



NEWS RELEASE

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SCCOE Creates Task Force to Examine Walden West

SAN JOSE, CA – The Santa Clara County Office of Education announced today that it is convening a special task force to examine the policies and procedures of Walden West Science Camp. Local school district leaders and members of the community have expressed concern about the operation of Walden West in light of the recent arrest of night manager Edgar Covarrubias-Padilla, over allegations of sexual misconduct and possession of child pornography.

“The Board of Education takes any threat to the safety of our children very seriously. It is important that we ensure the safety of every student at Walden West and in every other SCCOE program,” added Board of Education President Darcie Green. “We support Superintendent Gundry in the creation of this advisory task force and its thorough examination of Walden West operations.”

The task force is charged with reviewing camp policies and procedures to see how they compare to best practices at similar camps across the region and state. In many respects, Walden West already meets or exceeds many industry standards for safety and program offerings as set by the California Outdoor Schools Association (COSA). The camp received its last multi-year COSA accreditation in 2011.

“Over the past few weeks, we have been receiving numerous requests from the local news media for detailed information about Walden West. We have devoted a huge amount of staff time delving into employee background screening procedures, staff supervision, technology use protocols and other operational issues,” said county superintendent Jon R. Gundry. “I felt it was best if we consolidated that fact finding effort into a more comprehensive review process.”

Manny Barbara, vice president of the Silicon Valley Education Foundation, will co-chair the task force with SCCOE Chief Schools Officer Mary Ann Dewan. The task force coordinator will be Ken Blackstone, SCCOE’s Director of Media and Communications. The other task force members are being confirmed and will be announced next week. They will reflect diverse organizations and perspectives including a child psychologist, school safety specialist, camp directors, school district leaders, accrediting organizations, parents, teachers, and SCCOE risk management staff and general counsel. The task force will present its findings and recommendations to the county superintendent by August 1.

“Hundreds of thousands of students over the years have benefitted from the great outdoor experience offered at Walden West,” said Barbara. “This tragic incident should in no way diminish the well-deserved positive reputation of Walden West as an outstanding educational experience for the young people of our community. Our goal is to thoroughly assess where we are and make suggestions on how Walden West can improve.”

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