

My name is Rick Drew and I am the proud Principal of California Distinguished School Valley View Community School serving 698 Kindergarten thru 6th grade public school students. Valley View School is a targeted assistance Title 1 site with a large English Language Learner population and serves a school community of 53% socio-economically disadvantaged families. In August 2007, I was transferred as Principal of Fair Oaks Ranch Community School, our high performing sister school, to serve as the Principal of Valley View School by our Sulphur Springs School District Superintendent Dr. Robert Nolet, Ed.D.

The school program that I inherited at the start of the 2007/08 school year supported a safe school environment, but lacked a comprehensive plan to support all students and lacked any articulation with our local feeder junior high or high school. In early September 2007, our newly elected School Site Council and I began to discuss and work to define our vision for the school and school community culture we needed to create to better support all students' improvement in academic achievement. We started by asking our parents, students and staff what they needed. Using the results of our 2007 California Healthy Kids Survey and interviews of our Student Council members, we learned that the majority of our students had, at one time in their elementary school career, been the target of bullying. We developed a Parent Survey to ask our parent community what needs they had for their students that were not being met. The results of this survey also strongly suggested that bullying was the primary reason students' efforts to fully focus on their academics were challenged or retarded. Additionally, the majority of the reported bullying incidents had not taken place in the classroom. Instead, our playground during the unstructured recess periods was the primary location for bullying. In response to this learning, we immediately implemented two new programs. First, we created our Peace Patrol. The Peace Patrol is a group of 4th, 5th & 6th grade students selected based on teacher recommendation to be trained in "conflict resolution strategies" and "expert play." Our Peace Patrol members were provided identifying T-Shirts and released from class to help our 1st, 2nd & 3rd grade students during Morning Recess periods. Secondly, we implemented a program of structured recess activities with our "Ultimate Recess Challenge." The "Ultimate Recess Challenge" utilizes the same Peace Patrol students to instruct 1st, 2nd & 3rd graders in the rules of games and activities available to them during recess periods. At the end of our 2007/08 school year we were pleased with the results of these changes.

Unfortunately, while both of these hard won measures were successful, they also left 50% of the school's students unsupported – our 4th, 5th & 6th graders. We had older students to help our younger students; we had no one to help our older students. Our School Site Council went to work again. We brainstormed ideas: including: parent volunteer models e.g. providing "eyes" on students. But there were no parent volunteers. Due to our school community's low socio-economic status, the vast majority of our parents need to work full-time and cannot assist us during the school day. So, we looked outside our school district for other models. Through our relationships developed within our local charter of ACSA (Association of California School Administrators), we learned that both of our feeder schools, La Mesa J.H.S. and Golden Valley H.S., had successfully implemented the Safe School Ambassadors program. In August 2008, when our Superintendent informed district principals of an available grant application for SSA,

Valley View School applied. We were the only elementary school in our valley and our district to apply successfully and win the Challenge Grant.

Since winning the Challenge Grant, our school site has received and participated in a myriad of super effective implementation trainings and support meetings which have been extremely helpful to us in our efforts to improve our school's climate. January 21st and 22nd, 2009, were the training dates for our first Safe School Ambassadors training with Shay. Thirty-five students were trained those two days. Feedback from our students, adults and the community were very favorable. Students were very excited by the strategies to reduce bullying, fighting, put-downs and harassment by increasing pro-social behaviors. The students also reported that the training was "fun." Our local newspaper, The Signal, sent a reporter and photographer to cover the training. They produced a very favorable story and photos in their Friday, January 23rd edition on page A3. March 18th was the date of our All Ambassadors meeting. Students were motivated and invested in the program. This meeting was also an excellent reflection on the great work that our teachers were doing with Family Group Meetings. The purchase of "goodies" supported by the Challenge Grant helped the celebration of students and teachers' efforts. March 23rd was our Safe School Ambassadors Program Advisors meeting and our Valley View School Program Advisor, Mrs. Kathleen Zarlenga, an excellent 1st grade teacher at our site, attended. Kathleen reported to me that the meeting was very professionally presented and was very informative and extremely valuable to her. Our "Two Week Snapshot" period ended on May 7th and all Intervention Summary Reports, Family Group Meeting Reports, and attendance records were collected and compiled. Finally, Action Thermometers have been prepared for our final All Ambassador Meeting in June 2009. Because of the support of Community Matters and the SSA program, we have the tools to look at ideas and reflect on plans during our year-end wrap up. We will explore opportunities and network ideas in our planning for a stronger and sustainable SSA program for next year. Our Ambassadors and our school have been changed for the better.

On behalf of our Valley View School community and as the school's Principal, I wish to express our thanks for you supporting SSA for us. SSA is very beneficial to our school. We have a great deal of evidence supporting that this program works here and we are excited to expand, with your help, the program to train more students and staff next year.

With Sincere Appreciation,
Rick Drew
Principal of Valley View Community School