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For Immediate Release

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Two SCUSD playgrounds damaged by arson fires

Caroline Wenzel and John Sloat schools unlikely to open in September with playground structures due to criminal activity

August 7, 2013 (Sacramento): Arson fires over the past week severely damaged expensive playground structures at two Sacramento City Unified School District campuses, school and fire officials confirmed today. Because of the extent of the damage and state's school construction review process, it is unlikely that either school will open with playground structures in the fall, officials said.

Around 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday, July 31, a neighbor of John Sloat Elementary School reported to Sacramento Fire Department that the playground structure was on fire. The extent of damage caused by the blaze requires removal of the entire structure and all the materials under it, said SCUSD Safe Schools Manager Tracey Lopez. Fire officials have confirmed that the fire was deliberately set.

Then on Thursday night, the playground structure at Caroline Wenzel Elementary School in the Pocket neighborhood was set ablaze. Although the damage was not as extensive as that of the John Sloat incident, the structure will have to be torn down for safety reasons, Lopez said.

The district's insurance deductible of \$25,000 for each incident will come out of the general fund budget, further hampering the district's work to rebound from recessionary budget cuts. Playground structures generally cost more than \$70,000.

Anyone with information about these fires should call the Sacramento Fire Department Arson Tip Line at (916) 808-8732 or (877) 822-8477.

SCUSD is asking the community for help in keeping an eye out for arsonists, vandals and thieves for the remainder of summer break. School resumes on Tuesday, September 3.

“Graffiti taggers, arsonists and metal thieves are robbing our students of money we need to support our schools,” said Lopez. “It’s unconscionable that in this time of fiscal crisis that these criminals would victimize schools and hurt our ability to educate kids.”

Most of SCUSD schools are surrounded by homes and the district is counting on neighbors to join in protecting campuses by reporting any suspicious activity, said Lopez.

All SCUSD campuses are locked and alarmed during breaks, and all security cameras are monitored. However, the most effective anti-crime tool remains alert community members who “do the right thing and report suspected criminal activity,” Lopez said. “The schools belong to the community,” she added, “and we need the entire community to help us guard them.”

For schools within Sacramento city limits call 264-5471. Residents outside city boundaries should call the county Sheriff’s Department at 874-5115. School security can also be called 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 643-7444.

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