
Introduction

Schools of the twenty-first century are expected to provide a level of security unprecedented in the history of education. With a backdrop of increasingly prevalent violent behavior in society that has spilled over into schools, there is often a clash between the need to secure campuses and the desire to maintain an open and welcoming environment. As schools have responded with a myriad of strategies designed to strengthen security in and around campuses, some individuals call for more drastic measures, claiming not enough is being done, while others say schools have already gone too far.

While academic achievement should always be the primary focus of all who work in the school, great school leaders recognize that for this to be accomplished, a number of support columns must be in place. School safety is one of the columns supporting this mission; its removal or damage can have negative and even devastating consequences on academic achievement.

Although acts of school violence resulting in loss of life are still rare, students, staff, and parents are well aware of the headlines. These headlines can erode the confidence of parents hundreds of miles away from a specific event. In the aftermath of any school tragedy, school personnel self-evaluate and consider whether or not they have done enough to prevent such an occurrence on their own campus.

Safe school planning must merge two important concepts if it is to truly make a difference. First, a physical environment must be created that is reasonably safe. Second, the environment must be perceived as safe by the entire school community. Both concepts are challenging but equally important. Planning should not only address concrete items such as locks, doors, windows, parking lots, and lighting, but should also include strategies on how to promote these to the school community, while giving everyone ownership in the process.

THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK

The strategies in this book were originally written as columns for the NASSP's *Principal Leadership*. They have been edited to appeal to a wider audience, as well as to reflect the most up-to-date best practices. It is our intent to provide you, the reader, with the knowledge and tools to create and enhance a safe learning environment for students, staff, and the patrons who periodically visit your campus. We have attempted to do so by

- providing tips and strategies that have minimal or no associated cost;
- using strategies that blend with the educational atmosphere of most schools and are acceptable to most school communities;
- structuring the suggestions so implementation can be accomplished without major time commitments, while keeping the focus on academic achievement; and
- recommending methods of enhancing school safety we believe can make a difference in preventing or minimizing the opportunity for a tragedy to occur, facilitating a better response should such an event happen, and allowing a school to recover and return to normalcy in the aftermath of such an event.

Safe & Secure Schools: 27 Strategies for Prevention and Intervention provides a foundation for safe school planning. While not intended to address every security issue or problem faced by schools in the twenty-first century, the strategies provided in this book, when incorporated with systematic planning, ongoing discussion, and a review process, can make a positive difference.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

While the primary audience for this book is the school administrator, there are a number of other individuals that can benefit from the content. In fact, following the concept promoted by the authors that it is critical to make everyone in a school building “participatory to the process,” all staff members should read it. There are some groups and individuals that should be targeted specifically: Safety coordinators or individuals who, by job classification, have a specific responsibility for developing, planning, and implementing safe school strategies will find the book a valuable resource. Staff contemplating a future career move into administration will find the contents thought provoking. And, for schools that use safety committees, ad hoc groups, or other teams of individuals (such as counselors, school social workers, and lead teachers) to help guide safe school planning, the strategies and concepts contained in the following chapters will provide a starting point for discussion toward mapping out a course of

action. Regardless of the audience, there is something for everyone with a vested interest in enhancing school safety.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

Without belaboring the point, this book is not a cure or magic pill that will somehow fix or prevent the negative events that occasionally happen at school. Utilizing some or all of the strategies contained within is much like taking a daily aspirin to help prevent a heart attack. Bad events may still occur, but great leaders using the right medicine and following the prescription label help to minimize the opportunity.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The book is divided into four sections—planning, response strategies, professional development, and our recommended top ten strategies. While each chapter is related to these broad topics, some sections could easily be placed into more than one category. It was our intent to offer practical and cost-effective suggestions that principals could read “on the run.” It is our hope this goal has been accomplished.

The final section of the book is titled, “Top Ten School Safety Strategies.” Of all the ideas suggested within this text, we consider these to be the most important.