms such as Aeries, Facebook, Twitter, or even their own website to inform drivers of the proper drop-off and pick-up procedures. The use of social media platforms informs the public through a contemporary method familiar, accessible, and acceptable to most drivers. If schools are to keep pace with the changing nature of methods of communication in today's world, they should be open to exploring new ideas.

Stadium Road in Madera not only connects a football stadium but two high schools, and two elementary schools. Traffic is extremely congested during school start and end times for nine months each year. Traffic is exacerbated when drivers disregard the faded, unofficial "No Left Turn" sign exiting the Alpha Elementary School parking lot. Drivers traveling north on Stadium Road and turning left, across traffic, into Alpha Elementary School parking lot adds danger to the congestion.

The congestion on Stadium Road is well known to both the City of Madera and the MUSD. Permanent electronic traffic controls have been considered; however, the controls are quite expensive for the length of time they would be used. These types of electronic traffic controls would be needed only during the school year, twice a day, during arrival and dismissal times, or approximately 30 minutes twice a day.

John Adams Elementary School has designed and implemented a designated safe area on the north side of the school, on National Avenue, for buses, drivers, and students walking to school. However, drivers were witnessed double parking and blocking traffic while dropping off or waiting for students at the intersection of National Avenue and Accornero Street. Moreover, drivers were witnessed letting students out of vehicles in the middle of the street, allowing students to weave through cars causing increased danger.

Third Street, on the South side of John Adams Elementary School, is quite narrow and becomes extremely congested and dangerous during drop-off and pick-up times. John Adams Elementary School currently has almost three times the number of students, teachers, staff, and employee cars as the school was originally designed to accommodate. Many employees and residents compete for parking on the street. Parked cars, double parked cars, and the large number of drivers dropping off and picking up students, limits the traffic flow to one direction and creates an extremely dangerous situation.

Recently, the City of Madera has taken steps to increase safety for students walking to John Adams Elementary School. At the time of this writing, sidewalks, on the south, east, and north side of the school, are being constructed. The intent of this plan includes requesting drivers to drop students off on Williams Avenue instead of Third Street, and placing a staff person in the area to monitor drivers and students.

Madera Unified School District staff met with local police officers assigned to Madera High School Campus to try to design a safe and appropriate traffic flow of drivers dropping off and picking up students at each schools in MUSD. That effort was notable, but student safety issues could be vastly improved with complete coordination between the senior staff of MUSD and the senior staff of the City of Madera Police Department.

FINDINGS:

Finding for both Madera Unified School District and Golden Valley Unified School District:

F1. Both MUSD and GVUSD are in compliance with Education Code §39831.S (a) (A, B, C, D, and E) (2), the “Annual Student Bus Safety Document” requirements.

FINDING FOR GOLDEN VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT:

F2. GVUSD has not implemented the Webster Elementary Master Plan, and the traffic congestion and unsafe conditions persist during drop-off and pick-up times.

F3. Despite printed instructions being sent home to drivers, many drivers are either uninformed or disregard Webster Elementary School’s adopted procedures for dropping-off and picking-up students causing additional traffic congestion and unsafe conditions for students.

F4. GVUSD presented a job announcement searching for a volunteer crossing guard for Webster Elementary School, but this position remains unfilled as of the writing of this report. (see Exhibit C)

FINDINGS FOR MADERA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT:

F5. The MCGJ finds that the traffic conditions are dangerous at Alpha Elementary School and John Adams Elementary.

F6. Many drivers are either uninformed or disregard traffic safety procedures at Alpha Elementary School and John Adams Elementary School causing additional traffic congestion and unsafe conditions for students.

F7. Senior staff at both MUSD and Madera City Police Department are not collaborating to solve traffic safety issues throughout the district.

RECOMMENDATIONS MUSD AND GVUSD

R1. The MCGJ recommends that MUSD and GVUSD must continue staying in compliance

with Education Code §39831.S (a) (A, B, C, D, and E) (2), the Annual Student Bus Safety Document requirements each year to ensure that the most complete and accurate information is provided to drivers.

RECOMMENDATIONS: GVUSD

- R2.** The MCGJ recommends that by September 2020, GVUSD must secure funding for implementing the Webster Elementary School Master Plan for redirecting the entrance to Webster Elementary School in order to reduce vehicle congestion and improve student safety.
- R3.** The MCGJ recommends, by the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, GVUSD must begin using social media platforms, such as Aeries, Facebook, Twitter, and school website to post existing traffic hazards to illustrate problems and improve the education of drivers.
- R4.** The MCGJ recommends, by the start of the 2019-2020, Webster Elementary School must complete the implementation of a paid Crossing Guard Service to ensure, enhances, and maximize student and driver safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS: MADERA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

- R5.** The MCGJ recommends MUSD senior District leaders immediately meet with senior City of Madera Law Enforcement and the City of Madera Traffic Engineer in order to mitigate all traffic congestion at Alpha School and John Adams School.
- R6.** The MCGJ recommends, by the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, MUSD must begin using social media platforms, such as Aeries, Facebook, Twitter, and the school website, to publicize existing traffic hazards and expose problems in order to improve the behavior of drivers.
- R7.** The MCGJ recommends MUSD senior leadership immediately begin to collaborate with senior managers of the City of Madera Police Department and the City of Madera Traffic Engineer to review the traffic flow plan of each school in Madera Unified.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the grand jury requests responses as follows:

Golden Valley Unified School District Governing Board
Golden Valley School District
37479 Avenue 12
Madera Ca 93638

Madera Unified School District Governing Board
Madera Unified School District
1902 Howard Road
Madera Ca 93637

Superintendent
Golden Valley School District
37479 Avenue 12
Madera Ca 93638

Superintendent
Madera Unified School District
1902 Howard Road
Madera Ca 93637

City of Madera Police Department
Police Chief
330 S. C Street
Madera Ca 93638

City Engineer
City of Madera
204 West Fourth
Madera Ca 93637

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.

EXHIBIT B



WEBSTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

36477 Ruth Avenue, Madera, CA 93636

Phone (559) 645-3540 ♦ Fax (559) 276-1921

Ludislao Lopez, Principal

Audrey Fulton, Vice Principal



Dear Parents,

September 28, 2018

I write to clarify our morning and after school student drop off/pick up procedures. As you know, many of our students take the bus, while others walk to school alone or with parents. In addition, a large percentage of students are dropped off/picked up by parents. We constantly review and update our procedures to ensure the three groups of students are as safe as possible getting to school and home. Please help me provide a safe environment for all by following the expectations below.

Parents Escorting Students to School/Home

Morning: Students are allowed to be dropped off no earlier than 7:30 am. Students arriving before 7:45 am need to report immediately to the cafeteria where there is adult supervision. Students arriving after 7:45 am report to the playground for a short, supervised recess. I ask that you leave campus immediately after dropping off your child. If you are planning to volunteer in the class, sign in the main office and ask for a pass.

Afternoon: Parents please do not arrive to school before 2:25 pm and 1:05 pm on Wednesdays to pick up your child. After 2:25 pm and 1:05 on Wednesdays, you may wait in front of the three main buildings, but please do not visit classes, playground, cafeteria, bathrooms or black top area. If you arrive before 2:25 pm, please report to the main office and ask for a visitor's pass. If you're on campus before 2:25 pm, expect Webster staff to ask you for your visitors pass. I ask that you help me protect the safety of our students.

Traveling by Automobile

Drop Off/ Pick Up in front of the Main Office: Please drive slowly in this area, use the right lane only for drop off/pick up, and pull all the way forward so more families can access this zone. Please stay with your vehicle at all times to keep the flow of traffic moving. When exiting the lot, please note that it is a **RIGHT TURN ONLY**. This helps with the flow of traffic leaving our campus and keeps the parking lot from getting congested.

Drop Off/Pick Up in Surrounding Areas: You may drop off/pick up your child at the pedestrian gates on Road 36 ½ and Ardath Avenue. Webster staff will provide supervision before and after school in both areas.

Traveling by Bus

Bus Zone: There is to be no dropping off or picking up of students in this area. The area is exclusively for staff parking and bus loading and unloading.

Sincerely,


Lalo Lopez, Principal

EXHIBIT B

Ardath Avenue

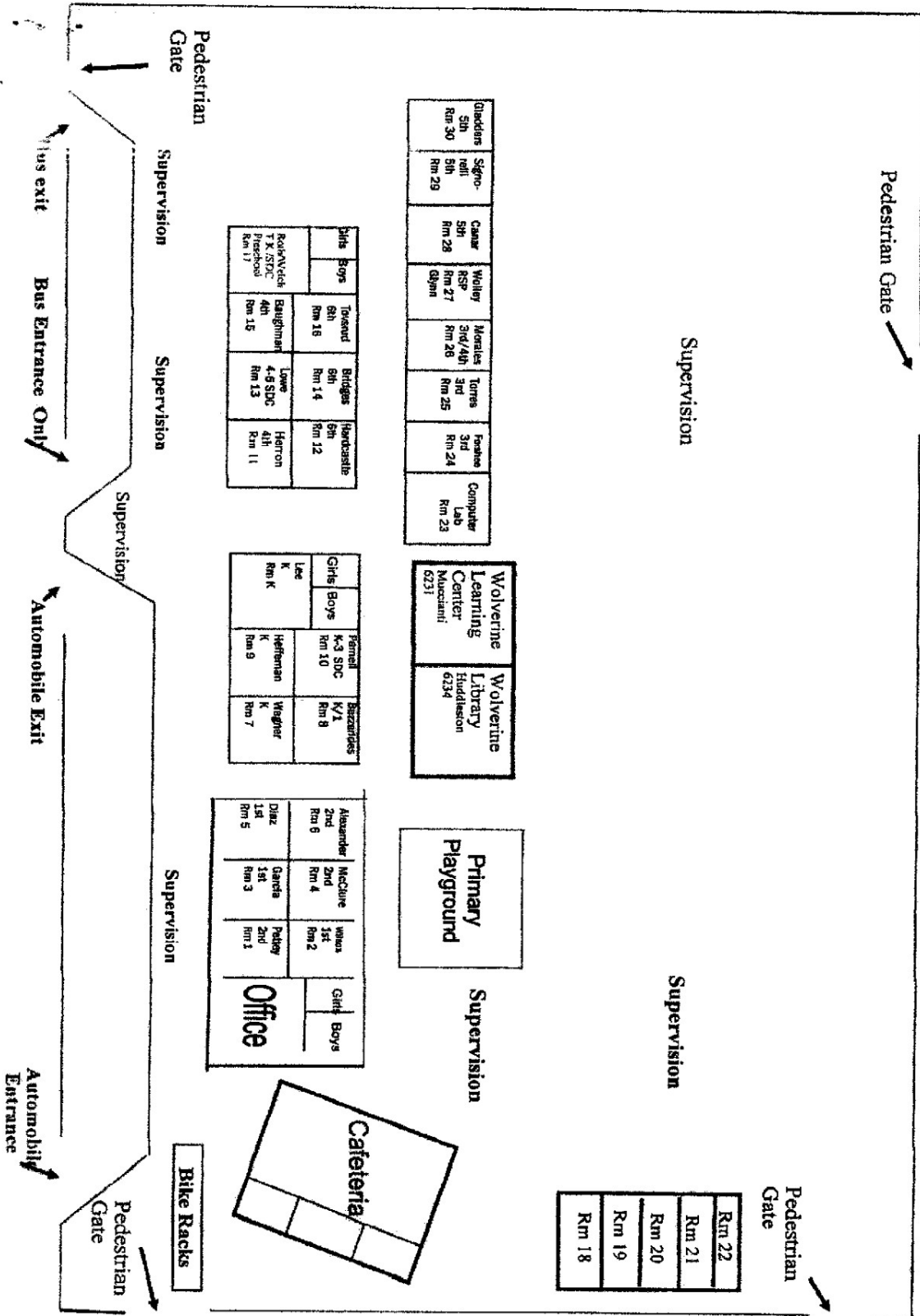


EXHIBIT C

Golden Valley Unified School District

is seeking

**VOLUNTEER
CROSSING GUARDS**



If you are interested in volunteering as a school crossing guard, please complete the information below and the Crossing Guard Waiver located on the back of this flyer.

Name: _____ (please print)

Contact Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Elementary School Site: _____ School Year: _____

Circle All That Apply: I would like to volunteer on the following day(s): M T W TH F

Check All That Apply: AM 7:30 a.m.—8:00 a.m. PM 2:20 p.m.—2:50 p.m. M/T/TH/F

PM 1:00 p.m.—1:30 p.m. early out Wednesday

I agree to take the GVUSD/CRMA online Safety Training course.

Signature

Date

A representative from the school/district will contact you to arrange the CRMA Safety Training and set up the crossing guard schedule.