



NEWS RELEASE

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Walden West Task Force presents final report

SAN JOSE, CA – The final report of the [Walden West Task Force](#) was presented to County Superintendent of Schools Jon Gundry and the Santa Clara County Board of Education at tonight’s meeting. The presentation comes three months after the Task Force was convened by the Superintendent as an advisory body to the administration of the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) to review industry standards for outdoor schools, assess current components of the program, and make recommendations.

Charged with reviewing industry standards for outdoor schools, assessing current programmatic and operational components of the program, the Task Force offered suggestions in a variety of areas. The sixty-one page report included an analysis of the program, a list of commendations, and recommendations and areas for further study—all of which were designed to strengthen the high-quality, outdoor educational experience that has been cherished by generations of Santa Clara residents.

“I commend the team and am pleased they came together on short notice and really became engaged in this important effort,” said Jon R. Gundry, County Superintendent of Schools. “It is apparent the Task Force was very deliberate in its review and I wholeheartedly accept its report. I have authorized the leadership team to implement the recommendations.”

The Walden West staff was commended for enhancing training for employees and cabin leaders, improving staff supervision, and establishing an easy-to-remember “TREE” acronym, which stands for Touch, Rules, Exit and Empathy, with accompanying awareness phrases for each.

Recommendations focus on additional trainings, staffing support, site enhancements, policies and procedures, and “spot audits.” In addition to the existing California Outdoor School Association accreditation, the report suggests a second accreditation from an entity that focuses on the camp aspects of the program, such as the American Camp Association, should be sought.

“I’m confident that Walden West will continue its long history of providing a rewarding educational experience in a safe and welcoming environment for all children,” said Board President Darcie Green in response to the Task Force report and presentation.

The SCCOE has been working diligently to build upon the track record of success and positive reputation of the camp, since allegations surfaced in late spring. Even before the Task Force was created, immediate additional safeguards had been implemented at Walden West. These include:

- Doubled overnight staffing: no individual staff member will have the opportunity to be alone with any student at night;
- Increased number of permanent employees;
- A buddy system: students going to the program office (the Hub) or bathroom will always be accompanied by another student;
- Reinforcement of the "Rule of 3": any time a staff member is with a student, at least one additional person must be present at all times (even if any students stay back from class or need to be brought to or from class, the “Rule of 3” will be followed);
- Intensified cabin leaders’ training on safety and supervision policies;
- Updated morning wake-up procedures to ensure that staff members do not walk through cabins (two staff members will knock on doors to wake up the campers);
- A signed Code of Conduct for staff affirming that they are aware of policies and procedures; and
- Mandated reporter training done by all current and new staff.

Facility upgrades and site improvements are other actions planned by the SCCOE at Walden West. While these plans were in process prior to the establishment of the Task Force, Superintendent Gundry expanded the scope by setting aside additional funds to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force.

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