

# The kids are all right: Schools say they're prepared for earthquakes

**Beau Yarbrough, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, 3-17-16**

When the Big One hits, one of the safest places for your child will be in school. Under 1933's Field Act, public K-12 schools and community colleges are built to a higher standard than virtually any other building in the state.

"Our buildings are less likely to fail" in the event of a major earthquake, said Jill Barnes, coordinator of Emergency Services for the Los Angeles Unified School District. "Although that said, we do still evacuate and inspect the buildings before we let the students back in."

Students and staff are also taught what to do in case of a major earthquake.

"By law, we're required to have drills periodically throughout the year," said Jon Best, director of Student Services for Redlands Unified School District. (This being 2016, those drills involve more than just fires and earthquakes: Schools also hold "lock down" drills where they learn what to do in case an armed intruder is on campus.)

"They all generally cover the same things: People know where to go, where the safe refuges are, how they do campus attendance," said Matt Bogaard, emergency and crisis planning consultant for Pasadena Unified School District. "All of that is so, in a real crisis, it'll be as smooth and easy a process as possible."

Cathy Coy, Emergency Preparedness Program manager for Long Beach Unified School District, recommends parents take part in the Great California ShakeOut drill at the child's school in October so they can be prepared for emergency procedures should the worst happen.

Among the things parents will learn: They can't expect to just grab their kids and go in the aftermath of a big quake.

"We're going to hold onto all of our kids, to make sure they're all accounted for, before they're released," Coy said.

Families should talk specifically about what to do if an earthquake occurs when everyone's at home, as well.

"Some of the younger kids may not transfer the learning from one site to another — they may know to drop, take cover and hold at school, but not at home," Barnes said.

Schools also have three days of food and water, search and rescue materials, triage and first-aid supplies and sanitation supplies on hand, including shovels, flashlights and batteries, all of which has to be certified ready for use every semester, with food and water periodically replaced as well.

"We have an expectation that there will be schools that have leftover kids — kids whose parents can't get there," Coy said. "So we will have staff there to feed and care for them until their parents arrive."

But parents need to do their part, making sure their contact information is up to date at students' school sites.

“Many times we have the wrong information, because phones get disconnected or parents move,” said Pia Escudero, director of school mental health and crisis counseling for Los Angeles Unified School District.

She recommends talking to children about the possibility of an earthquake and what to do.

“I was here in the school district for the Northridge earthquake” and Rodney King riots, Escudero said. “Since that time, we in the district have been fortunate to not have a major event of that kind. I think a lot of teachers, administrators and students haven’t experienced an event of that magnitude. The more we prepare now, the more prepared we are when it happens.”

Age-appropriate resources are available from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, including the Help Kids Cope app, which is available for iOS devices from the iTunes App Store.

But even children not directly impacted by a major earthquake might feel the effects, especially if there are other stresses happening at home, such as a death or a recent illness.

In 1994, “we found that a lot of the kids and some of the adults (in the Northridge area) were not as affected as we expected them to be,” Escudero said. “But we found that students in the Hollywood area and other areas needed more support than we expected.”

When the Big One comes, Barnes advises parents to check on the status and safety of their own home before picking their children up from the safety of a school site and then taking them home.

“We’ll be there,” she said. “We have the supplies, the training and we’ll be there, taking care of the kids until they’re picked up.”

Los Angeles Unified has emergency preparedness apps available online at <http://achieve.lausd.net/emergencyservices>, along with an employees-only app used to push out critical information during emergencies.