

Moraga School District agrees on child safety awareness coordinator

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MORAGA -- A plan to hire a child safety awareness coordinator to educate Lamorinda students about child abuse, bullying and sexual harassment is moving forward after winning an approval this week.

Moraga School District officials voted Tuesday night to greenlight their portion of an agreement between all three Lamorinda school districts and the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa County and fund Moraga's share of a full-time position.

This plan will bring an educator into classrooms to teach children about safety. The district estimates it will pay \$15,175 to staff the position until June 30; that amount would increase to \$20,909 beginning in July until the contract expires in June 30, 2015, according to district data.

Once hired, the coordinator would develop and teach a safety program to all first-, third-, fifth- and seventh-graders in Lamorinda's three school districts, and would also meet with parents to educate them about the program, said Moraga Superintendent Bruce Burns.

Orinda and Lafayette administrators are scheduled to review and vote on the agreement next week. The coordinator will be an employee of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa County and will report to its executive director, Burns explained.

Administrators have been working with the Concord- and Antioch-based nonprofit to develop safety guidelines and provide "mandated reporter" training to school staff in the wake of a sex abuse scandal that shook the district starting last year.

Burns said the idea to create the position surfaced through the Moraga district's student safety committee, which began meeting in June to update the school's child abuse reporting and prevention policy, among other goals.

A subcommittee of the group had been looking at various safety programs to bring into Moraga schools but found them too general, Burns said. So they settled on a collaborative approach with Lafayette and Orinda to create a program that would meet the needs of the three districts.

Additionally, administrators decided the program will be delivered by an outside person under the purview of the Child Abuse Council, adding another layer of safety.

"There's the possibility that during these presentations, a student may want to reveal something. We didn't want that person to be a parent volunteer," Burns said.

The Moraga district is set to begin mediation later this month with three former students who filed claims last year alleging that mandated reporting failures led to their sexual abuse by teachers in the 1990s.

Child Abuse Prevention Council *of* Contra Costa County

Carol Carrillo, executive director of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa County, said her agency has expertise with issues of child abuse, sexual harassment and bullying and their prevention, and will continue to conduct mandated reporting training in the district. The goal, she explained in an interview, is to have students, parents and educators on the same page regarding safety.

“All children need to have this information,” she said.