

**HB**

**210**

# Representative Tom Brice

## ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

119 N. Cushman, Ste. 205  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
907-456-7423 / Fax: 451-9293  
*While in Juneau*  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
907-465-3466

### Sponsor Statement House Bill 210 Disciplinary and Safety Program in Public Schools

If we are to offer our kids the best educational opportunities possible, they and their teachers must feel safe in the classroom. Preventing tragic situations is much better than reacting to them. HB 210 takes a proactive approach to stemming school violence. By ensuring school boards, parents, and teachers have the tools available to keep our classrooms safe, we can take a large step in providing our children the education they need. HB 210:

1. Establishes a discipline and safety program in each school. This will include training and instruction in violence prevention and response, minimum discipline standards, a conflict resolution program for grades 1-8, and an annual program review.
2. Creates an in-school suspension program for disruptive students.
3. Develops a behavior intervention plan for disruptive students who have been removed from class upon the third time in a semester. A team consisting of the student, parent, teacher, principal and a school psychologist will create the plan and modify it as needed.
4. Establishes a policy that requires written notification be given to every teacher or school administrator who has contact with a student who was found guilty or adjudicated of a felony, was expelled, was suspended due to involvement with weapons, alcohol, drugs or assault.
5. Requires an annual report be written and distributed that contains statistical and other applicable information regarding safety issues in schools.

This Safe Schools Program will allow Alaska to be proactive in protecting two of the state's most valuable resources: children and educators. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.



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### Sectional Analysis House Bill 210 Disciplinary and Safety Program in Public Schools

**Section 1** states findings and intent.

**Section 2** states the Department of Education will expand the report "Alaska's Public Schools: A Report Card to the Public" to include information regarding school safety and discipline.

**Section 3** states in **subsection (a)** that each school will have a disciplinary and safety program. The school board will, in conjunction with parent, teachers, administrators, students, and other community members establish a school discipline and safety program. This program will include mechanisms for parent/guardian participation, periodic training and instructions during the school year, communication between schools and parents, development of proactive measures such as: discipline policies, in-school suspension, conflict resolution, teacher notification, behavioral intervention, and reporting. There will be an annual review and assessment of the program's effectiveness.

**Subsection (b)** states that an in-school suspension program will be created. This in-school suspension program allows a teacher to remove a student from class who is disrupting the education process. The student will be placed in an separate classroom. A teacher may use this mechanism no more then five times a year with an individual student. Upon the third time a special discipline team will be created. This team will consist of the student, parent/guardian, counselor/school district psychologist, and school principal/principal designee. The team will create a behavioral intervention plan to modify the student's disruptive behavior. It is the responsibility of the teacher(s) and principal to monitor the plan.

**Subsection (c)** states that the a school of 200 or more students will have a fully staffed in-school suspension program. A school of less then 200 will be provided a district-wide in-school suspension program by the school board. The program will have adequate staff, space, and curriculum.

**Subsection (d)** states that each school will have a conflict resolution program. This program will teach students' tools for conflict resolution. Beginning July 1, 2000, the school board will enroll every student in kindergarten through eighth grade in a conflict resolution program.

**Subsection (e)** states that each school principal will give written notification to every teacher or school administrator who has contact with a student who was found guilty of or adjudicated of a felony and/or if the student has been expelled, suspended, or currently involved in a proceeding regarding weapons, alcohol, drugs, and assault. This notification must take place before the student can be enrolled in school.



**Subsection (f)** states that the Department of Education will provide intervention resources to schools.

**Subsection (g)** states that the school board will provide information regarding incidents of suspension or placement into in-school suspension, drop-out rates, attendance rates, and students' reasons for leaving school to the Department of Education for the publication in the "Alaska's Public Schools: A Report Card to the Public."

**Subsection (h)** states that this program will be funded by the Department of Education. Each district may receive up to \$20 for each enrolled student for the purpose of the discipline and safety program. The previously stated \$200 was a drafting error.

**Section 4** states that this act will begin July 1, 1999.

ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS  
*Advocates for Alaska's Youth*

May 11, 1999

The Honorable Fred Dyson  
The Honorable Jack Coghill  
Co-chairs, Health Education and Social Services Committee  
Alaska House of Representatives  
State Capitol Building  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 210 School Discipline & Safety Programs

Dear Representatives Dyson and Coghill:

Due to a scheduling conflict, I will be unable to provide testimony on HB 210 at the House HESS Committee meeting on May 13, 1999. The following are a few comments and concerns regarding the above referenced bill.

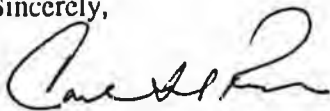
We appreciate the framework laid out in HB 210 to address school violence through prevention and intervention strategies. However, it is our view that HB 210 is overly prescriptive and would hinder implementation at the local level. It is also very expensive.

Specifically, the bill mandates a process for handling school discipline and safety programs without regard to local decision making. Mandating conflict resolution curriculum in grades K-8 and in-school suspension programs may be unrealistic in small schools. Allowing educators the kind of latitude prescribed in HB 210 may or may not be acceptable depending on the community. These decisions are better left at the community level.

Requiring Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) for ongoing disruptive students is a labor-intensive process and will be costly. We know from our experience with IEPs (Instructional Education Plans) for special education students that such individual treatment is expensive. Last year the Alaska Legislature recognized the high cost involved and chose to fund such programs with block grants. At this time, without knowing the parameters of such a program, we would hesitate to support a similar approach for BIPs.

In closing, I believe legislation should direct districts to provide for safe schools, and allow the districts to come up with an efficient and effective way to ensure that safety. I respectfully request the House HESS hold HB 210 in committee and form a subcommittee to craft a workable solution during the interim.

Sincerely,



Carl F.N. Rose,  
Executive Director



# NEA-ALASKA

*Affiliated with the National Education Association*

April 28, 1999

Rep. Fred Dyson  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 104  
Juneau,, AK 99801-1182

MAY 03 1999

Dear Rep. Dyson:

Re: Safe Schools Legislation A+ Schools for Alaska's Kids Campaign

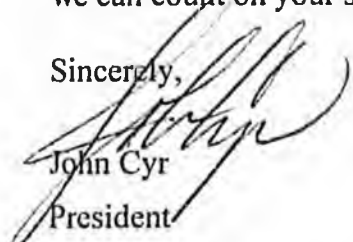
After several months of work, Representative Tom Brice has introduced legislation to address the profession's approach to making schools safer for children, school employees and families. Over a year ago NEA-Alaska designed the A+ Schools for Alaska's Kids campaign, joining with parents to proactively develop a legislative package for children. "Safe Schools" was one component of the package.

HB 210 will accomplish several objectives to make our schools safer. By providing conflict resolution training, we seek to help children deal with aggression. By inservicing school employees, we seek to prepare our members to deal with violent situations should they arise. By involving parents, we hope to build positive partnerships between families and schools to curb violence. By requiring the Department of Education to gather reports on the nature of violence and dysfunction, we hope to better address problems in the future.

HB 210 is not a quick political fix but an omnibus effort emphasizing prevention, education, and intervention. With new reforms, tests and quality schools efforts, we have been required to spend more and more time focused on preparing children's minds. I believe HB 210 will allow us to focus on not only providing safer schools, but also on building safer communities. Some may oppose the bill because of cost or the inconvenience of reporting. Approaching the problems of disruptive behavior in the manner outlined in the bill far outweigh the potential for trauma should we simply fail to do nothing or rely on politically expedient quick fixes.

This bill can become a legal reality with your leadership and support. We are asking that you co-sponsor and support this important piece of legislation. In closing, let us remember that this cannot be about partisan politics. This effort must be about making our schools safer for all of Alaska's children. Efforts to provide safe conditions for all children are a responsibility of EACH Alaskan. We hope that we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

  
John Cyr  
President

Attachment HB 210

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18 • (907) 274-0536 • FAX: (907) 274-0551  
0 • FAX: (907) 586-2744  
007) 456-4435 • FAX: (907) 456-2159

Support Letters and Articles

Subject: School Safety AND Children  
Date: Thu, 6 May 1999 08:55:06 -0800  
From: Jo Kuykendall <kuykendalljf@mosquionet.com>  
To: Representative\_Tom\_Brice@legis.state.ak.us

Dear Tom,

I read your half-page ad re. SAFE SCHOOLS in this morning's paper. I feel some sadness and concern that ONE MORE TIME we are taking the EZ way out. Quick-fix solutions may keep children safe while they are in-school, but addresses only the tip of a gaping wound. While everyone wants our schools to be safe, the causes must ALSO be addressed.

A small paper in OR carried an editorial that helps illustrate. Over 700 adolescents attempted suicide last year, and 35+ were successful, and that was JUST in OR.

What percentage of youth graduate w/ assorted skills, but have no idea who they are, or understanding of their own competencies and talents??

How much anger in our culture remains bottled up...? ...and is Exploding again and again where others are harmed?

The broader issue includes helping to prepare our children to live and work in a world that is changing daily. Until you, and other legislators like yourself, recognize the broader teacher-preparation issue, and absolutely REQUIRE that teachers understand child development before they teach, we will not stop what is happening. No amount of discipline programs, counseling services, or intervention will stop the damage being done to kids by teachers who do not understand what is happening in front of them. It is starting in childcare in programs for infants and toddlers, and moving forward through the years. Those who teach inappropriately (require children to learn information and in ways children cannot understand, but are forced to act like they do), who expect compliance to inappropriate expectations, and who discipline in inappropriate ways are compounding serious problems of children. And, they are not effectively helping parents. The effects are being shown in numerous ways.

An 18 month old baby threw a plastic doll on the floor recently, and when he saw an adult observing him, quickly picked it up and stroked it saying "gen-tle touch" w/ wide eyes on the adult. As soon as he saw no one observing him, he again THREW the doll on the floor and walked away. Sadly, at 18 months, children now understand how to camouflage their feelings and act in ways that adults require. But, equally sadly, the child's true feelings and emotions are not being dealt with.... not as toddlers, not as preschoolers, not as kindergartners, and not as elementary children. We are not DEALING with children--we are playing games w/ behaviors.

While I am no longer connected with the University full time, I do teach a class now and then, and continue to remain concerned. You are not solving the larger problem. Absolutely NO child development is required to teach children. (Some require a survey life-span development

course where each age is covered in about a half of a class, and they can attest that they are "covering" development. How else can one cover birth to death development in 14 or so weeks of a semester??) Teachers have not a clue. Social workers are not required to have child development. Most of them understand isolated aspects of development, but not the continuum of cause and long-term effects. Early childhood caregivers are also not required to have child development, although program graduates do. There is something desperately wrong.

Sincerely,

Jo Kuykendall

Curb violence before it starts

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Metal detectors and police decrease violent episodes in our schools only after they have escalated. Counselors and social workers, as integral members of school staffs, decrease overall violence and help prevent incidents like the one in Colorado this week. Addressing students' problems before they escalate and teaching them skills to deal with life pressures, anger and interpersonal problems is a big part of violence prevention.

Counselors and social workers in no way replace the need for parent supervising their children and teaching them moral and spiritual beliefs in their homes.

The number of students assigned to each counselor in junior and senior high schools does not allow adequate time for counselors to deal with student's personal dilemmas, nonacademic or school-related problems. Youth need a safe place to talk, share uncertainties, vent or just be reassured they are handling problems effectively. Counselors and social workers have the expertise needed to help students acquire skills to cope effectively with youth-related problems. Talking in facilitated groups, becoming members of classes on social issues important to them and receiving personal attention will decrease violence in our schools as well as increase academic performance.

Allocation of money to staff positions for more counselors and social workers in our schools will not happen unless you, the parents and concerned citizens of our community, contact school board members and legislators to demand funding for these positions. Get involved now, before we have more violence in our schools.

- Nancy Cole

Anchorage

January 1999

Vol. 7, No. 1

## SCHOOL VIOLENCE UPDATE

By Mary Fairchild and Veronica O. White

*School safety and violence are high on state legislative agendas.*

Multiple shootings on school grounds in Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, Pennsylvania and Oregon have captured the front page of newspapers and dominated talk shows. Parents, schools and public officials are looking for explanations and ways to avoid further violence. And violence and school safety are bound to be high on state legislative agendas. Experts, however, caution policymakers that there are no cure-alls and that violence on school grounds is not solely a school problem. Moreover, school violence is not limited to cities, but also is a problem in suburban and rural areas. They suggest that the most effective policies and programs address youth violence in a broader context and involve the community.

Although images of the shootings are fresh in the minds of citizens, most experts point out that public schools are still safe places for learning. In fact, during the last school year, there were fewer school murders than in 1992-93 (40 and 55 respectively). However, during the 1996-97 school year, one in 10 public schools reported at least one serious violent crime where police were called, and 6,093 students were expelled for bringing firearms to a public school.

*State legislatures are using many approaches to school violence.*

State legislatures are using many approaches to school violence, including creating and funding school-based prevention and intervention programs, improving access by schools and juvenile justice agencies to information and records, increasing security on school grounds, and passing tough penalties. A number of states, including California, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Oklahoma and Utah, have established community-based violence prevention programs that involve public schools as partners with other agencies and organizations, such as law enforcement and nonprofits.

*During 1998, 36 states considered school safety legislation.*

During the 1998 legislative sessions, approximately 36 states considered school safety legislation. California enacted the Comprehensive School Violence Prevention and Intervention Pilot Program, consisting of conflict resolution and mitigation curriculum for students and training for school security personnel. Maine created a school violence study commission. South Carolina's School Safety Act provides schools with resource officers who have the authority to arrest. Mississippi's tough new law classifies murder on educational property as a capital offense, punishable by death for those 16 years or older.

Since 1993, 35 states have passed laws to allow juvenile records and other pertinent information to be shared between juvenile justice agencies and school officials. The purpose of these laws is to provide for public safety and ensure coordination of services for troubled youths. Many states including Connecticut and Louisiana require police to notify school officials of a student arrest. New Jersey permits schools to be notified if a student is being investigated for a crime or is in custody. In Texas, teachers and support staff are also notified. Missouri law requires training for school employees on confidentiality and appropriate student discipline for violence at school. A unique 1998 enactment in Wisconsin requires schools to be notified when a youngster is found innocent or "not adjudicated delinquent." Other laws require school officials to report illegalities to law enforcement. Nevada law prohibits a juvenile who has committed certain sex offenses from attending the same school as the victim.

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*Executive Director: William T. Pound*

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*Denver Office:* 1560 Broadway  
Suite 700  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
303.830.2200

*Washington Office:* 444 N. Capitol St., N.W.,  
Suite 515  
Washington D.C. 20001  
202.624.5400

In addition, the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act requires states receiving federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Act to expel any student who brings a firearm to school.

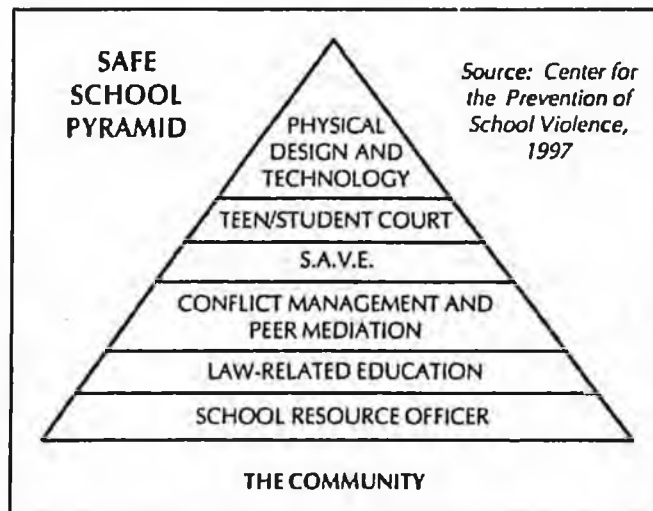
Since lawmakers design policies and fund programs, it is critical to consider research about school violence and programs that work. In its recent report, "Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools," the U.S. Department of Education provides important information about identifying early warning signs for violence such as uncontrolled anger, inappropriate access to firearms and low interest in school, and gives concrete steps to prevent, intervene and respond when it occurs.

*Since lawmakers design policies and fund programs, it is critical to consider research about programs that work.*

Additional studies of interest to policymakers include:

- Drug Strategies, a research company, evaluated and graded 84 school-based prevention programs. Ten programs received As; most got Cs and Ds. Effective programs offered a comprehensive, multifaceted approach and included at least 10 to 20 sessions in the first year. Certain programs using scare tactics or segregating aggressive or antisocial students were found to be ineffective.
- Blueprints for Violence Prevention, a project of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, includes three school-based programs on its list of effective programs: preventing bullying, promoting emotional competence and providing incentives to graduate.
- According to the National Institute of Justice, recent research on a high school program in Charlotte, N.C., shows that involving students in solving problems of school violence can reduce crime and fear among students. Program elements, incorporated into student curriculum, also reduced the time teachers spent on disruptive students.

Most experts believe policymakers can create a context to address school violence that includes multiple approaches for complex problems. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence has developed six strategies to prevent school violence that make up the Safe Schools Pyramid. With community as its base, this model incorporates elements to ensure physical safety, maintain an educational focus and involve students, parents and school personnel in problem solving.



One of its components, Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE), is a student initiated program that promotes nonviolence. Another feature involves policemen as school resource officers who provide counseling as well as crisis intervention and physical safety.

### Contacts for More Information

Mary Fairchild, Veronica O. White  
NCSL—Denver  
(303) 830-2200 ext. 182, 131  
mary.fairchild@ncsl.org  
ronni.white@ncsl.org

U.S. Department of Education  
(202) 401-2000  
www.ed.gov

OJJDP Clearinghouse  
(800) 638-8736  
www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm

Center for the Prevention of School Violence  
(800) 299-6054 or (909) 515-9397  
www.ncsu.edu/cpsv

**ERIC**  
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**Education**

# DIGEST

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## AN OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIES TO REDUCE SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Wendy Schwartz

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education

Violence among youth, especially in schools, is one of American society's most pressing concerns. It is also a source of controversy. While no recent nationwide study of the real extent of youth violence is available, small-scale and regional studies indicate that youth violence is increasing, at least slightly. In addition, youth, like adults, are now more frequently using guns instead of fists to settle disputes. And, lastly, whereas youth violence had once been thought to be an urban public school problem and a consequence of poverty and family dysfunction, stable suburban and rural communities are now also experiencing it, as are private schools.

However, despite sensational anecdotal media reports suggesting that the public is generally unsafe because of youth lawlessness, it is likely that youth violence is not as pervasive as is feared. In fact, some who spend their workday in schools think that they are among the safest places a child can be. Further, recent surveys indicate that the most prevalent type of youth crime is theft, and the most common types of violence are fist fights, bullying, and shoving matches.

While the public is ready to believe that school violence is ever-present, some local leaders and school administrators are not willing to acknowledge its occurrence on their own watch. Their position is based on the fear that people will boycott communities and schools labeled unsafe, and that they will be blamed for failing to keep the peace. Gang activity at school is particularly susceptible to "the Ostrich syndrome," as administrators may ignore the problem. An unfortunate consequence of such denial is that opportunities to reduce violence are lost.

Finally, there is sometimes a contradiction between school policies and practice. Whereas many districts and schools have comprehensive regulations for dealing with violence, enforcement may be uneven or lax. This creates a situation where teachers do not feel supported when they impose discipline, students do not feel protected, and the violence-prone think they will not be punished. Conversely, administrators express dismay that teachers do not enforce policies in their classrooms.

Despite these inconsistencies, many promising types of anti-violence strategies, focusing on both discipline and social and personal transformation, have been devised by government, communities, and schools. Most have originated in urban areas, where youth violence was first identified. This digest reviews a variety of the policies, programs, and practices to prevent youth violence (which are described more fully in the publications cited at the end), so that local leaders can base decisions about their own efforts on the experience of other communities.

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### Public Support of Violence Prevention

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The effectiveness of school violence prevention initiatives is increased considerably by public policies that reinforce their anti-violence message and by community programs that themselves seek to prevent or ameliorate youth violence.

### **Government Initiatives**

Legislation now exists at all levels of government to reduce the availability of guns, particularly the sale of weapons to minors. Weapons offenses are adjudicated more harshly in general, and the practice of trying violent juvenile offenders as adults is growing. Some states now hold parents legally responsible for certain behavior of their children, such as truancy and delinquency.

To deal specifically with violence in schools, President Bill Clinton signed the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act, mandating a one-year expulsion for students who bring weapons to school and bolstering the "zero tolerance" for weapons policies of some states and school districts already in existence. The Federal government, and most states, also make funds available for prevention activities through anti crime and education legislation. These include anti-gang programs and other very focused prevention education, as well as more general recreational activities.

### **Community Initiatives**

Community activities frequently focus on breaking family cycles of violence. The most effective are long-term interventions providing a range of family services. They involve the collaborative efforts of religious and recreational organizations; social service, public housing and health agencies; the business community; the schools; and law enforcement agencies. For example, programs in parenting skills and family relationships, particularly those focusing on nonviolent living skills and recovery from substance abuse, can protect children from learning violence at home. Programs in conflict resolution and anger management are similar to those discussed below that are designed for students.

Out-of-school programs (either independently operated or school-sponsored) keep youth constructively engaged when their families are unavailable, and provide them with attention from caring adults and good role models. They also keep youth away from negative influences on the street and television violence. Programs can also offer educational enrichment and assistance with school work, and help participants develop positive values. Those most effective at violence prevention actively pursue the prevention goals of local schools and serve as extensions of school prevention activities.

Helping young people find employment is an important way for communities to reduce property crime and help build adolescents' self-esteem and sense of responsibility. Having a job also helps youth appreciate how important staying in school is to their future career plans. Providing parents with jobs and job training is also a way to lower stresses that can trigger violence.

Community campaigns to supplement school programs against gangs are crucial because gang membership cuts across school lines. In fact, there is gang activity in all 50 states now, and gangs recruit and are active nationwide. Effective anti-gang programs include crisis intervention teams comprised of the police, probation officers, and community leaders; intensive community, family, and youth education programs; alternative youth activities; and a long-term commitment.

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### **School District and School Initiatives**

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School anti-violence policies and programs run the gamut from general educational improvement efforts to interventions that target specific types of illegal or anti-social behavior. The most effective are directed by a clearly-defined administrative entity, and have line-item budgetary status. They involve parents in a variety of roles and, as appropriate, also draw on community leaders and resources. Initiatives are directed at both preventing violence and at punishing and rehabilitating perpetrators. Their goal is to create a safe school community that believes in and practices nonviolence in resolving differences.

### **Overall School Improvement**

In recognition of the fact that student misbehavior (and even gang membership) can be a reaction to ineffective schooling and to feelings of frustration and failure, some districts are restructuring schools to increase student engagement, attendance, and performance. Indeed, school reform programs around the country, especially those requiring strong family involvement, report increased attendance and student satisfaction. Many schools that cannot totally restructure still strive to better meet the education needs of students through more accurate identification of learning disabilities and personal attention. A related reform is downsizing schools, since it has been widely documented that smaller schools have fewer disruptions and incidences of violence.

Schools can also reduce violence by promoting mutual respect among all members of their community, student self-respect, and appreciation for diversity. They demonstrate respect for students through availability of good facilities and resources, such as up-to-date textbooks, laboratories, and computer equipment. It is also believed that the appearance of a school adds to the perception of safety, and that a well cared for school is less susceptible to vandalism and violence. Unfortunately, schools in urban areas, where violence can be a particular problem, are among the most overcrowded and poorly equipped and maintained.

### **School Safety Policies**

Institutionalization of a code of conduct demonstrates a commitment to violence prevention and helps staff and students feel safe. The code should clearly explain school rules and punishments for infractions. A cornerstone of all policies is the Federally-mandated "zero tolerance for guns" provision. Some schools also institute zero tolerance provisions for other types of offenses, such as assaulting a teacher, so that violent students can be removed from regular classrooms. Because some disruptive students might welcome expulsion, many policies assert that the school response to certain specified acts will be legal prosecution.

Dress regulations, particularly those forbidding clothing associated with gang membership, are increasingly popular. Requiring uniforms is thought to increase students' commitment to school goals and to reduce theft of expensive clothing and jewelry.

Policies can be created at three levels: district, school, and classroom. Since there are different concerns at each one, it is reasonable for students to be governed by several complementary policies. Collaborative development by administrators, teachers, parents, and even students, with a review for legal compliance, helps ensure that a policy will be respected and enforced. Periodically reviewing a policy for appropriateness, effectiveness, and completeness maintains its usefulness over time. Copies are given to administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Students may also have the rules explained to them in assembly or a classroom to be sure they understand the purpose of the rules, the parameters of acceptable behavior, and the consequences of infractions.

### **Prevention Strategies**

*School Security.* The most common school security measure is the monitoring of students when they move through the hallways and in places where they congregate, such as restrooms and the cafeteria. School staff members have traditionally served as monitors, but increasingly schools are hiring security guards to patrol the building and to provide security at events. In the most violence-prone areas schools may form partnerships with the police to visit periodically or even to patrol the halls regularly. However, some educators believe that a police presence has a negative impact on teaching and learning and that the need for them is an indication of administrative failure. Others welcome police support but provide special training for dealing with students in a school environment. Probation officers with on-site offices can provide help to students who have already engaged in illegal behavior.

Some schools use parents as monitors and teachers' aides. Doing this is inexpensive and can be an effective deterrent, since students may be more reluctant to behave badly when watched by someone they regularly see in the neighborhood. Further, involving parents gives them a sense of ownership of anti-violence efforts and may help them reconsider their own attitudes about violence.

To keep students from bringing in weapons some schools use metal detectors and others administer systematic or random searches of students' bodies, possessions, and lockers. Since there is a strong relationship between student violence and use and sale of drugs, administrators make special efforts to keep schools drug-free, through both education campaigns and searching. The courts have been divided about the constitutionality of searches for either weapons or drugs, however, and some methods, such as use of drug-sniffing dogs, are being challenged legally.

*Teacher Involvement.* To dispel fears and help teachers feel supported, meetings about violence issues are held regularly, possibly as a component of general staff meetings. Administrators provide accurate information about violent occurrences and responses to them, involve faculty members in prevention efforts, and listen to their concerns. Also, teachers' input can be invaluable, since it is common for them to have information about the threat of violence (and, also, gang activities) before administrators do, and to have suggestions for how to deal with it based on personal knowledge of the students. Teachers can also meet in groups to discuss ways to establish and maintain control of their classroom and a climate conducive to learning, and to brainstorm strategies for working with disruptive students.

Training in violence prevention-for ancillary staff such as school bus drivers, as well as teachers-can both make the school safer and help staff feel more secure. Programs can include development of the ability to identify students at risk of anti-social behavior for preventive intervention, to identify and diffuse potential violence, and to deal safely

with violence should it erupt. Some staff training covers the same issues that comprise training for students, such as conflict resolution, and it can be effective for staff to participate along with students.

Since at-risk students respond positively to personal attention, teachers can help youth resist violent impulses and the lure of drugs and gangs by offering them extra help with their schoolwork, referrals, informal counseling, or even just a sympathetic ear.

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## Prevention Programs

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*Anti-Violence.* Early intervention is necessary to prevent youth violence. Elementary education training in anger management, impulse control, appreciation of diversity, and mediation and conflict resolution skills can help prevent youth from engaging in violence as they mature. Early discussions about the negative consequences of gang membership, and providing children with positive ways of getting personal needs met, can protect them from future gang recruitment efforts. Educating young children about the use of guns is also valuable, since accidents have happened as a result of children's naivete about their danger.

Age-appropriate training in self-esteem development and stress management and reduction, especially for students living in poverty or in difficult family circumstances, can help transform negative feelings into positive coping skills. Other types of training, introduced to students at later developmental stages, covers development of "refusal skills" to help youth resist using substances and engaging in sexual activity, and how to prevent date violence, with particular attention to battering during teenage pregnancy.

Some schools have a specially trained safety coordinator or a committee whose primary function is to coordinate anti-violence programs and to respond to crisis situations by offering counseling and mediation. Schools may also have crisis centers, which are staffed places where students who commit or threaten an act of violence can go to receive on-the-spot counseling and to "cool off."

Other types of programs take a positive approach to violence prevention by offering incentives for good behavior, such as a recognition and reward system for good school citizenship. The goal is to bring about a change in the students and school climate so that normative behavior is constructive. Bringing high profile community leaders to the school to discuss crime and violence is a way to provide students with positive role models.

*Anti-Gang.* Even more than violence prevention in general, effective anti-gang strategies involve all school operations and staff. They require establishment of a positive school climate, good communications and security, a staff trained in crisis intervention, and a coordinated effort. They also require that schools not only acknowledge a gang presence, but that they actively investigate its extent and accurately determine who the members are, what they do, and where they congregate. Finally, good strategies require schools to acknowledge that preventing, and even reducing, gang activity will be a protracted trial-and-error process during which many different tactics are employed.

A first step is often establishing and widely publicizing the philosophy that a gang presence (clothing and paraphernalia, as well as behavior) will not be tolerated. Policies that flow from the philosophy include a dress code and prohibition on flashing gang signs, shouting gang slogans, and writing gang graffiti on school or personal property. Discipline measures, meted out consistently, which escalate with the number or severity of infractions, demonstrate school seriousness.

Schools with gangs take stronger security measures, such as more extensive monitoring, than schools experiencing minimal random violence. Some also work with the police to increase communication about gang activity and the community to coordinate prevention efforts.

Schools make an extra effort to involve potential and active gang members in academic, extracurricular, and counseling programs. Providing gang members with effective educational supports, such as tutoring, can reconnect them with the rewards and value of academic achievement. Staff who takes a personal interest in individual members can help loosen the hold of the gang. By meeting informally with members and arranging for positive experiences that are probably otherwise lacking in their lives, staff can provide students with some of the affirmation that gangs offer. To do this, staff members may need to change their attitudes about gang members and take more time with certain students than they usually would.

Involving parents by providing them with information about their children's gang activity and its possible

consequences, and counseling to help them deal with the problem, can enlist them as allies in the effort to rid the school of gangs. Schools can also provide access to outside agencies that offer counseling. As a last resort, gang members can be transferred to alternative schools for more intensive support.

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### Remedies and Discipline

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School districts are aware that some students simply cannot function in a regular classroom, and many have created alternative schools for students who have been suspended or expelled, or are at risk of suspension. These schools incorporate intensive individual and group counseling into the educational program. To prevent the alternative schools from becoming warehouses that fail to turn around disruptive students, staff takes care to develop individual plans for students with the goal of returning them to a regular school.

Schools also may provide similar programs as an add-on for students who are placed in detention or who remain in their regular school. Some effective intervention programs focus on modifying beliefs and related behavior; examples include aggression replacement and anti-bullying training. Some districts include a community service component in their alternative program; a few even require that students' volunteer assignments allow them to see the results of violence firsthand, so they may work with injured crime victims.

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### Conclusion

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Concern about increasing youth violence is being channeled into a variety of innovative, and potentially effective, programs around the country. Although components vary depending on the particular needs of the community, the most effective programs:

- Make an accurate assessment of the existence of violence and, especially, gang activity.
- Use all the resources in the community, including social service and law enforcement, and not just rely on school officials to deal with the problem.
- Incorporate family services into both community and school programs.
- Intervene early in a child's life.
- Include not only anti-violence strategies but also positive experiences.
- Create and communicate clearly defined behavior codes, and enforce them strictly and uniformly.
- Prepare to engage in a long-term effort.

In all communities it is likely that sometimes anti-violence work will be compromised by lack of resources and time, and that even the most dedicated individuals will feel frustrated. Early evaluations of well-organized programs suggest that success is possible, though; and statistics demonstrating an increase in youth violence, however slight, indicate that the effort and the expenditure are necessary.

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Statement of Dr. Ronald D. Stephens

Executive Director

National School Safety Center  
141 Duesenberg Drive, Suite 11, Westlake Village, CA 91362  
Phone: 805-373-9977 Fax: 805-373-9277

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND FAMILIES**

**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**HEARING ON UNDERSTANDING VIOLENT CHILDREN**

**Tuesday April 28, 1998**

Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2175

Washington, DC

### **Youth Violence: Coming Soon to a School Near You**

Recent reports from the US Departments of Justice and Education reflect a slight reduction in school crime, but try to explain this to parents in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Pearl, Mississippi; Paducah, Kentucky; or to citizens and parents in Edinboro, Pennsylvania who experienced the killing of a teacher, along with the wounding of another teacher and two students this past weekend. Since 1992, there have been 211 violent-associated school deaths [as of April 28, 1998] that we can document. The incidents are just as likely to occur in rural and suburban America as they are in the inner city.. We are all still reeling from the recent shocking reminder in Jonesboro, Arkansas, that violent juvenile crimes -- even when they invade only 10 percent of our nation's schools -- are symptoms of danger and dysfunction that must not be ignored.

It should not require an act of courage for parents to send their children to school. Although the incidence of crime and violence may have declined slightly, the severity of those incidents continues to escalate. Fistfights and fire drills in schools have been replaced by gun fights and crisis drills. Violence is no respecter of persons, geography, class, color or ethnic origin. And it can happen anywhere. While the average American can no doubt name the five largest urban metropolises in the country where violence often occurs, who could predict that it would galvanize towns such as Grayson, Olathe, Blackville, Lynnville, Moses Lake, Bethel, Jonesboro, Pearl, West Paducah and now Edinboro?

For the most part, violence does not begin in schools. It walks onto school premises from the neighborhood. It enters the school doors with students, educators, visitors, volunteers and predators and sometimes even campus supervisors. Violence evades metal detectors, counselors and teachers because fear, anger, hopelessness, longing, and frustration are carried invisibly in hearts and minds. Whatever the source of that violence, whether from the home, the community or elsewhere, the effects of violence on learning are so destructive that educators are placing school security on the education agenda out of self-defense and necessity. Teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn in an environment of intimidation and fear.

Despite our best intentions, school safety cannot be legislated. It must be grown and developed from within. True crime prevention begins with heartware, not hardware. It is supported with positive attitudes and actions, which promote the safety, success and well-being of all children. Thus, it behooves us to eliminate those aspects of American life that conspire to rob all too many children, youth, parents, workers and citizens in general of their energy, hope and desire to learn and succeed.

## Understanding Youth Violence

Before we can identify the causes of youth violence, we must first examine its pervasiveness and the scope of the school violence problem. One out of twelve young people who stay away from school do so because of fear. This is a national tragedy.

A 1994 study produced by Metropolitan Life Insurance indicated that annually, one in four students and one in nine teachers are attacked in schools.

According to "Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97," a study by the National Center for Education Statistics, 10 percent of all public schools experienced one or more serious violent crimes (i.e., murder, rape or other sexual battery, suicide, physical attack or fight with a weapon, or robbery) that were reported to police or other law enforcement officials during the 1996-97 school year.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice's report, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence," the rate of violent victimization of juveniles (ages 12 through 17) was nearly three times that of adults in 1994. In 1995, 10 percent of high school students said they had carried a weapon to school in the 30 days preceding the survey.

According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics "America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being," in 1994, almost 2.6 million youth ages 12 to 17 were victims of violent crimes.

The U.S. Department of Justice's "Juvenile Arrests 1995" summarizes arrest statistics of juveniles. Findings are derived from data reported to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program. In 1995, juveniles were involved in 32 percent of all robbery arrests; 23 percent of all weapons arrests; 15 percent of all murder and aggravated assault arrests; and 13 percent of all drug arrests.

The Public Agenda's *Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools*, the results of a fall 1996 random telephone survey of 1,300 high school students nationwide, revealed that 48 percent of public school students said that drugs and violence are serious problems in their schools.

### Causes of youth violence

Understanding youth violence is a complex issue which is affected by a wide variety of social, economic, political and individual factors.

In a cooperative study involving the National School Safety Center and the Centers for Disease Control, an analysis was made of "School-Associated Violent Deaths" during the 1992 to 1994 school years. Specific common factors were identified among perpetrators:

- 40 percent had a past background of criminal misbehavior;
- 24 percent had been previously involved with substance abuse;
- 35 percent were involved in gangs; and
- 70 percent had previously brought a weapon to school.

Since July of 1992, the National School Safety Center has identified 211 school-associated violent deaths, most of which involved intention to cause personal injury. Using these factors and percentages, consider this:

- If 40 percent of the perpetrators had a criminal background, the inverse of this data is that 60 percent did not;
- If 35 percent were gang-involved, the inverse suggests that 65 percent were not;
- If 24 percent were drug-involved, the inverse suggests that 76 percent were not.

The data suggests that even with all we know, what we don't know is greater than what we do know. This suggests that there are many other factors that influence the development of youth violence.

Researchers and youth-serving professionals have identified many risk factors which contribute to violence. Perhaps the top two such factors are a history of victimization and perceptions of isolation.

**Past victimization.** Research involving schoolyard bullies reflects that about 80 percent of bullies were first

victims of bullies in the form of parents, peers, siblings or others. Many victims become perpetrators of crime in response to their own experiences with ridicule, physical punishment, torment and abuse. The combination of being both a victim and a perpetrator makes it more difficult to understand and sort through the causes of violent behavior. The way youngsters are treated by parents is perhaps the most influential predictor of child behavior. Most psychologists agree that bullying and aggression are learned behaviors. If they are learned, the implication is that they can be unlearned.

**Youngsters who feel isolated, neglected, ignored and ridiculed.** This factor itself is complicated. Some suggested causes of perceptions of isolation and neglect include:

- economic deprivation that distances children and youth from peers who have advantages and comforts they lack;
- lack of growth and enrichment activities such as conversation with family members, childhood reading experiences, exposure to social activities with family members and friends, pre-school classes;
- lack of nurturing role models and persons who can serve as caring supervisors, mentors or advocates;
- youngsters' perceptions that they are not understood and not appreciated;
- conflicts and isolation perceived due to differences among the culture of the family and varieties of cultures in the school or larger community;
- family disorganization and lack of meaningful rituals (for example, shared mealtimes, birthday celebrations and family outings)

Other causes of violence in youth include:

**A background of misconduct and trouble at home, at school and with the law.** One of the best predictors of future behavior is past behavior. Youngsters who begin at home to act out, withdraw, bully others and evidence impaired attention spans reveal potential indicators of future trouble. Such children are candidates for immediate and early intervention. Consequently, prevention and early intervention activities and programs through churches, social services agencies and schools can go far to ensure that disruptive, delinquent behavior does not become ingrained.

It is critical to guide children through positive role modeling, encourage them through positive mentoring, and help them achieve success through supervision and support.

**Social skills deficit disorder.** A common pattern among perpetrators is a social skills deficit disorder, which is often characterized by rage, defiance, thoughtlessness, detachment and nonconnectivity. Often these youngsters feel powerless and hopeless, but with a gun, they feel powerful and in control. Several new terms have been developed over the years to describe these kinds of individuals, including ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder), ODD (oppositional defiant disorder) and IED (intermittent explosive disorder). Whatever the label, the result of disruptive, delinquent behavior is unacceptable.

**School failure.** School failure is a significant predictor of later offending. Because such failure is a consistent predictor or correlate of violent behavior, it may be useful to identify children who are at risk of school failure due to living in high-risk, economically deprived neighborhoods. Such children must be targeted for preschool intellectual enrichment programs, which have correlated positively with reductions among children at-risk for school failure and later offending.

**Alcohol and other drugs.** Use of alcohol and other drugs tends to diminish inhibitions and lower an individual's threshold for violence. School administrators across the country are looking for ways to identify early the potential for violence. For instance, Carmel High School in Indiana mandates a drug test when a youngster is suspended or expelled from school for an infraction. Early results have shown that 40 percent of students tested because of fighting tested positive for illegal substances, 42 percent of students violating the tobacco policy also tested positive for illegal substances. The good news about Carmel High's testing program is that after the testing, 64 percent of all students who tested positive for an illegal substance received treatment.

**Gang involvement and gang violence.** Involvement in gangs is a vicious cycle of intimidation, violence and retaliation masquerading as "belonging" and taking part in peer rituals. The November/December 1997 issue of *Juvenile Offender* reports on the Rochester Youth Development four-year study of a sample of 1,000 7th- and 8th-grade Rochester public school boys and girls, a majority of whom were from high-crime areas. (The data as reported in the publication were weighted to represent the total population.) The study reveals that adolescent gang members, representing only 30 percent of the study population, were more involved in delinquent acts than were the

adolescent nongang members. Gang members were responsible for 65 percent of general delinquency, 86 percent of serious crime, 60 percent of public disorder crimes, 70 percent of drug sales, 63 percent of alcohol abuse and 61 percent of drug use. In addition, gang members often escalated violence through their rivalries and retaliation activities.

In several of the school-associated multiple shootings, individuals have been gang-involved or negatively influenced by peer groups. For instance, in Pearl, Mississippi, the perpetrator was a member of satanic cult; in Bethel, Alaska, and Lynneville, Tennessee, the shooters were influenced by other students.

**Prejudice and discrimination.** Emphasis on differences, along with acts of bigotry based on differences, has perhaps done more to fuel gang membership and involvement than anything else in American society. The way others are treated, particularly newcomers, has a great deal to do with the alliances and affiliations that are formed. However, prejudice and discrimination are pervasive in society at large, not simply instrumental in encouraging the formation of gangs or other social groups. Inbred fear, hate and discrimination are often imperceptibly passed from one generation to another without any defensible justification or understanding.

**Violence publicized in the media and sports.** Violence is publicized throughout our culture in movies, sports and the media. Our societal attraction to violence is exhibited in our crime rates and in the media. Such publicity has a significant effect on stimulating youth violence. Young people tend to become what they see and what they experience. The United States has one of the highest rates of interpersonal violence among all nations of the world. In addition, the United States has the highest homicide rate of any Western industrialized society.

When it comes to the media, the theme seems to be "if it bleeds, it leads." There is a tendency to showcase the most violent acts in daily news reports. Oftentimes fights at school are not reported unless the incident results in a serious injury. Even video and arcade games have taken on a deadly and violent character. The marketing language tells the story. We've gone from "Mortal Combat" to "Mortal Combat II" to ultimate annihilation and even worse. The way we die says so much about the way we live. Death review boards across the country have observed that now when youngsters kill each other, it is often not simply a single shot that brings death to the victim, but multiple shots to the head, chest or groin, reflecting not simply violence, but raging violence.

**Easy availability of guns.** Despite the argument that people kill, guns don't, the easy accessibility of weapons to young people in this country is staggering.

- A 1993 study of juvenile possession of firearms drawn from questionnaire volunteer responses of 835 male serious offenders in 6 juvenile correctional facilities in 4 states and 758 male students in 10 inner-city schools near those facilities revealed:
  - 83 percent of inmates and 22 percent of the students had possessed guns;
  - 55 percent of inmates carried guns all or most of the time in the year or two before being incarcerated; 12 percent of the students did so, with another 23 percent carrying guns now and then.
  - When asked how they would get a gun, 45 percent of the inmates and 53 percent of the students said they would "borrow" one from family or friends; 54 percent of the inmates and 37 percent of the students said they would get one "off the street."
  - A Harvard School of Public Health survey in 1993 revealed that of the 2,508 students surveyed (in 96 public and private elementary, middle and senior high schools, grades 6 through 12), 59 percent said that they could get a handgun if they wanted one. Two or three who knew where to get a handgun said that they could get one within a 24-hour period.

In the old days, when fistfights were the way to settle arguments, young people would walk away with a few bruises or black eyes. Today, however, with guns it is about body counts, not bruises. We have transitioned from the single shot zip guns to the six shooter to semi-automatic weapons. There seems to be a tendency to see how much more violent the next school-associated violent death can be.

**Absence of responsible adult supervision.** Despite all of the high-tech strategies-- including camera surveillance, metal detectors, motion sensors and access control systems--still the single most effective strategy for preventing youth violence is the physical presence of a responsible adult in the immediate vicinity.

The above are just a few of the causes associated with violent juvenile behavior. We must develop recommendations for actions that parents, educators and students themselves must take to eliminate this threat to the education and development of skilled, knowledgeable, socially responsible citizens.

## What can be done?

Teachers are so frustrated about school safety that such issues are now becoming part of their collective bargaining agreements. Emerging components of collective bargaining agreements include recommendations such as the following:

- zero tolerance policy, applicable to all students, for assaults or any weapons or dangerous devices capable of producing bodily harm;
- expulsion of students who repeatedly engage in actions resulting in serious violations;
- cooperative problem-solving to develop improved security procedures involving teachers and school staff;
- automatic and immediate expulsion for assaults on educators;
- requirement for students expelled for violent behavior to successfully complete a behavior modification program prior to school readmittance;
- reassignment to another school for students who have assaulted an educational employee (Receiving schools will be given all information available concerning assaultive students.);
- immediate investigation of allegations of assault or weapons possession followed by prompt and reasonable action to protect all parties;
- prompt reporting to appropriate school security or police personnel of incidents of assault or weapons possession;
- prioritizing the establishment of area safety and security before providing emergency treatment;
- requirement for school district to file criminal charges against any student or any patron found to be on school premises under the influence of drugs and or alcohol (School district will support any employee who chooses to file such criminal civil charges.);
- annual evaluation of hearing officers for student due process hearings;
- school district authorization for employees to use force to prevent injury to self or another;
- requirement for school district to train all employees to deal in a nonthreatening manner with threatening students;
- requirement for the school district to continue payment of an employee's salary without charging sick leave when employee has been injured due to school violence;
- requirement for school district to provide leave with pay for one week for any educator assaulted by a student or patron, whether or not the employee has been injured;
- requirement for school district to pay any legal fees incurred in holding students and parents liable for damages; and
- requirement for school district to provide leave with pay if the employee is injured as a result of school violence.

## What Congress Can Do

What can be done at the federal level to mediate against causes of youth violence such as those I have outlined?

1. Place school safety on the national agenda.
2. Permanently fund the National School Safety Center:

- to provide national leadership as a catalyst for promoting and preserving school safety.
- to provide training and technical assistance; and
- to serve as a central resource for model programs.

**The National School Safety Center is the nation's leading school crime prevention resource and brings with it a wealth of resources and experience. Funding for this much-needed program has expired.**

3. Continue to provide grant funds for research and evaluation of violence prevention programs and strategies.
4. Fund rigorous longitudinal studies of populations of at-risk children and youth to identify

causal factors influencing youth violence and to identify protective factors that contribute to effective prevention/intervention results.

**5. Encourage state legislation which focuses on:**

- comprehensive safe school legislation;
- improved information sharing;
- expanded alternative school programs for troubled youth;
- expanded after-school programs for children and youth;
- youth community service and involvement through volunteering;
- development of truancy prevention/intervention programs;
- interagency cooperation and collaboration; and
- encouragement of teacher training in school violence prevention.

**Action at the local level**

This nation's educational system has its foundation at the local level. Education is a federal concern, a state function and a local responsibility. Assigning such responsibility to parents, students, educators and other citizens closest to the need for schooling is both appropriate and demanding. There is much to do in carrying out the educational mission of the schools and in preserving schools as safe havens for learning. The following list details ways in which school administrators, law enforcers, parents, students and local citizens can promote the educational mission of schools and preserve schools as safe havens in which children can learn and develop their skills as successful, socially responsible citizens.

**No. 1: Place school safety on the top of the educational agenda on each campus and within the community.**

School administrators tend to get not only what they expect and deserve, but also what they measure. When the district makes a conscious decision that safe and welcoming schools are a high priority and measures its progress by assessing aspects of school safety, that commitment provides the basis for the development of strategies to achieve this goal. Placing school safety on the educational agenda is a mandatory first step toward safer and better schools.

**No. 2: Develop a comprehensive systemwide safe schools plan.**

A districtwide safe schools plan should be established, complemented by a safe schools plan for each school site. These plans benefit from the collaborative input of parents, students, educators, law enforcers, the courts, probation and social service personnel, and religious, corporate, and other community leaders who represent the racial and ethnic balance of the community. Safe school planning requires vigorous, ongoing interagency support. Community and corporate partnerships should not focus merely on security and supervision but also on education. Plans should be annually updated and broadly disseminated to students, parents and staff.

**No. 3: Amplify the mission statement.**

The school's mission statement should reflect the context in which the school and district wishes academic learning to take place. For instance, the phrase "To learn in a safe and secure environment free of violence, drugs, and fear" enhances the school's legal position to create and enforce policies promoting a safe, caring and disciplined school climate. A statement of this nature can markedly increase the validity and credibility of the district's efforts to create and preserve a safe environment.

**No. 4: Enhance multicultural understanding.**

Stress the unique worth of every person. Polarization among student groups and the rise in gang activity indicate a need to develop educational programs that bring students together and focus on cultural competence and cooperation, not merely tolerance.

**No. 5: Ban forms of nonphysical intimidation.**

"Hard looks," "stare downs," "mad-dogging" and "mean-mugging" should be added as actionable offenses to the

student code of conduct. Such threatening behavior should not be tolerated. Psychological intimidation can be as damaging as physical assaults.

**No. 6: Create an active student component.**

Students should be involved in their own safety and in safety planning. Consult with students on safety strategies and recommendations. Devise a life skills curriculum that focuses on good decision-making, responsible citizenship and conflict resolution. School violence is the tangible expression of unresolved conflict. If we can help children and youth identify and implement constructive conflict resolution techniques, our campuses can be made much safer. A curriculum that emphasizes courtesy and thoughtfulness will contribute toward this goal. Involve students in planning and managing student events, campus beautification and crime reporting. Encourage students to report any suspicious individuals on school grounds. Provide students and staff with a toll-free, anonymous hotline for reporting weapons offenses and other criminal activity. Student participation promotes responsible student development and maturity, enabling students to be part of the solution rather than being perceived only as part of the problem.

**No. 7: Implement a peer counseling and peer mediation program.**

Students represent one of the best agents for promoting and maintaining a safe campus. An effective peer counseling program can head off many problems before they reach explosive levels. Students trained as peer counselors can serve as influential resources for nonviolent problem solving.

**No. 8: Make the campus welcoming.**

School safety leadership begins at the top. Unquestionably, the best principals know their students and spend much of their time outside their offices. Staying in touch cannot be accomplished in a cloistered office. The way the day begins affects the climate of the entire day. Greeting students at the front door, being present in the hall during class changes, visiting classrooms and participation in special events is crucial.

**No. 9: Establish an engaging system of extracurricular programs and services.**

Without positive and challenging activities, students tend to fill the void with negative activities. A safe school provides students with several options before, during and after school. Schools must work with the community's local recreation department, social services agencies and youth and civic groups to ensure that children and youth and their families have a safety net of agencies, advocates and services available to them.

**No. 10: Develop and enforce a school dress code.**

Students and staff tend to behave the way they are allowed to dress. Establish a districtwide dress code policy that sets specific and unambiguous appearance standards for both students and staff. Gang attire should be prohibited, and dress code expectations should be consistently enforced. Contradictory policies and procedures and inconsistent enforcement by staff send mixed messages to students. School staff should serve as role models for students. Involve students and parents in developing appearance standards. Students and parents will support and preserve what they help create.

**No. 11: Ensure that behavior expectations are clearly communicated, consistently enforced and fairly applied.**

School policies should reflect behavior expectations outlined in federal, state, county and local statutes or ordinances. Review the student and teacher handbooks and place students, parents and staff on notice. Require that students and parents provide written acknowledgment that they have received and read the student behavior code.

**No. 12: Carefully screen and select new employees.**

One key decision parents and communities make involves deciding who will teach, train, coach, counsel and lead their children. Keeping child molesters and pedophiles out of classrooms, schools and youth-serving organizations is a major task. Responsible parenting and thoughtful leadership on the part of schools and other youth-serving agencies should provide enough reasons to establish appropriate safeguards for keeping child molesters away from children. Increasing litigation against school systems and child-care providers has created a financial reason to conduct appropriate background checks to protect the safety of children. Some school systems and youth-service

organizations already have faced multimillion-dollar lawsuits for their failure to appropriately screen, properly supervise and/or remove employees who may present risks to children. Every school system should have clear policy guidelines and procedures to weed out individuals with criminal backgrounds of misbehavior involving children. Any record-screening program must consider the rights of privacy and due process as well as the right to a hearing when disqualification is involved. But the screening program also must balance these rights against the rights of the children who will be served by the individual.

**No. 13: Create a climate of ownership and school pride.**

Campus pride begins with a clean and orderly school. School maintenance efforts may also include the development of a graffiti abatement and community clean-up program. School officials should also work with police and community leaders to ensure the walk to and from school is crime-free and nonthreatening. Together they can work on ways to shut down drug houses and stop illegal group activities in school neighborhoods. The local U.S. attorney and city and county officials represent some excellent resources to cultivate. Their support is critical to abate gangs, drug activity and graffiti.

**No. 14: Provide adequate adult supervision.**

Young people need continuous responsible supervision. This may include teachers, administrators, parents, campus supervisors, or law enforcement officers. By all means, do not forget senior citizens. Like many young people, many senior citizens with talents and are looking for something to do. Recent studies show that most young people believe adults play a major role in counseling and encouraging kids toward nonviolence.

**No. 15: Identify specifically assigned roles and responsibilities.**

Policies and procedures that detail staff members' and parent-volunteers' responsibilities for security should be developed. These responsibilities may include monitoring hallways and restrooms, patrolling parking lots, and providing supervision at before-school and after-school activities.

**No. 16: Mandate crime reporting and tracking.**

A uniform school crime-reporting and record-keeping system is critical to maintaining a safe, secure campus. When administrators know what crimes are being committed on their campuses, when and where the crimes are committed and who is involved, appropriate supervision can be implemented. In addition, school leaders must analyze crime data to determine whether linkages exist among criminal activities on campus.

**No. 17: Identify and track repeat offenders.**

Most school crime problems are caused by a small percentage of students. To discourage their continued misbehavior and criminal acts, school leaders should track, monitor and closely supervise these youngsters.

**No. 18: Maintain close supervision and ensure remedial training for offenders.**

Troublemakers should not be rewarded with more time off from school or lighter class schedules. Their training and supervision should be intensified. Consider the following actions when planning close supervision: Place such students with experienced teachers; develop individual behavior and education plans; assign a specific counselor to each student; and assign these students to lockers in areas that are clearly visible and easily supervised. Create a local network of resources and youth-serving referral agencies in your community.

**No. 19: Expand alternative placement options for troubled youth.**

Youngsters who have committed weapons violations and other serious disruptions should be removed from the mainstream educational setting and relocated to an in-school suspension program or alternate education site within the district where closer supervision and greater structure are provided.

**No. 20: Consider placing a probation officer on campus.**

Probation officers can provide additional intensive supervision for students on probation who attend school. Exercising such an option can complement the efforts of student personnel staff, who then can invest more time reinforcing positive behavior among all students, rather than simply disciplining troublemakers.

**No. 21: Require restitution and community service for all juvenile offenders.**

Work with the presiding juvenile judge, the chief probation officer, and community or government leaders to establish a community service and restitution program at the school. Individuals involved in vandalism and malicious mischief should have positive means of making amends to society for their offenses.

**No. 22: Control campus access.**

Parking lots and school buildings with multiple entrances and exits maximize the potential for vandalism and defacement of vehicles and school property. Continuing efforts should be made to minimize the number of campus entrance and exit points used daily. Access points to school grounds should be supervised regularly by individuals familiar with the student body. Campus traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, should flow through areas that can be easily and naturally supervised. Delivery entrances used by vendors also should be checked regularly. Perimeter fencing should also be considered as a means of restricting access to campus.

**No. 23: Establish uniform screening procedures to monitor visitors and potential campus intruders.**

Signs directing persons to the office should be placed in strategic, visible locations and should be large enough to attract visitors notice. Visitors should be required to sign in at the school office, state their specific school business, and be required to visibly display a visitor's badge. All school employees should be trained to courteously challenge unidentified persons and direct them to the main office. "May I help you?" is a kind, nonthreatening way to begin.

**No. 24: Require picture identification cards for each student and staff member.**

A school administrator is responsible not only for keeping students away from trouble, but also for keeping trouble away from students. Being able to distinguish enrolled students from nonstudents and guests is critical. An effective picture identification system enhances the control and management of the campus. Authorized parent volunteers and school visitors also should display clearly identifiable badges or name tags.

**No. 25: Articulate a clearly defined locker policy.**

The locker policy at each school should appropriately reflect the district's custodial interest. Students and parents should be notified that the lockers are school property. Students should be advised in the student handbook that lockers "and their contents" may be searched at any time for reasons of health and safety. Distributing district-owned locks to students or requiring that students use only locks for which the school has combinations will further enhance the school's custodial position in conducting routine locker checks.

**No. 26: Disseminate a summary of laws pertaining to school disorder.**

The summary should be drafted by the district's legal counsel and disseminated through the director of security to all site administrators and security personnel to ensure consistency of student supervision and management.

**No. 27: Review discipline and weapons possession policies.**

Ensure that policies attack the problem, and not simply the symptoms. Clearly distinguish between disciplinary matters and criminal offenses. Identify top discipline problems and then establish a task force of students, teachers, administrators and parents to review and/or develop effective strategies and programs that promote a safe and secure campus.

**No. 28: Establish a crisis response plan.**

Many problems can be avoided through responsible planning. However, sometimes a crisis is unavoidable. A good crisis plan focuses on crisis prevention, preparation, management and resolution. It also identifies community resources that serve students. The crisis response plan should include step-by-step procedures for crisis situations.

**No. 29: Establish an emergency communications center.**

Use the latest technology to enable site administrators to make immediate contact with teachers and school safety

personnel. A school communications network should link classrooms and schoolyard supervisors with the front office or security staff, as well as with local law enforcement and fire departments. At least one radio with cellular phone capability should be available on campus for emergencies. Detention classrooms or facilities for behaviorally disruptive students also should have emergency call buttons. A fully computerized public safety emergency frequency is recommended.

**No. 30: Promote crime prevention through environmental design.**

Trim or remove shrubbery that interferes with natural surveillance. Provide maximum supervision in heavy traffic areas. Provide strategically located public telephones with dial-free connections to emergency services. Relocate safe activities near typical trouble spots. For instance, consider relocating a counselor's office near a corridor or locker bay where problems have occurred. Conduct ticket sales or concession activities in or near problem areas. Eliminate obstacles such as trash cans and architectural barriers that block or impede traffic flow as well as supervision and surveillance. Use parabolic/convex mirrors in stairwells and locations that require improved supervision. Replace double-entry restroom doors with an open zigzag design to better monitor behavior in restroom areas. Use automatic flush valves and automatic water faucets to reduce vandalism and control water consumption.

**No. 31: Remove posters from all windows.**

Posters and construction paper covering windows block natural supervision. Unless glaring sun or the need for privacy mandates the covering of windows, they should be left clear to enhance supervision.

**No. 32: Use current technologies that promote crime prevention.**

A host of options exists relative to access control, property identification and supervision. For example, consider electromagnetic door locking systems. Proper control strategies such as microdot systems, surveillance cameras for difficult-to-supervise public areas and other high-tech strategies may be appropriate.

**No. 33: Limit opportunities to transport and store contraband.**

School systems have put in place crime prevention policies that include: allowing only clear plastic or mesh book bags, or no book bags at all; eliminating lockers; establishing a coat check area for oversized articles of clothing capable of shielding weapons; and providing students with two sets of textbooks, one for home and one for school, to eliminate the need for book bags and to reduce the time for class changes.

**No. 34: Stress that campus parking is a privilege, not a right.**

The parking policy should emphasize that when students drive their vehicles on school property, they agree to abide by campus rules and to having their vehicles searched. Diminishing the privacy expectation can deter the presence of contraband or weapons. The policy also enhances the district's position for legal action relative to search and seizure.

**No. 35: Enhance interagency cooperation among youth-serving professionals.**

Creating safe schools is a community function. Schools cannot accomplish this task alone. Safe schools actively cooperate with community agencies. Campus security operations should be coordinated with local law enforcement agencies. Include law enforcers in your curriculum, supervision and crisis planning. Community support agencies such as county mental health, child protective services, department of parks and recreation, juvenile probation and the courts together must identify students who are potentially dangerous and provide services to preclude juvenile offenders from causing further problems. These agencies must also provide services that assist in troubled students educational and personal development.

**No. 36: Consistently enforce the information-sharing agreements.**

At least once annually, school administrators should review their information-sharing agreements to ensure they comply with federal and state laws and to ensure school administrators and staff are doing everything possible to share such information with those who have a legitimate need to know. Special follow-up should be given by the court to ensure that court orders and other information-sharing agreements among agencies comply with court guidelines. The student record policy should state that student records may be shared with any teacher, staff member or youth-serving professional who has a legitimate need to know.

**No. 37: Establish a parent/volunteer center on each campus.**

The center can recruit, coordinate and encourage parents to participate in the educational process. Possible activities include helping supervise hallways, playgrounds, restrooms or other trouble spots. Classroom visits and participation in special events are encouraged. A special training program that outlines expectations and responsibilities for parents in volunteer roles can be particularly helpful. School crime decreases when responsible adult supervision is present.

**No. 38: Conduct annual school safety training programs.**

Prior to the start of each school year, training sessions should be held for all site administrators and security personnel to review school safety procedures. Staff should be regularly updated on safety plans through in-service training. The training should include certificated and classified staff as well as part-time and substitute employees.

**No. 39: Provide teacher training programs.**

Special in-house training on student behavior management should be offered for teachers and administrators. Strategies that worked 20 years ago no longer may be effective. Teachers must develop coping skills and techniques for controlling classroom behavior and dealing with disruptive youth and angry parents.

**No. 40: Conduct an annual review.**

Every school should conduct an annual safety assessment of its safe school planning. The evaluation component is a continuing reality check and refinement of the safe school actions and attitudes that the school wishes to create and maintain. The assessment may reveal that additional steps should be taken to improve adult supervision, revise curricula, pass legislation, redesign facilities or establish new programs.

## **Conviction and Commitment**

Well-educated, socially responsible citizens constitute this country's greatest strength. On the eve of the twenty-first century, we are called to act with conviction and pledge commitment from the highest levels of government to the most intimate circles of caring--our families. Citizens in partnership, we must strive to ensure that our children are educated in violence-free schools and communities.

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National School Safety Center  
141 Duesenberg Drive, Suite 11, Westlake Village, CA 91362  
Phone: 805-373-9977 Fax: 805-373-9277  
Comments! Questions? [webmaster@nsscl.org](mailto:webmaster@nsscl.org)  
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## 2: What Communities Can Do Through Collaboration (cont'd)

### What Schools Can Do

#### 1. *Provide strong administrative support for assessing and enhancing school safety.*

A comprehensive approach to school safety and security requires that school administrators and principals meet several challenges simultaneously. These challenges include:

- Assessing the school's security needs.
- Monitoring the school facility to ensure it is a clean, safe environment.
- Implementing policies that support and reward pro-social behavior.
- Implementing schoolwide education and training on safety and avoiding violence.
- Providing counseling and social services to students.

The direct involvement of top school leadership commits the necessary resources (including staff and classroom time) and supports the policies and strategy recommendations of work groups concerned with school safety issues. School leadership also ensures that principals receive training on the development and implementation of policies and strategies.

#### 2. *Redesign the school facility to eliminate dark, secluded, and unsupervised spaces.*

A school's physical plant influences whether crime will occur. Schools can be designed to limit access of unauthorized persons, increase the ability of school staff to visually supervise all areas of the school facility, and reduce crowding. Schools should be built with security in mind, but existing schools can make changes to their buildings to increase safety. Installing adequate lighting and break-proof door and window locks, minimizing private storage areas, and eliminating removable ceiling panels are important safety measures all schools can adopt. The key is to make the school environment safer and to use space constructively without creating a restrictive environment.

#### 3. *Devise a system for reporting and analyzing violent and noncriminal incidents.*

Information cannot be effectively used if it is not regularly collected and examined. An incident reporting system provides a systematic approach to monitoring rule infractions and analyzing problem areas. Obtaining accurate records of violent incidents and injuries from year to year helps school officials identify overall trends in school violence. Tracking individual student behavior patterns over time is a good way to identify students in need of additional assistance before their problems become more serious.

For a school crime data collection model, refer to chapter 4, Resources, for Recommendations of the Crime, Violence, and Discipline Reporting Task Force of the National Forum on Education Statistics.

#### 4. *Design an effective discipline policy.*

School rules must be clear and consistently enforced. Serious and repeated violent infractions carry heavier penalties than less serious or infrequent infractions. It is important that the school discipline policy be communicated periodically to students, parents, and staff. A common practice at many schools is for students and parents to sign a document at the beginning of the school year indicating that they know and agree to follow school rules. Discipline needs to be consistent for all students. Due process involves more than one staff member listening to all parties, gathering and interpreting evidence, assigning sanctions where appropriate, and ensuring access to an appeal process.

#### 5. *Build a partnership with local law enforcement.*

Although a school may have its own security personnel, establishing a relationship with community law enforcement is essential. Both groups play important roles in making schools safe. School security personnel are familiar with the school facility, its security devices, and the student body. Police officers are trained to deal with violent incidents. Accurate reporting of criminal behaviors to the police sends a clear message that illegal acts will not be tolerated.

In many communities, police officers know the community and its residents. They often have information about community and family problems that is useful to school personnel. They promote school safety by interacting closely with students. Police officers can teach special courses on substance abuse, kidnap prevention, and gun safety. They often have access to or knowledge of community resources such as recreational facilities and organized athletic leagues.

If State and local laws allow, police can assist school administrators in identifying specific students who require additional supervision. In some schools, probation officers work inside the school building where they have better access to the students assigned to them by the courts.

#### *6. Enlist school security professionals in designing and maintaining the school security system.*

In some schools, obvious security measures are needed to ensure safety. School security measures include:

- Hiring security personnel.
- Installing security devices.
- Conducting random inspections.
- Providing students and staff with identification cards.

Security involves careful attention to training, searching for and closing any security gaps, improving communications, testing security devices and procedures, performing maintenance, and updating technology. Relying heavily on security devices like metal detectors without adequate staffing, training, and other strategies will have limited impact.

● School staff and consultants can assist in preventing and reducing crime by:

- Conducting security assessments.
- Providing staff development programs.
- Developing crisis preparedness guidelines.
- Identifying security equipment needs (such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras).
- Designing enforcement and investigation techniques.
- Enhancing links with community officials.
- Providing safe activities for students.

#### *7. Train school staff in all aspects of violence prevention.*

Training staff in enforcing discipline, handling disruptive students, and treating students with respect decreases the likelihood that students will become violent in the school setting. Staff needs to be trained to serve as models of nonviolent communication for students and to set the standards for appropriate behavior and communication. Limiting the number of students assigned to each teacher increases the chances that training will have the desired results. Staff need to be familiar with all school rules and policies dealing with violent behavior, and they must know how to use the alarm system, when to refer students for counseling or discipline, and what to do in a crisis.

#### *8. Provide all students access to school psychologists or counselors.*

All young people have a variety of emotional needs that they bring to school. Some needs may be met in school

through encounters with peers and school staff (teachers, psychologists, and counselors), while other needs require proper assessment and referral to community services. If these needs are handled effectively, students are less likely to engage in negative behavior.

9. *Provide crisis response services.*

Serious but rare events, such as shootings, bomb threats, hostage situations, and other crises require quick and pre-planned responses. A comprehensive plan for dealing with a crisis situation includes:

- A crisis response team with clearly delineated duties.
- A plan for evacuating the school.
- A plan for coordinating with and notifying police, elected officials, government agencies, and other proper authorities.
- A plan for notifying parents quickly.
- A media/communications strategy.
- Counselors available to deal with students in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

When resources are lacking in the local community, help is available from the State or Federal level. Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools, published by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice, provides detailed information for schools on how to respond to a crisis. (See Chapter 4, Resources, for information on how to obtain a copy.)

10. *Implement schoolwide education and training on avoiding and preventing violence.*

Many schoolwide programs are effective in preventing and reducing violent behavior in schools. Schoolwide education efforts can focus on common myths about violence and misperceptions about normative behavior. Training might be offered on:

- How to avoid dangerous situations, places, and people.
- How to get help when in danger.
- How to notify authorities about weapons.

Skills training can be offered in social interaction, problem solving, coping, communication, resisting peer influence, understanding values, respect for individual differences, countering bias, anger management, conflict resolution, and peer mediation. Instruction and skills training can be effectively combined using interactive and engaging learning strategies.

11. *Use alternate school settings for educating violent and weapon-carrying students.*

Research tells us that a relatively small percentage of students account for most of the violent incidents at school. Providing special services to this group of adolescents is essential for increasing school safety. If a student continues to commit repeated acts of serious violence, the school administrators may be obligated to place this student in a separate educational setting to assure the safety of other students and staff. Separating violent and weapon-carrying students from the general student body sends the message that school administrators have acted appropriately to preserve school safety and allows the special needs of these students to be met more effectively. Alternative programs are preferred to suspension and expulsion alone because they avoid shifting violent students onto the streets with little supervision. Common features of effective alternative schools include strong administrators, dedicated and well-trained staff, needs-based assessments of each child, a low student-to-staff ratio, and counseling for students and their parents.

12. *Create a climate of tolerance*

Fostering and maintaining a safe learning environment means creating a climate of tolerance in which all students are

comfortable and secure. Particularly in adolescence, youth have a strong need to be accepted by their peers. However, because of stereotypes, ignorance, and intolerance, certain individuals and groups tend to be alienated from their fellow students. A source of conflict in many schools is the perceived or real problem of bias and unfair treatment of students because of ethnicity, gender, race, social class, religion, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, physical appearance, or some other factor—both by staff and peers. Schools can encourage students to be more accepting of diversity through school-wide awareness campaigns, policies which prevent harassment and discrimination, and offering support groups.

For students who bring firearms to school, the local chief administering officer of schools should keep in mind both the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under the GFSA, every State receiving funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must have a law which (1) requires any student who brings a firearm to school to be expelled for not less than one year, and (2) allows the expulsion requirement to be modified on a case-by-case basis by the local chief administering officer. The GFSA explicitly requires that the GFSA must be implemented in a manner consistent with the IDEA. GFSA also makes clear that school districts do not violate the GFSA if they provide educational services in an alternative setting to a student who has been expelled from the student's regular school for bringing a firearm to school. In addition, all local educational agencies receiving ESEA funds must refer any student who brings a firearm to school to the criminal or juvenile justice system.

Under the IDEA, school personnel may remove a student with a disability who carries a weapon, including a firearm, to school or a school function to an interim alternative educational placement for up to 45 days, which can be extended for additional 45 day periods of time if a hearing officer determines that it would be dangerous to return the student to the student's normal placement, although appropriate educational services to the student must continue in that alternative site. In addition, IDEA does not permit discipline that changes a student's placement, such as an expulsion, if the student's behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability. Finally, IDEA makes clear that school personnel can report crimes committed by students with disabilities to appropriate authorities. If a student with a disability brings a firearm to school, a school district can comply with both the GFSA and the IDEA by using the provision of the GFSA that permits modification of the expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis and ensuring that the discipline of students with disabilities is handled consistent with IDEA.

● 13. *Provide appropriate educational services to all students.*

A schoolwide culture that supports positive learning opportunities for all children and youth is critical. This entails assessing special needs among students who behave inappropriately, referring them to special educational and other services when appropriate, providing positive behavioral supports and interventions as needed, supporting the development of skills for future employment, and developing working relationships with parents, families, and communities.

14. *Reach out to communities and businesses to improve the safety of students.*

Youth need to be safe all the time, not just at home or at school. School personnel can take the initiative to work with businesses and other community partners to create safe places and safe corridors. Such places include businesses, religious centers, museums, police and fire station activity rooms, and hospital and library meeting rooms.

15. *Actively involve students in making decisions about school policies and programs.*

Students often know the strengths and weaknesses of school policies and programs as well as anyone, and they have unique insights to offer. When students participate in the decision-making process, they are more likely to support the decisions that are made. Students are an excellent resource for creative ideas, which can be collected from all students, student leaders, and students who are active in school safety programs.

● 16. *Prepare an annual report on school crime and safety.*

School staff, parents, students, and other members of the community want to know how safe their school is and what progress is being made on school safety. Schools can collect and tabulate incidents of crime and misbehavior, report the trends over time, compare school violence trends with similar trends in the local community, and outline how these trends have been used to alter policies and procedures. This report can also be used to introduce school safety

programs and strategies to parents and to the broader community.

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[\[What Communities Can Do\]](#)

[\[What Students Can Do\]](#)

# How to detect school killers

## Some signs are consistent

We used to think our children were safe at school. Now we know better. What can we do to prevent this horror from happening at our own schools to our own children?

This is the question on the mind of every parent I've talked to in the aftermath of the killings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., the worst school massacre in U.S. history.

Two boys, Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, went on a rampage. They planted pipe bombs in the school, mowed down students in the library, laughing uproariously as the teenagers bled to death.

Then the boys committed suicide, leaving no suicide notes or explanation. They were members of the Trenchcoat Mafia, loners who dressed in a black "goth" style.

In such situations, we do have early warning signs. Yes, parents can tell their children what to watch out for. Yes, school districts can do something, at surprisingly low cost.

But you have to know what to watch for.

Dressing in black? My own son would wear nothing but black as a teenager.

Talking about guns? If this is an early warning sign, we have one huge detection problem in Alaska.

Do we need armed guards in every school? Columbine High School actually had one on duty who fired his gun but didn't accomplish much.

"Students have the information to prevent this from happening," says June Arnette, associate director of the National School Safety Center.

"When the adults were interviewed, they didn't know what was going on. But other students knew. The killers telegraphed their intent. It was the other students who received this information.

"But the students didn't know

Judy Kleinfeld



how to evaluate the information or what to do with it. They didn't want to rat and risk becoming outcasts themselves."

The National School Safety Center has developed a checklist of 20 common characteristics of students who have caused violent deaths in American schools from July 1992 to the present. You can find it at their Web site: [www.nsscl.org](http://www.nsscl.org).

Many characteristics like "displays cruelty to animals" are well-known signs of antisocial personalities prone to violence.

"We examined cases of school violence and identified commonalities," says Arnette, cautioning that this checklist is not based on a rigorous, scientific study.

Match their list to what happened at Columbine High School:

1. "Habitually makes violent threats when angry."

When another Columbine student, Brooks Brown, walked out of school to get a cigarette, one of the killers, Eric Harris, warned him to get out of here and go home.

A year before, Eric Harris had told Brooks Brown he was going to kill him, says Mark Eddy, a Denver Post staff writer.

Harris even posted a message on his Web site urging people to hunt down and kill Brown. Harris was mad because he had broken Brown's windshield and Brown had told Harris' parents.

Other students at Columbine High School reported similar death threats. But they didn't take the threats seriously. They thought Harris was just swaggering.

2. "Is preoccupied with weapons, explosives, or other incendiary devices."

A 16-year-old boy in the neighborhood said that Eric Harris

was obsessed with anything related to World War II. Other students said Harris talked obsessively in philosophy class about buying a gun now that he had turned 18.

Talking about buying a gun isn't a danger sign, it's the obsessions.

3. "Is involved with a gang or an antisocial group on the fringe of peer acceptance."

Klebold and Harris were loners and misfits who belonged to the Trenchcoat Mafia. The group even had a Web page.

Many teenagers show some of these characteristics. It's not any single trait that counts. It's the number and the pattern.

More important, teenagers themselves have powerful social radar. They pick up on subtle signals that adults are apt to miss. Brooks Brown, for example, knew that Eric Harris hated people, loved the idea of killing people, and reveled in this fantasy.

Suicide prevention programs have been remarkably successful in alerting teenagers to the early signs of suicide. Students know what to do when friends talk about killing themselves.

Violence prevention programs which alert teenagers to the early warning signs could also save lives.

Some school systems have established anonymous "tip lines" which let teenagers alert adults when they are worried about particular peers. The tip is passed on to people who can determine if the situation needs assessment or action.

It's easy to see how such tip lines could be abused. Teenagers could use them to get revenge. Students with an alternative style could get hassled.

A study of tip lines that the National School Safety Center completed last week found few such instances, but some are bound to occur.

Anonymous tip lines make me queasy but the risks are worth bearing.

Judith Kleinfeld is director of the Northern Studies program and a professor of psychology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her columns appear every other Sunday on the Opinion page.