

OPINION

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Students evacuate a school as a drill for a natural disaster.

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Making Our Schools Safe

Preparing for natural disasters

BY SUSAN CASTILLO



Given the recent catastrophes in Haiti and Chile, it is well worth noting that April is Earthquake and Tsunami Awareness Month. The safety of our students and staff is paramount, and you should know that public schools in Oregon are doing everything they can to prepare our people and buildings in the event of a natural disaster.

We all know that the Northwest is one of the most seismically active regions in the world. So all our public schools are required, at least twice a year, to instruct and drill students on emergency procedures such as "Drop, Cover, Hold."

The key to preparedness is practice, so that kids can respond quickly and without panicking when it really counts. In some of our coastal communities, schools also practice tsunami evacuation drills.

There is still much work to do to make sure

our school buildings are safe in the event of an earthquake.

The average Oregon school is 46 years old, and while seismic upgrades have been completed over the years, many buildings are not as safe as they need to be.

In fact, a 2007 report from the Department of Oregon Geology and Mineral Industries found that there are 274 public schools across our state considered to be at highest risk in the event of an earthquake.

Earlier this year, Oregon took a step in the right direction by distributing \$7.5 million in Seismic Rehabilitation Grants to a number of education and emergency services buildings, including 12 public school buildings from Beaverton to Lakeview. Another \$7.5 million will be granted in the second round of applications.

We continue to work toward a long-term plan to ensure that our school buildings are made safer.

To access more information and resources, please visit the Oregon Department of Education's "Quake-Safe Schools" webpage at ode.state.or.us.

Susan Castillo is the Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction.



Do I need a counselor?

We all have life stressors, especially in today's complex world. Balancing your home, work, and spiritual life can be overwhelming.

Internal coping skills can get us through a crisis or change; however, we may not have the resources to overcome in the most effective way.

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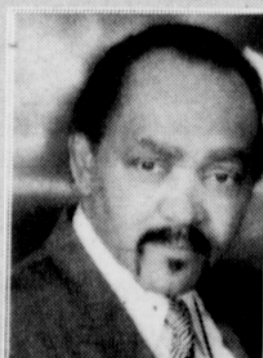
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