

Is your school safe in an emergency?

LAUSD gets a failing grade in fire and life safety and emergency preparedness for a large number of its schools.

By the UTLA Violence Prevention and School Safety Committee

Would your school be a safe place in the event of an emergency? How would your staff and students fare in a fire or earthquake? For many schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the answer may be no. According to its own recent statistics, LAUSD receives a failing grade in fire and life safety and emergency preparedness for a large number of its approximately 900 schools.

Every three months, the District's Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) performs safety inspections at many school sites. The schools are rated in 14 safety categories. A school can receive a compliance score from zero to 100 percent in each of the categories, with 70 being considered the minimum passing score for any safety category. An averaging of scores in all 14 categories creates an overall rating for the school from "good" to "poor."

The UTLA Violence Prevention and School Safety Committee reviewed recent OEHS statistics on all adult schools, early education centers, and elementary, middle, high, and continuation schools in all eight local districts. The good news is that the rating system has yielded overall improvement in schools, according to District statistics. Since its inception several years ago, the

The table below illustrates how early education centers, adult schools and elementary, middle, high and continuation schools in each of the eight local districts fared in each of the three categories. The number before the slash (/) is the number of schools having a failing score in that category; the number which follows the slash is the overall number of schools in the division or local district. The number followed by the percent sign (%) represents the percentage of the of schools in the local district or education division that had a failing score in that category.

Division / District	Accident Prevention		Fire/Life Safety		Emergency Preparedness	
	FAILING/OUT OF	%	FAILING/OUT OF	%	FAILING/OUT OF	%
Early Education Centers	33/101	33%	43/101	43%	37/101	37%
Adult Schools	12/27	44%	19/27	70%	12/27	44%
Schools in Local District 1	35/104	34%	55/104	53%	26/104	25%
Schools in Local District 2	56/89	63%	57/89	64%	33/89	37%
Schools in Local District 3	55/74	74%	57/74	77%	34/74	46%
Schools in Local District 4	54/97	56%	68/97	70%	35/97	36%
Schools in Local District 5	74/81	91%	65/81	80%	48/81	59%
Schools in Local District 6	34/40	85%	32/40	80%	23/40	58%
Schools in Local District 7	36/63	57%	37/63	59%	20/63	32%
Schools in Local District 8	61/89	69%	61/89	69%	37/89	42%

number of schools rated poor has been reduced and the number rated good and fair has increased.

The bad news is that a significant number of schools have low scores in three categories critical to emergency safety, even if overall the schools were rated "fair" or "good." Overall, 30 to 55 percent of schools in the District received failing scores in emergency preparedness, accident prevention, and fire/life safety. Some 450 schools received a failing grade in accident prevention, 499 schools received a failing grade for fire/life safety, and 305 schools received a failing grade in

emergency preparedness.

When ranked in order of highest percent of failing sites, the early education centers, adult schools, and local Districts rank as follows: Local District 5, Local District 3, Local District 8, Local District 6, Local District 7, Local District 4, Local District 2, adult schools, Local District 1, and children's centers. While each of these may have higher overall ratings generally, some do better than others in just these three categories (see table).

The answer to the question we asked at the beginning of this article, would your school be a safe place in the event of an emergency? It depends on which local district your school is in and whether or not your school was on

the list of failing schools. To find out how your school is doing, go to the OEHS website: www.lausd-oehs.org. Click select "Inspection Results" from the Site Highlights menu on the right side of the web page, which will take you to another page. Select your school from the box menu on that page and select click "View Inspection Results." This will give you the corrective actions your school has been ordered to make. For a real treat, click select and view the "Inspection Guidebook."

By UTLA Violence Prevention School Safety Committee members Mark Wilkins, Gloria Simosky, Martha Bayer, Louis De Pace, Glenn Shockley, Doug Stingley, Paul Huebner, and Susie Chow.

Safety factors to consider

What do you consider to be important factors in the safety of your school in case of an emergency? For many people such factors as fire/life safety, accident prevention, and emergency preparedness would rank at or near the top of their list.

Accident prevention factors include safe work practices, having and maintaining cleanup equipment, and tracking and reporting accidents. Unsafe work practices and increased accidents are potential indicators of site safety (critical if an evacuation is necessary).

Fire/life safety indicators focus on having functioning fire equipment, obstruction-free access and egress, and other items critical to fire prevention. A school that fails in this area may harbor causes of fire or impediments to evacuation.

Emergency preparedness factors include having and maintaining proper emergency equipment, planning out evacuation routes, and training staff and students what to do in case of an emergency. Simply put, it is the ultimate indicator. Lack of preparation could accelerate potential injuries and deaths in an emergency.