Effective Strategies for Creating Safer Schools and Communities

Creating Schoolwide

Prevention and Intervention Strategies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
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Intervention Strategies

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About the Effective Strategies for Creating Safer Schools and Communities Series

School safety requires a broad-based effort by the entire community, including educators, students, parents, law enforcement agencies, businesses, and faith-based organizations, among others. By adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing school safety focusing on prevention, intervention, and response, schools can increase the safety and security of students.

To assist schools in their safety efforts, the Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) have revised this series of five guidebooks intended to build a foundation of information that will assist schools and school districts in developing safe learning environments. The series identifies several components that, when effectively addressed, provide schools with the foundation and building blocks needed to create and maintain safe schools. Written in collaboration with leading national experts, these resources will provide local school districts with information and resources that support comprehensive safe school planning efforts.

Each guide provides administrators and classroom practitioners with a glimpse of how fellow educators are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success in key areas of school safety. They will assist educators in obtaining current, reliable, and useful information on topics that should be considered as they develop safe school strategies and positive learning environments. As emphasized in *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*, a joint publication of the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, creating cultures and climates of safety is essential to the prevention of violence in school. Each guidebook retains this message as a fundamental concept.

Under No Child Left Behind, the education law signed in January 2002, violence prevention programs must meet specified principles of effectiveness and be grounded in scientifically based research that provides evidence that the program to be used will reduce violence and illegal drug use. Building on the concept in No Child Left Behind—that all children need a safe environment in which to learn and achieve—these guides explain the importance of selecting research-based programs and strategies. The guides also outline a sample of methods for addressing and solving safety issues schools may encounter.

Creating Schoolwide Prevention and Intervention Strategies, by Jeffrey Sprague, is intended to put the issue of schoolwide violence prevention in context for educators and outline an approach for choosing and creating effective prevention programs. The guide covers the following topics:

- Why schoolwide prevention strategies are critical
- Characteristics of a safe school
- Four sources of vulnerability to school violence
- How to plan for strategies that meet school safety needs
- Five effective response strategies
- Useful Web and print resources

School Policies and Legal Issues Supporting Safe Schools, by Thomas Hutton and Kirk Bailey, is a practical guide to the development and implementation of school district and school policies that support safe schools. Section 1 provides an overview of legal and practical considerations to keep in mind and to address with local legal counsel when developing policies at the district level to prevent violence. Section 2 addresses specific situations and issues that may arise and discusses how the framework set forth in Section 1 bears on these questions.

Ensuring Quality School Facilities and Security Technologies, by Tod Schneider, is intended to help educators and other members of the community understand the relationship between school safety and school facilities, including technology. The guide covers the following topics:

- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- Planning To Address CPTED: Key Questions To Ask
- Security Technology: An Overview
- Safety Audits and Security Surveys

The Role of Mental Health Services in Promoting Safe and Secure Schools, by Krista Kutash and Albert Duchnowski, explores the role of mental health services in developing and maintaining safe schools. The guide provides an overview of research-based school mental health models and offers guidance for school personnel and others on implementing mental health-related services, including the role that federal, state, and district policies play and the need for community involvement.

Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement, by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor, provides an overview of the nature and scope of collaboration, explores barriers to effectively working together, and discusses the processes of establishing and sustaining the work. It also reviews the state of the art of collaboration around the country, the importance of data, and some issues related to sharing information.

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The Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory hope that the guides in this series assist your school and its partners in creating a safe, positive learning environment for the children you serve.

About the Author

Jeffrey Sprague, Ph.D., is co-director of the University of Oregon Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior. He has been a classroom teacher, teacher supervisor, behavioral consultant, and researcher, and is currently an associate professor of special education. He has directed federal and state research and demonstration projects related to schoolwide discipline, youth violence prevention, school inclusion, school-to-work transition, systems change, self-advocacy, and severe behavioral disorders. His research activities include applied behavioral analysis, school safety, school violence prevention, and other areas.

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Introduction.

Major Trends in Youth Violence Prevention and School Safety

Most efforts to improve school safety over the past two decades have been the result of, or influenced by, five major trends. Each of these trends, which overlap and blend together, continues to shape and define current issues regarding school safety:

- Responses to the issue of violent juvenile crime

- Prevention and response to mass school shootings

- Conceptualizing school violence as domestic terrorism

- Integration of universal prevention initiatives in schools

- National efforts to integrate children's mental health interventions in schools

We discuss each of these trends in the following sections of this publication.

In this guidebook, we will cover the following topics:

- *Major trends in youth violence prevention and school safety*

- *Why schoolwide prevention programs are critical to safe school planning and implementation*

- *What is a safe school? Four sources of vulnerability to school violence*

- *The "how to" of school safety and intervention*

- *Recommended schoolwide prevention programs*

- *References and resources*

Violent juvenile crime

The overall juvenile crime rate and the alarming increase in interpersonal violence are associated with a dramatic escalation in the number of children who bring antisocial behavior patterns to the schooling experience (American Psychological Association, 1993; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Thornton, Craft, Dahlberg, Lynch, & Baer, 2000). In the past several decades, the number of children and families displaying antisocial behavior has surged significantly (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002). The rate of interpersonal violence in the United States finally stabilized in 1992, after a decade

of unprecedented increases (Satcher, 2001). However, child delinquents (i.e., those who commit offenses prior to the age of 12) remain a major focus of concern by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Three of the four crimes (robbery, rape, and murder) used to construct the FBI's annual violence index have returned to levels prior to the huge surge that began in the early 1980s, fueled mainly by the crack cocaine epidemic. However, aggravated assault levels have not shown such a reversal and remain a cause of great concern to policymakers, federal officials, and legislators concerned with juvenile crime issues (see Satcher, 2001). Figure 1, from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/crime/ JAR_Display.asp?ID=qa05201), illustrates trends in these indices since 1980. The statistics show that the juvenile Violent Crime Index arrest rate increased 5 percent between 2004 and 2005. This increase follows a year in which the rate had reached a historically low level. In 2005, there were 283 arrests for Violent Crime Index offenses for every 100,000 youth between 10 and 17 years of age. If each of these arrests involved a different juvenile (which is unlikely), then no more than one in every 350 persons aged 10–17 was arrested for a Violent Crime Index offense in 2005, or about one-third of 1 percent of all juveniles aged 10 to 17 living in the United States.
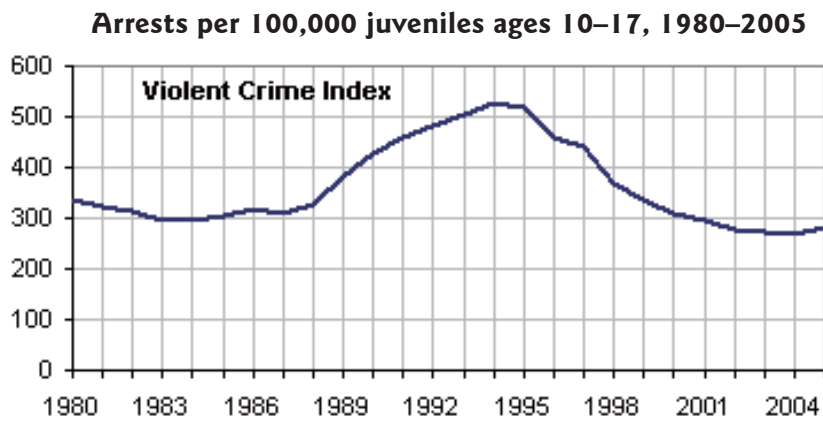
Arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10–17, 1980–2005

Figure 1. Juvenile Arrest Rates for Violent Crime Index Offenses, 1980–2005

Prevention and response to mass school shootings

In the 1990s, the United States and its public schools were profoundly shaken by a series of school shooting tragedies that changed the landscape of school security and destroyed, perhaps forever, the sense of relative safety that students, families, and educators have traditionally held about the schooling process and the physical setting in which it occurs. Everyone concerned with the schooling of our children and youth was powerfully affected by these terrible events.

In the wake of these school shootings, students and parents were traumatized on a broad scale by fears of school tragedies and concerns about lack of school security. Even though schools, compared to other social settings, are one of the safest places for our children and youth (Kingery & Walker, 2002), school settings were no longer regarded by society as exclusively safe havens in which students are free to develop academically and socially, unburdened by concern for their personal safety. The pattern of school shootings has continued into this decade, punctuated by the killing of 10 girls in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, and the April 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech University, the worst school shooting incident in U.S. history.

Conceptualizing school violence as domestic terrorism

In recent years we have seen a reinterpretation of school shootings as a form of urban or domestic terrorism. This development was sparked by two distinct series of events. First was the occurrence of a number of infamous planned mass shootings, which continue almost annually. Second, the September 11 terrorist attacks have changed the way society views violent acts on U.S. soil, even spurring the federal government to move elements of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools to the newly established Office of Homeland Security.

Particularly notable among mass shootings is the Jonesboro, Arkansas, tragedy, which served as a watershed event in the history of school shootings. The safety of the Jonesboro school was shattered by an act of domestic terrorism planned and carried out by two young students who attended the school. These youth arranged for a fire alarm to be set off and then shot at teachers and students from outside the building as they vacated the school. Many of the school shooting tragedies that followed Jonesboro were similar in type and scope, and their

cumulative effect was to alter permanently the nature of schooling in relation to issues of school security and student safety. The total number of students killed and wounded on school grounds in the 1990s was close in number to those in earlier decades (National Center on Education Statistics, 2007). However, the magnitude and impact of these tragedies tended to be qualitatively different in terms of:

- The number of killed and wounded per episode or tragedy

- The randomness by which victims were selected as targets

- The careful planning and conspiratorial nature of these school shootings

- The use of school shootings as an instrument for settling scores for grievances, real or imagined

Because these features usually characterize terrorist acts, the general salience of these tragedies has risen to unprecedented levels of concern and outrage in our society. In particular, the tragedy of Columbine High School in Colorado stands out in this regard. This event reflected a dedicated commitment by seriously disturbed high school students to redress their grievances through revenge-seeking actions aimed at innocent parents, students, and school personnel. The shock, grief, and outrage that followed the tragedy of Columbine galvanized the government into taking a series of dramatic actions geared toward improving school safety. One of these actions was the creation of the *Early Warning, Timely Response* document (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998) to help schools enhance their overall safety. This document, jointly sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, was produced by a 25-member panel of experts that included the authors of this volume. All 125,000 public and private U.S. schools received a copy of *Early Warning, Timely Response* during fall 1998.

In a related action, the U.S. Department of Education funded the Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative at the end of the decade, which provided funding support for school district–community collaborations to implement comprehensive programs that promote school safety. Over 250 grants have been awarded as part of this initiative, and additional funding is still available (see http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/ for application information). Finally, recent analyses of the characteristics of school shooters by the U.S. Secret Service (Fein et al., 2002) and a "threat assessment" protocol developed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provide information aimed at helping school personnel assess the level of risk presented by student threats or dangerous behavior. These actions have raised awareness of the factors that contribute to a lack of school safety and stimulated a broad range of protective activities by schools and communities.

Integration of universal prevention initiatives in schools

Mass school shootings, while alarming, remain very low base rate events (DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, & Baum, 2005). As such, schools and communities recognize the need to be prepared to prevent and respond to such incidents. Likewise, school personnel recognize the power of their daily interactions with students to prevent these tragic events. This need has been expressed best in the national initiative to promote schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (PBS).

To prevent minor, as well as serious, antisocial behavior, educators are turning to a comprehensive and proactive approach to discipline commonly referred to as **Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support** [SWPBS] (Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2002; Sprague & Golly, 2004). SWPBS is based on the assumption that when faculty and staff in a school actively teach and acknowledge expected behavior, the proportion of students with serious behavior problems will be reduced and the school's overall climate will improve (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000).

The procedures that define SWPBS are organized around three main themes: prevention; multi-tiered support; and data-based decision making. Investing in prevention of problem behavior involves (a) defining and teaching core behavioral expectations, (b) acknowledging and rewarding appropriate behavior (e.g., compliance with school rules, safe and respectful peer-to-peer interactions, academic effort/engagement), and (c) establishing a consistent continuum of consequences for problem behavior. The focus is on establishing a positive social climate in which behavioral expectations for students are highly predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored.

Multi-tiered support is available beyond the prevention level for those students with at-risk and antisocial behavior. The greater the student's need for support, the more intense the support provided. The SWPBS approach emphasizes using the principles and procedures of behavior analysis as a foundation for defining behavioral challenges, completing functional behavioral assessments, and using these assessments—in conjunction with person-centered planning—to design effective and efficient procedures for addressing patterns of unacceptable behavior.

Data-based decision making is a theme that is interwoven throughout SWPBS, and builds on the assumption that the faculty, staff, family, and students will be most effective in the design of preventive and reactive supports if they have access to regular, accurate information

about the behavior of students. The value of data for decisionmaking is emphasized for both the design of initial supports and the ongoing assessment and adaptation of support strategies. The SWPBS approach includes adoption of practical strategies for collecting, summarizing, reporting, and using data in regular cycles.

Evidence suggests that sustained use of SWPBS practices can alter the trajectory of at-risk children away from destructive outcomes and prevent the onset of risk behavior in normally developing children. It is expected that effective and sustained implementation of SWPBS will create a more responsive school climate that supports the two goals of schooling for all children: **academic achievement** and **social development** (Horner, Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2001; Walker et al., 1996).

Implementing and sustaining an organized, schoolwide system for behavior support and teaching social behavior are the foundations for effective prevention. In addition to the direct benefit on student behavior in school, such a system creates the context for school-based efforts to support effective parenting. When school personnel have a shared vision of the kind of social behavior they want to promote among students, and a shared understanding of the type of social environment that is needed to achieve such behavior, they are in a position to inform and support families in creating the same kind of supportive environment at home. When educators are clear about how to use rules, positive reinforcement, and mild, consistent negative consequences to support behavioral development, they are better able to coordinate their efforts with those of parents. As a result, parents know more about their children's behavior in school and are able to provide the same supports and consequences that the school is providing. As of 2007, more than 3,500 schools across the country were actively implementing SWPBS. These schools report reductions in problem behavior, improved perceptions of school safety, and improved academic outcomes (Horner et al., 2001). We expect that many more schools are using PBS practices without involvement in one or more of the statewide PBS initiatives (see http://www.pbis.org for a description of these initiatives).

National efforts to integrate children's mental health interventions in schools

There are numerous references to the extent of mental health diagnoses among students in school settings. For example, according to the 1999

Surgeon General's report (Satcher, 2001), 3–5 percent of school-aged children are diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in a six-month period; 5 percent of children aged 9–17 are diagnosed with major depression; and the combined prevalence of various anxiety disorders for children aged 9–17 is 13 percent. According to the same report, about one-fifth of the children and adolescents in this country experience the signs and symptoms of a mental health adjustment problem in the course of a year. In a recent survey of 83,000 representative elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States, Foster, Rollefson, Doksum, Noonan, Robinson, and Teich (2005) found that 73 percent of the schools reported that "social, interpersonal, or family problems" were the most frequent mental health problems for all students combined. For males, aggression or disruptive behavior, and behavior problems associated with neurological disorders, were the second and third most frequent problems. For females, anxiety and adjustment issues were the second and third most frequent problems.

While these data suggest that a substantial percentage of students manifest conditions that negatively affect their ability to function in schools, many with these needs are not identified (Hoagwood, 2001). Mental health conditions that directly interfere with students' ability to meet the academic expectations of schools certainly contribute to an increased risk of academic and social failure. Students whose mental health needs are unidentified or inadequately addressed may be particularly at risk of becoming clients of the juvenile justice and mental health systems as young adults (Mash & Dozois, 2003), and many of the students who have committed school shootings were not among the group considered to have "externalizing" problem behaviors, according to Secret Service and FBI reports. School systems and communities only recently have begun to make serious efforts to address this massive problem (Kutash, Duchnowski, & Lynn, 2006).

> " Evidence suggests that sustained use of SWPBS practices can alter the trajectory of at-risk children away from destructive outcomes... "

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Section I.

Why Schoolwide Prevention and Intervention Strategies Are Critical

As previously pointed out, many schools in the United States are relatively safe places for children, youth, and the adults who teach and support them (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 1999). However, the fears about personal safety of students, teachers, parents, and community members are real and need to be addressed. It also is true that some schools do have serious crime and violence problems and that most schools are dealing with more serious problem behaviors, including bullying, harassment, victimization, drug and alcohol abuse, the effects of family disruption, and poverty (Kingery, 1999). An understanding of the complex, interconnecting relations and factors affecting the safety and climate of schools is necessary for identifying antisocial and violent youth early in their school careers and developing and implementing effective interventions in the contexts of schools, communities, and families.

School safety and violence

We have seen the tragedy of interpersonal violence and conflict played out in the daily lives of students and staff in settings that were once relatively safe. Statistics from recent reports on violence provide striking examples of this development:

1. More than 100,000 students bring weapons to school every day with an average of 32 students killed with these weapons annually on school campuses in the period 1992–2000 (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 1999).

2. Large numbers of students fear victimization (e.g., mean-spirited teasing, bullying, and sexual harassment) in school and on the way to and from school where bullies and gang members are likely to prey on them (Kaufman et al., 1999).

3. Several thousand teachers are threatened annually and many are physically injured by students on school grounds.

4. Schools are major sites for recruitment and related activities by organized gangs (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1999; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

5. Forty percent of juvenile robberies and 36 percent of assaults against urban youth take place in schools (Crowe, 1991).

6. Half of all students who admit bringing weapons to school say they do so for their own protection.

The problems outlined above compete directly with the instructional mission of schools. The result is decreased academic achievement and lower quality of life for students and staff alike. The *National Educational Goals Panel Report* (U. S. Department of Education, 1998) lists four essential areas in which national school performance has declined:

- Reading achievement at grade 12 has decreased (Goal 3)

- Student drug use has increased (Goal 7)

- Threats and injuries to public school teachers have increased (Goal 7)

- More teachers are reporting that disruptions in their classroom interfere with their teaching (Goal 7)

These findings illustrate the clear link between school climate, school violence, and academic achievement. We cannot achieve national educational goals without addressing these disturbing conditions.

School practices that contribute to the problem

Many school practices contribute to the development of antisocial behavior and potential for violence. Because of an overemphasis on detecting individual child or youth characteristics that predict violence or disruption, many important institutional variables are often overlooked. These include, among others:

1. Ineffective instruction that results in academic failure

2. Failure to individualize instruction to adapt to individual differences

3. Unclear rules and expectations regarding appropriate behavior

4. Failure to teach positive interpersonal and self-management skills

5. Failure to effectively correct rule violations and reward adherence to them

6. Failure to adequately supervise and monitor student behavior in classrooms and common areas

7. Inconsistent and punitive school and classroom behavior management practices

8. Failure to assist students from at-risk backgrounds to bond with the schooling process

For more detail on these factors see Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai (1993); Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill (1999); Mayer (1995); Sprague & Walker, 2005; and Walker et al., (1996).

These issues of school violence and climate are *all* amenable to change with a positive, preventive approach. Schools can serve as an ideal setting to organize efforts against the increasing problems of children and youth who display antisocial behavior (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). Unfortunately, school personnel have a long history of focusing solutions elsewhere or applying simple and unproven solutions to complex behavior problems (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspensions, expulsions). They express understandable disappointment when these attempts do not work as expected (Walker et al., 1996). This practice is sustained by a tendency to try to eliminate the presenting problem quickly (e.g., remove the student via suspension or expulsion) rather than focus on the administrative, teaching, and management practices that either contribute to or reduce them (Tobin, Sugai, & Martin, 2000).

Can this really work?

A solid research base exists to guide an analysis of the administrative, teaching, and management practices in a school, and for constructing alternatives to ineffective approaches. *Interventions must be implemented that target both whole school and individual approaches.* Educators in today's schools and classrooms must be supported to adopt

and sustain effective, cost-efficient prevention practices (Gottfredson, 1997; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Czeh, 2000; Walker et al., 1996).

Effective approaches might include systematic social skills instruction; academic and curricular restructuring and adaptation; early identification and treatment of antisocial behavior patterns; or positive schoolwide discipline systems (Biglan, 1995; Lipsey, 1991; Mayer, 1995; Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 1998; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Walker et al., 1995; Walker et al., 1996).

The challenge: Integrating and sustaining effective approaches

Educators are given a plethora of advice regarding effective interventions, but scant help in *integrating and sustaining* effective practices. We recommend that intervention selection be based upon a thorough assessment of school functioning (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2000), with special attention to disciplinary referral patterns, suspensions, and expulsions (Sugai et al., 2000); self-reported violence perpetration and victimization (Biglan & Smolkowski, 2002); and the quality and consistency of academic instruction.

Thorough needs assessments can guide planning, avoid overlapping or conflicting services, and serve as the basis for evaluation of change. Accomplishing changes of this magnitude in schools requires an appropriate and sustained investment in staff development (Hawkins et al., 1999; Sprague & Golly, 2004). In our work, we provide training and support to representative teams of teachers in schools over a two- to three-year period, providing training and technical assistance to install each of the above components. These school teams work to complete initial and ongoing needs assessment, choose interventions (e.g., school rules, social skills curriculum), and use student- and staff-level data to refine and evaluate their efforts (see Todd, Horner, Vanater, & Schneider, 2000; and Sprague et al., 2001, for a description of this work).

Recommendations from the recent Surgeon General's report on school violence (Satcher, 2001) provide a compelling rationale for adopting a prevention approach in which school is organized as a hub of intervention that includes preventing the development of antisocial peer networks and reinforcement of deviancy. This report recommends that we establish "an intolerant attitude toward deviance" by focusing on breaking up antisocial peer networks and changing the social context of the school. Second, it recommends that we increase our "commit-

ment to school" so that academic success is possible for all children and positive school climates are established. Third, the report recommends that students are taught and encouraged to display the skills and behaviors that enable them to respond appropriately to events that occasion and promote antisocial behavior.

This landmark report is buttressed by parallel recommendations from at least two other reports. Mark Greenberg of Pennsylvania State University and his colleagues (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 1999) outline the research on effective, school-based interventions for antisocial behavior at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. These authors and others (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007; Walker et al., 1996) recommend that schools work to offer integrated interventions at all three levels.

The real challenge then becomes how to give schools the capacity to adopt and sustain the processes, organizational structures, and systems that enable them to carry out these effective interventions (Gottfredson et al., 2000). The Gottfredsons recently conducted a first-of-its-kind national study of delinquency prevention in schools and argue convincingly that the problem is not the lack of effective programs (those that work), but rather one of *efficacy* (helping typical schools adopt and carry out the interventions).

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE AND SAFE SCHOOLS

Schools that are effective also are schools that are safe and less vulnerable to violence (Furlong & Morrison, 1994). Effective schools have:

(a) clearly defined goals in a school improvement plan;

(b) close monitoring and feedback regarding progress toward these goals;

(c) high academic expectations for all students;

(d) clear and positive expectations for behavior;

(e) high levels of student bonding and engagement to the schooling process; and

(f) meaningful involvement of parents and the community

(Dishion & Kavanagh, 2003).

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Section II.

What Is a Safe School? Four Sources of Vulnerability to School Violence

Describing a safe school as one without serious violence is necessary, but not sufficient, for school and community leaders. Such a narrow focus may lead policymakers toward narrowly focused and expensive approaches. If the only goal is to prevent school shootings, overuse of law enforcement and/or school security technology may be the result (Green, 1999). While often necessary and appropriate, these approaches need to be balanced with the overall mission of schooling, which is to promote academic excellence, socialization, citizenship, and healthy lives for our children.

Students with antisocial and violent behavior present serious risks to the safety and climate of any school. However, the presence of substantial numbers of antisocial students in a school is not the only risk to its safety. Figure 2 (see page 16) illustrates four major sources of vulnerability to the safety of school settings. These include 1) the physical layout of the school building, and the supervision/use of school space; 2) administrative, teaching, and management practices of the school; 3) the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood(s) served by the school; and 4) characteristics of the students enrolled in the school. This section defines and outlines each source of vulnerability and provides sample measures for assessing it.

In the search for school safety solutions, educators' attention often is typically focused exclusively on student backgrounds, attitudes, and behavioral characteristics. *The child is viewed as the problem.* However, the remaining three sources of vulnerability in Figure 2 can be very

meaningful in accounting for the safety of today's schools. It is essential that school officials address each of these four areas systematically in order to create safe and effective school environs. With proper and thorough assessment, school officials can identify, plan for, and reduce the risk factors that move schools in the direction of potential violence and reduced safety.

Design, Use, and Supervision of School Space

- Height of windows
- Number and type of entrances/exits
- Location and design of bathrooms
- Patterns of supervision
- Traffic patterns and their management
- Lighting
- Ratio of supervising adults to students

Administrative and Management Practices of the School

- Quality of administrative leadership
- Positive inclusive atmosphere
- Consistency of student supervision
- Direct teaching of social-behavioral skills
- Positive recognition of all students
- Support for teachers in classroom and behavior management

Nature of the Neighborhood Served by the School

- Crime levels in neighborhood
  - person
  - property
  - drugs and alcohol
- Domestic violence
- Child abuse and neglect
- Lack of cohesion

Characteristics of Students Enrolled

- Poverty of student body (percent eligible for free and reduced-price lunch)
- Number of at-risk students enrolled
- Frequency and type of juvenile arrests
- Number of school discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions
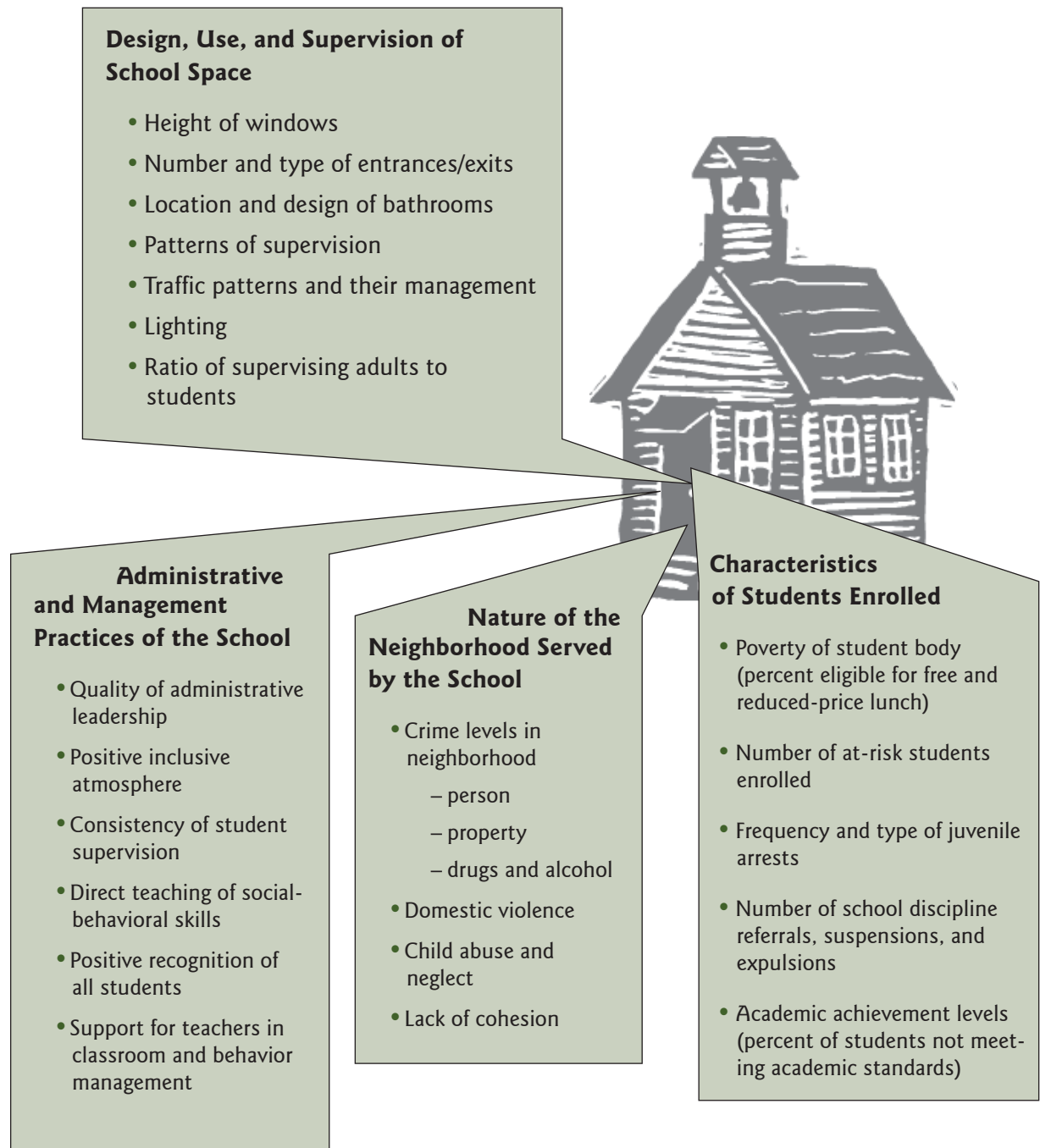- Academic achievement levels (percent of students not meeting academic standards)

Figure 2. School Safety: Sources of Vulnerability in School Settings

Adapted, with permission, from Sprague, J.R., & Walker, H.M. (2005). *Safe and healthy schools: Practical prevention strategies.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Physical layout of the school building and grounds

Perhaps the most neglected of the four sources of vulnerability displayed in Figure 2 is the architectural design of the school building and surrounding grounds (Schneider, Walker, & Sprague, 2000). School safety and security were not dominant concerns when most of our current school facilities were designed. School planners have paid relatively less attention to this area in the past, perhaps because school safety was not a pressing issue and ranked lower on the list of priorities that drive school design. However, the knowledge base required for designing safer schools has existed for some time. This ecological knowledge base, relating to the influence of the social and physical environment on safety and security, has emerged during the past four decades (Schneider et al., 2000). This knowledge has been organized and formulated into a set of principles known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED helps us to understand how the physical environment affects human behavior. Thus, it can be used to improve the management and use of physical spaces in both school and nonschool settings. It has been used extensively in the prevention and deterrence of criminal behavior in a range of community settings. CPTED also has been applied with considerable effectiveness in making school sites safer and more secure in recent years (Schneider et al., 2000). See the companion guide *Ensuring Quality School Facilities and Security Technologies* in this series for much more detailed information about CPTED and several tools you can use to conduct an assessment of a school site.

In the wake of recent, highly publicized school shootings, some have discussed a high-security, architectural design using metal detectors, locked gates, video surveillance cameras, and other measures. However, a well-designed school should look like a place to learn—not a locked-down fortress. Prudent application of CPTED principles can satisfy both perspectives. Architectural features that allow natural surveillance, while providing controlled access to the school, create an environment that can reduce violence risk while enhancing, rather than detracting from student learning.

Weaknesses in the overall architectural design of the school can be difficult or expensive to overcome in older buildings. Reasonable security arrangements can reduce, but not likely eliminate, the absolute risk of an armed intruder or other violent incidents (Schneider, et al., 2000). These recommended arrangements include the following:

- **Closed campus**—Closing high school campuses during school hours simplifies surveillance demands and helps prevent entry by unauthorized persons.

- **Security cameras**—Strategically placed cameras can be a deterrent by themselves and may assist in identifying intruders.

- **Staff and visitor identification badges**—Visitors, staff, and substitutes should be asked to check in at the office and wear identifying badges.

- **Volunteer or campus supervisors**—Volunteers can assist with building supervision before school and during lunch, patrolling and talking to students. Teachers or school resource officers can be assigned each period throughout the day to walk around and monitor activity on campus.

- **Two-way communication systems**—All adults in the school should have the ability to achieve two-way communication with the front office at all times, without leaving the classroom or otherwise entering a dangerous situation.

- **Child study teams**—Building administrators, school psychologists, counselors, and others should meet regularly to review the adjustment status of students in the school, especially those who have generated concerns by any staff member or parent. In this context, problem solving takes place, and action plans are developed ranging from continued monitoring to intervention.

- **Lockdown procedure**—Building emergency procedures should be reviewed with staff each fall, contained in the staff handbook, and practiced by all staff and students, much like the traditional fire drill.

- **Confidential reporting system**—The school should make available a confidential reporting system for anyone during school or nonschool hours. Options include anonymous "tip lines" or Web-based applications, such as Report It (http://www.report-it.com).

- **School resource officers**—Schools increasingly use either sworn officers or community safety personnel to supervise students, provide training, and intervene in conflicts or illegal activity.

Administrative, teaching and management practices of the school

Schools have been identified as an ideal setting for organizing an effort against the increasing problems of children and youth who display antisocial behavior (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). Effective interventions must be implemented that:

- Apply a multiple systems approach to schoolwide discipline aimed at all students

- Support educators in today's classrooms and schools

- Adopt and sustain evidence-based, cost-efficient practices that actually work as intended (Gottfredson, 1997; Walker et al., 1996).

Effective approaches to schoolwide discipline and management, for example, include:

- Systematic social skills instruction (e.g., conflict resolution education, drug and alcohol resistance curriculum)

- Academic or curricular restructuring

- Positive, behaviorally based interventions

- Early screening and identification of antisocial behavior patterns

- Alternatives to traditional suspension and expulsion (Biglan, 1995; Lipsey, 1991; Mayer, 1995; Sprague et al., 1998; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Walker et al., 1995; Walker et al., 1996).

Detailed implementation practices are discussed later in this section.

Characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood

The contexts for school-influencing risk factors include the family, neighborhood, community and, finally, the larger society (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). Across these contexts, contributing risk factors can include poverty; dysfunctional and chaotic family life; drug and alcohol abuse by primary caregivers; domestic abuse; neglect; emotional and physical abuse; negative attitudes toward schooling; the modeling of physical intimidation and aggression; sexual exploitation; media vio-

lence; and the growing incivility of society. These risk factors provide a fertile breeding ground for the development of antisocial attitudes and coercive behavioral styles among the children who are pervasively exposed to them.

Assessment of neighborhood and family characteristics can be accomplished in large measure by using archival data collected (often routinely) by law enforcement, child protective services, juvenile authorities, and health departments. We will illustrate the constructive use of these information sources later in this guide.

Characteristics of the students enrolled in the school

Our schools are made unsafe by the attitudes, beliefs, and dangerous behavior patterns of antisocial children and youth that attend them. These characteristics are stimulated by the risk factors listed above regarding family, community, and society. The task of schools, families, and communities is to promote resilience, teach skills for success, and develop positive alternatives to replace the maladaptive forms of behavior the child has learned to use in achieving his or her social goals.

In any school, we would expect to find three relatively distinct populations of students: (a) typically developing students; (b) those at risk for behavioral and academic problems; and (c) high-risk students who already manifest serious behavioral and academic difficulties (Sprague & Walker, 2000, 2005). Differing but complementary approaches are necessary to address the needs of these three student groups in any school. Figure 3 (page 21) illustrates characteristic distribution of students of each type and indicates the level and intensity of intervention each needs. Assessing and identifying the characteristics of students in the school includes identifying rates of juvenile arrests or contacts with law enforcement; the frequency and severity of discipline referrals in school; the proportion of students in poverty; academic achievement levels; levels of social skills development; and other measures of student well-being, connectedness, and development.
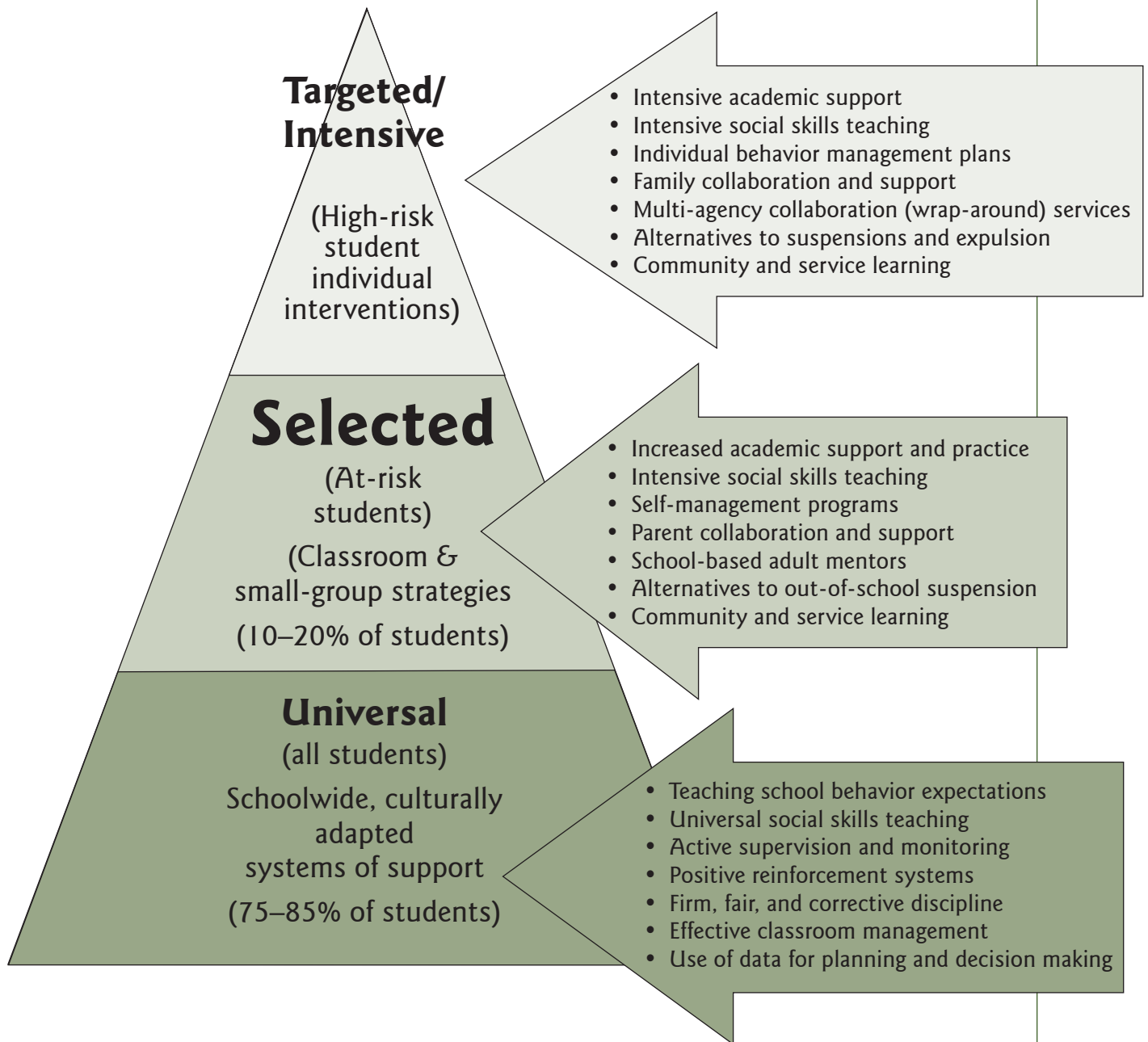
**Targeted/
Intensive**

(High-risk
student
individual
interventions)

- Intensive academic support
- Intensive social skills teaching
- Individual behavior management plans
- Family collaboration and support
- Multi-agency collaboration (wrap-around) services
- Alternatives to suspensions and expulsion
- Community and service learning

Selected

(At-risk
students)

(Classroom &
small-group strategies

(10–20% of students)

- Increased academic support and practice
- Intensive social skills teaching
- Self-management programs
- Parent collaboration and support
- School-based adult mentors
- Alternatives to out-of-school suspension
- Community and service learning

Universal

(all students)

Schoolwide, culturally
adapted
systems of support

(75–85% of students)

- Teaching school behavior expectations
- Universal social skills teaching
- Active supervision and monitoring
- Positive reinforcement systems
- Firm, fair, and corrective discipline
- Effective classroom management
- Use of data for planning and decision making

*Figure 3.* Student Risk Level and Intensity of Corresponding Interventions

Adapted, with permission, from Sprague, J.R., & Walker, H.M. (2005). *Safe and healthy schools: Practical prevention strategies*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

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Section III.

The "How To" of School Safety Planning and Intervention

We recommend use of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free School's "Principles of Effectiveness" as an organizing framework for planning and implementing whole-school approaches. The steps outlined include 1) a **local needs assessment** of the risk and protective factors affecting model sites; 2) **establishment of measurable goals and objectives** by the school in collaboration with students, families, and community members; 3) **selection of science-based and research-validated curricula and interventions**; and 4) **development of a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation plan** that features a logic model that includes evaluation of the inputs (resources, staff, materials), outputs (actual costs, description of the process of implementation), outcomes (student behavior change), and impact (overall satisfaction with project products and outcomes). In this section, we will discuss the first two steps. The following section provides recommendations for specific schoolwide prevention programs.
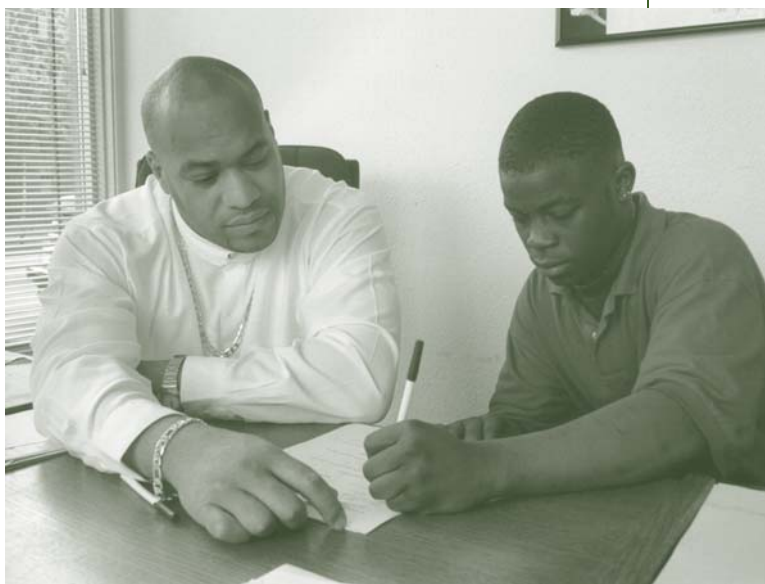
Conduct a Local Needs Assessment

We recommend that intervention selection be based upon a thorough assessment of school functioning (Sprague & Walker, 2005) with special attention to the four sources of vulnerability discussed previously. Thorough needs assessments can guide planning, avoid overlapping or conflicting services, and serve as the basis for evaluating change.

Table 1 (page 24) provides a summary of the assessment tools we recommend for a comprehensive needs assessment. These tools can be

located through the citations listed, or by using the resource links provided at the end of this guide.

Table 1.
Four Sources of Vulnerability to School Safety: Needs Assessment Tools and Data Sources

Architecture and Supervision of the School Building	Administrative and Management Practices of the School	Characteristics of the Community and Its Families	Characteristics of Students Enrolled in the School
Ensuring Quality School Facilities and Security Technologies, by Tod Schneider (see pages 17, 18, and 27 for further discussion)	• Schoolwide PBS practices survey (Sugai et al., 2000; available at http://www.pbis.org) • Schoolwide Education Evaluation Tool (Sugai et al., 2001) • Oregon School Safety Survey (Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 1998) • Faculty characteristics • Office discipline referrals (frequency, type) • Suspensions and expulsions (frequency, type)	• Poverty (free and reduced-price lunch status of school) • Mobility • Family or domestic violence rates • Community crime rates • Community focus group information (needs, goals, barriers)	• School enrollment (school size) • School demographics • Academic achievement test scores • Attendance • Juvenile crime rates • Universal screening (assess prevalence of adjustment problems) • Teacher nomination • Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug (ATOD) use survey results (e.g., Youth Risk Behavior Survey)

Adapted, with permission, from Sprague, J.R., & Walker, H.M. (2005). *Safe and healthy schools: Practical prevention strategies.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Set measurable goals and objectives and select evidence-based strategies

What follows is an approach to preventing school violence that has the potential to positively impact both the administrative and management practices of the school and the characteristics of the students enrolled in the school.

The U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) has developed a classification system that provides for the coordinated integration of differing intervention approaches to address the divergent needs of the three student types present in different proportions in every school (not at risk, at

risk, and severely at risk). These approaches are referred to as primary, secondary, and tertiary (see Figure 3, page 21). Primary prevention refers to the use of approaches that prevent problems from emerging; secondary prevention addresses existing problems that are not yet of a chronic nature or severe magnitude; tertiary prevention uses the most powerful intervention approaches available to address the problems of severely at-risk individuals. Walker and his colleagues have outlined an integrated prevention model, based upon this classification system, for addressing the problem of school-based antisocial behavior patterns (Walker et al., 1996).

Universal interventions, applied to everyone in the same manner and degree, are used to achieve primary prevention goals; that is, to keep problems from emerging. We would expect these interventions to benefit both high- and low-risk schools. Good examples of such interventions include:

- Developing a schoolwide discipline plan

- Schoolwide teaching of conflict resolution and violence prevention skills

- Establishing high and consistent academic expectations for all students

- Using the most effective, research-based methods for teaching beginning reading at the point of school entry and in the primary grades

- Informing and inviting parents to support school success and monitor their children's activities and peer group affiliations

Individualized interventions applied to one case at a time or to small groups of at-risk individuals (e.g., alternative classrooms or "schools within schools") are used to achieve secondary and tertiary prevention goals. Typically, these interventions are labor intensive, complex, and often intrusive and costly, but they can be very powerful if properly implemented. They are necessary to address the more severe problems of chronically at-risk students who "select" themselves out by not responding to primary prevention approaches. These youth need much more intensive intervention services and supports. Often, implementation of these interventions is preceded by a functional behavioral assessment (O'Neill et al., 1997) to identify the conditions (antecedents and consequences) that sustain and motivate the problem behavior. We also recommend a comprehensive assessment of family, school, and individual *risk* (Achenbach, 1991; Walker & McConnell, 1995; Walker & Severson, 1990) and *protective* factors (Epstein & Sharma, 1998) to guide delivery of broader ecological interventions.

This integrated model, although it has rarely been implemented fully in the context of schooling, provides an ideal means for schools to develop, implement, and monitor a comprehensive management system that addresses the needs of all students in the school. It is also a fair system in that typically developing students are not penalized by being denied access to potentially beneficial interventions. In addition, it has the potential to have a positive impact on the operations, administration, and overall climate of the school. This model, through its emphasis on the use of primary prevention goals achieved through universal interventions, maximizes the efficient use of school resources. It also provides a supportive context for the application of necessary secondary and tertiary interventions for the more severely involved students. Finally, it provides a built-in screening and assessment process; that is, through careful monitoring of students' responses to the primary prevention interventions, it is possible to detect those who are at greater risk and in need of more intensive services and supports.

Section IV.

Recommended Schoolwide Prevention Programs

We believe the following strategic approaches can move schools in the direction of greater safety and over time will reduce the likelihood of a school tragedy:

- Secure the school

- Address the peer culture and its problems

- Involve parents in making the school safer

- Create a positive, inclusive school culture

- Develop a written school safety and crisis-response plan

The more at-risk a school is perceived to be, the more important these topical areas become and the greater the potential investment in them. Their importance and relevance increase as one moves from elementary to middle to high school.

Secure the school

The most immediate and direct method of addressing school safety issues is to secure the school. The three primary approaches to seriously consider in this regard are (1) the appropriate use of school security technology; (2) employment of school resource officers; and (3) use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and techniques. Used in combination, these three approaches can be effective in reducing the likelihood or probability of a school shooting tragedy. Considerable progress has been made in the development and appropriate use of security technology to make schools safer without turning them into fortress-like structures. This technology is being

increasingly used in schools across the country. An excellent resource on this topic has been developed and published by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Green, 1999). School administrators should be aware of the status, advantages, and limitations of this technology when considering implementation of school safety options and strategies.

Address the peer culture and its problems

The primary target for our prevention and safer schools efforts should be the peer culture. The norms, actions, beliefs, and values within broad sectors of today's peer culture are socially destructive and demeaning. Many youth experience a trial by fire in negotiating the complex and difficult social tasks involved in finding their place in this peer culture. Far too many fail this critical test, become lost within it, and wander aimlessly while seeking acceptance that is generally not forthcoming. They become isolated within the larger peer group and their lack of fit is well-known among peers. This process forces many marginalized youth to affiliate with atypical or deviant peer groups, which can prove destructive to them.

Transforming this destructive peer culture is perhaps our most formidable task in the area of school safety. This culture is not of the schools' making, but schools are perhaps the only social institution, excluding the family, capable of addressing it effectively. Four ongoing strategies are recommended in confronting this issue.

- **Bully-proof the school setting by adopting science-based, anti-bullying/harassment programs, such as the Olweus Bullying Program, Bully Proofing Your School, or Steps to Respect.** The best disinfectant for bullying, mean-spirited teasing, and harassment is sunlight. These events need to be defined as clearly unacceptable in the school by everyone (administrators, teachers, other school staff, students, and parents) and made public when they occur. Students should be given strategies for reporting and resisting them in an adaptive fashion and reporting those who commit these acts should be made acceptable. The above-cited programs incorporate these principles and strategies.

- **Teach anger management, impulse control, and conflict-resolution techniques as part of regular curricular content.** The Second Step Violence Prevention Program, developed by

the Committee for Children in Seattle, is one of the best means available for creating a positive peer culture of caring and civility, teaching specific strategies that work in controlling and managing one's anger, and resolving conflicts without resorting to coercion or violence. This program was recently rated as the most effective of all those currently available for creating safe and positive schools by an expert panel of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education.

- **Refer troubled, antisocial, and depressed youth to mental health services and ensure that they receive the professional attention they need.** Youth with serious mental health problems and disorders who are alienated, socially rejected, and taunted by peers, can be dangerous to themselves and others. These students are often known to peers and school staff and should be given the appropriate professional and parental attention, access to services, and social supports. Having mental health problems combined with being the target of severe bullying and taunting by peers has proven to be a dangerous combination in the context of school shootings.

- **Ask students to sign a pledge not to tease, bully, or put down others.** Reports from schools that have tried this tactic indicate that it makes a difference in the number of incidents that occur and in the overall school climate.

Involve parents in making the school safer

With each new school shooting tragedy, parents of school-age children and youth seek greater assurances that their child's school is safe and, increasingly, ask for a voice and role in helping the school attain this goal. Parents have much to offer in this regard and can be a powerful force in bringing greater safety and a sense of security to the school setting.

The following strategies are recommended for facilitating parent involvement:

- **Create a parent advisory planning group at each school devoted to school safety issues for that school.** Such an advisory group would bring valuable knowledge, experience, and advocacy to the process of dealing with local school safety challenges. It could also serve as a forum for reacting to district- and state-level policy directives in this area.

- Advocate for parents to teach their children adaptive, nonviolent methods of responding to bullying, teasing, and harassment at school; ask them to avoid encouraging their children to fight back. In the vast majority of cases, fighting back will not be effective and may escalate the situation to dangerous levels. It will more likely increase the probability of the offensive behavior occurring again rather than reducing it. An anti-bullying program that has parental support and involvement will be much more effective in the school.

- Advocate for securing weapons at home and providing access to gun safety instruction for all family members. Given the society we live in, and the number of guns in U.S. homes, it is imperative that everyone understands the dangers involved in handling guns and in being in proximity to those who do so. Trigger locks and secured gun cases are essential elements for securing weapons in the home (where the keys to same are also secured). The National Rifle Association has developed some excellent information on gun safety that can be accessed by anyone. In connection with these efforts, young children need to be taught about the sanctity of life and that guns are deadly, life-ending instruments.

- Make available to parents solid information on effective parenting practices and provide access to those parents who seek training and support in more effective parenting. There are five generic parenting practices that are instrumental in determining how children develop: firm but fair discipline; monitoring and supervision; parent involvement in children's lives; positive family-management techniques; and crisis intervention and problem solving. A large number of available parent-training programs address these practices (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2003; Sanders, 1999).

Create a positive, inclusive school climate and culture

There is solid evidence that effective schools are safer schools and vice versa. The research of Denise Gottfredson and others shows that a school climate that is positive, inclusive, and accepting is a key component of an effective school. Three recommended strategies for addressing this component of school safety include:

- **Create and promote a set of school-based positive values about how we treat others that includes civility, caring, and respect for the rights of others.** It is unfortunate that schools have to teach civility in addition to everything else, but this is now the case. Children and youth are daily exposed to very poor models of uncivil behavior toward others by adult society. Making civility a core value of the school's culture may help reduce some of the coarseness of the peer culture that has become such a problem in our schools and society.

- **Teach all students how to separate from their own lives the exaggerated media images of interpersonal violence, disrespect, and incivility to which they are exposed daily.** School curricula exist that teach media literacy relative to interpersonal violence. It is especially important that young children learn how to disconnect media displays of violence and their own behavior and actions (Center for Media Literacy, 1993).

- **Establish schoolwide rules and behavioral expectations, as well as specific applications of same.** The Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) program is an excellent and proven vehicle for accomplishing this goal. PBS is being broadly implemented in local districts across the country (see http://www.pbis.org). It is a highly recommended approach for creating orderly, positive, well-managed school environments.

Develop a written school safety and crisis-response plan

Most states require each school to develop a school improvement plan but no law mandates development of a written school safety and crisis-response plan. In today's environment, it is essential that each school go through a planning process designed to reduce the likelihood of a school tragedy and to manage a crisis should it occur.

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Conclusion

Policy generally lags well behind the research that validates evidence-based approaches that can inform and guide policy decisions and practices. This is especially true in the area of school safety and violence prevention. The pressures and demands of the moment force school administrators to make decisions about school safety strategy and tactics that may appear promising but are not, as yet, proven through the research process. Thus, we are left with basing such decisions upon practices that appear promising, relying on our experience, and using our best judgment until the knowledge base on school safety becomes more solid, cohesive, and evidence-based. The action recommendations described in this guide represent what we appear to know about these complex issues at present. See the other titles in the "Effective Strategies for Creating Safer Schools and Communities" series for more information on creating safe and effective learning environments.

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES

- *School Policies and Legal Issues Supporting Safe Schools*

- *Ensuring Quality School Facilities and Security Technologies*

- *The Role of Mental Health Services in Promoting Safe and Secure Schools*

- *Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement*

These titles, and other resources, can be downloaded from the Hamilton Fish Institute Web site at: http://www.hamfish.org.

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Additional Reading and Resources

Web Sites:

- Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior
  http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ivdb/

- SWIS database for tracking office referrals
  http://www.swis.org

- OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
  http://www.pbis.org

- Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Safety
  http://www.hamfish.org

- Pennsylvania State Prevention Research Center (Mark Greenberg)
  http://www.psu.edu/dept/prevention

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/spotlite/SafeYouthSafeSchools.htm

- National Center on Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention
  http://www.promoteprevent.org/

- The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative
  http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/

- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence
  http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/

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Oregon School Safety Coalition. (2001). *How safe are Oregon schools?* Salem, OR: State of Oregon Attorney General's Office.

Recommended Programs for Preventing Violence, Bullying, and Harassment:

Bully Proofing Your School (available from Sopris West, P.O. Box 1890, Longmont, CO 80502-1809; 1-800-547-6747; http://www.sopriswest.com/).

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (available from the Institute on Family & Neighborhood Life at Clemson University; 1-864-710-4562, http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/index. html).

Second Step Violence Prevention Program (available from the Committee for Children, Seattle, WA, 1-800-634-4449, http://www.cfchildren.org).

Steps to Respect (anti-bullying program; available from the Committee for Children, Seattle, WA, 1-800-634-4449, http://www.cfchildren.org).

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