

District to purchase defibrillators for schools

March 20, 2007

By: JENNIFER KABBANY - Staff Writer

TEMECULA -- School district campuses will soon be equipped with lifesaving devices -- automated external defibrillators -- thanks to a new program trustees approved at their meeting Tuesday.

Hailing defibrillators as vital to improving safety measures at each of Temecula Valley Unified School District's 29 campuses and other work sites, board members voted unanimously to purchase the devices, which are machines that can jolt a heart back to life.

"I think this is a great step forward in making our school district safer," said Trustee Vince O'Neal, a fire captain. "The sooner you can initiate lifesaving activities, the better the chance of increasing a person's survivability. I'm excited about this."

District officials said they have been considering a defibrillator program for several years. The devices have become much safer and easier to use over the years, and the time is right, they said.

"If we save one child, prevent one tragedy from occurring on any campus, why hesitate to bring it forward?" said Debbie Jones, the district's risk management coordinator. "It's an excellent program."

Another thing that prompted the district to work to create the program this year was De Luz resident Bob Roy. His 14-year-old son, Travis, went into sudden cardiac arrest at Thompson Middle School in Murrieta in 2005 and died a few weeks later.

Since then, Roy has become an advocate for getting defibrillators in schools. His urging prompted Murrieta school officials to purchase them. He is also in the process of starting a nonprofit foundation named after his son to further his goal, and helped create the statewide observance, "Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Day," on Sept. 12.

Roy attended Tuesday's meeting and commended district leaders for their efforts.

"This district is taking on a leadership role by establishing a comprehensive ... program," Roy said. "Sudden cardiac arrest ... can strike anywhere at any time -- not just on your campuses, or athletic events or field trips. ... It is not very often that a school board gets to make a life or death decision. Thank you for making the right choice."

About 3,000 to 5,000 children die each year from sudden cardiac arrest, and one out of every 100,000 to 300,000 high school athletes die annually from sudden cardiac arrest, according to statistics. State law already requires defibrillators in gyms, and federal law requires them in airports.

High school and college athletic programs should develop plans for responding to sudden cardiac arrest in athletes, including having prompt access to automated external defibrillators, according to recommendations in this month's issue of the Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine.

District officials estimate they need 43 defibrillators, one per elementary school, two per middle school and three per high school, as well as for other work sites.

The program is expected to cost about \$72,000, and district officials are working with the city's Public Access Defibrillator program to have half the cost of 35 defibrillators reimbursed. The city and district will basically run their programs in concert, and share training and resources, school district officials said.

"The city is interested in helping the school district with this program," said fire Capt. Tim Buckley, who will train school district employees on how to use the devices.

"Having AEDs out there is a great benefit to the community," he said.

Jones said officials are going to purchase and install the devices as soon as possible.

The vote to approve the program was 4-0, with board President Stewart Morris absent.

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