



Let None Learn in Fear

Michael Dorn on School Safety

Michael Dorn



Michael Dorn serves as Executive Director of Safe Havens International Inc., an international non-profit school safety center dedicated to developing practical and effective safe schools strategies to make school a safer place for children anywhere in the world.

Let None Learn in Fear

Michael Dorn on School Safety

Michael Dorn

Let None Learn in Fear

©2006 by Michael Dorn

Edited by Tricia Mosser and Chris Dorn

Safe Havens International, Inc., an IRS approved non profit school
safety center

www.safehavensinternational.org

www.schoolterrorism.com

www.weakfish.org

ISBN 0-9741240-9-5

LCCN

All rights reserved. No part of this book, including interior design, cover design and drawings, may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, except in the case of brief quotation embodied in critical articles and reviews without prior written permission of the authors. For information, address all inquiries to Editor, Safe Havens International, Inc.

Book and cover design by Pamela Terry, Opus 1 Design

www.Opus1design.com

Cover photograph by Chris Dorn

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of School Police Officer Euel Thomas Smith or “Bubba” as he was affectionately known to his brother and sister officers. Officer Smith was shot and killed in the line of duty at Central High School on April 22, 1983 in Macon, Georgia, while protecting the children of Bibb County. His death, witnessed by hundreds of the students he gave his life to protect, will not be forgotten. His sacrifice symbolizes the dedication of the brave men and women of the Bibb County Public School Police Force, men and women who have changed the course of school safety around the globe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Dorn serves as Executive Director of Safe Havens International Inc., an international non-profit school safety center dedicated to developing practical and effective safe schools strategies to make school a safer place for children anywhere in the world. Safe Havens analysts have worked in two dozen countries and have worked with more than 2,000 public and private schools and school systems as well as with law enforcement, emergency management, emergency medical, public health, homeland security and other organizations that make our world a safer place.

A respected and trusted expert in his field, he served with the Mercer University Police Department for ten years before being appointed as the chief of police for the Bibb County Board of Education Police Department in Macon, Georgia. During his ten-year tenure as police chief, the department was featured as a model program by many organizations including the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education. In 1999, he was appointed School Safety Specialist for the nation's largest state government school safety center – the School Safety Project of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Governor (GEMA) – where he served as Georgia's lead school safety expert. He was selected as the State Antiterrorism Planner after the horrendous terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 when GEMA was designated as part of the Georgia Office of Homeland Security. In spring 2003, Michael was designated as the Lead Program Manager for the Terrorism Emergency Response and Preparedness Division before being selected to serve as the Senior Analyst for School Safety and Emergency Management by Jane's after an international search in February 2004.

Michael has authored and coauthored more than 20 books on school safety including *Innocent Targets – When Terrorism Comes to School*, *Weakfish – Bullying Through the Eyes of a Child* and *Jane's Safe Schools Planning Guide for All Hazards* – the most detailed and comprehensive book ever published on school safety. He has published hundreds of articles and pens columns for *Campus Safety*, *School Planning and Management*, *Today's School*, *School Transportation News* and *College Planning and Management* magazines. He is also a regular contributor to LRP Publication's *Maintaining Safe Schools* and *The School Discipline Advisor*. He has been featured in 12 training videos and DVDs, which are now in use in more than 30 countries and

has been frequently interviewed by major news organizations including *Good Morning America*, *The BBC*, *Tokyo Broadcasting*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *Associated Press* and *United Press International*.

He has a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in history and political science and a master's degree in service administration from Mercer University. He has finished more than 18 months of police academy and emergency management training and holds five advanced certifications from the Georgia Peace Officers Standards and Training Council. He graduated from the 181st session of the FBI National Academy at Quantico, Va., and was selected for a fellowship with Georgia State University to train in Israel through the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange Program (GILEE). During this intensive program, he received advanced antiterrorism and counterterrorism training from the Israel Police, Israel Defense Forces and the Mossad.

Michael has served on numerous government task forces, expert working groups, and fact-finding committees. The multi-disciplinary threat management and home search techniques developed by the author and his colleagues have been used to successfully thwart several dozen planned school shootings and bombings. Michael is a powerful and popular keynote presenter and conducts intensive advanced training sessions and consultations for school districts and private schools around the globe.

For more information on Safe Havens International, visit www.safehavensinternational.org

About the Editor

Tricia Mosser

Tricia Mosser is currently an editor for LRP Publications where she reports on K-12 education. She is studying for a masters of arts in education with an elementary specialization through the University of Phoenix. She is a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Her previous book editing projects include *The Enemy Among Us: POWs in Missouri During World War II* by David Fiedler, winner of the Missouri Governor's Award for the Humanities. She is currently co-authoring the book *Freedom Generation: A Call to Action* with Dr. Robert Gillio, founder of InnerLink.

Other Books authored and co-authored by Michael Dorn

Innocent Targets – When Terrorism Comes to School

By Michael and Chris Dorn

Weakfish – Bullying Through the Eyes of a Child

The Last Straw – A Guide to Hate Groups, Cults, Youth Gangs and
Warning Signs of Destructive Youth Behaviors (in press)

By Michael Dorn and Chris Dorn

Sexual Monsters – What Every Parent, Educator and Youth Service
Professional Must Know about Child Molesters (in press)

Michael Dorn, Chris Dorn and Russell Bentley

Jane's Safe School Planning Guide for All Hazards

Jane's Teacher Safety Guide

Jane's School Safety Handbook Second Edition

School/Law Enforcement Partnerships – A Guide to Police Work
in Schools

Policing and Crime Prevention Deborah Mitchell Robinson, Editor

Prentice Hall www.prenhall.com/policestore

School Safety Essentials – Series of twelve short books

LRP Publishing. 1-800-341-7874 extension 275

Warriors – On Living with Courage, Discipline and Honor

Edited by Loren W. Christenson. Paladin Press.

www.paladin-press.com

Children are poor men's riches

English proverb

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would once again like to thank my patient and hard working editors. They have always given me encouragement, solid advice and understanding, and I must admit to a one they have consistently improved the rough drafts I have submitted to them. A good editor has all of the above qualities, is good at working under extremely tight deadlines and above all else, has the ability, if not the gift, of being a talented wordsmith. I can honestly say I have been blessed with editors who epitomize each of these valuable qualities.

Deb Moore from Peter Li Publishing

Jerry Enderle from *School Planning and Management*

Mary Noshang from *College Planning and Management*

Robin Gray from *Campus Safety*

I would especially like to thank Tricia Mosser whose careful and patient editing made this book a reality. I experienced six computer crashes while working on this manuscript which delayed publication for more than a year. Tricia was very kind and patient and was able to provide backup copies which reduced my stress level considerably.

I would also like to thank my good friend Les Nichols AIA, Vice President of Building Services for Boys and Girls Clubs of America for the vast amount of expertise he has generously shared with me and for his specific encouragement to turn my columns from *School Planning and Management* into this book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section One – Introduction	<u>17</u>
Section Two – Perspectives	<u>21</u>
Section Three – Preventive medicine	<u>89</u>
Section Four – Emergency Operations Planning	<u>157</u>
Section Five – Motivational Columns	<u>195</u>

FORWARD

Educating children is one of the most rewarding jobs any of us will ever have – and one of the toughest. Schools today are tasked with recruiting and retaining good teachers, adhering to legislative mandates, paying the bills and educating an increasingly diverse student population. Look into any classroom and you will find gifted students, students with disabilities and special needs, students who speak English as a second language, students who live in poverty or are homeless. Each and every one of them deserves the chance at a quality education, their school being the place where they can discover, learn, create and grow.

The environment where learning takes place plays a big role in how well these students perform in school, or for that matter, in life. If students do not feel safe and secure, they will have difficulty concentrating on their lessons and, therefore, cannot take full advantage of their learning experience. Statistically, schools are one of the most secure places for our children. Many children can't wait for vacation to end, welcoming the chance to see their friends again and to see what new adventures the new school year will bring. But for many others, anxiety, fear and a sense of personal risk keep them away from school, causing them to fall further behind in their studies. It should be a concern to all of us when even one student spends more time worrying about their safety than their studies, when even one teacher is so preoccupied with the fear of violence erupting in the classroom that they cannot teach, or when a parent's worst worry is the safety of their child at school.

No matter how safe and secure you feel your school may be, it is important to understand that no school is completely risk-free. Events like the shootings at Columbine, September 11th, or Hurricane Katrina have served as an impetus for many to prepare for the unexpected – concerned with what has happened before, realizing that it could and probably will happen again, and knowing that next time it could be at their school. Providing these districts with the right information to plan, prepare, mitigate and respond is of great importance. That is a job that we at *School Planning & Management* magazine, with the help of Michael Dorn, have gladly taken on. The readers of Michael's column share his deep concern for students' safety and success. Those who have acted on his advice have taken the first steps in providing their students with the safe and secure environment they

Let None Learn in Fear

deserve. In this new book, *Let None Learn in Fear*, Michael speaks to the issues that school officials need to hear (including those they do not always want to hear.) I encourage you read Michael's new book and then take action against crime and violence in your own school. Our students deserve it.

Deborah P. Moore
Executive Editor/Publisher
School Planning & Management

Section One

Introduction

Introduction

I have been writing a school safety column for *School Planning and Management Magazine* for more than seven years now. During this time, I have had many calls, e-mails and comments from subscribers. In fact, to my surprise, the column has quite a few dedicated readers. My editor, Jerry Enderle, has mentioned on several occasions that a compilation of the columns would make for a useful book on school safety. One avid reader who has developed into a good friend is Les Nichols. Les serves as the Vice President for Building Services for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and often has a leading role in helping the more than 3,000 clubs worldwide create and maintain a safe environment. I have worked with Les on a number of pro bono safety projects for Boys and Girls Clubs of America and have grown to have immense respect for the man and his opinions. When Les echoed Jerry Enderle's view that the columns would make a helpful book, I knew I should act. My regular readers can probably tell I love to write, and both Jerry and Les provided me as good an excuse as any to write another book on a topic close to my heart.

This book is my twenty first to be published, and I have enjoyed the experience as much as those before it. This is the first of my books that I have been able to give away for free. It costs quite a bit to put this book out in e-book form but thanks to the support of our dedicated analysts at Safe Havens who have been willing to work for little or in many cases no financial compensation, we are now fiscally able to give this book away to those who are dedicated to making children safer. We also plan to provide the book to Vietnam National University to be translated into Vietnamese without payment of royalties in keeping

with our desire to help protection of school children wherever they may attend school.

Readers might be interested to note the title is derived directly from the motto of the Bibb County Public School System Police Department. I had the honor and privilege of serving as the Chief of Police of this fine agency for ten years to the day before I accepted an appointment at the state level. No group of men and women has worked more diligently to protect school children.

I decided not to simply compile my columns in book form, but instead decided to update each column and add several new sections. I now write columns for a number of magazines and one thing this experience has taught me is how to dramatically condense information into its most concise useable form. The distinct disadvantage of writing a regular column is that it is often not possible to address a topic as well as you would like in 800 words, no matter how carefully you edit. I have added information to certain columns where I feel a little more information is needed. I also decided to include revised editions of articles I published in other magazines that could prove useful. In addition, I added several unique sections that might be useful to the reader. I fervently hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it. More importantly, I hope it is a valuable tool for you in your efforts to protect our nation's most precious natural resource – our children.

Section Two

Perspectives

What You Need to Hear

April 2002

Readers of this column have provided helpful feedback in guiding topics to be addressed in future issues. In a recent e-mail, a member of a large consulting firm expressed gratitude for the direct manner in which many of the topics addressed in this column are broached. The writer said he often couldn't be as blunt as he would like when dealing with clients. He went on to say colleagues at his firm were grateful the column speaks to many issues school officials really need to hear, but sometimes do not want to. While I have received a considerable amount of comments indicating most people appreciate this approach toward confronting tough school safety issues, there is always a concern that I sometimes fail to reach members of my target audiences because of this directness.

While I do make a genuine effort to be tactful, and occasionally even sensitive, memories of horrible events experienced as a student, as well as those encountered by others, compel me to be clear and direct when addressing school safety topics. I watched a young man bleed to death from gunshot wounds across the street from a local high school because of local politics, turf issues, and attempts to pacify vocal segments of the community. I came close to being shot on the same night for the very same reasons. While undoubtedly striking a nerve with some on occasion, my hope is most people are willing to at least consider what they read in this column each month. Several dozen planned school shootings and bombings have been successfully thwarted by techniques my former co-workers and I developed. We have shared these concepts with many that have read my columns and articles, attended our seminars and viewed our training videos. Many of the

concepts discussed here are now in common use around the nation. The home search technique, multi-disciplinary [threat assessment](#) and the plain view vehicle checks shared in this column and other venues were developed in the Bibb County Board of Education Campus Police Department during my tenure as Chief of Police. These techniques are now widely used around the nation by many who picked up the concept in this magazine. I by no means claim to be the final authority on school safety, but I have been around the block not only in terms of experience, but in terms of professional development as well. I hope most readers will consider the ideas set forth here. While there are others who also take a direct path in addressing school safety, a number of experts in the field have told me they are not in the position to convey information as directly and honestly as they would like. Private sector and government school safety professionals frequently face difficult challenges in telling people what they need to hear instead of what they want to hear. School safety efforts, like so many other important topics in our time, can be corrupted by the constant cry to be politically correct to the point of being ineffective.

Each of us has an obligation to continually question, challenge and re-examine what we hear, see, experience and most importantly, what has become standard practice. We owe it to ourselves to be sure we are truly listening to and inviting necessary feedback from others. Anyone can be subject to send out signals to others that we are open to and expect to hear certain things. In reality though, isn't it better to hear it from someone else while there is still time to take corrective action than to learn the hard way a change needs to occur? When engaging a consultant, requesting help from government school safety personnel, seeking the council of local public safety experts or trying to involve students and parents in safety efforts, educational leaders should work diligently to afford them a genuine opportunity to offer their opinions. And just as not every concept put forth in this column will be right for every school, some of the feedback and advice offered by others will not be appropriate for every situation. Careful evaluation and consideration must be used to select the best concepts for each environment. But being open to new ideas or different ways of doing business are important to success.

Today's school officials are overwhelmed with information. In some instances, they also can be overwhelmed with notions and assumptions not necessarily accurate or current. There are many people out there who can help schools more effectively address safety concerns.

Qualified consultants, public safety officials, government school safety experts, school employees, parents, students and staff can all contribute. But to make a difference, the suggestions and opinions offered must be heard by the people who have authority to act and the power to affect change. Most of the people who read this column each month are the decision-makers in their organization. If you take the time out of your busy day to read this column each month, I probably have not offended you too badly. So, I would like to take this opportunity to say, keep an open mind and keep up the good work, there are many special people who are dependent on your best efforts to do so.

We Never Thought it Could Happen Here

August 2000

For more than a decade now, major acts of [weapons](#) violence have occurred in American public and private schools each year. There have been hostage situations, multiple victim shootings, and detonations of explosive devices in our nation's schools. In some years, all three types of incidents have occurred. Following the intensive media coverage of the mass shooting at Pearl High School in Mississippi, we saw a rapid acceleration in attempts to commit major acts of planned school [weapons](#) incidents. For every incident reported in the media during the past several years, there also were a number of planned major acts of [weapons](#) violence, which were successfully thwarted. These were stopped by communities where the threat was recognized and acted upon because people were prepared and understood such incidents can take place in any school. If we look at the trends, it is clear attempts to commit such horrible acts will be with us for quite some time. What is unclear is how many attempts will be successful because some communities still don't recognize and adequately address the danger that exists.

Just when it seems there could not possibly be anyone who has not understood the message our troubled youth send us time and time again, we find there are indeed those who still believe their community or school is somehow exempt. If we look at many of the schools that have experienced the most tragic events, we find they are not just good schools, but excellent schools. They are staffed by competent educators, and attended primarily by good kids. At least two of the mass school shootings in the past three years took place in schools

where more than 80 percent of graduates move on to attend college. Violence knows no borders. Breaches of safety can happen in your school regardless of its size, whether it is a public or private religious school, no matter your location or the crime rates in your community. Every day your students arrive at school, is a day you must provide them with a level of protection that mirrors the challenges found in our violent society. I speak here of major incidents of planned weapons violence, if we add the much more common single victim shootings and edged weapons assaults, the scope of the problem is magnified considerably.

Just how much handwriting must be on the wall before we can all read it? I was prompted to write this column after I learned of a situation where a student made clear statements involving [weapons](#) violence at school. This high-risk student exhibited numerous violent indicators and destructive behaviors. He even made reference to a specific date for venting his anger. The lead school administrator's response, "Things like that couldn't happen at this school" is disturbing. A police investigator assigned to the case didn't have time to follow up on the investigation even though the first date mentioned by the student was the next regular school day. This is inexcusable behavior from those charged with protecting. Thankfully, in this case, a state law enforcement agency intervened.

According to the National School Safety Center, more than 300 violent school deaths occurred in public and private schools in our nation since 1992. According to the U.S. Department of Education, it is estimated that more than 100,000 students carry a [gun](#) to school each day in this country yet only about 4,000 students are reported as expelled for [gun](#) possession each year. Two students were recently caught with [guns](#) on school property in a Midwestern state. The students were given five days suspension from school and were not prosecuted. Is it logical to treat a student [gun](#) violation as we would smoking on campus when we have an estimated 18 million student [gun](#) violations in our public and private schools each year?

Schools typically provide a safer environment than most other places frequented by our youth. Some statistical data even tells us school crime has decreased over the past decade. While it is extremely difficult to accurately gauge overall national school crime rates due to pervasive underreporting, it does appear the violent school death rate is down. But when we have twenty to forty violent school deaths each year in our nation, how much crime and violence is "acceptable"?

Let None Learn in Fear

When lives are lost due to acts of violence in schools around the nation, we constantly hear the words, “We never thought it could happen here.” When we look more closely, we often see a lack of adequate prevention, planning, and response measures in schools where those in charge really did not believe “it” could happen. How many tragedies will it take to arouse those who are still dangerously unaware? How many more lives must we lose before safety is a serious consideration in every school in our great nation?

Time for a Calm and Measured Approach to the Threat of Terrorism

October 2001

The horrific events of September 11, 2001 shocked us all to the core. These methodical and cold-blooded attacks struck deeply within our hearts and minds. We as a nation will be forever changed by these barbaric acts. Unfortunately, these events also have ominous implications for our schools. Having been extensively trained on counter-terrorism in the United States as well as in Israel, I have concerns about schools as potential targets. While we must avoid knee-jerk reactions and panic, we must be realistic. In other countries, terrorists have repeatedly targeted schools, school buses, as well as places of worship, to hit their victims hard – and where it hurts the most.

I will never forget the first time I saw a group of Israeli school children on a field trip. Standing close to the children was a young man in his early 20's. He was wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt. The man was leaning casually against a wall with an M-16 rifle hanging from a shoulder sling. I then learned that in Israel, school children are not allowed to go on a field trip without an armed escort. This measure was implemented after two school groups were gunned down by ruthless terrorists.

Here we have had our own woes. In 1986, a couple armed with explosives and firearms took hostages in a Cokeville, Wyoming elementary school. Two militia types took over a small private school in Alabama in another incident. These cases, along with numerous incidents in other settings, should remind us Middle Eastern groups are not the only terrorist threat. And of course, we should remember schools can be dramatically affected by nearby acts of [terrorism](#), even when they're not the primary target.

These recent tragedies require a calm and pragmatic re-evaluation of all existing prevention, planning, and response measures. If you have methodically worked to create a safe school environment over the past few years, you should have a solid platform to operate from. However, most schools across the nation do not have a comprehensive and effective safety strategy that fits the current threat level. And while this statement was true for traditional threats prior to the tragedies in New York and Washington, D.C., it is even more pertinent now.

If you have not taken steps to reduce the vulnerability of your facilities to bomb incidents, you are not properly prepared. If your emergency operations plans do not outline steps on handling a mass casualty incident, you have work to do. If you have not addressed how a chemical, biological or radiological incident in your community would affect your school(s), you should begin to do so immediately. Many [terrorism](#) experts accurately predicted our nation would see incidents like the Oklahoma City Bombing and the first World Trade Center bombing. They also said we are likely to see at least one large-scale incident involving chemical, biological or radiological aspects. This holds true as we have already had one instance involving hundreds of people contaminated by a biological weapon, and another incident in a school involving a deadly toxin. If you are not prepared to meet threats of this level, you have clear reasons to do so now.

Other areas of focus in your efforts should include:

A review of current access control measures. Review personal and vehicle access to facilities with public safety officials. When possible, seek ways to make parking an unauthorized vehicle close to a building difficult. Consider measures to reduce the ease of driving a vehicle containing explosives into a school through the use of physical barriers. This should be done more so to prevent the types of situations that do not relate to [terrorism](#) where individuals have driven vehicles onto school grounds and into school buildings, sometimes striking children.

An evaluation of the types, numbers and capabilities of security and police personnel assigned to and/or working closely with your schools. If you do not have a strong law enforcement partnership, your schools are as outdated as schools without computers.

The design of schools for safety. The principals of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) should be in use in your schools.

Involve local public safety and emergency management officials in emergency operations planning. It is still common for schools to simply copy a plan, or to purchase a “plan in a can” without properly tailoring it with the assistance of local public safety officials. Also, make sure school officials are integrated into the incident command structure.

Conduct a tactical site survey. Be sure to invite representatives from each of your area public safety agencies.

Develop mutual aid agreements. All school systems and private schools should have formal mutual aid agreements to ensure they have the resources needed for a major incident.

Carefully review bomb threat procedures with public safety assistance. Make sure you are not “setting yourself up for the kill” when you react to bomb threats. If you simply evacuate 500 feet to the same football field every time you receive a bomb threat, you are extremely vulnerable to a devastating attack targeting evacuees.

If even one major incident occurs in an U.S. school, school event, or on a school bus, it will be difficult to calm the fears of parents, employees, and students unless you already have measures in place. As we can see from the difficulty of reopening our airports, waiting to have contingency plans for dramatically enhanced safety measures can be disastrous. Use a calm and measured approach to prepare for threats that we all hope will never materialize.

Terrorism and Schools

June 2002

I decided to allow time to pass after the tragic events of September 11, 2001 before writing this column. The occurrences of that day as well as of the following months created a sense of panic as people came to grip with the reality of [terrorism](#) on American soil. Though we have had many other acts of both domestic and international [terrorism](#) in our country, most people could not face the reality of the dangers posed by [terrorism](#) until that fateful day. And now that time has passed and people are settling back down, the time is appropriate to more directly address the threat of schools being selected as specific targets of [terrorism](#).

I have included antiterrorism measures in my training programs for many years. Prior to last fall however, many attendees were skeptical when we covered such topics as target hardening HVAC systems, developing protocols for chemical and biological incidents, and advanced bomb threat management techniques. Now that school and public safety officials have a heightened sense of awareness regarding the potential impact of [terrorism](#) on our schools, we are flooded with requests for our terrorism in schools training. So, it seems the time is right to begin a frank discussion on this topic without adding to the hysteria that was running rampant for a while in our society.

First, we must accept the fact our nation is in for a heightened threat of incidents of [terrorism](#) for the long haul. I routinely interact with a number of top experts in the fields of antiterrorism and counterterrorism and not one of my colleagues feels we are anywhere close to out of the woods. Most predict we will in fact see an escalation of terrorism in our nation during the coming decades. The months of

antiterrorism and counter [terrorism](#) training I have attended in this country and in Israel tell me these experts are on the mark. And my training and experience causes me to be concerned about our children as specific and incidental targets of [terrorism](#).

While we had two acts of domestic [terrorism](#) in schools in our country - one in a small private school and one in a rural elementary school — these incidents occurred many years ago. Both incidents involved right wing homegrown terrorists who were not very sophisticated and were not formally trained terrorists. Schools in other countries have not been quite so fortunate. When terrorists struck an elementary school in Ma'alot, Israel in 1974, 22 children were murdered. I will never forget noticing off-duty soldiers with their M-16 rifles casually slung on their shoulders protecting children as they visited landmarks and tourist attractions in Israel. The Israeli response to having two busloads of innocent school children ruthlessly gunned down by terrorists was to increase security rather than stop having field trips for their children. Children have been targeted in other nations as well. On May 10 of this year, a remote controlled bomb in Kaspiisk, Russia killed 36 people including 13 children during a parade. Schools, and most particularly, elementary schools, have several traits terrorists seek when they select targets: (1) they are soft targets; (2) school violence incidents garner considerable media attention; and (3) acts of [terrorism](#) in schools grip parents with fear for their children's safety causing significant reactions across the country.

We must understand that as in Israel and other countries, we may be forced to rapidly modify the type and level of security in our schools even if a single incident takes place. If a busload of children were gunned down by a terrorist in a small town in Wisconsin next week, would it have an impact on your transportation system? If a high school football game in Texas were hit by a chemical attack and dozens or even hundreds were killed, your game security measures would have to change quickly lest we capitulate, stop playing football and draw even more of the same types of attacks due to their success. If a murder/suicide bomber drove a sport utility vehicle loaded with 1,000 pounds of explosives through the front doors of an elementary school in a town most of us have never heard of and killed several hundred children and teachers, you better have an idea of how to immediately increase security in your schools.

Now is the time to discuss such concerns with local public safety officials. While the chances of any one individual school being a direct

target of [terrorism](#) are extremely remote, the impact on all would be dramatic and instantaneous. If our schools are slow to resume “business as usual” with enhanced security measures, we would more likely see additional incidents.

I detailed in a column last fall some appropriate [anti-terrorism](#) measures for schools in the post 9-11 world. For those who wish to remain cutting edge when it comes to school safety, it is appropriate to actively investigate your options in the event a single act of terror changes the equation. While I do not predict we will have a wave of [terrorism](#) in our schools, we should be braced for the very real possibility that terrorists will select one or more schools as primary or secondary targets in the future.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

April 2003

A few school safety and [terrorism](#) “experts” are working hard to drum up business by predicting a wave of [terrorism](#) in our schools. In a U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education threat management symposium a few months ago, a participant asked a speaker about the concerns expressed by one “expert” that a certain violent scenario would be carried out by terrorists. The Secret Service agent said while such an occurrence was possible, it was highly unlikely. She also stressed such predictions were not supported by any available reliable intelligence information available. She suggested some consultants might be making statements in media interviews to instill unreasonable fears and stir up work.

HELPING THE TERRORISTS

Sadly, that is part of how terrorism works. Media reports exaggerate the actual individual level of danger from terrorists. We have seen a crop of people with no actual experience or professional preparation holding themselves out as experts on [terrorism](#) in schools. The Secret Service agent is not the only one concerned about such unsavory characters.

ASK QUESTIONS AND LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE ANSWERS

Sony Shepherd is a respected colleague of mine who is one of the few people in the country with actual full-time experience working in government units that deal with school safety and [terrorism](#). Sony served as a School Safety Coordinator for three years and was promoted to serve as the State Antiterrorism Planner for the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. Last year, she was selected as the

Bioterrorism Exercise Coordinator for the Georgia Department of Human Resources. Sony suggests that before putting stock in the advice of anyone claiming to be a [terrorism](#) expert, school officials ask some basic questions:

1. Does this individual have formal training in [anti-terrorism](#) or counter terrorism?
2. If so, who provided the training that makes this individual an authority?
3. Has the expert worked in a full-time capacity in the field of [terrorism](#), and if so, in what capacity?
4. Is their background relevant to the information being provided? Antiterrorism involves efforts to counter, reduce and plan for acts of [terrorism](#) while counterterrorism focuses on military or law enforcement tactical responses to acts of [terrorism](#). For example, a retired military officer with experience in counterterrorism operations may be well qualified to advise law enforcement tactical teams, but poorly prepared to help you in school emergency operations planning. A government antiterrorism planner may be extremely helpful in reviewing your school emergency operations plans but might not be qualified to train school resource officers in tactical responses to [terrorism](#) incidents. Few people have solid backgrounds in both antiterrorism and counterterrorism.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONCERNS?

While future events may dictate changes in areas requiring additional attention, there are certain specific points where school officials may want to focus their efforts. These are not limited to the prevention of and preparedness for terrorist events. In fact, good security and emergency preparedness measures designed to reduce risk of [terrorism](#) often have much in common with efforts designed to reduce the risks associated with accidents, typical acts of violence, mass contamination incidents, natural disasters and other hazards of concern. Evaluating access control, security hardware and the effectiveness of your school/law enforcement partnership goes a long way to target harden your schools. Reviewing your emergency operations plans to see how solid protocols are for bomb threats, major acts of violence, lockdown, incident command, evacuation and shelter-in-place

procedures is also a major step in the right direction. In short, there is no need to develop a new emergency operations plan for [terrorism](#). The focus should be on making sure your old plan is a good one. Unfortunately, far too many school systems rely on poorly developed plans purchased from those who have more skill in marketing than in emergency operations planning.

FOCUS ON THE BASICS FIRST

Dr. Robert Friedmann of Georgia State University serves as the Director of the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange Program (GILEE). Through GILEE, hundreds of high ranking police officials from the United States, Israel, Austria and Hungary have traveled to participating countries for intensive training focused on antiterrorism, counterterrorism and community policing. As a trainer for officers coming to the United States and having spent 14 days in Israel through the program, I can easily say it is the most intensive of the nearly 19 months of formal public safety training I received during my two decades in law enforcement. Dr. Friedmann stresses effective efforts to reduce and respond to [terrorism](#) are directly tied to the kinds of measures we should have in place to address more traditional concerns. Dr. Friedmann believes community-based efforts like community policing are among our most effective tools to address [terrorism](#).

While schools around the world have been targeted by terrorists in the past and will continue to be in the future, our response must be deliberate and practical. Beware the wolf in sheep's clothing that may be more interested in your district's funds than in the safety of students and employees.

Answering Parents' Tough Questions

February 2001

School safety centers receive many inquiries from parents asking how they can evaluate schools for safety. Are you prepared to answer hard questions posed by informed parents?

A BASIC OUTLINE

A highly visible, confident, involved, approachable and assertive administrative team is a key element of a safe school. No amount of security technology, law enforcement presence or other measures can overcome the limitations created by weak administrative leadership. If administrators don't demonstrate commitment and support for their staff and students, safety will be compromised. Indifferent responses, inconsistent discipline and lack of visibility in the school create numerous small problems that lead to big incidents. If I had to use one word to describe the best school administrators, it would be "omnipresent."

COMMUNICATION

In an ideal situation, school administrators work tirelessly to maintain open lines of communication throughout the school. The most glaring symptom of an unsafe school is an administrative team that expends more effort to conceal school safety incidents and problems than time working cooperatively to correct them. If administrators do not communicate openly and honestly with school employees, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, students and parents, the school is not as safe as it could and should be.

Efforts to educate students and parents and to train staff on safety-related topics should be in place. Of particular importance is

an environment where students, parents and employees can easily report potentially dangerous conditions or situations. If students do not know how they can report such situations, there is work to do.

A safe and orderly school is operated with thoughtfully established and clearly communicated guidelines. Everyone in the building – students, administrators, teachers, school employees and visitors — receives reasonable notification of what is expected and acceptable behavior while on school property.

STRATEGIES

A school's lead school administrator should be able to produce a written safe schools plan that addresses all four phases of emergency management (prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery) upon request. The philosophy driving that plan should allow for plenty of input from students, parents, representatives from every local public safety agency, emergency management, mental health providers and others who have an interest in school safety. Plus, a tactical site survey should be completed each year.

I caution parents to be very concerned if the only thing their school administrator can provide is a flip chart outlining basic steps to take in a crisis. A school administrator who has nothing more is far more likely to face a crisis, and is doomed to failure in a major crisis situation.

ACCESS CONTROL

A stranger should not be able simply to walk onto the campus and roam the building. Any school can be open and inviting and still be reasonably secure. Every school should have a strategy to screen students and visitors for weapons. This is an area that is seriously lacking in many schools. Nationally, only a tiny percentage of [guns](#), [knives](#) and other [weapons](#) brought to school are recovered. The [weapons](#) screening program should be tailored to fit the threat level at the school. While entry point metal detection is not a viable option for many schools, there are a number of other ways to detect [weapons](#) and deter people from bringing them on school property. While many elementary school officials feel [weapons](#) reduction efforts are not relevant to their situation, many of the [guns](#) seized from students each year are confiscated from elementary students.

LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP

No school should be without a strong law enforcement partnership. The approach should be tailored to fit the needs of the school, and

designed in a manner that maximizes the available law enforcement resources. No combination of other components can replace the valuable benefits of an effective school/law enforcement partnership.

How will you answer tough questions posed by informed parents? More importantly, how safe is your school? If any critical elements are missing, it might be time for some modifications.

One Size Does NOT Always Fit All

March 2002

A newspaper article a few years ago announced the New York City Public School System was facing a \$2 billion budget cut. That is significant because the budget cuts are larger than the total budget of many school systems. None the less, the headline paints a picture of a huge organization tasked with educating a diverse and urban population in more than 1,000 schools across the city. On the other end of the spectrum, a rural South Dakota school district might have sixty students in grades K-12. Furthermore, a small and selective private school in northern California will also be different than a school run by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in Cherokee, N.C. And while all of these educational organizations must address some of the same risks, it is obvious there would be significant differences in how they should do so.

A customized approach for school safety is always required if meaningful results are desired. While this might seem obvious, it is not uncommon for people to attempt to copy school safety concepts from elsewhere with little or no effort to tailor them to the size, structure and unique settings they will be implemented in. While there is nothing wrong with looking to examples of successful measures, they should be viewed as more of a starting point than a finish line. Although our society has moved away from customizing and adopted a one-size-fits-all” view to many issues, schools should not. One common example is the plan-in-the-can approach used by companies who offer a ready-made emergency operations plan. Some of these plans cost a little more than \$100 while others run more than \$60,000. This is particularly dangerous as there are many poorly

developed emergency operations plans out there, and some of the worst plans look impressive at first glance. One of the worst school emergency operations plans I have reviewed cost a large school district well over a \$1 million (the plastic binders alone cost more than \$12,000). Why throw away money on a fancy plan that will likely fail during a major crisis? Unless the plan contents can be easily modified to fit local needs and resources, it is not realistic to expect it would work in the various school settings described earlier.

Some school safety consultants have sold the same basic plan to schools for several years. Making little effort to tailor the plans, they simply change the name of the school system or institution for each client to print on the “plan”. This approach raises the same concerns. Even some government agencies have taken this path on occasion by providing generic flipcharts to schools with no attempt to encourage locally tailored plans. Another common problem is the tendency for some school officials tasked with school safety duties to simply copy a plan from another organization without any meaningful effort to tailor the plan or even check the plan contents.

Similar problems arise in the prevention arena. Commonly, undue credit will be given to one particular aspect of an overall prevention strategy. For example, there have been a number of instances where a metal detection program was credited with dramatic drops in [weapons](#) at a school. In reality, schools with significant success using metal detection programs have typically added other supporting programs at the same time. When used with other supporting efforts, metal detection programs are extremely effective. But like so many other strategies such as school resource officers, crime prevention through environmental design and character education programs, [metal detectors](#) alone do not make safe schools. This is why attempts to copy proven prevention programs sometimes fail. Often, local officials have invested a lot of time and resources in a particular aspect of a broad school safety strategy. This can lead to an overemphasis on the “magic bullet” that is actually only one of numerous components that work so well together. Even when some of the other programs do not, at first glance, seem to be important, they often are. When reviewing prevention programs from other settings, be sure to look for any peripheral measures that may play an important role in supporting more visible safety efforts and take those into account. In addition, it is important to remember even identical programs will result in varying amounts of success from one local to another. For example,

the use of citations to appear in court has resulted in dramatic reductions of problematic behaviors in communities where judges actively support the concept with significant consequences for violators. In other communities where judges do not agree with the concept, only modest gains have resulted.

Finally, a customized approach to school safety requires more initial effort than simply trying the “copycat” approach taken by many. In reality, many school officials find the more complex and tedious route to a tailored approach is more time efficient in the long run, and they frequently report it is significantly less expensive as well. Regardless of the side benefits, made-to-order school safety is more effective than the one-size-fits-all approach any day of the week.

School Safety Involves Everyone

October 1999

If schools are to face up to the incredible challenges of violence in our modern society, a comprehensive approach involving all school employees must be used. Too often, we overlook school personnel who can help us to dramatically improve the level of safety we all desire to achieve.

A typical example might be the school custodian. Many school administrators overlook the value of involving custodians in the school safety program when it's your custodian who could save a life at critical moment. As just one example, think about the ever-growing frequency of school bomb incidents —hoaxes and real devices. Who knows our buildings better than our custodians? Who can spot the suspicious package faster? Who can help us ensure every nook and cranny of our building has been properly evacuated during a crisis?

Many other employees are often overlooked when school safety training is delivered and when updating school emergency operations plans. Have bus drivers been trained on how they will need to function when students and staff must be relocated quickly to a remote family reunification center during a crisis? Have we trained all school staff who answers telephones on what they are to do if they receive a bomb threat? Do all substitute teachers know what to do during a lockdown? Do they know all emergency phrases that may be used to notify them of critical situations or the need to carry out emergency functions? Have we included our cafeteria staff in our post-crisis debriefing protocol to ensure they have the proper assistance in dealing with trauma if a major event occurs?

Effective safe school planning and crisis response measures require a great deal of effort because they are ongoing processes. No one in the school community should be overlooked. One interesting example of this approach is the Environmental Health and Safety Specialist Program under consideration in the Bibb County Public School System. When the Bibb County Sheriff's Department asked the school system to take over the school crossing guard function, there were significant concerns that the 28 officer school district police department would be seriously strained in attempting to cover the 50 crossing guard posts on days when a number of crossing guards might call in sick at the same time.

A new approach was developed by the Associate Director of Operations with the creation of the Environmental Health and Safety Specialist classification for school custodians. The custodial supervisor created an enhanced job description for those custodians who are capable of handling additional safety related duties. After a screening process is completed, a group of custodians from each school in the district will be selected for additional training and job responsibilities. Each safety specialist will participate as an ongoing training process program to prepare them to function as relief crossing guards and to help with other important safety duties. Safety specialists will be trained to serve as additional eyes and ears for school administrators and campus police. They will be trained to report and coordinate rather than to confront potentially dangerous situations directly. A few areas of training and responsibility will include:

- Using visual screening techniques to spot persons who are carrying a [gun](#) on or near campus.
- Conducting a sweep of the building for suspicious packages which could contain an explosive device or a delivery system for a chemical/biological weapon.
- Helping to evacuate the building during a crisis.
- Helping to manage parking at the family reunification center during a crisis at another school in the district.
- Constantly monitoring the school for any type of safety hazard.
- Serving on the school safety committee.
- Making suggestions to improve the level of safety at the school.

Environmental Health and Safety Specialist-qualified custodians could also serve as an excellent resource pool for the school system for supplemental support persons for large special events and other special situations. Those custodians who choose to take on the additional responsibility can earn additional income and feel the pride of being involved in making their school safer. This would dramatically increase the safety level of children and other staff. The concept is currently only a proposal, but it shows much promise as an example of how staff members can be included in the safety program for schools.

Each school should look to its most valuable resources — the people in the school — for answers to pressing school safety issues. It is often amazing just how much help may be right in front of us. Making school safety a true team effort can improve morale, give employees a sense of control over the fear they may feel concerning recent events in our nation, and can help make our schools safer places.

The Maginot Line

October 2002

Monday was a busy day as a group of second graders was making their way along the nature trail behind the school with their teacher. A fifth grade class had just departed on a bus for a field trip to a local museum, and still another group of children were in the cafeteria listening to a presentation by a local bank president.

At 10:12 A.M. the deadly cloud drifted slowly towards the elementary school. Every child and teacher at the school was in imminent danger as the toxic cloud began to make its way to the campus. At 10:15 A.M. the principal notified Mrs. Johnson to activate the school crisis team — he had just been notified by the local emergency management agency that a tanker truck was involved in an accident about a half mile from the school. He was advised to shelter the children in place as the deadly chemicals would reach the school before an evacuation to a safe area could be carried out. Within minutes, the crisis team was assembled and began to discuss the situation. They immediately realized there were several serious problems with their emergency operations plan. The plan did not include a shelter in place protocol; and the staff had no guidance to address the situation with the bus that might be headed right into the cloud. A team member pointed out that a teacher and a group of students were out of the building for an activity on the nature trail. Team members began to experience frustration and panic as they realized children as well as the team members were woefully unprepared for the deadly situation. People in the school and in the bus could be in grave danger in a few minutes.

Fortunately, the above scenario is simply part of a functional exercise I recently conducted to help school crisis team members test their emergency operations plans and hone their skills in simulated crisis conditions. As previously mentioned in this column, the most carefully developed and detailed emergency operations plans are still mere theory until they are tested by a real event or with appropriate emergency operations [exercises](#). Serving as the lead technical expert for one of the nation's largest government school safety centers, which has responded to more than 300 public and private school crisis situations around the nation, has been revealing. These experiences have driven home the point that few schools have viable emergency operations plans. Even more so, these incidents, my training sessions, and the review of many emergency operations plans from around the nation has impressed upon me that many school and public safety officials are significantly overconfident in their prevention strategies and level of preparedness for crisis situations.

Being a history buff, I sometimes use the example of the Maginot Line in France as an analogy. French political and military leaders were so confident in the ability of their complex and carefully prepared fortifications, they were blind to the risks to France from a German invasion, even though a German officer wrote and published a book on a concept that would eventually be used for a successful assault on France. The huge and well-equipped French army would be overwhelmed by the attack because a basic flaw was not identified and corrected. One of the most powerful nations in Europe would fall and much French blood would be spilled due to this oversight.

On a smaller scale, the safety of many school children and educators is reliant on flawed prevention and preparedness concepts. Dependence upon untested theories when there are proven ways to test our systems is like playing Russian roulette with school children. Experience and careful research illustrates criminal incidents, [bullying](#), and many hazardous conditions often remain undetected in our schools. Most student firearm violations are not detected and many a child is bullied in a school bathroom unbeknownst to school officials. Unless and until serious efforts to evaluate the danger level in a school are completed, the real level of safety is in question.

I have rarely conducted a tactical site survey of a school where hazardous conditions were not uncovered. [Tactical site surveys](#) should be completed in each school every year. In the same manner, annual surveys of students and staff are one of the most reliable ways to identify risk before someone gets hurt.

On the preparedness side of the house, appropriate emergency operations [exercises](#) should be conducted annually *after* the emergency operations plan has been developed. Initially, only [drills](#), table top [exercises](#) and functional [exercises](#) should be used before moving on to full-scale [exercises](#). A properly designed full scale exercise takes six to eighteen months of preparation and students should not be used as role players. Make sure the exercise is coordinated by someone with experience in the field of emergency management and is evaluated by external personnel. And most importantly, determine what specific areas of your plan are to be tested.

You can evaluate efforts, respond to crisis situations and more importantly, reduce the odds your plan will be needed. Don't find yourself in the terrible situation many of your colleagues have faced because of sometimes simple oversights. Make sure history does not repeat itself in your schools.

Contamination Threats

December 2000

A Florida middle school student recently contaminated salsa in the school's cafeteria with poisonous Talon-G pellets. According to media reports, as many as fifty students were affected, and a number of them had to be taken to the hospital. The type of poison used was also utilized as a rat poison in the school, which indicates the troubled youth may have obtained his weapon of choice from the school itself. Fortunately, the amount of poison ingested by the unsuspecting children was not a lethal dose, and all were treated and released from the hospital.

This incident should cause school officials to review their prevention strategies and their emergency operations plans to see if they are comprehensive enough to cover incidents of a non-traditional nature. The poisoning of a food source is only one type of contemporary threat that must be considered. Group or mass contamination using chemical, organic, radiological or biological agents is a viable threat due to the types of information available on the Internet.

A number of school districts have experienced situations where students and non students have sprayed mace, tear gas, or pepper spray in classrooms, hallways, or other public areas to disrupt the school routine. In a few cases, individuals sprayed pepper spray into school air handling units to contaminate numerous classrooms at the same time. In one case in an elementary school, teachers and students began to panic because they did not know what was causing their physical distress, and the situation almost became chaotic even though they were in no real danger.

Unfortunately, contamination of a facility with more deadly agents can be as simple as making a trip to the home supply store and purchasing several dozen “bug bombs”, locking down the caps, and placing them next to an air handling unit. With a little more ingenuity, a disturbed individual or group can download recipes for deadly nerve agents such as sarin, which was used in a relatively inefficient manner to kill 20 people and to injure thousands of others in the subway attacks in Japan.

During the past two years, numerous schools around the country have experienced “anthrax scares,” which one expert calls “the bomb threat of the year 2000”. In this scenario, the perpetrator mails an envelope containing powder to a school official with a note that the powder contains anthrax and the person who opened the envelope is contaminated. A number of school officials have experienced rather frightening waits for conclusive laboratory results.

Accidental situations can also occur such as one incident in an Alabama school where students were exposed to toxic fumes due to a ventilation system being installed backwards. When the ventilation system was turned on while a car was being painted in an automotive shop class, a number of students were overcome by toxic fumes pumped into their home economics classroom. Other accidental situations occurred due to simple but critical mistakes or oversights.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce the chances an intentional contamination or an accidental exposure will affect occupants of our schools. Conducting a vulnerability assessment using a multi-disciplinary team helps identify potential trouble spots and results in viable suggestions to decrease danger. All area public safety and emergency management agencies should be asked to provide a representative for the assessment as well as custodial and maintenance staff. Food service personnel should also be on the assessment team and representatives from the appropriate county and state food service regulatory agencies should be invited. The team should be asked to look at each facility to try to identify potential vulnerabilities and practical ways to address them.

Specific techniques to target harden facilities can range from making access to HVAC systems more difficult, to better security of cafeteria foods keeping toxic chemicals in locked areas. One area of concern is the potential for terrorists or others to contaminate a food source with toxins such as botulinin toxin. Contamination could occur at a food processing facility, a warehouse, during shipment, or at school

system food storage sites. This type of attack could result in mass contamination, and at least one major terrorist group has explored the possible use of this technique. There are a variety of strategies that can reduce the vulnerability of a facility to accidental or intentional contamination. Experts in the use of [weapons](#) of mass destruction believe creating a less vulnerable target can cause potential perpetrators to move on to an easier target elsewhere or even decide not to commit the crime.

As no preventive measures provide absolute protection from mass contamination incidents, school emergency operations should address them. Mass contamination incidents can require a variety of complex responses such as mass decontamination of victims or rapid shutoff of HVAC systems. The same team that conducted the assessment of school facilities should be help develop viable protocols for mass contamination incidents. It is critical the school emergency operations plan is coordinated with the communities' emergency operations plan to address these types of incidents.

Unfortunately, the current capability of one individual or a small group of individuals to cause illness, injury, and even death to the majority of the occupants in a facility has become a real threat. When these dangers are combined with the hazards of accidental contamination incidents, no community can afford to ignore the dire need to address them.

The Humanization of School Safety Technology

Some of the worst school violence episodes in our nation's history have been captured on surveillance cameras. Not to say that cameras are ineffective, but like any other safety measure, they are of limited use without interlocking and supportive measures.

We are prone to the use of technology to solve problems. Sometimes, this works extremely well, but sometimes results aren't so good. Many look toward the use of security equipment to ensure the safety of our schools. Unfortunately, even excellent school safety equipment can only be expected to deliver optimal results when combined with what can only be described as the "human touch".

We sometimes hear complaints of the "prison-like" and "impersonal" environments created when security cameras, [metal detectors](#), identification card systems and other technology are incorporated into the school setting. There have been major acts of violence in schools where a heavy investment in such equipment is made. This causes many casual observers to mistakenly believe these and other types of security technology don't work.

If we look further take a closer look, we typically see several problems:

- Security equipment is purchased as a single approach "answer" to school violence problems and isn't integrated into a comprehensive approach to school safety.
- The equipment is selected without a proper evaluation to match it to the needs of the application the equipment is selected for, for example, installing security cameras that are

fitted with a lens that is not suitable for the lighting and distance requirements.

- Those who are to be protected by the equipment are not consulted to see if they have any suggestions as to how the benefits of the equipment can be realized without creating an oppressive environment.
- The technological resources are added without adequate preparation to ensure employees are prepared to work with and complement the effectiveness of the technology.

There are situations where access control systems in a facility are compromised by human error such as an employee holding open a door for a complete stranger. There are instances of [guns](#) smuggled through a metal detection checkpoint at a courthouse or an airport. We hear of a burglary not being detected because someone forgot to turn on a burglar alarm system. These situations often lead people to assume the technology isn't valuable. Instead, we should question how the equipment was selected, implemented, and integrated into the environment. In this regard, schools can be similar to other facilities. If we fail to consider how the technology will work in a caring environment, problems are likely to surface.

Often, schools must be run on limited funds. This makes it even more critical decisions to purchase security equipment and technology are made thoughtfully. If you are considering the purchase of access control systems, security cameras, [metal detectors](#), incident reporting software, or other types of technology, consider the following:

- Do you know how to achieve the benefit of the technology while maintaining a positive and caring environment for students, employees, and visitors?
- What is the reputation of the manufacturer and vendor? What kind of tech support can be expected?
- Is the equipment matched to your specific needs or will you be trying to match your needs to the equipment a particular vendor wants to sell?
- How does this equipment fit in with your overall approach to school safety?
- Have you established a sense of priority for the use of available funds?

- Is there a government or corporate grant source that might pay for this technology?
- Have you considered how this approach will impact efforts to utilize crime prevention through environmental design?
- Have you addressed all of your concerns through proper staff development and information strategies for students?
- Are you prepared to properly train and educate students and staff to maximize the benefits of the equipment?

Of course, I have used the terms equipment and technology interchangeably in this column. The concepts we have explored are relevant whether we are discussing a relatively inexpensive and simple piece of equipment such as a handheld metal detector, or a \$65,000 state-of-the-art security X-ray machine. The considerations are just as important when we talk about old technology or technology that is relatively new to the school setting such as the CD-ROM crisis response systems appearing on the market.

Fortunately, many equipment vendors realize the importance of providing potential customers with useful information to help them in the selection process and to assist them in integrating specific school safety products into their environment. Government resources are also available such as the National Institute of Justice research report – *The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools*. This manual can be downloaded from www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/. School safety centers and private consultants can also provide assistance in this quickly evolving area.

There are many types of technology that can help schools reduce problems with disruption, crime, and violence. By viewing them as important components that must be combined with human resources, schools can obtain the maximum benefit from the advancements in available technology that. As with any other aspect of educating youth, the human touch is important. If you do your homework, you can make the grade in school safety technology.

Beware the Snake Oil Sellers

July 2001

School administrators are constantly seeking ways to improve school safety. There are some exceptionally skilled consultants who are willing and eager to assist in creating safer schools. Unfortunately, there are also many unscrupulous individuals who are exploiting the concerns of educators for financial gain. And often, these individuals do more harm than good.

There have been a number of sad situations where school districts used their limited funds to hire an “expert” only to find the necessary safety services were lacking. In one instance, a school district paid a consultant more than \$100,000 to develop emergency operations plans that turned out to be nothing more than a generic plan with the name of each school inserted. Fortunately, the district was later able to develop a viable plan by working with local emergency management and public safety personnel.

In another case, an “expert” who only recently began working in the school safety field, told school officials at a training session (costing \$250 per person) that they should never call law enforcement officials when a student makes a threat – even when the threat involves a mass [weapons](#) assault and it is believed that the student is serious. Given the number of such assaults successfully thwarted through school/law enforcement cooperation, this advice is disturbing. Another consultant offers training for teachers to show them how to disarm individuals with handguns, shotguns and rifles – an incredibly reckless concept at best.

It is a sad fact some in our society are focused on increasing their personal wealth with little real concern for improving safety in our

schools. How do we determine which services will help to create the safe school environment we all desire? While there are no easy answers to this question, there are some guidelines to improve your odds of success. The following are some “red flags” that should cause some skepticism.

Money is the main object. If a consultant is continually trying to sell you their services and seems more focused on billable hours than on your needs, beware. Sharp school safety consultants have more work than they can handle.

You hear what you want to hear instead of what you need to hear. Be alert for the “yes man” who is more interested in stroking your ego than in helping you avert disaster that could ruin your career and leave you with severe feelings of guilt.

Consultants who are new to the field. Consultants who have begun working in the area of school safety during the past several years are popping up like dandelions now that the demand for services has exploded. Many of these individuals are extremely limited in the quality and scope of services they provide. Consider whether the person’s background prepared him or her to advise you properly.

I did it wrong but can tell you how to do it right. The consultant’s main credentials involve one or more experiences where they failed to provide a safe school environment. These individuals can sometimes offer valuable insight into what it is like to go through a crisis unprepared, but they are rarely a good source on preventing and responding to school crisis situations. If you had concerns about your football team, would you seek out a coach with a track record of losing?

No experience. The consultant does not have practical experience proven to be effective in real-life situations or has no solid base of research experience.

Copycat. The consultant relies heavily on the experience of others and simply regurgitates their concepts. This type of individual can rarely provide the depth of information needed to deliver high-quality services. Unqualified consultants frequently use the materials of others without crediting them and more importantly, without understanding the information they are providing. If you observe this trait, RUN!

Imposters. The consultant does not have specific credentials or is reluctant to provide reasonable documentation of credentials. Beware of vague language such as: “Mr. Jones studied psychology.” Instead of “Dr. Jones completed his Ph.D. in Psychology at Columbia in 1982 and is licensed as a psychologist by the Commonwealth of Virginia.” One school safety consultant has falsely claimed degrees, falsely alluded to being a former assistant district attorney, a criminal investigator and has conducted mental health debriefings without being licensed or trained to do so. Relying on this type of individual could result in significant civil liability and embarrassment for your organization. Consultants who simply make up their credentials are extremely common. Real experts with solid credentials appreciate an informed client who asks for verification. After all, if the credentials are real, then the consultant should have nothing to hide.

Before hiring a consultant, be sure to check with local, state and federal government and non-profit agencies to see if comparable services are available at no cost or for lower cost. There is a wide array of free and low cost services available to schools. As with private consultants, evaluate the credentials of government experts as well, one state government school safety center hired two individuals who falsely claimed to have earned college degrees.

School violence can be reduced dramatically with professional guidance. By doing some careful research, checking available free resources and checking references, you can receive valuable assistance. A good school safety consultant is more than worth the investment. Unfortunately, school districts must use caution in seeking expert advice to avoid being victimized.

Cell Phone and Pager Blues

August 2002

Many schools have policies prohibiting students from carrying cellular phones and pagers while at school. However, many have begun to question the wisdom of these policies in light of the events of September 11. Some feel the negative aspects of students having these devices at school are outweighed by the possibility students might find it necessary to use cell phones to call for help during a crisis such as a shooting, bombing, natural disaster, or other catastrophic event at school. In addition, many school officials report difficulties enforcing policies designed to regulate student possession of these popular devices.

While there is merit to each of these points, careful consideration should be given before abandoning these policies. There are definite safety concerns regarding student possession of pagers and cell phones while attending classes. Most policies banning these devices were developed to avoid classroom disruption and to curtail communications between gang members and drug dealers during school hours. These are all valid concerns. In several cases in one school district, gang members sent coded pages instructing other members, who were in school, to kill rival gang members. There was at least one shooting where a gang member was notified of his victim's exact location on campus via cell phone (and four students were shot when more than 30 rounds were fired in the school gym). There were many instances of communications where drug sales on campus were transmitted via pager and cell phone. And anyone who attends professional seminars regularly in recent years has experienced the distraction of adults who forget to set their beepers and cell phones on silent mode. If adults

have so much trouble remembering to respect their peers and presenters, can we expect better results from students?

But there are far more pressing reasons to be concerned with pagers and even more so with cellular phones among students. The most compelling reason is that when schools allow students to carry these devices, they typically encounter greater difficulty in managing critical incidents on campus. In one case, a high school principal decided not to enforce his district's policy on electronic communication devices, and significant disruption resulted when a series of bomb threats were called in for his school. Each time a bomb threat occurred, students began to call parents en masse. Many of the students exacerbated the situation, and hundreds of panicked parents rushed to the school, blocking all streets leading to the facility. In another instance, a number of people drove across the campus grounds during the confusion, endangering students and staff. Moreover, in one case, students called local television stations and falsely reported a bomb actually detonated, resulting in the appearance of news helicopters over the school and much adverse publicity and further panic. There were also indications several of the bomb threats may have been called in by students at the school using their cell phones. The confusion caused by student use of cell phones during a major incident can make it difficult, if not impossible, to effectively manage the crisis. In the end, the school district spent more than \$250,000 to rectify the problems created by the principal's lack of enforcement.

Another concern is that some explosive devices can be detonated by the cumulative radio frequency energy from the use of cell phones during a bomb threat or bombing incident. While the circumstances where this can occur are exceedingly rare, there is some risk. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms reported more than 60 actual explosive devices were placed in U.S. schools from 1998 to 2001; so this aspect cannot be taken too lightly. Though it is unusual for radio detonation devices to be used by bombers, it does happen.

Some advocate students should be allowed to carry cell phones because of situations like the Columbine shooting and bombing attack. I participated in a live remote television interview on the Law Enforcement Television Network with personnel from several tactical teams who responded to the Columbine incident. They made repeated reference to the confusion caused by erroneous information called into the 911 center during the incident. Another concern was that many students called the media and gave away their hiding

places on live national television when it was still not known whether the aggressors were still in the building with access to television. In one school shooting incident last year, emergency medical technicians refused to enter the campus until police arrived because the caller was a student, and they were concerned they were being set up for an ambush. While they were criticized for their actions, such concerns cannot be dismissed in light of the types of school incidents we saw in recent years. In fact, EMT's in the Atlanta area were repeatedly shot at by a sniper when they responded to his fraudulent calls until he was finally shot and killed by police.

Fortunately, while effort is required to enforce student possession of these devices, there are many schools that have been quite successful in keeping them out of the classroom. For example, one district of more than 25,000 students found few of the devices during surprise random metal detection checks after a policy was implemented to require a \$25 recovery fee.

While there will assuredly be scenarios where a cell phone would prove to be valuable to students in a major crisis at a school, the more common situation is a significant impediment to critical incident management. If the topic of allowing students to carry these devices becomes an issue in your community, weigh the pros and cons carefully before taking either path.

Site-Based Decision-Making

Many school districts use site-based decision-making to improve the quality of education students receive. One frequent problem is the failure to properly coordinate school safety efforts between schools. Many public safety officials express concern, if not alarm, at the lack of standardization between schools in the same district when critical issues such as [emergency operations planning](#) and certain prevention measures are addressed. While there are a number of opportunities for administrators at different schools for varying techniques to prevent, prepare for, respond and recover from school crisis situations, certain safety issues demand a standardized and coordinated approach. Through proper evaluation, an appropriate balance can be maintained between the need for consistency in the district and the desire for autonomy at the site level.

Some concerns involve the real danger of a potentially life-threatening situation being mishandled because one or more schools does not establish and follow a viable procedure. For example, if a site team at a particular school decides students reported to possess a [gun](#) will be searched by school officials without police assistance, injury, death or hostage situations are far more likely to occur. Another school may choose not to use a multi-disciplinary threat management approach to evaluate instances where a threat was made and multiple violent deaths could occur. Some situations are so critical they must be handled in a specific manner to reduce the chances a tragedy may occur. And while experiences demonstrate these mistakes are made with or without site-based management, allowing every site team in a large district to decide how to address critical

and specialized safety concerns will increase the odds this type of catastrophic failure will take place.

An even more common problem relates to [emergency operations planning](#) efforts. Some school districts require or allow each site team to develop its own unique emergency operations plan. This approach is more likely to result in failures than in workable plans. In a district with numerous schools, there are many problems inherent in having numerous separate plans. School system employees who work in multiple schools, are promoted, or transferred, must be able to function the moment a crisis occurs. Only through the use of a standardized system plan can staff be expected to function at any one of several schools on a moment's notice. Public safety responders and system wide school system personnel cannot be expected to provide effective support when every school has a different plan. One emergency management professional recently noted the lockdown procedures were different in each school in his community. He said when responding to school situations around the county, public safety and many school officials are repeatedly confused because the emergency status card systems and lockdown procedures are different at each school. He also said an emergency operations exercise and an actual shooting incident proved non standardized plans used by the district were not working.

Critical safety-related district wide policies and emergency operations plans are more likely to be effective when developed by a broad-based team comprised of school officials, local public safety personnel, students, parents and other relevant community representatives. In many instances, once the critical issues are addressed in a standardized fashion, a site-based team can (and will need to) tailor the system wide measures to fit their unique school. For example, the master emergency operations plan should outline specific action steps to be taken for a bomb threat no matter which school is affected. Each site team would then develop specific site procedures to detail how these steps will be accomplished and by whom. The site procedures should then be inserted into the plan in the corresponding section. This method serves to relieve individual school administrators and the district of considerable civil liability, prevents a tremendous amount of extra work that would be required if each school has to create its own plan, and helps ensure high risk and high liability issues are addressed in every school.

A happy medium between reasonable standardization and localized control can be achieved with careful thought and planning.

Let None Learn in Fear

Appropriate standardization of critical safety functions also has the benefit of freeing up school-based administrators to handle other important duties. In one district of 25,000 students, administrators consistently reported they found the use of a standardized base plan tailored with specific site procedures by their site-based team took a tremendous load off their shoulders and resulted in a feeling of far greater confidence among staff that they were prepared for a major crisis event.

The Law Says...

Have you ever been in one of those situations where you found an excellent solution to a problem only to be told, “The law says you cannot do that?” Education is one of the most highly regulated activities known to mankind. Educators are literally hamstrung by a plethora of statutes, code sections and case law. When it comes to situations involving law enforcement, even more legal conditions apply. Of course, concerns for civil liability are often a compelling factor in decisions regarding how students will be protected. An incredibly litigious society has resulted in many schools being dominated by inaction because they are mired down in regulations, rules and laws relating to safety and discipline.

QUESTION “THE LAW”

There are countless myths regarding “the law” as perceived in our schools. In one community, officials wanted to revise school bomb threat response protocols to better protect students and staff. The old practice of automatically evacuating for every bomb threat would make it easy for a knowledgeable bomber to target evacuees and cause a mass casualty incident by patterning the responses of school officials. For years, commanders from the local fire department insisted a county ordinance required schools to evacuate for every bomb threat. When asked for a copy of the ordinance, however, they could not produce it. When the matter was researched further, officials found no such statute existed.

WE NEED MORE TIGERS

Unfortunately, years of litigation involving schools created an exaggerated sense of fear among many school officials. While the threat

of litigation is real, it is easy to focus on the wrong issues. We often have the fierceness of lambs while the plaintiff's legal counsel exhibits the traits of a tiger. Frequently, this fear of assertive action results in increased vulnerability for students and civil liability for school officials. For example, most courts around the country uphold searches of students based on reasonable suspicion by police officers acting under the authority of school officials. One school district was been sued over various school safety issues (including two violent student death cases) and decided not to allow school police to search under these conditions for fear of litigation. School police are required to wait outside the principal's office while administrators search for [drugs](#), [guns](#), [knives](#) and other contraband. While this is a dangerous practice at best, it has created greater exposure to civil liability than the practice was designed to avoid. After more than a year of following this practice, school police (who receive intensive training in school search and seizure through the state's 88 hour school resource officer course) became aware one administrator was instructing students to strip down to their underwear when he was searching them for contraband. The strip search of students under these conditions creates a "slam dunk" case for any remotely competent attorney.

LEARN THE LAW

School systems that seek expert legal advice from specialists can avoid much needless litigation while better protecting their students. The district where I served as police chief has one of the most aggressive search strategies in the nation. The district police have used detection dogs, random locker inspections, random metal detection, and many other types of searches on and off campus to reduce [weapons](#) violations. School police conduct the vast majority of searches and were challenged by competent legal counsel and by a powerful national civil rights group. The department's strategies relied on the advice of Dr. Gary Avery, one of the nation's top school search and seizure experts for many years. And not one search was ever found to be unlawful in court during the past 15 years while these practices were in use. By getting training and advice from one of the best in the business, the district, serving a high-risk community with more than 25,000 students, has not had a single civil action relating to the school police or alleged inaction by the district in this same time span.

FRONTAL ATTACK

One military concept holds that under certain conditions, an aggressive frontal assault will result in fewer casualties than the traditionally safer use of flanking maneuvers to engage the enemy from the side or rear. There are times when directly addressing safety problems with approaches that might appear to increase the risk of civil action can similarly reduce actual risk. If a school district of 50,000 students recovers 500 [weapons](#) in the course of a year based on traditional means such as tips from students, the risk of a student [weapons](#) assault is significant. While the district could face legal challenge if a random [weapons](#) screening program is implemented, a properly developed and implemented program should withstand court scrutiny. Conversely, the weapons problem indicates students will almost assuredly be assaulted with [knives](#) or other weapons because even with relatively ineffective methods, large numbers of weapons are being recovered. When these assaults occur, the likelihood of litigation and the chances it will be successful are high.

By knowing the law and focusing on doing what is right to protect staff and students, schools can reduce risk of injury, death and disruption while also decreasing civil liability.

Use it or lose it

As a rookie university police officer, I attended my first police academy many years ago. Only half of us were able to graduate from the rigorous and demanding three-month program to move to the next step of learning how to apply what we had learned under actual conditions. One four-hour block of instruction was designed to teach us sign language in case we needed to communicate with hearing impaired persons during an emergency. The instructor stressed we would need to practice what we learned if we had any hope of being able to apply it under field conditions. I practiced signing the entire alphabet when I went jogging each day, but I never had occasion to use sign language. After several months passed, I stopped practicing.

LOSS FOR WORDS

About a year later, I was called to meet with a group of upset individuals and upon my arrival, I found that every member of the group was hearing impaired. As I strained to remember how to sign, the already agitated group grew even more frustrated. Upon experiencing my poor excuse of communication, I was only able to tell them that I could sign slowly. After I signed that, I was at a loss and finally resorted to using my pen and notepad to communicate. Finally, a gentleman arrived who was not hearing impaired and could sign properly. When he explained to the group I was taught how to sign in the police academy but had not kept up with practice, a flurry of signing erupted amid laughter from the group. The tension of the situation was broken, and I was able to help resolve the original problem — the group had scheduled the use of a room for a meeting, and someone from the university had

dropped the ball, leaving the group without a meeting space. When I asked what the group was laughing about, I was told a member of the group had commented “use it or lose it” when he learned I was trained on sign language only to allow my skills to lapse. Though it was embarrassing at the time, the episode taught me a valuable lesson. The information we receive through formal training, education, reading and daily interaction with others is only as powerful as our application of what we learn. This lesson is also applicable to seminars and other communications of school safety information.

ASTUTE STUDENTS

I teach a powerful program on [weapons](#) concealment and detection. I routinely receive feedback from former attendees who were able to avert planned school shootings and recover [guns](#) and other [weapons](#) using the information they learned. I often relate their successes during my presentations to demonstrate to attendees the information is only as powerful as their use of what they learned. One example involves a school psychologist who stopped an armed robbery at a grocery store because she noticed a man was carrying a concealed handgun. By practicing what she learned in the class, she not only stopped an armed robbery, but she also received a \$50 gift certificate! At a recent conference in Texas, a participant in one of my sessions related the most impressive success story to date. He attended one of my sessions in Oklahoma City three years ago and began immediately spotting armed students. In fact, his observations have since led to the recovery of 52 pounds of edged [weapons](#) from students. He said no one in the district previously had any idea students carried so many [weapons](#) and his colleagues were astounded at his ability to detect them. He tried to tell them how simple the techniques are, but they still continue to believe he has a unique talent. As a pleasant side note, he also reported the district promoted him to safety coordinator! By listening and applying what he learned at a conference, he has not only dramatically improved the level of safety in his schools, he was rewarded with a higher salary and a position he finds to be even more rewarding than his previous position.

ATTENTIVE ADVOCATES

Some say information is power. Motivational speaker Brian Tracy contends information is “potential power,” and it is the application of information that is power. It tears my heart out when I hear of a child’s death in a school that could have been easily averted if the right

people in the school were exposed to and utilized the right information. Information contained in articles, videos and training sessions, were used to prevent accidental and violent deaths on campus. But the information available to protect our children is only as good as its application. You would not have read this column if you were not concerned for the safety of your students and staff. The trick is to be sure to use what you have learned over the years to be the best you can be at what you do. The safety of our schools depends on it.

Let's Not Turn Our Schools into Prisons

July 2002

How many times in the past few years have you heard the phrase “Let’s not turn our schools into prisons”? Many are quick to utter the phrase as soon as security measures like [metal detectors](#), security cameras, access control systems or school resource officer programs are mentioned. Unfortunately, far too many of our schools are prisons without them – prisons of fear. I do not suggest every school should implement every one of these measures, but there are many schools that need but do not have them. Too many of our children are allowed to die in schools where appropriate security measures were not in place. The “Let’s not turn our schools into prisons” mantra sometimes comes from ignorance based on lack of awareness as to the real level of risk in a particular school, and lack of knowledge as to how such measures can be implemented without making children feel like prisoners.

Some parents and school officials still question the need for [SROs](#) in their schools, particularly armed officers. I will never forget the words of the principal of Pearl High School when he said he never even considered the need for a [SRO](#) until he saw children dying in his school. He recalled thinking at that moment that he would have given every material possession to have had just one officer on hand to stop the carnage. Interestingly enough, the adults make a much bigger mountain out of the [SRO](#) issue than the students we are so concerned with. A statewide survey of Florida high school students revealed the [SRO](#) was identified as the “most trusted adult” on campus by 94 percent of students surveyed.

Another common concern that confounds me is the issue of security cameras. While cameras are sometimes overrated in their effectiveness,

they can make a significant difference if used appropriately. I once met with school officials and elected board members in a fine restaurant in an upscale Maryland community. I was informed a number of parents strenuously objected to the idea of security cameras in local schools. As we discussed the topic, I noticed there was a security camera in place for each table at the restaurant! I suppose those same parents would refuse to dine at what I was told was among the most popular eating establishments in the community. Funny how people will readily accept security cameras in a bank, convenience store or hospital but will balk at the idea of using the same devices to protect what is most precious to them.

And of course, we are apt to hear the phrase applied when metal detection is discussed. Most students and parents are not aware of the actual rate of [weapons](#) carried in our schools, so they may be inclined to raise a considerable fuss if metal detection is mentioned as an option unless a child is actually killed in their school. With less intrusive options available for schools such as random metal detection programs, it is interesting how it takes an actual incident to change people's perspectives. I was asked to observe and evaluate the metal detection program at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. According to Bob Padhrasky of Garrett [Metal Detectors](#), the "Salt Lake City Winter Olympics were by far the largest and most comprehensive security event ever held." Mr. Padhrasky said more than 475 walk-through and 950 handheld [metal detectors](#) were utilized for screening. When contrasted to the 60 walk-through units relied upon at the Los Angeles games, the metal detection program was intense. Other security measures, such as elaborate identification cards (it took hours to get mine while a second background check was run on me), security cameras and the presence of large numbers of law enforcement officers were also evident. The 2002 Winter Olympic Games were clearly a high security event. And how did the public respond to this intense security? While reviewing metal detection checkpoints at the games and nearby facilities, such as Temple Square, I heard one positive comment followed by another. According to a front page article in the *Desert News*, the metal detection program was "wildly successful". A survey of 400 people showed the following results to the question, "How satisfied were you with the level of security at the 2002 Winter Games?" 87 percent "very satisfied", 9 percent "somewhat satisfied", 0 percent "not very satisfied", 0 percent "not at all satisfied," and 4 percent "don't know". And no one said they felt like they were in

prison. These responses echoed the attitude of the people I spoke to at screening stations. After standing in line for 45 minutes; they repeatedly said the wait in line was worth the peace of mind that would allow them to enjoy the games. While it is clear an act of [terrorism](#) could still have occurred it did not—even though there are probably some who desired nothing more than to mar the games with an act of violence. Also, 42 percent of respondents to the survey said they were confident security was tight enough to foil “any terrorist plot,” and another 47 percent said they were somewhat confident in the same level of safety. The end result is the Atlanta Games will be remembered for a bombing while the Salt Lake Games will be remembered for the games themselves. How will your schools be remembered?

The Little Things That Count

January 2002

Security. Technology. Community-based school safety plans. Multi-disciplinary threat management teams. All of these require considerable time and effort. No school can approach an acceptable level of safety without them. Each of these and other important areas of the big picture of school safety requires a commitment. At the same time, it is easy to lose sight of the basics of a safe school environment. Too often, we forget the importance of paying attention to the little things in life so critical for a safe and effective learning. Some schools are equipped with the most expensive state-of-the-art security equipment, only to experience a high rate of problematic behavior. Why are we so surprised when a major act of violence occurs in an environment where students, staff, and visitors see, hear condone, tolerate and even participate in a host of unhealthy behaviors each day?

As just one common example, what would happen if an angry parent entered an elementary school in your community and loudly used profanity towards a school secretary, a teacher, a custodian or a bus driver? It astounds and bewilders me that in many American communities, such incidents occur without meaningful consequence to those who abuse school staff members. School officials in most states have a list of possible recourses including having the perpetrator taken into custody by law enforcement officers, having officers issue the violator a citation to appear in court and even having the culprit banned from school property. And yet, rather than take these reasonable and rational steps to support school employees, and to maintain a safe, peaceful and orderly environment for our kids, many schools tolerate this

incredibly unacceptable antisocial behavior. Why would it surprise us that a student would openly curse or threaten an educator when we, by our lack of action, demonstrate it is acceptable for adults to do the same? Also, employee recruitment and retention can be problematic when staff members are sometimes treated inhumanely by individuals who have little or no respect or concern for others. I certainly hope such incidents are not tolerated in your schools. I must unfortunately report I have had feedback nationwide from thousands of seminar participants that their schools do indeed tolerate such conduct. The impact of this deterioration of school climate is significant.

A clean environment can also enhance safety. I recently had the good fortune to hear a presentation by Gregory Thomas who formerly served as the Executive Director for the Division of Student Safety and Prevention Services for the New York City Public School System. Greg now serves as the Director of the Program for School and Emergency Preparedness at Columbia University. In addition to being a talented speaker, he makes some astute observations. Mr. Thomas places great stock in maintaining a clean school said unclean facilities are at greater risk for crime and disruptive behaviors.

Politeness is another environmental standard with a major behavioral impact. When I attended the FBI National Academy program in Quantico, Virginia for three months, I was deeply impressed with something the academy staff managed to do. Realizing that the hundreds of trainees from various organizations around the world will have to live apart from friends and family for extended periods of time, they created a remarkably friendly and polite environment. A standard of conduct was established that requires people to speak politely to each other as they meet one another in the halls of the large maze of connected buildings. The impact of being greeted continually through the day with “Good morning, sir” or “How are you today?” is something one must experience to appreciate. While I have never seen anyone achieve such an incredible level of genuine participation elsewhere, many schools have done an excellent job of creating a warm, friendly and polite environment. Efforts on these lines will bear considerable fruit in creating an environment that feels safe while actually being safer than they would otherwise be.

Without viable, appropriate and enforceable policies, it is difficult to at least maintain a safe and orderly environment in most settings. This is even more telling when viewed in the context of schools. There are a host of behaviors that, when left unchecked, tend to escalate into

problems between people. When students and even staff are allowed to treat others with disrespect, we can expect problems. And most importantly, any form of threatening or physically invasive behavior must be addressed promptly and effectively.

By focusing on those seemingly minor issues in schools, your staff can support the major components of your safety strategy and hopefully avoid major problems. Small problems do grow into big ones – Remember, the little things count.

Know When to Call For Help

February 2002

Administrators in a large metropolitan school system were recently criticized in the national media for allegedly botching a situation involving child molestation by a group of young children. Prosecutors and law enforcement officials maintain criminal charges cannot be pursued because school officials mishandled the situation before law enforcement officials became involved. Allegations of this type have surfaced in other regions involving cases as serious as murder. In another school sexual assault case, three men who raped a special education student went free because an assistant principal began conducting his own investigation before the arrival of law enforcement officers. Educators, like other professionals, must know when to hand situations over to those who are more qualified.

Today's school administrators face situations far more complex than ever before. They must make a wide variety of decisions each day, and many have a considerable impact. Some choices have lasting consequences, whether positive or harmful. Just as they would summon a school psychologist to work with a student with severe emotional problems, school administrators must know when to involve and listen to the advice of public safety experts.

Just how serious can these situations be? Well, in one case in a small town, school staff members would not leave the scene of a hostage situation as directed by law enforcement officials. Instead, several school employees tried to negotiate with the student who was armed with a shotgun, even though a trained police hostage negotiator was on the scene and advised them to leave. After one staff member upset

the student, he swung the [gun](#) towards the educator. In the resulting [gun](#) battle, the student was killed and two police officers were permanently disabled.

Another common situation involves emergency operations planning. There are many instances where plans developed without input from local public safety and emergency management officials have failed during school crisis situations. One major purpose of school emergency operations plans is to minimize additional loss of life, injury and damage to property when a crisis occurs. This aspect of [emergency operations planning](#) makes cooperation between educators and public safety officials the only acceptable option.

Failure to utilize this type of cooperation can suddenly become the most costly mistake a school official can make. In one case, school administrators decided to search a student for a [gun](#) without police assistance. Allowing an unarmed and untrained individual to search a student suspected of committing a felony violation with the potential means to kill others not only doesn't make sense but shows reckless disregard for human life. In this particular case, one administrator paid for the mistake with his life, and another was shot and wounded. This particular case took place a number of years ago, but some school administrators are still making it a practice to put themselves and others at needless risk. Just this week, several paraprofessionals at a training session complained administrators required teachers and paraprofessionals in their school to search every student in the school because of a tip a particular student had a [gun](#). Female employees were particularly uncomfortable because they were required to pat down male students. This type of case not only involves some serious questions about the legality and efficiency of the search, it also raises significant issues involving the extent to which the safety of school employees can be endangered. The courts routinely hold that schools cannot require school employees to risk their safety in this fashion.

A number of steps can be taken to reduce the risk these situations will occur. Here are several that address some of the more common events requiring public safety assistance:

- Meet with law enforcement officials to develop specific protocols to be followed whenever information is received that someone has a weapon on school property or on a school bus. Once the protocols are developed, they should be communicated to all school employees, volunteer staff and law enforcement officers.

- Develop a policy requiring immediate notification of law enforcement officials whenever a report is received concerning a crime of a sexual nature. Meet with law enforcement officials to develop information to guide staff on actions that should be taken while police are en route.
- Require by policy that the fire department be notified immediately and evacuation procedures implemented if there is any indication of a fire in a school.
- Develop written guidelines specifying when emergency medical service personnel should be notified. Establish a procedure for a staff member to meet responders to escort them to the incident location.
- Coordinate [emergency operations planning](#) efforts with area public safety and emergency management officials.

Incidents like those described can be and typically are handled properly by school officials who develop a smooth working relationship with their local public safety and emergency management officials. A healthy dose of mutual respect and cooperation between school and public safety officials can go a long way toward helping everyone get what they truly want — safer schools.

An inexcusable Crime in Schools

December 1999

One of the most challenging and significant safety problems in schools is the underreporting of crime. The failure of school officials to properly recognize and report school crimes is an issue that must be dealt with if we are to protect our students and those who educate them. All states and the federal [Gun Free School Zones Act](#) require certain crimes be reported to law enforcement officials. Unfortunately, the violation of these reporting laws still occurs frequently around the nation. Such violations of state and federal law by school officials are inexcusable because they allow dangerous conditions in schools to continue to remain unidentified and ignored.

We are long overdue for the reality check that only comes when we recognize unlawful situations in schools for what they are – criminal acts. Only through analyzing crime trends both on and near school campuses, can proper prevention and response strategies be developed. According to the National School Safety Center, more than 300 violent school deaths took place since 1992. What must the death toll be before every school takes a serious and straightforward look at their specific crime trends?

It is still not uncommon for a student to be caught with a [gun](#), [drugs](#), or other weapon at school without criminal charges being filed. There are still school administrators with [knife](#) collections and other [weapons](#) in their desk drawer – [weapons](#) never logged in as evidence by law enforcement officers because the violation was handled “administratively”. If you have such a collection, or allow those who report to you to do so, I plead with you to look at yourself in the mirror and ask

some tough questions. The “mirror test” can be quite revealing when dealing with those tough decisions school officials often face.

If a child or school staff member dies as the result of a [weapons](#) assault, will you be able to look in the mirror and feel you did everything you could to prevent it? Will you be able to look their family members in the eye? Will you be able to look at the jurors in civil court in the eye if you must testify in your own defense? Or will you follow the path of so many of your colleagues who have had to wonder if they had done all they could to protect those whose safety was in their care?

Sometimes, in the field of school safety we must tell educators what they need to hear rather than what they would feel comfortable hearing. It is particularly unpleasant to write this knowing some who read this have had to struggle with these difficult questions following an incident. The importance of this topic requires we do so. We must consider disturbing things that have or can happen to prevent from having even more disturbing experiences and additional unpleasant memories that will never go away.

Last year, I a law enforcement officer in one of my seminars become upset and asked to speak with me privately during a break. It upset him that a number of participants in the seminar told me they did not have any significant criminal activity in schools in the region. He said he was forced to shoot and kill a 16-year-old student in the local high school lobby after the young man took hostages and shot two police officers. What upset him most was the realization the incident wouldn't have happened if police were called in prior to the incident. There were seven specific criminal offences where the perpetrator was victimized at the school. None of the incidents were reported to the police. The young man finally reached the end of his rope and reacted in rage resulting in a horrible tragedy in this small town. There has since been another violent school death in the same community.

I meet few educators who I would consider to be lazy or dishonest. I meet even fewer that I felt did not truly care a great deal about their students and staff. I have however, met a number who appear to underestimate the level of potential danger in their schools and who minimize it unrealistically. It is not uncommon for a violent incident to occur in schools traditionally thought of as safe. When we look deeper, we often see a lack of adequate safeguards due to this perceived sense of safety.

While no measures can assure absolute safety, a carefully developed and comprehensive safety program can dramatically reduce the threat level in any school. A key step in developing a successful program is the analysis of crime trends in and around each school. Once these trends are identified, effective countermeasures can be selected and put into place.

School image is important, but a false image regarding school safety is dangerous. We cannot properly address school safety problems until we have identified and analyzed them. It is time to treat criminal code violations in schools as what they are – crimes. Those who chose to obey the law and trust us to protect them deserve no less.

What Our Kids are Reading

(Titled - A Realistic Look at Security Threats when printed)

April 2001

Recently, an 18-year old from Elmira, New York, was arrested when he was found with 18 bombs and two [guns](#) in his gym bag. In Hoyt, Kansas, police arrested three teens after a search of their home revealed [weapons](#), bomb materials, white supremacist literature, and a map of their school. A planned hostage taking by two middle school students in the tiny town of Temple, Georgia, was averted when police and school officials responded to a tip and searched two students as they arrived at school. [Weapons](#) and a roll of duct tape were found in their book bags. They readily admitted they were going to take students and teachers hostage.

As more communities are using multi-disciplinary evaluations and the information available from sources such as the *Early Warning Signs/Timely Response* and the FBI and U.S. Secret Service reports, dozens of near catastrophes were averted in the past several years. Some feel our schools are “out of the woods” because the last mass school shooting took place just over a year ago in rural Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. Make no mistake about it: While schools and police are responding more effectively, the number of attempted planned school [weapons](#) assaults is alarming.

Mental health professionals and experts from a number of other disciplines provide us with an array of causal factors and conditions to explain why a small percentage of our youth feel the need to enact major acts of ruthless violence in our schools. In *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*, Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman and co-author Gloria DeGaetano make a good case that modern video games condition unstable youth to kill with military efficiency. But where else do

young people learn how to wage war on our campuses? The answer is a mouse click away.

The information age provides ample opportunity for anyone who wants to acquire the knowledge to create mayhem. Regardless of the motivations of those who desire to lash out, the means to do so has never been so easy to obtain. A routine inquiry using an Internet search engine reveals considerable information on bomb making and other more deadly endeavors. This is a good reason to ensure someone checks the computers in your schools to make sure such sites are properly blocked. There are a number of incidents where students downloaded information on bomb making and hate group literature from computers right in their school's media center.

An even wider selection of deadly instructions can be obtained from hundreds of books, instructional manuals, and videos. Just a short list from one catalogue contains such titles as: *The Guide to Germ Warfare*, *Ragnar's Homemade Detonators*, *Improvised Land Mines*, *Field Expedient Hand Grenades*, *Improvised Radio Detonation Techniques*, *The Poisoner's Handbook*, *The Militia Battle Manual*, *The Black Book of Arson*, *Homemade Grenade Launchers*, *Urban Combat*, *Homemade Submachine Gun Plan*, and volumes I and II of *How to Make Disposable Silencers – a Complete Guide*. The same catalogue contains 67 pages of similar titles.

There is also a considerable amount of information available through Internet chat rooms. Consequently, a number of individuals have already been prosecuted for supplying Internet information used in at least one mass school shooting. There is no shortage of people with expertise in mass killing. Even more disturbing, some of these individuals are willing to share this information with young people.

The implications for school administrators are significant. Some of our youth have and will continue to use this type of information to harm others. While the likelihood of a major planned event is slight in any given school, the consequences of failing to prevent such an incident are beyond description. Administrators must remain cognizant that it only takes one individual to carry out a major act of violence. Measures must be in place to reduce the chances a planned event will occur.

It is equally important [emergency operations planning](#) measures are adequate to address situations created by perpetrators who are intelligent and well studied in the ways of death and destruction. Keep in mind that a number of school [weapons](#) assailants were extremely

intelligent — some were even honors students.

We see the consequences when communities are caught unprepared for major events. Having reviewed plans for districts from across the United States, it is clear to me most communities are not properly prepared to handle the types of major school crisis situations we have already seen. Even fewer communities are ready to handle the type of situations we have come close to experiencing but have been spared. As horrible as the tragedy at Columbine High School was, it could have easily been far worse. Experts from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms estimate more than 400 people would have been killed if the improvised propane device had detonated in the school's cafeteria.

Have you measured your prevention strategies against these potential challenges? Are you really confident in your emergency operations plans? Have you tested your plans through appropriate emergency operations [exercises](#)? Unless they are tested through extensive practice or actual experience, prevention and response measures are still based in theory. Can you afford to rely on what may or may not work when the stakes are so high?

Body Count

Some government agencies, school safety experts and the media representatives stress the number of homicides in American schools declined sharply in recent decades. This is a primary indicator used to assure the public all is well in our schools. Though no one has complete and accurate historical data on homicides in our schools, the limited available data does support the contention that fewer people are being murdered in our schools than in past decades. But as we become fixated on the number of incidents resulting in fatalities, are we lulled into a false sense of security by a façade of numbers?

SHATTERING THE MYTH

Groundbreaking research results released earlier this year indicate the much touted drop in the American homicide rate may be more due to advances in emergency medical care than other factors. Anthony Harris, the director of the criminal justice program at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst, along with three other respected researchers, published a paper in the May issue of the *Journal of Homicide Studies* that challenges many popular notions about homicide in America. The researchers provide compelling evidence that the major influence on the reductions in the murder rates are directly correlated to vast improvements in emergency medical treatment. In short, they report a person who is shot, stabbed or otherwise suffers a traumatic injury today is much more likely to survive than a person who received a similar injury in previous decades. The statistics they offer in support of their argument show while the murder rate has dropped, the number of people seriously wounded in violent attacks

has risen sharply.

**THE NUMBERS MAKE A STRONG POINT AND COMMON SENSE
SUPPORTS THE LOGIC**

According to the research, the ratio of serious assaults resulting in death dropped by about 70 percent. Using their ratio to extrapolate the rate of homicides that would occur without the improved medical care, the researchers said between 30,000 and 50,000 Americans would be murdered each year in our country, more than doubling and potentially tripling our current murder rate. Twenty years of experience working with victims of [weapons](#) assaults and the emergency medical personnel who cared for them leads me to believe their research is on track. Many of us in public safety have felt for years improved emergency care was having a favorable impact on the homicide rate, but most of us would not have realized the impact was so significant.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SCHOOLS?

If the projections are correct, they would obviously apply to incidents of school violence as well. This would make the much touted estimates that school homicides are down sharply in the past two decades not as solid an indicator of reduced levels of serious violence as previously asserted. If the research is accurate, our schools would be the scene of two to three times the number of homicides were vastly superior emergency medical care not available. Keeping in mind the majority of victims who are shot, stabbed or otherwise seriously assaulted survive, the real rate of serious violence in our schools is much worse than the rate of violent deaths would indicate when viewed in isolation. While we are all pleased a higher percentage of victims are surviving their wounds, our ultimate goal should be they not suffer in the first place.

OTHER SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS

While the research obviously has significant implications for school violence, there are other significant points to be gleaned. Violence is not the only cause of death in our schools. Students, faculty, staff and visitors die more often from medical emergencies and accidents on campus than from acts of violence. Better emergency medical care also improves the likelihood a student will survive an injury resulting from an accident. Like the homicide rate, this means we can just as easily miss the significant cues provided by accidental deaths on campus, which should spur us to action. Just as schools must focus

on reducing violence, there is a need to work diligently to reduce risks likely to result in injuries from accidents. Another consideration is whether schools fully utilize the advances in emergency medical technology that can aid in further reducing other types of death on campus. We now have available to us excellent emergency defibrillators that can dramatically improve the survival rate of a student, staff member or a visitor who experiences a heart stoppage on campus. These remarkable units are becoming more commonplace in our airports, private businesses and government buildings. They clearly have a place in our schools as well.

The school safety arena is frequently fraught with political pressures for school, government officials and others to proclaim our schools safe. The media vacillate between hyping the situation beyond reality and painting a picture that school and public safety officials are overreacting. Regardless of how the available data is interpreted, it is safe to say even those with the most optimistic views relating to safety would agree we would like our schools to be safer than they are. The fact that the body count is often a primary consideration in our evaluation of the level of safety in our nation's schools in and of itself indicates we have much work to do.

Section Three

Preventive medicine

What You Don't Know Can Hurt the Children

March 2001

Yet another news crew was set up across the street from the elementary school. They were obviously going to shoot footage for another story about the arrest of the fourth-grade teacher, charged with molesting three students. The media was having even more of a field day now that they knew the teacher had previously resigned under pressure from a teaching position in another state after allegations of inappropriate conduct with students. Plus, the teacher was convicted for the possession of child pornography several years before. Naturally, the parents of children at the school were in a state of hysteria, school board members were asking tough questions and at least one local attorney was already priming his subsequent civil case against school officials.

It is sad that countless such scenarios have unfolded around the country. They result in significant legal expenses, loss of confidence in those who educate our children, damaged morale of school employees and most importantly, irreversible damage to those who are victimized. What is even more disturbing than the fact such situations occur is the reality most could be prevented if reasonable measures were taken to screen employees.

What should be done to screen those who will be trusted with access to property and people in your schools? What are the limitations of checks for previous criminal records? When is the last time screening measures used by your organization were reviewed?

A number of states now mandate criminal history checks on candidates applying for jobs in education. Even when not required to conduct such inquiries by state law, responsible public and private

school systems require applicants undergo a background check as a condition of employment. Failure to screen applicants properly is an invitation to disaster.

There are millions in the nation's applicant pool with lengthy criminal records for violent crimes, drug offenses, and crimes involving theft. Incidents around the nation document many unfit and even dangerous individuals are hired to work with and around children.

Sexual child predators, above all else, seek access to children. They frequently apply for positions that give them the opportunity to interact with young people. School systems that do not conduct criminal history checks will eventually hire such individuals, and these individuals will then victimize innocent children.

Workplace violence is another tragedy that can sometimes be avoided through careful applicant screening. In a number of incidents, the perpetrator was hired after establishing a clear pattern of violent criminal behavior. Careful examination of prior work history and a criminal record check help reduce the risk of such tragedies.

Also of concern are thefts that take place due to inadequate screening of employees. Hiring someone with a dozen theft-related convictions and giving them access to anything valuable will likely result in losses.

The custodian who steals ten computers, or the accounts payable manager who embezzles \$200,000, has frequently obtained the position by simply lying on the "previous criminal convictions" section of the job application – and taking the gamble many employers either do not actually attempt to verify this information or don't do so effectively.

Screening candidates for previous criminal conduct is only one aspect of crime prevention through hiring practices. Requiring six work-related references, instead of three, and interviewing each reference will paint a more accurate picture. A pre-employment drug screening program will help to weed out many potential problem employees, as will careful verification of all major credentials. Careful evaluation of all employees takes time, effort, and fiscal resources. Lax review that results in an incident down the road can take even more time, effort and expenses. What is important to remember is this: What good is it to ask for information such as references and previous convictions if you don't take advantage of the information?

Let us not forget contract employees, substitutes, temporary workers, and yes, even volunteers. Stolen property is just as gone if removed by a smiling parent volunteer as if removed by a regular employee or

a thief in the night. The media coverage will be just as embarrassing when a substitute teacher snaps and physically assaults a student as when a full-time teacher does the same.

Unfortunately, all background checks are not the same. Be sure to find out the limitations of the criminal history check you are using. In some states, legislation limits the types of information an employer can uncover. When contracting for background checks, services vary dramatically from one company to the next. One school system contracted with a private security company for two dozen security officers to supplement their school police force in an effort to save money. After officers recognized a security officer they had arrested for involvement in a drive-by shooting, they began to check the backgrounds of all security officers serving under the contract. More than half had prior arrest records including charges for rape, armed robbery and drug distribution. The type of background check utilized by the security company was so limited in scope it missed all these arrests.

Regardless of how you choose to screen your employees, several things are important. Ask many questions. Remain vigilant and alert. There are dishonest and dangerous individuals who will seek employment with your organization. The only way to protect your school system, your employees, and the children under your care is to be thorough and afraid of what you do not know. What you fail to discover about a candidate can hurt the children.

Dealing with Trespassers

*From the feature article in **School Planning and Management Magazine**:*

Trespassing. It doesn't sound so bad. But, left unchecked, it can lead to far worse violations of your school's safety.

November 1998

The trespasser on a school campus can pose problems ranging from minor disruptions to mass murder. Fortunately, the latter is still an extremely rare event. While disasters grip our attention, the much more common act of violent behavior between these two extremes and pose the most danger to our schools. Trespassers can be safely and effectively dealt with using a number of techniques proven useful in school systems around the nation.

First, we much define the term *trespasser* in the context of a school setting. I include as trespassers non students, students on suspension, employees on suspension and, under certain conditions, students' parents. Let us first consider non students and students on suspension before moving to the much less pleasant topic of suspended employees and parents who pose a threat to school order and safety.

WHERE THE DANGER LIES

Schools have a tremendous advantage over most jurisdictions because they can usually prevent crime by banning those who are likely to commit unlawful acts from school property, and in some cases, from the school safety zone around each campus. Most police departments would have a much easier job if they could simply ban the "usual suspects" from entering the city. Banning local criminals before they commit crimes on campus is a proactive measure to create safe schools. This technique is particularly effective when used with gang members, drug dealers and other miscreants. There is no reason to allow a local man who is a known drug dealer to hang out and mix with students in the high school parking lot each afternoon. Banning this type of individual from campus before he has an opportunity to

sell [drugs](#) to students is just plain common sense. Yet, it is surprising how often schools fail to address this type of situation until it is too late. In one case in South Carolina, a drug dealer shot and killed a student in a high school parking lot after he was allowed to hang out on campus. In another case in Georgia, an alert school resource officer banned several known gang members as soon as they tried to enter campus. When they attempted to sneak onto campus again a few minutes later, he arrested them and searched their car. During the search, he recovered two handguns and a sawed off shotgun. The resulting investigation revealed they were on campus to shoot and kill a student. His alertness and the stance of school officials to keep trouble makers off campus averted an almost certain bloodbath.

The next category involves students who are suspended, assigned to an alternative program or expelled from school. The student who returns to a campus and commits an act of violence following a suspension is not at all uncommon. If your state trespassing law allows it, each school should make it a standard practice to ban all such students during the period of the disciplinary action. Students need to know they will be arrested on sight if they are found in a school safety zone or on school property. The ban for suspended or expelled students should be applied to school activities and sports events as well. A violent incident at a basketball game has the same implications as one at the school itself. Police personnel assigned to the school should be made aware of all suspensions for this reason.

In addition to security related benefits, this practice also serves as an added incentive to students to obey school rules to avoid suspension or expulsion. A student with no qualms about getting suspended for three days may care a great deal about not being able to attend school events or activities important to them, such as football and basketball games. If a student is aware of this added penalty of misbehavior, he or she may work harder to avoid trouble.

As a general policy, students should also be prohibited from entering schools in the system other than the one they attend. Students from other school systems and private school students should not be allowed to enter your public school property without just cause.

Our officers once arrested two students from a nearby rural high school with loaded handguns as they tried to sneak the [guns](#) into a basketball game. My officers have also arrested numerous private school students for [weapons](#) violations and drug charges, arrested one private school student who attempted to come to an event to shoot a

public school student from a rival gang, and another parochial school student who attempted to pull a loaded [gun](#) on three of our officers to shoot his way out of an arrest. Consideration should be given to these types of problems with students from other schools who may come to your campus to sell [drugs](#) or assault your students.

WHEN EMPLOYEES AND PARENTS POSE A THREAT

In some rare cases, an employee who suspended from work or who is being terminated may pose a threat to the safety of other system employees or students. While such cases require careful evaluation, it may be wise to ban such incendiary individuals from school property when their words or actions indicate they may pose a threat.

The same is true of parents who show by their actions they pose a danger or are likely to disrupt the school significantly through violent verbal or physical behavior. While no one wants to ban a parent from the child's school, we cannot allow our students and/or employees to be subjected to threats, cursing, or acts of physical violence.

APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

All schools should consider the use of environmental control measures such as signs, posters, visitor's badges, dress code and diagrams directing them to the central office and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) to deter those who pose a threat to the peace and tranquility of the learning environment.

These measures will deter a number of trespassers. But one of the most effective means to keep people whose presence causes concern off school property is the use of criminal trespass warning slips, or "barring slips" to advise these individuals they will be arrested if they come to school property (and in some cases, the school safety zone).

Following a review of your state's statute on trespassing, an arrangement should be worked out to have a police officer present when any non student is banned from school property. There are two important reasons to do this. First, it may eliminate the need for school personnel to go to court to testify when violators are arrested. Second, dealing with these individuals can be dangerous – that is why we ban them in the first place.

In 1983, Officer Euel Thomas Smith of the Bibb County Board of Education Campus Police Department was shot and killed on a city street while stopping a suspicious person found trespassing at one of our schools. Another Georgia school police officer was shot and killed

by a high school student trespassing at an elementary school after hours last year. It was later found he had just burglarized the school.

These incidents illustrate just how dangerous trespassers can be to police officers, let alone unarmed students, teachers, and school administrators. Always use police personnel to deal with situations that may require a police response – it is better to be safe than sorry. Let us prevent serious crimes by denying access in a legal and safe way to those who pose a threat to our students and employees.

Are Police Officers in Schools the Answer?

*From the feature article in School Planning and
Management Magazine:*

November 1998

A recent study in the state of North Carolina showed assigning police personnel to the school reduced [weapons](#) violations by as much as half. There are numerous examples of violent attempts (including at least one bombing attempt) thwarted by police officers assigned to the school setting.

School police personnel can prevent other more prolific problems just as important to our schools, including eliminating fights, preventing theft and damage to property, controlling truancy and disruptive behavior and reducing the amount of alcohol and [drugs](#).

Officers can also teach a wide range of crime prevention and safety programs that not only reduce undesirable behavior, but can help to address the crime problem in the community as a whole. It is amazing how much a carefully selected and well-trained police officer can improve a school's environment.

There are several issues surrounding the decision to assign police officers to the school campus:

Who will pay for it? Funding can be derived through grants, covered by the school system, paid by the local police agency, or generated through student parking fees. The availability of grant money is currently good, because of the tremendous amount of public concern for safety.

Will they be armed? The concern for image should not take precedence over the safety of children and employees. There have been several instances of police officers who were helpless to intervene in [weapons](#) assaults at schools because they were not allowed to carry a firearm. One large district experienced several shootings in the pres-

ence of unarmed school police before the decision was made to arm their officers. No such incidents have occurred since their officers began carrying [guns](#) ten years ago.

Under what circumstances will they make arrests? This causes the most apprehension on both sides. The best solution is to have a standardized school policy: Students who commit a felony should be arrested. The policy should go further and mandate the arrest of all students who commit misdemeanors such as fighting, theft and possession of alcohol. These misdemeanors could be “ticketed” to avoid booking students into a jail.

This approach may be controversial to some, but experience has shown it will:

- Reduce crime and disruption in the school.
- Significantly reduce the number of [weapons](#) and other contraband.
- Dramatically reduce the amount of time educators and administrators spend on disciplinary issues.
- Reduce the number of student days spent on suspension and reduce the dropout rate.
- Reduce the truancy rate and reduce turnover of school system employees. Both may be caused by fear of victimization.
- Reduce the triggering behaviors that lead to a major [weapons](#) incident.
- Improve the learning environment and academic performance.
- Reduce vandalism.
- Foster a feeling of security.

Our nation’s recent history is filled with many examples documenting the need for police protection in schools. It is time to face the facts of our changing society and do what is right to protect our students and those who dedicate their lives to the education of children.

Make School Safety a Priority

*From the feature article in **School Planning and Management Magazine**:*

The following techniques can help to reduce violence, fear, and weapons violations in your schools.

October 1998

Following the publication of the article featuring the Bibb County Model for school [weapons](#) in the May 1998 edition of *School Planning and Management*, I have received hundreds of requests for additional information on our [weapons](#) reduction program. The following strategies are suggestions for preventing the majority of school [weapons](#) assaults not included in the first article due to space limitations.

BARRING SLIPS

Criminal trespass warning forms or “barring slips” are an effective means to prevent trouble. In most states, troublemakers can be banned from school property and arrested if they refuse to leave the campus or return to the property. In many states, individuals can be arrested for loitering in a school safety zone if they continue to do so after being warned. Students who are suspended or expelled can also be banned from all schools in the system and from loitering in the school safety zone during the period of their suspension. By putting this practice into place, the chances a student will return to school to retaliate following disciplinary action will be reduced.

Parents can normally be banned from their child’s school if there are indications that serious disruption or violence may occur if they are allowed on school property. While no one wants to ban a parent from their child’s school, it is a better option than a serious [weapons](#) incident involving a hot headed parent.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Classroom presentations can help reduce violence, fear and [weapons](#) violations in the school setting. Bibb County Board of Education

Campus Police Officers teach three programs to 10,000 of our 25,000 students each year. Macon Police Officers and Bibb County Sheriff's Deputies also teach programs each year. These programs all include information to ensure students know [weapons](#) are not allowed at school and how to report [weapons](#) violators or students who threaten to commit acts of violence. The programs taught by Bibb School Police Officers include:

- **Eddie Eagle GunSafe Program®.** This program teaches elementary-aged children to “Stop, don’t touch, leave the area and tell an adult” if they find a [gun](#). Bibb School Police also stress to students [guns](#) and other [weapons](#) do not have a place at school. This program helps instill in young children the need to report danger. It is notable that Bibb students are quick to report [weapons](#) violations and threats involving other students. This program can be taught by teachers or police officers. The program is produced by the National Rifle Association.

Phone: (800) 231-0752

Website: <http://www.nrahq.org/safety/eddie>

- **Gang Resistance, Education, and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T. ©).** This program teaches elementary and middle school students the dangers of gang involvement, how to stay out of trouble, and how to resolve conflicts with others. The program must be taught by police officers who have completed a rigorous two-week training program. It is administered by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.

Phone: (800) 726-7070

Website: <http://www.atf.treas.gov/great/index.htm>

- **The Law-Related Education Program (LRE).** There are a variety of LRE programs around the nation. These programs can be taught by teachers, attorneys, or police officers. The Bibb County LRE program is locally developed and teaches students about the services provided by school police, the consequences of an arrest, victim's rights, and the criminal code sections that will result in mandatory prosecution under our student code of conduct. This program helps our students know their rights and understand the level of accountability for violations. The program is taught to all seventh grade students each year.

HOME SEARCHES

When Bibb School Police Officers recover a [gun](#) from a student at school, a team of officers conducts a search of the student's bedroom at home for additional [weapons](#) and evidence. In most cases, the parents are willing to give consent to search the room. If the parents will not consent, most courts around the country hold probable cause for a search warrant exists.

The warrant should list, but is not confined to: Additional firearms, ammunition, [gun](#) cleaning supplies, and records that may indicate where the student obtained the [gun](#) and [gun](#) accessories. These items will build a stronger case should the student claim he or she did not know the weapon was in their possession. Search warrants for [guns](#) will normally be valid for the student's bedroom only — unless you have information about contraband in other areas. As with other search warrants, police officers should always seek consent before producing the search warrant.

An important rule is to always look for additional [weapons](#) when one is found. Consider the suspect in an Oregon school shooting who tried to stab a deputy hours after his arrest. A hunting [knife](#) taped to the suspect's leg was missed by arresting officers.

The home search is an extension of this concept. If a student is caught with a [gun](#), officers should search the student's book bag, locker, and vehicle. All [gun](#) violators should be questioned about the source of the weapon and the locations of additional [weapons](#) if possible. Always ensure [guns](#) recovered at school are traced and sent to the crime lab for ballistic testing, even if the parents claim ownership of the [gun](#). It may be stolen and/or involved in another incident.

The home search technique should also be used when a student threatens to commit a [weapons](#) assault. In some cases, there may not be enough information to obtain a search warrant and consent will be the only legal means to search.

If it is absolutely necessary to obtain consent in these cases, one option is to grant immunity from prosecution in return for consent. If this is done, the form used should only grant immunity for [gun](#) possession. It must be clear that if the [gun](#) is stolen, is connected to another crime, or evidence of another unrelated crime is found, prosecution will occur. In these cases, it is better to get the gun off the street and not be able to prosecute than to leave the gun in the student's possession.

The mass school shooting in Oregon last spring is a classic example of the need for home searches. Bibb County School District Police Officers have recovered more than a dozen illegal firearms and one partially constructed explosive device *before* they came onto school property using this tactic. It is important *not to publicize this technique*. If students become aware of it, the [weapons](#) you need to find will be hidden where you cannot locate them.

VISUAL SCREENING

This technique involves training police officers and educators in the art of spotting those individuals carrying a concealed firearm. Violators will often give observable cues because of the discomfort caused by carrying the weapon, fear of being caught, or the weight, size or shape of the weapon.

Using observations originally developed by retired Detective Robert Galligher of the New York City Police Department and driving pattern cues noted by our officers, Bibb School Police Officers have recovered more than 20 handguns from violators. Consider the following cases from the fall of 1997:

- Officer Kenneth Bronson of the Special Operations Unit noticed a car of gang members driving in what our officers refer to as the “hunting” pattern in a stadium parking lot during a football game. The hunting pattern involves suspects driving slowly and methodically through a parking lot looking for their intended victim’s vehicle. Upon stopping the car, we recovered a loaded .380 caliber semi-automatic from the waistband of a 14-year old student. The suspect (who had been expelled from public school for painting gang graffiti) told officers he had come to the game to find, shoot and kill a rival gang member and had indeed been hunting for the intended victim’s car.
- Seven days later, Special Operations Unit Commander Steve Meadows observed the same driving pattern in the same parking lot at another football game. During the traffic stop, the passenger of the car was told he and the car would be searched for [guns](#). A loaded .32 caliber semi-automatic was recovered from under his seat. The student tried to deny the [gun](#) was his. After officers found he had written his full name on the pistol magazine, he admitted the [gun](#) was his, and he had carried it on a daily basis for three months.

- Officer Joyce Myrick was visually screening students as they entered the middle school she was assigned when she observed the unnatural swing of a student's jacket caused by the weight of the [gun](#). This turned out to be caused by an unloaded .25 caliber semi-automatic pistol. The student was a gang member and was planning to sell the [gun](#).

There are a number of applications for visual screening techniques in the school setting. While not every [gun](#) violator will give off visual cues, it is amazing how many [guns](#) can be recovered in this manner. It is important to note visual cues alone do not always provide legal justification for a pat down and further inquiry may be needed before a student can be searched. One idea is to post signs in school parking lots notifying students their vehicles may be searched at any time after they enter the lot. If parking lots are clearly posted with the proper signage, school police can normally search any vehicle that enters it.

RANDOM-POINT VEHICLE CHECKS

Customs officers, drug enforcement officers, immigration officials, counterterrorist units and airport security personnel around the world have considerable success in mass screening of travelers through the use of carefully developed questions designed to enable them to detect those with something illegal to hide.

Our department is currently experimenting with the use of a series of structured questions designed to help the officer detect signs of undue nervousness and deception to help them identify a student who has a [gun](#) in the car. Officers can screen large numbers of students as they enter the parking lot in the morning. Officers will check cars in a similar manner to that used for license and insurance checks.

WELL-TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

By now it should be apparent police officers can significantly enhance [weapons](#) prevention programs. A well-trained, carefully selected, sworn and armed police officer assigned to the school is one of the most important components of an effective [weapons](#) reduction strategy. No other single measure can offer the protection a dedicated officer can provide. School police officers not only keep [weapons](#) off school property, they may also serve as a powerful deterrent to an individual who plans to come to a school to copy the events of last school year. It is important to note armed police personnel were not present in any of the mass shootings of the 1997-98 school year or in

the dozens of similar mass school shootings that took place in previous years in public and private schools. It should be pointed out Bibb County School District Police Officers are among the most highly paid, carefully selected and without a doubt the most highly trained police officers in the state of Georgia. These officers receive an average of six weeks of police academy training each every year. The average training level for an officer in the department is currently in excess of ten months in a state that only requires ten weeks of basic police recruit training. Officers in the department also have an average experience level of fourteen years.

Part of the Bibb County strategy is to put as many countermeasures in place as possible to demonstrate to violators that if they were to attempt a planned [weapons](#) assault, there would be a significant chance it would be interrupted by one or more countermeasures. Of course, our strategy also emphasizes a comprehensive approach to the prevention of [weapons](#) violence on and near campus.

While no measures can absolutely ensure a school [weapons](#) assault will not occur, it is our experience many of the serious injuries and deaths due to weapons assaults take place in schools without a comprehensive weapons reduction strategy. The techniques in this article were used to reduce Bibb County Public School weapons violations by more than 70 percent while community weapons violations among school-aged offenders skyrocketed during the same period. These methods, combined with excellent gang intelligence efforts, have successfully thwarted several planned shootings at schools or school events involving gang members bent on retaliation.

We need to find new and better ways to prevent the bloodshed that has sadly become a threat to every public and private school in this nation. We can prevent most school [weapons](#) assaults if we are willing to make school safety a priority. We must learn from the terrible situations that have occurred in schools across our land. We cannot afford to continue to follow those educators who have uttered those fateful words, “I never thought it could happen here.”

Do Metal Detectors Work?

June 2001

My son travels the country, concealing rifles, shotguns, machetes, hand grenades, and a wide array of other weapons on his person to help me show attendees how easy it can be for a student or non student violator to conceal not only one weapon, but even multiple [weapons](#) (note: as of July, 2006 his current record stands at 172 weapons concealed in ordinary clothing). During these concealed weapons demonstrations, I point out how, by paying careful attention, you can detect these [weapons](#). Our exaggerated demonstration is designed to heighten the awareness of school officials. Based on United States Department of Education [gun](#) recovery figures contrasted with self reporting survey results, it is estimated only one out of every 4,000 [guns](#) carried to school in our nation is recovered. It is clear we can do a better job of preventing and detecting [weapons](#) violations in our schools.

Some schools try to find a quick fix to the problem by using [metal detectors](#). Sometimes these efforts end in failure because of a lack of familiarity with today's high-tech weapons detection equipment. When used appropriately with other preventative measures, [metal detectors](#) can be quite effective. In the Bibb County School System, [metal detectors](#) were an important part of a comprehensive strategy that reduced [weapons](#) violations by 90 percent (following an earlier reduction in weapons violations with no change in reporting criteria, on campus student weapons violations dropped from a 70 percent reduction to a 90 percent reduction between 1998 and 2001 as contrasted to the starting point data gathered in 1989).

First of all, it is important to understand [metal detectors](#) must be viewed as a single component of a comprehensive strategy. Emotional security needs are as important as physical security needs. For a school [weapons](#) assault to take place, two factors must be present: Presence of a weapon on school property – a [gun](#), a [knife](#), a bomb, a chair or a pencil – and the desire for an individual to use that weapon to injure another human being. Weapons screening programs address only half of this deadly equation. There is also a need to change the students' perception they need to carry a weapon.

Most people immediately think of airport or courthouse style metal detection when the discussion turns to screening equipment for schools. In reality, this approach is rarely feasible for schools. Entry-point metal detection (the kind used most commonly in airports and courthouses) requires intensive use of resources. A few of the common problems that must be addressed for effective entry-point [weapons](#) screening include:

- Adequate staffing to screen students effectively without backlog.
- A secure perimeter so a student cannot simply put a [gun](#) on a window ledge and retrieve it from inside the window after being screened.
- An armed officer present at the screening station to prevent offenders shooting their way through the checkpoint (Note: After this article was published this technique was employed by the assailant in the Red Lake Reservation school shooting incident.)
- Screening of all persons who enter the facility after hours – otherwise a weapon can be brought into the building when screening is not being conducted, hidden and retrieved later.

The fiscal resources required to maintain an entry-point screening program that cannot be easily defeated by a middle school student of average intelligence can be significant. This type of screening is typically best suited for alternative school programs located in smaller facilities where it is easier to address many of the above concerns.

For most schools, a random [weapons](#) screening program is a far more effective and reasonable option. For example, a school administrator draws classroom or school bus numbers randomly from a pool of all the numbers, and all students in the selected area are screened by a team of properly trained personnel. This method has

proven to be effective while being less intrusive to the students than entry-point screening.

The effectiveness of random screening lies in its value as a deterrent. When students never know when they will be checked or where, it reduces [weapons](#) violations in two ways. Firstly, they will be deterred from bringing weapons in the same way as entry-point detection. More importantly, it gives potential violators less chance to find a way to 'beat the system' as discussed above. Random screening also eliminates many of the easily exploited gaps present with entry-point detection.

In addition, students do not face the inconveniences of being subjected to [weapons](#) screening on a daily basis. Screening is done randomly and without warning, so students do not have to be checked as often. A typical student may be checked only once or twice each year, rather than once every day. Random screening also eliminates the need for students to arrive early each day to allow time for screening. As long as personnel are polite, professional, and treat students with respect, random screening programs are normally well received by students. To help create a positive attitude, it is highly recommended students be a part of the team that develops the screening program.

Of course, guidance of legal counsel must be incorporated into the development of the policies and procedures for the screening program. Some school board attorneys may need to consult with a specialist if they are not familiar with this unique area of school search and seizure law. Properly conducted random screening programs have been upheld by courts across the country for more than a decade.

A final benefit of a random screening program is that it is much less expensive than entry-point screening. Money saved through random screening can be used to develop or enhance emotional security efforts, such as peer mediation and [bullying](#)-reduction programs.

Also remember an informed public is far more likely to support a [weapons](#) screening program. When parents and students know the dangers that are being addressed in a comprehensive manner, they tend to be supportive. By working with parents and students, you may find that metal detection equipment can help to make your school a safer place.

Dressing Our Youth for Safety and Success

By our most conservative estimate, students carry [guns](#) to school 18 million times each year in our nation, according to the [School Safety](#) Project of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency - Office of the Governor. Many schools face the added challenge of youth gang activity in their communities. Major acts of school violence make us painfully aware of significant issues facing our schools and our youth. These incidents and concerns for calm and effective learning environments often lead us to re-examine an old idea: Setting standards for how our students dress can help to create a safe and effective school environment.

In recent decades, most schools either relaxed or eliminated traditional standards of dress for students. Why did we abandon what was apparently working so well? More importantly, are we co dependent to disruptive and even dangerous students by setting a tone that “anything goes” in school? And, have schools actually helped to prepare students to fail in the real world they will face after graduation?

I think failure to establish and enforce a reasonable dress code is an extremely dangerous practice. In one of our more popular demonstrations, we show how it is possible to conceal numerous firearms, [knives](#), and other [weapons](#) under a baggy shirt and a pair of moderately baggy blue jeans. A proper dress code does not eliminate the problem of weapons in schools, but the lack of a dress code makes concealment of firearms, even rifles and shotguns incredibly easy. I have also personally witnessed my school district dramatically see a reduction in the number of elementary school student [gun](#) violations

primarily through the use of dress code (from six [guns](#) seized to only one the year after dress code was implemented).

But the danger of [weapons](#) in schools is only one aspect of dress code. Another issue is the tension and disruption caused by gang and hate group dress in the school setting. Allowing students to wear such clothing often leads to [bullying](#), disruption, and even physical violence. A reasonable effort to reduce the presence of clothing relating to such groups helps many schools minimize the negative impact commonly seen in the school setting. In severe situations, it may be necessary to move beyond dress code into the realm of school uniforms to adequately address problems with youth gangs.

Research results relating to the effectiveness of dress code on school discipline and academic performance have varied. It is important to remember dress code is only one strategy, and many schools implement dress codes along with other measures. This often makes it difficult to show which measures are responsible for improvement. We should remember when a stand-alone approach is used, it rarely has a meaningful and lasting impact. My experience is a properly implemented and enforced dress code has a positive, significant impact on [school safety](#) and climate if properly combined with other measures.

Also, dress codes help prepare our youth to succeed in the work setting after graduation. As one superintendent of schools put it, “School is a student’s job. When we allow students to dress without standards, engage in disruptive behaviors, be routinely tardy, and otherwise act outside of reasonable standards, we are setting them up for failure in the real world”. His point is worth consideration. Many employers complain graduates often fail to acquire or maintain employment because they are not accustomed to following standard employee guidelines relating to dress and behavior. If we desire to help students succeed as adults, a dress code are a form of education and preparation in and of itself.

How can we effectively design and implement a dress code? Just as with other safety measures, programs with viable community input are much more likely to be successful. The public and students in particular should be involved in evaluating the need for a dress code, and for helping to develop it. My experience in working with hundreds of communities around the nation is that parents and students will actively support reasonable safety measures when they understand the need for them. They can best do this when they have a seat at the table when safety measures are being developed.

A dress code will not solve all of a school's discipline and safety problems, but it is a critical component to a successful strategy. If our schools are to be safe, and our students successful, we must dress our youth for safety and success.

Recognizing and Defusing “Triggering Behaviors”

March 1999

While still statistically rare when compared to other types of settings, [weapons](#) assaults are far too common in our nation’s schools. According to the 1997-1998 Center for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 7.4 percent of high school students surveyed were threatened or injured with a weapon within the past 12 months. The survey included a diverse group of students from both public and private schools, from communities of all sizes and from different regions of the country.

We must refuse to accept [weapons](#) assaults in our schools as the way things must be. We can reduce the use of weapons significantly. Two things must happen for a school weapons assault to take place:

1. An object that can be used as a weapon must be on school property.
2. An individual must feel motivated to use it to threaten or harm another person.

[Weapons](#) screening, educational programs, tip reporting systems and clear and consistently enforced [weapons](#) policies are designed to reduce the presence of illegal weapons. Unfortunately, some weapons will still come onto school property even when these measures are in place. In other cases, innocent items such as chairs, pencils and eating utensils can be used as improvised [weapons](#) during an altercation.

Adults use weapons to harm others over trivial matters on a daily basis. Typically, triggering behaviors serve as the “last straw” for an individual who does not have normal coping skills and is faced with

a series of challenging events. We should not be surprised our youth sometimes react in the same manner.

Schools must find ways to reduce the frequency of behaviors that act as a “trigger” in school [weapons](#) assaults. While we must never accept triggering behavior as justification for an incident, violent assaults will more frequently occur when these behaviors are commonplace. Every school employee must understand every instance of triggering behavior increases the chance of a [weapons](#) assault.

The most common triggering behaviors for school weapons assaults include:

1. Fights.
2. [Bullying](#).
3. Excessive teasing.
4. Public displays of disrespect, especially toward rival gang members.
5. Extortion of lunch money.
6. Threats to commit acts of violence.
7. Altercations over the sale of illicit [drugs](#).
8. Trespassing (may include non students or suspended students coming on campus to settle a score with victims).

While it is impossible to eliminate all these behaviors from the school setting, the occurrence of such behaviors can be dramatically reduced. First, bring such behavior to the attention of the front office. Once a realistic and honest assessment is complete, the process of eliminating the behavior can be developed.

There are a number of techniques proven effective for reducing triggering behaviors in schools. For example:

- Reviewing current school policies.
- Training staff and students to identify what behaviors are prohibited.
- Creating a policy that says anything that is a crime out of school will be treated the same at school.
- Issuing citations to students who commit offenses such as fighting, disruptive gang behavior and disorderly conduct.

- Instituting a teen court to allow teens to help solve youth problems.
- Developing a peer mediation program.
- Using educational programs such as the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.) to teach students conflict resolution skills.
- Clearly communicating all key policies through standard video presentations, student behavior contracts or other proven means.
- Vigorously enforcing all policies geared to the reduction of triggering behaviors.
- Automatically banning suspended students from school property with consistent arrest of violators.
- Using barring slips or criminal trespass warning slips to ban undesirable non students from the property (such as known drug dealers, gang members etc.).
- Reducing drug possession and distribution on and near campus.
- Controlling loitering.
- Developing a program to help reduce excessive teasing, harassment and [bullying](#).
- Maintenance of each of these priorities through committed and consistent close supervision of students each day.

By making it a priority to identify triggering behaviors, and by communicating and consistently enforcing policies, administrators can greatly enhance the level of safety in their schools.

Responding to Student Threats

May, 1999

Over the past decade, there were a number of school shootings, bombings and hostage situations involving one or more perpetrators who made threats prior to the attack. We need to focus on methods that work for responding to student threats, rather than continue to depend on luck.

Creating and maintaining an environment where students report threats will go a long way to reduce the odds a planned [weapons](#) assault will take place. While these events are still rare, the gravity of their impact makes them a viable threat for every school. We must take any threats by students (and others) seriously, particularly with the frequency of Internet chatting among those young people who support and say they want to copy the heavily publicized mass assaults of recent years. Though these types of assaults occurred dozens of times in schools since the early 1970s, students who might be predisposed to carry out such acts have never been so aware that others had similar feelings of anger and rage. Intense publicity in recent years resulted in an escalation of the number of students who have attempted to carry out such atrocities. Fortunately, prompt and appropriate intervention averted many of these potential tragedies.

Students must be motivated to report threats, know what to report, and how to do it. Posters, signs, videos, assemblies and classroom presentations can be used to let students know how much [school safety](#) depends on their willingness to get involved. Students should be taught in the elementary grades to report dangerous situations to school staff. As students move up through the grades, these efforts should continue. Never take for granted students know what to do.

RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY

Students must also see staff respect confidentiality and appropriate action will be taken when students get involved. I am familiar with numerous cases where students were caught with a [gun](#) following a tip and the violator was punished by a suspension – but no criminal charges were filed. Is it any wonder several thousand students are caught with [guns](#) on campus each year when our society in many cases sends the message it is no big deal for a student to be caught with one on campus? When students see this type of under reaction, do not be surprised when they do not come forward with critical information. This situation is rapidly changing now that educators are more aware of the dangers that in reality have been with us for decades. It is fortunately becoming less common for [gun](#) violations to be treated lightly on campus.

Easy access to reporting methods can mean the difference between a routine arrest and a bloodbath on campus. Students should have easy access to 24-hour phone reporting. This can be through a dedicated phone line with an answering machine after hours, through a commercial service, or through a 24-hour dispatch center in larger school systems. With the availability of computers, e-mail reporting is also an option. It is important someone check early each morning what tips have come in. It would not be tragic to have a major incident and later discover a student called in a tip which was not reviewed in time.

PREPLANNED RESPONSES

Once information is received about a student's threat, a specific pre-planned response should be put into action. While investigation will show many of these situations do not pose any immediate danger, it is important every one be investigated properly. The most thorough way to evaluate student threats is through a joint assessment involving at the minimum, a mental health professional and a police officer.

If the information received indicates a student made statements relating to planned [weapons](#) assaults involving firearms or explosives, the following is a list of potential responses that may be appropriate depending on the findings of the response team's initial assessment:

- A visit to the home of the student(s) by the team for further evaluation. If deemed appropriate, a thorough search of the student's bedroom, following consent by the parent or with a search warrant, may uncover firearms, bomb-making materials, or indications of instability (drawings, writings, or objects).

- Talk to the student's friends and family members. Have they noted changes in the student's habits or personality that would indicate violent instability?
- Does the student have advanced knowledge of explosives or [weapons](#) of mass destruction (chemical or biological weapons)? Has the student been active on the Internet with individuals who show a desire for more school [weapons](#) assaults?
- Has the student been saving news clippings and viewing an inordinate number of televised reports of violent weapons assaults from around the country?
- Does the student complain of excessive teasing or harassment by peers? Has the student been in any fights recently? Been jilted by a girlfriend/boyfriend?
- Could the information received be a prank?

If information is received showing a student has a weapon on school property, armed police officers should always be present when the tip is investigated. Be cautious in approaching the student so as not to cause panic. If appropriate, the student's locker and/or car may need to be checked. When a [gun](#) is recovered, the student should be asked about any additional [guns](#) that may be in other locations. A home search should be standard in this type of case; and most courts will uphold a search warrant for the student's bedroom under these circumstances.

The Bibb County Public School System was the first in the nation to adopt this type of approach to the assessment of student threats as a standard practice. The school district police department began jointly assessing threat cases with school system mental health professionals in 1990 and conducted hundreds of successful assessments, several of which involved averted shootings, one which prevented a planned double suicide at a high school and yet another that stopped a planned bombing at a middle school. This approach is now widely used around the nation due to the department's efforts to share the technique with hundreds of thousands of colleagues through training sessions, articles and training videos. Dozens of planned shootings and bombings were thwarted through multidisciplinary [threat assessment](#).

While prank tips do occur, my experience with students over the past decade is that the vast majority of tip-based searches yield contraband. Student assistance is an important component of any safe school strategy.

The Home Search

June 1999

One of the most underused techniques to keep firearms and explosives out of schools is the home search. Developed by the Bibb County Board of Education Campus Police Department, the technique successfully thwarted a number of planned school shootings and bombings around the country. This technique is normally used in three specific situations:

- When a student is caught with a firearm or explosive device at school.
- When information is received that a student has a firearm or explosive device and the information is believed to be accurate, but no weapon is found when the student is searched.
- When a student (or anyone else) makes a threat to commit an act of violence with a weapon and a multidisciplinary [threat assessment](#) team feels a weapon or explosives may be in the student's room (or other location such as a workshop, basement, clubhouse etc.).

The home search concept is based on two important philosophies:

1. Schools (working with police) should go beyond the boundaries of the school to maintain a safe school environment.
2. When a student is found to have one weapon, every effort should be made to ensure the student does not have access to more weapons.

My officers used this technique to recover more than a dozen firearms and one partially constructed explosive device. Just as importantly, home searches shed a great deal of light on the potential for violence posed by some of these students. It is not uncommon to note indicators of gang activity, violent extremist leanings, satanic cult activity, and general emotional instability that might not be readily apparent at school.

Just how does the home search work? This simple technique involves police officers (often accompanied by a school administrator) going to a student's residence and searching the student's bedroom or other areas used privately by the student for weapons. This can be done in two ways — with a search warrant or with the willing consent of the parent or guardian (in most states). School administrators should never attempt to conduct a home search without the assistance of a law enforcement officer.

HOME SEARCHES WITH CONSENT

In the vast majority of cases (so far every case but one in Bibb County), parents will consent to the search of their child's room if the situation is approached correctly. Police officers who request consent should try to appeal to the parent's sense of what is right and point out if a weapon is actually in the room, terrible outcomes could result including the accidental death of their child. Most parents share the school's concern following this year's tragic events in Littleton, Colorado, (where sheriff's deputies started to use the technique but did not follow through and search one of the shooter's bedrooms prior to the shooting) and will cooperate if approached in the right way.

SEARCHES FOLLOWING IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION

In many cases when you want to do a home search, there will not be sufficient probable cause for the police to obtain a search warrant and consent is the only option available. This is particularly true in cases where threats were made or a general tip was received. In some cases, the parent may not give consent for the police to search.

One tactic often successful in these situations is for the officer to grant the student immunity from prosecution *for weapons possession only*. Parents should be advised verbally and in writing that if a [gun](#) is found in the student's room, no charges will be filed for [gun](#) possession. No immunity will be provided for other violations such as a crime connected to the gun or of other crimes uncovered during the search. I strongly recommend meeting with a representative from the

prosecutor's office before the situation actually arises and obtaining the prosecutor's permission in advance. The issue is a basic question of whether it is better to recover the [gun](#) and not prosecute than to wait until someone is shot to make an arrest.

SEARCHES BASED ON A WARRANT

Courts around the country routinely held that when a student is found in possession of a [gun](#) on school property, probable cause exists for a search warrant to be issued for the student's bedroom to be searched. The warrant should list items to be searched for including: Additional firearms, ammunition, gun cleaning supplies, gun magazines and clips, gun accessories such as targets and hearing protectors, holsters and records that may include how and where the [gun](#) was obtained. Specifically listing these items can become extremely important in legal terms. Listing records may allow officers to check paper and computer records otherwise off limits during the search.

The recovery of these items will also help refute claims in court that the student did not know the recovered weapon was in the student's car, locker, purse, book bag or other area where others could be claimed to have common access. If a search warrant is used, officers should always attempt to obtain consent before producing the warrant.

There are a number of cases around the nation where the home search resulted in illegal [guns](#) and explosives being seized before anyone could get hurt. Just last spring, a New England high school student was arrested after police found a bomb and a semiautomatic rifle in his room during a home search after the student made threats.

The home search technique is a valuable tool that can be used to recover [weapons](#) before they are used in the school setting. Make sure you are prepared to use this valuable life saving technique when appropriate.

Weapons on Campus: Responding to Tips

November 1999

Last spring, a middle school principal was taken hostage when he tried to investigate a tip a student was carrying a [gun](#). A few years ago, a student and two school administrators were shot (one administrator was killed) when the administrators tried to investigate, without police assistance, a tip that a student had a [gun](#).

We could continue to cite numerous examples such as these from around the nation. Unfortunately, such senseless incidents will continue to occur for two reasons: First, some school officials will continue to investigate tips regarding [weapons](#) without police assistance. Second, some police officials will continue to tell school officials incorrectly, “Call us if you actually find a weapon.”

These improper responses are still common in many places and result in avoidable deaths, injuries, hostage situations, and other crises in schools. Understanding the inherent danger of these situations can mean a difference between a safe resolution and a crisis. Make no mistake about it; it is patently unsafe and reckless for school administrators to search for [weapons](#) without an armed officer present.

Studies estimate that between 100,000 and 250,000 students carry a [gun](#) to school each day, yet only about 3,500 [gun](#) recoveries are reported to the United States Department of Education each year. It is clear that the vast majority of the [weapons](#) that come to school each day are not recovered. Failure to properly investigate tips has resulted in missed opportunities to prevent mass shootings as well as many more routine [weapons](#) assaults.

Here are a number of key points that should be considered regarding how schools and police should respond to tips regarding [weapons](#):

- School personnel should never attempt to investigate tips regarding [weapons](#) without an armed law enforcement or security officer present.
- With the assistance of legal counsel, districts should develop a carefully researched policy regarding weapons searches and communicate it to all district employees. Many school systems' policies do not allow searches for students when they could be legally conducted. At least three multiple victim school shootings occurred after lawful searches, which could have averted the shootings, were not conducted. The [gun](#) you fail to find could be the one used to kill students on your campus. Involve the police agencies that will respond to schools and school buses to ensure officers understand how to work with administrators in resolving potential school [weapons](#) situations.
- A standard protocol for investigating tips regarding weapons should be developed between school and law enforcement officials. All available information should be shared between school and police personnel.
- When conducting searches of individuals for [weapons](#) based on reasonable suspicion, never rely on [metal detectors](#) alone; a pat down should always be done before the metal detector is used.
- It is usually best to have the officer handcuff the student as soon as any felony-grade weapon is recovered. While many school officials feel this is overreaction, it is better to secure the student than to risk death or injury for those involved. Recently, a school security officer was shot and wounded by a student when this protocol was not followed.
- It is strongly recommended all felony [weapons](#) violators be prosecuted. If your school chooses not to do so, speak to local prosecutors to develop guidelines to protect against false arrest litigation when you detain violators. An arrest can occur even when the student is not handcuffed or told they are under arrest.
- Whenever a weapon is found, continue searching for additional [weapons](#). It is common for additional weapons to be in the violator's locker, book bag, purse, vehicle, or on their person.
- If a firearm or explosive device is found at school, an attempt should be made to search the student's bedroom at home as

well. In most areas of the country, the police can obtain a search warrant for the student's bedroom when they are caught with a [gun](#) or explosive device on school property. Local prosecutors and police may not be aware of this, but such searches were upheld by courts in all 50 states. Such searches should never be conducted without an armed police officer. It is suggested a school administrator or school mental health worker assist the officer(s) as long as officers feel it is safe for them to do so. School personnel often spot significant potentially problematic signs in a student's room that police might not recognize as important. In some cases, school officials even recognized stolen school property in a student's bedroom!

- School administrators and law enforcement officials should plan a local protocol on how students should be approached when they are believed to be armed. Consider a variety of scenarios such as a student who is reported to be armed in a classroom, during lunch, on a bus, at a special event, and other common situations. Law enforcement officials should seek to minimize disruption. School officials must understand police officers conduct themselves in certain ways to prevent a minor situation from turning into a crisis. Every tip regarding a weapon on campus has the potential of being either the next act of horrible school violence or a peaceful and effective intervention. Through careful planning, clear policy guidance and consistent application, the risks of dealing with this type of situation can be dramatically reduced.

Safe School Zones

January 2000

All school officials are affected by the criminal activity in their neighborhoods. Fortunately, many schools are located in low-crime areas. The level of criminal activity in the community around a school has a direct and often significant effect on the degree of safety in the school. Unfortunately, many incidents around the nation indicate schools must be concerned about [school safety](#) zone issues.

Students who must walk through high crime to get to and from school each day are more likely to be truant, carry [weapons](#) to school or join a youth gang because of increased fear of. This aspect alone makes incidents in these zones relevant to the level of safety in our schools.

Students, parents and school staff feel little consolation that the fatal shooting of a student took place off campus if the incident occurred across the street from the school. To them, students and staff do not seem any safer than if the crime took place in a classroom or the school gymnasium.

This is a critical area where a community-based school/law enforcement partnership can effectively improve a difficult and dangerous situation. A coordinated approach, which uses the various resources of the community, can usually improve seemingly surmountable problems.

Around the nation, there are examples of communities who decided not to accept high crime levels in close proximity to schools. Some state legislatures designated specific, legally defined [school safety](#) zones to help communities make these areas what they should be – safe havens for students, parents and school employees. In other areas, local governments passed ordinances

to address these concerns when their state legislatures have not provided support.

These statutes are not to be confused with the weapon and drug free school zone laws that partially address school zone crime. Effective [school safety](#) zone laws and ordinances provide the tools that allow law enforcement officers to deal with a broader range of undesirable behavior, such as loitering within a [school safety](#) zone.

When school personnel and law enforcement officials develop a strategy with significant input from students and area residents, incredible improvement can be the result. Such initiatives also result in strong and sometimes incredible support in the school and in the community. Typically, students, school staff and parents quickly embrace school safety zone efforts when they are informed of the hazards these efforts help address. Building support for such initiatives by involving the stakeholders is a critical component for this type of strategy.

The most successful [school safety](#) zone initiatives involve a strong enforcement component, making the zones high intensity enforcement areas for traffic code violations and quality-of-life ordinances such as disorderly conduct. Many people do not realize the powerful connection between seemingly minor violations and serious crime. The connection between aggressive traffic enforcement and the prevention of drive-by shootings is a case in point.

For a drive-by shooting to occur, five elements must be present:

1. Gang members (traditionally – though terrorists and hate crime attackers have also used the technique).
2. One or more [guns](#).
3. A car.
4. The desire to commit the crime.
5. Access the intended target(s).

One way to prevent such a crime from taking place near a school is to remove one or more of the required elements. Intensive traffic enforcement often helps to deal with at least three of these elements by limiting the perpetrators' access to intended victims, their anonymity of movement in a vehicle, and in many cases, the recovery of illegal firearms during a traffic stop.

It is common for gang members to “hunt” an intended victim by repeatedly driving through or parking in an area where the victim is likely to pass. Gang members often find the school zone is an ideal

place to exact revenge on a victim. But intensive traffic enforcement makes the zone a high risk and a much less appealing hunting ground for gang members.

Gang members do not generally fare well in areas where traffic enforcement efforts are intense. A study conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police found most illegal firearms recovered by officers are found during traffic stops. The same study also revealed the greatest volume of illegal [drugs](#) recovered by police was found pursuant to traffic stops.

From the gang member's perspective, another negative aspect of highly patrolled areas is vehicles often end up in the impound lot because they don't comply with safety requirements. Careful monitoring of nonmoving violations such as illegal parking can also be a deterrent.

The drive-by shooting is just one problem [school safety](#) zone efforts can address. A host of others can be dealt with just as efficiently, as long as the strategy is designed using a team approach that stresses the partnership between the school, court officials, the law enforcement agency and the residents of the neighborhood.

Schools should not and cannot be tasked with the responsibility of securing these zones alone. But they can be a major component in the problem-solving process. Assertive school/community policing practices can quickly convince the criminal element your students, staff and visitors, whether on campus or traveling to and from school, are "off limits." Isn't it time we sent that message loudly and clearly?

Are You Building for Safety?

December 2001

I recently had the opportunity to present at a conference for school architects and school planners at the University of Wisconsin. I have had architects and planners in my seminars before but had not previously taught for an entire group of them. It was an educational experience for me and my audience. I learned some important things from them, and they must have found the session helpful, or they would not have stayed until almost 6:00 p.m. asking questions after the presentation ended at 4:00 p.m.

If the group in my session is typical, I learned architects sometimes encounter difficulty when trying to make design suggestions to enhance the level of safety of schools they are designing — even though many of those in attendance had a lot to contribute to this important area. A number of them said school officials sometimes tell them they do not want such assistance from the architect.

At the same time, none of the participants ever received any formal training on the three topics we were covering – crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), prevention strategies for schools, and emergency operations planning for schools. The evaluations for the program and other feedback made it clear attendees felt much better prepared to design safer schools after even this relatively brief training session. They also demonstrated a sincere eagerness to learn to build the safest schools possible.

I have found over the years there is often a significant lack of communication in the design phase of educational facilities. In one case, an architectural firm built a new medical school without talking to university police, or apparently, those who would use the building. The firm

selected an expensive and sophisticated alarm system that has never been used since the building was constructed more than 15 years ago. The particular system installed was designed to protect a facility that is completely vacated. As many people use the library and other areas of the building each night, the system cannot be engaged, leaving the entire building vulnerable. This vulnerability proved to be a problem when one of the construction workers who helped to build the facility returned to burglarize it several times after it was completed.

There are a number of ways to enhance the safety of a school during the design phase or when planning for major renovations:

- **Include formal training on [school safety](#) as a favorable factor in your bid guidelines.** School districts, as well as architects, can incur civil liability if a major criminal incident occurs, and they failed to be proactive by using accepted standard safety design concepts such as CPTED in the design of school facilities. You have a right as a consumer to require those who build a school to have at least a basic competence in this important area.
- **Require architects, planners, and contractors meet with [school safety](#) officials and with key staff who will actually use the facility to discuss safety features.** A thorough and interactive session can prevent numerous problems down the road.
- **Carefully select fixtures and equipment that can have an impact on the level of safety in the facility.** Typically, it costs just as much to buy the wrong type of locks as it does to purchase the right ones. Consider closely items such as classroom door locks, door hinges, light fixtures, intercom systems, windows, lockers, fire extinguisher cabinets, and bathroom fixtures. Locks should be the right type for the door where they are installed. For example, classroom doors that can be easily locked by a teacher from inside the room in the event a lockdown is required. At the same time, classroom and closet doors should require a key or combination to lock to reduce the opportunity for an assailant to force a victim into a room and lock the door to ensure privacy during the attack.
- **Plan for safety considerations if you anticipate significant growth in the student population down the road.** Talk to architects about specific problem areas for overcrowded schools. For example, you can add a new wing or portable classrooms, but

what about areas all occupants will use such as stairwells? It may be to your advantage to request all stairwells be designed with extra space to avoid jam packed students and the safety problems they pose. It is far less expensive to address this in the design phase than it is to add additional stairwells.

- **Ask questions of, make suggestions to, and listen to the advice of your architects.** Like you, they want the project to be a success. As it is good for their business for you to be satisfied with their work, they want you to be happy with the completed facility. They want to avoid the potential civil liability that can result from a poorly designed school.

Positive and mutual interaction helps everyone wins — you, the architects, and the staff and students who must live with what you build. Careful planning combined with this high level of communication leads to a safer school, and safer schools are more effective learning environments for our kids.

Safe Schools by Design

January, 2003

A concept that first became popular many years ago has shown a strong comeback in the school setting recently. Crime prevention through environmental design, commonly known as CPTED, is a field of knowledge that should be applied in every new school construction or renovation project. While some unfortunately try to over bill CPTED as a magic bullet that can fix all security woes, it is a more powerful approach when properly integrated with and supported by other more traditional measures. Many schools are built today with inherent problems because no one on the planning team is familiar with the powerful research – based concepts of CPTED. I routinely advise school systems to insist architectural firms bidding on school construction projects have staff trained in CPTED or to require a member of their team to attend formal CPTED training as a condition of a successful contract award.

WHAT IS CPTED?

CPTED focuses on the built environment, along with a view as to how space is used by those who occupy these spaces. CPTED helps to make the normal user feel at ease and welcome, while making the unauthorized user feel very nervous about engaging in inappropriate behavior.

THREE MAIN TENANTS OF CPTED

Oversimplifying things a bit, the incredible success of CPTED lies in three main categories. All three have relevance and used together make CPTED the powerful tool it has become.

ACCESS CONTROL

Access control is typically thought of in a mechanical sense. People often think of hard physical barriers and electronic systems when it comes to access control. While these approaches clearly have a place, there are more subtle and also effective ways to improve access control in a facility or even outdoor area. Channeling people through the use of landscaping features, passive entryways that gently force visitors to approach the front desk of a school and other means to guide people to and away from specific areas is an exceptionally effective way to dramatically improve the level of safety in any school, particularly when this is done during the design phase.

TERRITORIALITY

In this sense, territoriality most often involves creating a connection between the place and the legitimate users. When a sense of ownership is created, people are more prone to become involved when someone does something they are not supposed to do, like vandalize a school bathroom. Landscaping, murals, color schemes and visible identifiers like a statue of a school mascot are common examples of creating positive territoriality for schools.

NATURAL SURVEILLANCE

While security cameras can be a powerful deterrent to crime and misbehavior, creating a sense of natural surveillance is also an extremely powerful tool. Paying attention to lines of sight in building design and later, how space is utilized, a feeling that people can be observed by others is a subtle yet powerful way to make people feel safe while increasing the actual level of safety. Natural auditory surveillance is also very important. Designing school bathrooms without doors not only reduces public health concerns, but creates an automatic sense of awareness among those visiting the restroom that acts of [bullying](#), violence or other misbehaviors may be overheard and that tobacco or marijuana smoke will likely be easily detected by people traveling the hall.

The concepts of CPTED will make a great school design a superb school design. The most skilled architects and building planners will significantly increase the quality of their designs by attending good quality CPTED training. CPTED is an invaluable tool to design safer and better schools.

In Plain Sight

February 2000

Last school year, a student in a rural community went to his truck to retrieve an item. While he was in his vehicle, he accidentally discharged a hunting rifle in a [gun](#) rack in the vehicle. The bullet passed through a mobile classroom unit, barely missing the head of another student. The student was expelled from school and sentenced to serve a year in prison. A number of students and a teacher were quite shaken by the incident, and the school received negative publicity when the media reported the incident. While this incident was an accident, there are many other weapons incidents around the nation involving [weapons](#) in student vehicles that involved intentional assaults.

It is tragic this incident took place. It is disturbing to think how much worse the situation could have been if the round had a trajectory a few inches to one side. Such incidents can be prevented with a simple and inexpensive measure known as the plain view check. It is tragic the student had the weapon in plain view in his truck each school day for more than two weeks and no one did anything about it until the accident occurred. This student will serve a hard prison sentence that also could have been avoided.

The law allows school officials and/or law enforcement officers to seize contraband items visible in vehicles parked on school property.

The “plain view doctrine” provides educators and law enforcement officers with the means to locate, and confiscate a significant percentage of [weapons](#) brought to school each day. It is sometimes astounding to see how many [weapons](#) may be present in student vehicles. During one of the first plain view checks my officers conducted

almost a decade ago, three firearms and about twenty other [weapons](#) were recovered from one student parking lot. I have had a number of seminar participants call me with similar results after trying the technique for the first time.

The concept is simple. The school administrator(s) and/or law enforcement officer(s) designated to conduct the check walk around vehicles and look from outside the vehicle for [weapons](#) visible inside the car. As long as they remain where they have the lawful authority to be (outside the vehicle), they can lawfully seize any contraband they can see in plain sight inside the vehicle.

My experience is those designated to conduct these checks should undergo a brief training session conducted by a police officer with a good track record of making contraband cases during traffic stops. The officer can place a number of examples of contraband [weapons](#), [drugs](#), and alcoholic beverage containers in a vehicle and point them out to trainees. They will need to learn to be alert for the butt of a handgun protruding from under a car seat, part of a [knife](#) sheath visible in the side door pocket of the vehicle, and other partially exposed items of contraband.

Once contraband is spotted and the decision is made to recover the item, an armed law enforcement officer should be summoned if one is not already present. The student should then be located and asked if there is any other contraband located in the vehicle. Depending upon what has been found in the car and what district policies allow, it may be a good idea to search the student once a weapon or [drugs](#) are found. In all cases, once the presence of [drugs](#) or [weapons](#) is confirmed in the vehicle, it should be searched thoroughly for additional weapons.

When contraband is located, an attempt should be made to question the student about its presence in the car. It is not uncommon for parents and other relatives to claim ownership of the weapon to try to avoid consequences for the student. Taking statements from students indicate they were aware of the presence of the weapon in the car, making claims from others irrelevant.

It is strongly recommended school officials make sure the student code of conduct clearly notifies students contraband in student vehicles will be treated as contraband possession on campus. It is also a good idea for administrators to make a series of intercom announcements to students concerning contraband in vehicles prior to conducting plain view checks. Some districts are unprepared to deal with a sudden surge in [weapons](#) recoveries and have dealt leniently with

the first group of students caught. This could create undue civil liability for the district and take away from the deterrent value of the technique. Our goal should be to prevent [weapons](#) violations rather than to find as many weapons as possible.

While the main objective is to prevent student weapons violations, we do want to convey to students that those who choose to bring weapons to school are likely to be caught, and just as importantly, will be punished. Having a “zero tolerance” policy that directs all students caught with any weapon on campus will face a custodial arrest and expulsion from school may cause difficulty when a number of students are found to have small [knives](#) and other similar items in their vehicles. Graded punishments such as citations to appear in court and short-term suspensions or assignments to an alternative school may be more practical. The key point is a consequence significant enough to provide a deterrent while being reasonable enough to build public support based on the specifics of the violation.

By paying attention to what is right in front of us if we only look for it, we can reduce the presence of weapons on our campuses and create a safer learning environment.

Just the Ticket

May 2001

A middle school student dies after being beaten up by a student involved in fights with dozens of smaller and typically younger students. A middle school student opens fire in a crowded hallway on students who repeatedly beat him up. He tried to report the beatings to school administrators and local police to no avail. School officials are criticized for overreacting when a student is booked into the local jail for having a pocketknife in his car while on school property. A valued school secretary quits the job she has loved for more than a decade because she has grown frightened and weary of irate parents yelling and cursing at her when they come to the school to voice complaints.

These real scenarios point to common gaps in the safety net that should be in place in every school. Schools should be a place in our society where certain types of behavior are not tolerated. At the same time, consequences for inappropriate behavior must be viewed as reasonable by the “street committee” or school administrators may lose the public support necessary to an effective educational environment. What can prevent these problems from happening in your school?

One extremely powerful tool for the astute school administrator is the police citation. Schools across the nation see dramatic reductions in problematic behaviors and increased support from parents and students by using citations to address minor criminal behavior in schools. A thoughtfully implemented ticketing system helps school officials find a middle ground for providing reasonable and effective consequences.

In most jurisdictions, law enforcement officers can write a citation for minor criminal violations rather than perform a custodial arrest.

This allows officers to bring a case before the court without booking the offender into a detention facility. This approach can provide consequences such as monetary fines; community service, counseling, probation, and other court ordered measures. Many students and parents previously unable to control undesirable behavior quickly learn to do so after a \$250 fine is levied.

Creative judges in many areas work closely with school officials and probation officers to develop local programs to improve school climate. In some cases, alternative sentencing programs allow cases to be brought to court without processing a formal charge. This permits court officials to levy fines, court costs, and assign violators to serve community service hours without having a permanent criminal record created for the defendant. This system gives significant sanctions without the stigma of a conviction record. In some cases, judges ordered defendants to perform their community service hours on or near school property. Using the labor of offenders to pick up trash, clean up graffiti, or wash school buses can drive the point home to violators that misconduct will not be tolerated.

An effective citation program also helps reduce disruptive behaviors such as students yelling and cursing at teachers in the classroom or parents acting out in a similar fashion. This type of program proves effective in reducing the occurrence of offenses such as trespassing and possession of alcohol on school property and at school events. Citation programs are also a key component to a number of highly successful truancy reduction programs. Above all else, this approach is effective at reducing the occurrence of triggering behaviors such as fighting, throwing of gang hand signs, and criminal forms of [bullying](#) that precede most instances where weapons are used in schools.

Citations also help keep kids in school who would otherwise be suspended or expelled. By combining other forms of school discipline with the powerful deterrent effect of monetary fines, schools can reduce the need for out-of-school suspensions, assignments to alternative schools, and the number of students expelled over time. This aspect helps to build strong support for a well thought out ticketing program.

In some jurisdictions, court officials may claim a ticketing system cannot be used due to the structure of the legal system. Creative judges and political leaders can overcome these obstacles. In some cases, ticketing programs are established by modifying local operating procedures, implementing them as part of an existing diversion

program, or through the creation of a local ordinance. It may not be easy, but an effective citation system can be established. Experience shows it is worth the effort to establish a citation process.

Whether your community would like to reduce truancy or reduce the likelihood of a major weapons incident, this type of program may be just the ticket.

Involving Students in Your Safety Efforts

August 2001

More than a decade ago, a school superintendent in Bibb County, Georgia created a community-based task force to address growing concerns of [school safety](#). He wisely made sure students from each high and middle school served on the task force. In one work session, the topic of discussion was how [metal detectors](#) might play a part in reducing the significant and growing problem with student weapons violations in the district. Evaluation demonstrated entry point metal detection would cost the district more than \$500,000 per building each year and would still provide limited protection due because students changed classes between different buildings each day.

A student on the task force came up with a viable solution – a random metal detection program. As a result of the student's input combined with other measures, the district was able to reduce weapons violations by more than 90 percent. By using his idea, the district has saved more than \$50 million on weapons screening over the past decade. As an added benefit, hundreds of schools across the nation now see the demonstrated success of the program and have implemented the concept first suggested by a student. These are powerful results for the seemingly simple step of involving students in making their schools safer. Schools across the nation find students are a valuable asset in developing meaningful strategies to the complex [school safety](#) problems they face.

The legislature in the student's home state not only recognized the value of student input but made such participation a legal requirement. When Georgia Governor Roy E. Barnes signed Senate Bill 74

into law two years ago, student participation in the development of [school safety](#) plans became mandatory for Georgia public Schools. While private schools are not mandated to do so, many have also used the same approach. One private institution saw direct benefit when a particularly gifted student created [school safety](#) software for their emergency operations plan, saving the school thousands of dollars. In many communities, the power of students to help remains untapped. The time has come for students to provide input in the means used to safeguard them.

Students can often provide insight different from that of adults. They can sometimes spot flawed ideas and avoid wasting precious funds. Surveys of students helped school officials detect problems that needed to be addressed and previously went undetected. These surveys make sure efforts are focused on the most pressing problem areas. In other cases, student input helped prevent embarrassment when school officials planned to implement ideas that would be doomed to fail. Often, students come up with excellent ideas to solve seemingly insurmountable problems.

Surprisingly, students often help build support for measures or programs when we might expect significant resistance. Student help sell measures such as dress code, identification badges, and weapons screening programs when they are allowed to help develop them and are provided information showing the measures are reasonable and necessary.

Schools can draw on students for help in more direct ways too. Peer mediation programs, teen courts, and other programs allow students to solve problems involving their peers. Such programs are proven successful around the nation. In many areas, teen courts have a significantly lower recidivism rate than the juvenile courts that established them. These programs also provide an excellent opportunity for students, who serve as volunteers, to gain valuable experience.

One national program for students, which helps them make their schools safer, has been growing rapidly in recent years. Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) is a student initiated program to promote nonviolence. Developed by students for students, S.A.V.E. now has more chapters in more than 35 states with more than 80,000 student members. This organization provides a structured means for students to work cooperatively with school and law enforcement officials to improve school climate. S.A.V.E. can be implemented as a curriculum at the elementary level, or as a club at the middle and high

Let None Learn in Fear

school levels. Visit the S.A.V.E. Web site at: www.nationalsave.org to see if a chapter might help you help your students.

Students can be a tremendous asset to [school safety](#) efforts. Our youth possess creativity, interest, and the boundless energy that can help address the concerns we all share for the safety of our children and those who dedicate their lives to educating them. Isn't it about time we gave our kids a chance to help?

No One Answer

July 2000

In one book on bullying, the author said if the concepts in the book are used, a safe school environment will be created and all issues of school violence will be addressed. The author of another book on [bullying](#) recently spoke at a conference on school safety and maintained a similar stance. Both authors are critical of measures such as law enforcement officers assigned to schools and other control measures, such as security cameras and student identification cards. Both authors believe by focusing on [bullying](#), school violence will end.

In a recent incident in a Northeastern state, a student rode the bus to school with a loaded shotgun concealed in his clothing. He walked into an area filled with students and pulled the weapon. Fortunately, a massacre did not occur because the student changed his mind and decided not to open fire on his classmates. Media accounts report the school had made efforts to combat [bullying](#) in the school. A [bullying](#) prevention policy previously was implemented and students received information about the consequences of [bullying](#) others. Yet the student indicated he was bullied severely at school and news reports said others witnessed such incidents.

Educators face complex issues when it comes to school safety from youth gangs, emotionally unbalanced parents and visitors to special education students who become violent. This situation described earlier is one more example proving problems with youth violence in schools are complex. It also shows there are no easy and simple solutions.

[Bullying](#) is a critical problem in many schools. In fact, bullying is one of the most pressing issues demanding our attention, but it is far from the only one. There is no simple or single approach to maintain

a safe school environment. The marketplace is filled with those who offer a wide variety of school safety wares they claim will make our schools safe places. They offer consulting services, books, videos, security products, software programs, and a host of other “solutions” we can buy to make our children safe. While individual products and services are often viable and valuable components, school administrators should be cautious when approached by those who offer a “solution” to the school violence problem.

Leading authorities, including Dr. Ronald Stephens of the National School Safety Center, advocate a comprehensive community-based approach rather than a strategy based on limited components. Experience of other experts also indicates a broad-based collaborative is much more effective than reliance on a few individual strategies.

School safety is not a product, it is a process. There is no solution to the problem, only strategies to address it. There is no one size fits all product or service you can purchase to make the problem go away. It would be wonderful if it was that simple, but it is not. Modern schools are faced with students with behavior disorders, drug activity on campus, child abuse, child molesters, employee theft, domestic violence coming to campus, street criminals who enter a campus while fleeing from police, the student who feels bullied or persecuted and plans to commit an act of weapons violence, triggering behaviors including fights that often escalate to more serious acts of violence, and a host of other issues.

One of my major work responsibilities is to provide free technical assistance to public and private schools in my state. I also handle technical assistance requests from around the nation and overseas on a daily basis. To be able to provide assistance, I regularly test, review, and evaluate products and services relating to school safety. I have evaluated [metal detectors](#), X-ray machines, crime tracking software programs, weapons systems for law enforcement, emergency operations plans, school resource officer programs, mock crisis [exercises](#), [threat assessment](#) services, and a host of other products and services. There are some exceptional products and services available to schools as useful components to a safe school strategy. There are also products and services of poor quality, and in some cases, even those that are counterproductive to a safe school environment. Above all, I see no one product or service comes close to being “the solution” to the problems of school safety.

Those who are still convinced we can provide a safe school environment by reliance on singular approaches or by using only two or

three strategies may be rolling the dice with the safety of children as their gamble. Those who are still behind the times on examining proven and critical components such as law enforcement partnerships shall continue to allow children to be victimized through their resistance to change. I challenge everyone who is a stakeholder in the safety of our schools to periodically review what they have in place. It is also important to reexamine our cherished beliefs and philosophies to make sure they are still in line with our changing society. If the children are foremost on our minds, we can make the effort to do so. School safety is not easy in today's troubled world, but it is a worthwhile goal.

Partnerships to Reduce Truancy

March 2000

Truancy is a critical issue for many communities. Common sense tells us and research documents students who are regularly truant are more likely to drop out of school. The evidence is clear that a high percentage of dropouts (as many as 95 percent according to one study conducted in Dade County, Florida, end up serving time in prison. Students who are truant are more likely to be arrested for crimes while truant and are much more likely to be victims of crime when they leave the safety of their schools behind and roam the streets.

A number of communities around the nation are having significant success with a relatively new approach to fight truancy. Over the past ten years, a number of successful partnerships between police and schools were created to fight truancy. These communities found by drawing on the strengths of both disciplines, the rate of truancy is reduced dramatically. While each discipline is limited in effectiveness when acting alone, the partnership between the two is a powerful one.

In recent years, examples of the value of such partnerships have been developed in:

- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma with Truancy Habits Reduced Increasing Valuable Education – THRIVE.
- Ronherth Park, California with Stop, Cite, and Return.
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin with the Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression Program – TABS.
- In Macon, Georgia with the Return to School Program.

There are a number of other high quality programs using a school/law enforcement partnership tailored to fit the needs of their communities. This concept has demonstrated significant success that can be replicated in communities around the nation.

These initiatives rely on an approach only a collaborative can achieve. They all require commitment from the participating agencies, and each requires support from the courts to augment the social services only the school system can provide.

Several highly respected law enforcement publications have printed articles relating to the role of the police in helping schools reduce truancy. Law enforcement executives around the nation are becoming more receptive to anti-truancy efforts because such efforts also reduce crime. School administrators in many communities are finding law enforcement officials to be open to this concept.

A number of truancy reduction efforts were implemented with the assistance of federal grant funding. In recent years, the value of these programs for long-term crime reduction was noted by the federal government. Grant-funded programs repeatedly have demonstrated success. This has increased the chances new programs can receive federal grant support.

Effective truancy reduction partnerships normally rely heavily on the use of citations for the parent and/or student to appear in court. By attaching a monetary or community service consequence to the violation, parents are frequently motivated to make their child's attendance at school a priority. Once parents learn they can no longer allow their children to remain out of school without a significant consequence, they tend to take an active role in helping to resolve the problem.

Parents who face such consequences tend to pay closer attention to the information provided by school staff relating to how they can help get the child back in school. Once parents begin working with the school, improvement is likely to occur. As word spreads in the community that the police and the courts are supporting the schools in reducing truancy, many parents begin paying attention to their child's attendance rates before the situation becomes chronic enough to require intervention by the team.

One challenge that needs to be addressed in any truancy reduction program is the way chronically truant students are reintegrated into the school setting. These students often need additional attention to get them back on track academically and may struggle with conduct. The program should include well thought out efforts to help students

adjust to the school setting once they return. Considerable efforts may be required to help students absent from school more than they are in attendance.

There are of course obstacles. The lack of meaningful requirements for home schooling sometimes allows parents to bypass the truancy reduction program by claiming they are going to home school their children. In some areas, court officials may need to be educated on the importance of making compulsory attendance law violations a priority in already overloaded court calendars. Such obstacles are often encountered with juvenile justice initiatives, but they should not stand in the way of a well-designed program.

Truancy reduction initiatives are a key component to reducing current problems with today's youth. They are also an effective way to reduce future crime problems in our communities. While posing many challenges to resolve, the problem of truancy requires no less than our best effort.

Do You Have a Plan For Safety?

February 2003

Most schools now have some written plan for emergency situations, but only a small percentage of schools around the country have a written plan for prevention of accidents and acts of violence. Many districts also do not have a formal response plan to ensure the proper implementation of the emergency operations plan, and a number do not have a written recovery plan to help staff and students get back on track after a crisis. As every school district and private school has a written budget plan, and most have a well-defined plan for the achievement of other important long-term operational goals, it makes sense to use the same approach to guide district personnel in providing a safe and secure learning environment.

WHAT IS A SCHOOL SAFETY PLAN?

A school safety plan is a comprehensive written strategy for the prevention/mitigation of accidents, crime, violence, and the reduction of the impact of natural disasters in the school setting. A proper school safety plan also addresses preparedness, response and recovery for crisis situations. The all-hazards approach developed by the emergency management community stresses the need to address all potential hazards that could occur in the region be they natural disasters, accidents, acts of violence, outbreaks of disease or other crisis events. By using the proven emergency management concept of an all-hazards plan that addresses the four phases of emergency management (prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery), a school safety plan can more effectively address a wide range of safety concerns. Though it is often confused with a school emergency

operations plan ([EOP](#)), the proper school safety plan addresses these other areas, while the emergency operations plan is designed only to guide the response to a crisis that takes place.

The emergency operations plan, when properly designed, is one part of the overall school safety plan. An emergency operations plan provides a set of detailed steps that should be followed in the event of a crisis. A comprehensive [EOP](#) is often comprised of the following components: Master protocols, site-specific procedures, [flip charts](#), event tracking software program, and CD-ROM pre-incident planning system or PIPS. The school safety plan is designed to prevent the emergency operations plan from being needed. The [EOP](#) is required for those instances where the safety plan fails to prevent a crisis from developing. As no school is immune to occurrences such as earthquakes and acts of violence, every school should have both types of plans.

Most school safety experts insist only a comprehensive approach to school safety will create a reasonably safe and peaceful learning environment. Trying to ensure all potential risks are covered by appropriate prevention, preparedness, response and recovery measures can be a daunting task if not approached in an organized fashion. The process of developing a school safety plan can bring order and efficiency to what can otherwise be a haphazard approach to prevention.

WHAT CAN THE SCHOOL SAFETY PLAN BE USED FOR?

A properly developed school safety plan demonstrates to students, parents, school staff and the media that school safety issues are addressed in an orderly and thorough manner. A good plan can enhance the chances of obtaining grant funding, reduce civil liability and make it easier to defend the organization and individual school employees in the event of safety-related litigation.

FOCUS ON THE PROCESS RATHER THAN THE PARTICULARS

Using the approach detailed in the most comprehensive book on the subject, the Jane's Safe School Planning Guide for All Hazards, the process can be streamlined with the outline provided. By approaching areas of concern categorically, a working group or task force can evaluate a wide range of specific strategies to select those best suited for the budget, risks, political climate and available resources in the local community. As with emergency operations plans, a canned plan will not be effective, but a sample format can go a long way to get things started without reinventing the wheel.

TOPICAL AREAS THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE PLAN

While each school system or private institution is unique, there are certain basic topical areas that should be covered in the plan. These often include:

- Policies affecting students, staff and visitors.
- Information and educational prevention efforts such as staff development and crime prevention programs aimed at students.
- Emotional security initiatives such as [bullying](#) prevention programs, school resource officer programs and counseling services.
- Environmental security efforts such as school safety zone initiatives and the use of crime prevention through environmental design concepts in building construction.
- Fire and accident prevention measures such as annual safety inspections and the use of a daily safety sweep procedure by school staff.
- Pupil transportation safety efforts such as the installation of security cameras and radios in buses and school bus safety inspections.
- Truancy and dropout reduction programs such as the creation of a return to school officer program and mentoring programs.
- Employee and volunteer screening procedures such as the use of standard background checks and verification of references.
- Incident reporting, tracking and analysis such as the use of standard reporting procedures and software systems to track and analyze incidents.
- Emergency preparedness measures such as proper training of staff on the use of the emergency operations plan and the use of [drills](#) and [exercises](#) to test plans and familiarize staff with the plans.
- A specific response plan designed to make the implementation of the emergency operations plan smoother.
- A specific recovery plan designed to address the mental health needs of affected students, school employees, emergency responders and the loved ones of those who affected by the crisis.

Let None Learn in Fear

- Documentation of safety related efforts in the district to reduce liability.

School safety should be enough of a priority in every community to prompt anyone who has an interest in the education of our nation's children to take the time to map out and record a comprehensive school safety strategy. An effective all hazards school safety plan that addresses the four phases of emergency management is the best way to achieve that worthy goal.

A Place for Every Child

May 2003

The U.S. Secret Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Education and a number of other organizations have carefully studied incidents where youth have committed preplanned multiple victim shootings in American schools. Their meticulous research supports what many educators believed for years — at-risk youth need to be connected to and feel a part of their school. While the majority of credible research indicates there is no reliable profile of a school shooter, but a careful review of the research indicates there may be a profile of a school where major acts of violence are more likely to occur. Whether the concern is for what the Secret Service calls “acts of targeted school violence”, for gang violence or the more common incidents of “minor” violence on campus, attention to detail is important.

EVERY STUDENT HAS A PLACE

Today’s schools face many daunting challenges. One is to find a place for each student in every school. Our fast-paced, diverse and complex society can be seen in our schools and any other segment of our society. Today’s students take many forms; they come from a wide range of household situations and in general, are less alike from one another than in most if not any time period in our nation’s history. While such diversity brings many positive influences to our schools, it also can result in alienation for many of our youth who find themselves struggling to fit into a world seemingly without a place or group to call their own. This is where the staff plays an integral role; research shows students who can identify one adult they

trust and admire are less likely to engage in risky behavior (Resnick et al, 1998).

AT LEAST ONE CARING ADULT FOR EVERY CHILD IN THE SCHOOL

One technique with merit is to ask staff members to help administrators identify every student in the school who appears to be in need of a mentor type relationship. A staff member or other responsible adult can then be paired with each of these students as a mentor. By partnering with organizations such as a mentor program, Boys and Girls Clubs of America or other reputable youth organization, the number of available mentors can be dramatically increased. While most school systems already make significant efforts to encourage students to avail themselves of such opportunities, some do not make a concerted effort to take the route of going to individual students as a consistent practice. By combining this approach of offering programs to students along with encouraging specific at-risk youth to link up with specific adult role models, a much higher percentage of students will participate.

A FOCUS ON LISTENING

In the school threat management training programs offered by the Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, the instructors stress to an important finding from their interviews with students who have perpetrated multiple victim shootings. Suspects they interviewed repeatedly said educators in their schools were not easily approachable. When asked what school officials could have done to prevent his shooting rampage at Pearl High School, Luke Woodham said if he could have talked openly with any one school employee about his problems, the shooting would not have taken place. He emphasized this openness would only have been present after he had become comfortable with the adult, indicating such relationships must be built over time. While this approach will obviously not work with every troubled youth, most will respond in a positive fashion.

FINDING A PLACE FOR EVERY CHILD

In addition to striving to ensure every student is connected with at least one responsible and caring adult, efforts to get students involved in supportive group environments within the school are worthwhile. Some students find a place in band, many in a science club and others on the school rifle team. The point is to get each student connected to a larger group of their peers.

YOUNGER ROLE MODELS

A number of major violent acts such as shootings and countless less visible situations such as fights were connected to incidents of exclusion and [bullying](#) by various groups within the school. Football players, cheerleaders, gifted students, affluent students and informal groups of a seemingly endless variety were identified as putting immense pressure on individual students who they targeted. One technique that shows positive results is to solicit staff with influential roles over such groups to encourage their active involvement in preventing [bullying](#) and school violence by heading up anti-[bullying](#) and anti-violence campaigns within the school community.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Teachers frequently have a tremendous positive impact on students without even being aware of it. This is particularly true for students who do not feel like they have a place. A good teacher can give a child at least a chance to feel, “[If] she thinks I’m worth something, maybe I am,” Said Tracy Kidder in *Among School Children*. You can make a difference in the lives of children, probably more than you realize. Structuring our schools to ensure we are making a difference in the lives of the children who need it the most is not only a noble thing, it is a practical goal.

School Safety as a Quality Service Issue

March 2003

There was much talk about quality service over the past decade. A careful study of the field of quality service management reveals that in the private sector, many organizations either thrive or cease to exist because of their focus on quality service or the failure to do so. In local, state and federal government, we rarely see the situation where an organization ceases to exist, but we do see struggling and ineffective organizations as well as examples of exceptional ones. And more often than not, when we see the success stories, we find ample evidence of a focus on quality and the basic tenants of quality service management.

THE PUBLIC IS NOT TOTALLY HAPPY

We have all seen the surveys more times than we would probably care to. We read the headlines declaring the American public is not satisfied with our nation's public schools. Dramatic increases in home schooling programs in recent decades may indicate significant portions of our population are not satisfied with either public or private schools. While the results of such surveys and the meaning of the statistics are subject to differing interpretations, there is much to indicate fair or not, right or not, our educational systems do not have the level of support and confidence from the public we would all like them to have. In the world of quality service management, this necessitates a deep and honest self-assessment based on the *customer's viewpoint*.

Closer examination of the critical survey results of students, parents and the general public typically reveals inadequate school safety is almost always one of the top concerns expressed. Assuming some

feelings relating to school safety may be unfounded, it is still the job of those charged with school safety duties to address not only the *actual* level of safety, but the *perceived* level of safety as well.

SAFETY IS A TRULY QUALITY SERVICE ISSUE

The National Resource Center for Safe Schools uses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to illustrate the point that until safety and security needs are met, greater things such as self-actualization cannot occur. Put another way, no matter how nice your buildings, no matter how high the test scores and no matter how well the football team does in the playoffs, no school is as good as it should be until it has a truly effective safety strategy. Unless and until safety is truly a main priority in name as well as in deed, the best of schools by other measures fall well short of their potential. During the past several decades, we have seen some of our nation's most violent criminal acts carried out by student at schools with high test scores, in nice neighborhoods and housed in nice facilities.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

First and foremost, those in positions of leadership must make school safety a real priority that permeates the organization. School safety is a place where talk is cheap but actual achievement is not. Next, school leaders must develop a complete intolerance for anyone in the organization who in any way covers up school crime, [bullying](#) and other safety concerns. Education is seriously harmed every time public and private school administrators keep their jobs after covering up hostage situations, [guns](#) recovered from students, explosive devices on campus, sexual assaults on campus, and other serious crimes. When these incidents come to light, school employees, parents and students lose trust and respect for the individuals involved, their organizations and the field of education itself. This is enough of a problem around the country that every state and the federal government now have laws to address school crime reporting. A basic principal of quality service management is open and meaningful communications with the customer. Sometimes, the process of maintaining this dialogue is a painful one. But in the long term, openness normally builds trust more valuable than the short-term damage of frankness.

BALANCING ACT

Obviously, school officials must be concerned with the image and reputation of their schools. No teacher, parent, student, administrator or

board member likes to see a local school painted as a dangerous place by the media. And clearly, the media does not always provide fair coverage for school safety incidents. But unfortunately, it's difficult to discern between trying to maintain a positive image and the need to openly address school safety problems. And when school officials are found in what appears to be an attempt to hide safety issues from the public, the media and the public can be very unforgiving. In these instances, severe damage can be done to the reputation we wish to protect.

The time to make safety and security a guiding principal in every school in our country is long overdue. For those school districts and private institutions that truly desire to be the best, there is no other option.

Section Four

Emergency Operations Planning

Beginning the Emergency Operations Planning Process

March 2000

It is crucial every school have a comprehensive and properly developed emergency operations plan for the facility and school safety zone. Events over time demonstrate crisis situations can occur in urban schools, suburban schools, small schools, large schools, public schools, and private schools. There were accidental, man-made, and natural disasters in schools of all description across the nation during the past decade. There was one recurring commonality in these tragic situations: Many of the affected schools did not have an adequate emergency operations plan.

While no amount of planning and preparation can ensure a school crisis situation will be handled flawlessly, it is clear communities who fail to properly plan will experience avoidable problems. One problem is school and public safety officials frequently underestimate the difficulties posed by school crisis situations. School administrators do not typically have experience or prior training with emergency management issues. Some public safety officials may mistakenly feel a school crisis can be handled just like a crisis in any other setting. Few of the nation's hundreds of school safety consultants have any actual experience or formal training in the field of emergency management. This results in woefully inadequate school emergency operations plans for most. Through a collaborative effort and careful research, effective school emergency operations plans can be developed.

It is important school emergency operations plans be developed locally, by those who will have responsibility for implementing the plan if a crisis occurs. The "plan in a can" so popular with many school districts is the easy route, but it is also a route fraught with danger.

Such generic plans often end up being adapted to a particular school or school system by simple modifications with little real thought as to how they might work during a real crisis. It is also popular for school administrators to obtain a copy of another district's plan and make simple modifications before adapting it to their own district. If you are relying on a packaged plan, it may be prudent to carefully review the plan with local public safety professionals and see if it will serve your needs in a major crisis. Such plans may provide a useful framework, but will rarely be effective during a challenging situation if not significantly tailored to local conditions.

When put to the test by a major crisis, improperly developed plans often fail miserably. As one key administration official said after their school district experienced a mass weapons incident, "We thought we had a good plan, it was used as a statewide model prior to the incident, but our plan fell apart immediately. We had no idea that we could experience some of the problems that we were faced with." Inadequate plans can result in increased civil liability, loss of property, loss of public confidence, and most importantly, loss of life. Proper plan development is not just a good idea; it is a requirement of conducting the business of educating our children.

How then is an adequate plan developed? First, a planning committee should be developed. It is important every agency that may be needed to respond to a crisis be involved. It is especially crucial assistance be sought from the local and state emergency management agency. It is important to remember it will be the personnel from these agencies who will be the first responders to a local school crisis situation. Georgia Senate Bill 74 requires all area public safety agencies be involved in the planning process. It also mandates students and parents have a role in the planning process. Further, it recognizes faculty, as well as support staff and administrators need to be involved. Each of these parties is a stakeholder in a school crisis situation and may contribute valuable input in plan development. Many other states adopted similar legislation since the bill was passed in the late 1990s. Be sure to check the laws in your state to ensure the plan you develop meets legal guidelines. One large school district paid a consulting firm approximately \$1 million dollars to develop a plan that failed to meet minimum standards for approval under state law. To make matters worse, the plan failed when school officials tried to use it to address three different crisis situations faced by the district since it was adopted.

Once the committee is established, specific concerns to be addressed and goals should be developed. A useful tool in this process is a planning guide. Check with your state emergency management agency and state department of education to see if they have a school [crisis planning](#) guide for educational facilities. If they do not have a planning guide, they may offer a sample plan or emergency operations flip chart. These can serve to stimulate discussion and to provide a framework for the development of a tailored emergency operations plan that will match the needs and resources of your community.

The committee should then develop specific plans and procedures to cover a variety of situations. The district could develop an overall system protocol to provide consistent guidelines for all facilities within the district. Each site designates a safety team to develop specific procedures unique to that site. For example, the system protocol might mandate if students are evacuated for a bomb threat, several sites at least 1,000 feet from the facility will be available, these sites will be rotated after they are used, and a “go-ahead team” shall inspect the site for suspicious packages before students and staff are evacuated. The school procedure would then outline which sites were identified for that specific facility, and the route students will take to reach each of the sites.

The planning process must be an ongoing and introspective look at the hazards and resources of the individual community. Through diligent efforts involving all relevant agencies, development of a viable emergency operations plan is within reach. By realizing school crisis situations require response efforts that are well thought out, practiced, and properly applied under trying conditions, you can be ready if the need arises.

Bomb Threat Basics

*From the feature article in **School Planning and Management Magazine**:*

Although they seem rare, bomb threats and explosive devices, both hoaxes and real, are becoming an increasing concern on school campuses.

February 2001

A rural school district recently learned it had a flaw in its bomb threat protocol: It called for evacuation of students to the same site each time a bomb threat was received. Fortunately, the school and public safety officials in the community were exceptionally good in their preventive protocols.

A middle school student made threatening statements to other students who, to the credit of the students and the school district, reported the threats. By taking the threats seriously and conducting a thorough investigation, school and law enforcement officials recovered drawings of the building showing the locations of relevant security features. They then conducted a home search and recovered a partially constructed hoax device and drawings common to violent extremist groups. During interviews with the student, he admitted he planned to build a real device, place it in the evacuation area and call in a bomb threat to more effectively target a larger number of victims. The student also admitted he planned to cripple school system computers with several viruses. An independent psychologist who completed a court-ordered evaluation felt the young man was intent on, and fully capable of, carrying out his plan if not identified through the investigation.

Because of the proper handling of the situation through an effective school/law enforcement threat-management partnership, you did not see yet another school tragedy on the news. But the situation alerted officials to what could have been a serious yet simple oversight in the manner in which bomb threats are often handled in schools around the nation.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The use of explosive devices in the school setting increased in recent years. During the second half of the last school year, explosive devices detonated in Colorado, Missouri and Georgia on school property. A number of other incidents took place involving real devices and hoax devices and many U.S. schools were inundated with bomb threats. Additionally, real concerns arise regarding secondary devices — devices designed to kill or injure evacuees and public safety responders — that have actually been used on U.S. soil in recent years.

During the past few years, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) received more than 5,000 notifications of juvenile cases involving explosives, and the BATF reports more than 60 functional explosive devices were placed on American K-12 campus during a three-year period. Why are so many of our youth experimenting with bombs? One reason is the unprecedented access to bomb-making instructions and tactics for the deployment of explosives. Today's terrorist, anarchist, troubled youth or curiosity seeker can simply browse the Internet to learn how to make and use a wide variety of explosive devices. There is also no shortage of propaganda from hate groups to try to persuade maladjusted students why they should use explosives to make a statement to society.

For those who may be uncomfortable with the Web, there is a wide selection of books to choose from. One catalogue lists an incredible number of titles relating to explosives. Texts on bomb making, triggering devices, booby traps and remote control systems for explosives abound. The ease of learning how to make and use bombs is more disturbing because functional explosives can be made from such a wide variety of easily obtainable materials. A student of average intelligence can build a powerful vehicle bomb with less effort than some students expend on their science projects.

What can and should schools do? Five key responses can go a long way to help schools decrease the threat level:

1. Accept the reality incidents involving bomb threats, hoax devices and real devices can occur in any school.
2. Get help from the experts — most importantly, those public safety agencies actually involved when incidents occur.
3. Develop and implement preventive measures based on the recommendations of the experts.

4. Develop bomb threat protocols for schools, special events and school buses, and effectively communicate them to all staff and area public safety agencies.
5. Develop crisis protocols for situations involving suspicious packages, actual known devices and detonation of a device on school property and at off-campus sites where school events take place.

IMPLEMENTING A PLAN

We should now look closer at each of these five categories.

1. School officials must accept the fact that while incidents involving real explosive devices are still statistically rare in the school environment, they do occur with enough frequency to merit serious consideration. Most school bomb incidents involving detonation of actual devices were small devices of relatively low power. However, the largest device failed to detonate at Columbine High School, which BATF experts feel would have killed more than 400 students. This is just one example of the potential for a mass-casualty bomb incident in the school setting.
2. Experts in the area of explosives should be contacted to see what training and technical assistance is available. The BATF is the nation's lead agency for bomb incidents. They have some of the world's best experts in this field on staff and some of the most state-of-the-art information available anywhere on bombs and bomb incidents. Consider calling on those individuals whose full-time capacity is to deal with these matters, as it is these professionals who will be by your side to assist you if an actual device detonates in one of your buildings. U.S. Postal inspectors are responsible for preventing, investigating and responding to incidents involving packages sent through the U.S. mail system. Here again, we find the best in the business. Don't overlook your state and local law enforcement agencies. In my state, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation goes to the extent of sending its bomb technicians to Israel for training to ensure they have all available information on their specialty. Experts in explosives who work for public safety organizations tend to be very competent — their lives often depend on it. It is in their interest to work with you at the planning stage rather than to come in to cleanup a disastrous situation that could

have been prevented.

3. Using the advice obtained from the experts, make each facility a tougher target, and document your efforts. Take steps such as making sure all vacant school lockers are kept locked, and evaluate the types, numbers and locations of waste receptacles and dumpsters in and around your facility. Implementation of a strict dress code, random weapons screening and proper installation of security cameras will increase the chances a violator will be caught or, more importantly, deterred. Setting a firm tone that any illegal activities relating to bombs or bomb threats will be dealt with swiftly and firmly may have a powerful deterrent value. My experience has been school systems that make it a clear priority to identify and prosecute those who make bomb threats have far fewer bomb threats than those districts dealing with violators through suspension or expulsion without filing criminal charges. Those districts that choose to notify the media immediately following such arrests often have even better success.
4. Using guidance from local, state and federal public safety officials, school administrators should develop a thorough and realistic standardized system wide protocol for handling bomb threats. Concerns, such as the use of multiple evacuation sites, how the decision to evacuate or not to evacuate will be made, the dangers of secondary (multiple) devices and credibility assessment, should be addressed in the protocol. All facilities should be covered by the protocol. Be sure to include emergency management personnel in this process. The safety team at each facility should then develop a specific building procedure detailing site-specific points such as the location of evacuation sites and evacuation routes. The system wide protocol should cover those things every site must address such as minimum evacuation distance and should cover things such as incidents involving school buses, athletic events and special events such as graduation ceremonies.
5. The school system should also develop protocols and site procedures to address situations involving suspicious packages, suspected devices and detonation of an explosive device. If a device detonates in a school where considerable planning was not made for this situation, a bad situation can become much worse.

By recognizing the reality of the dangers of bombs in the school setting and working with public safety officials, schools can be better prepared to deal with these difficult issues. While actual detonations of explosive devices on school property are still statistically rare, no school is immune to the threat of such an incident. Ask anyone who has experienced such a tragedy. They will quickly tell you it is worth the effort to prepare.

A FEW FREE RESOURCES

The Anti-Defamation League can provide to school administrators high-quality training and/or resource materials relating to hate groups – (212)490-2525.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms is the nation's lead federal law enforcement agency in the area of illegal explosives. ATF personnel can provide free training of the highest quality in many areas of the country. The agency also produces printed materials well suited for school staff — Arson and Explosives Division, (202)927-7930.

U.S. Postal inspectors have a great deal of knowledge concerning mail bombs. They can provide assistance with printed materials focused on prevention efforts and in many areas of the country, they can also provide training – (800)654-8896.

The School Safety Project of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency – Office Homeland Security has a number of full-time school safety experts on staff. GEMA personnel offer a wide range of free technical assistance, training and response capabilities to all public and private schools in Georgia. The agency also shares its information by allowing out-of-state personnel to attend its seminars without charge, and by providing information on its website www.gema.state.ga.us – (404)635-7000.

Are You Prepared for the Next Crisis?

From the feature article in School Planning and Management Magazine:

Security equipment and emergency plans are only as good as the thought that goes into them and the practice your staff has in using them.

April 2001

Mrs. Kent, the school secretary, was in complete shock. Standing before her was Mrs. Amerson, the 65-year-old grandmother of Sarah Johnson. Upon being told she could not see her granddaughter because of a restraining order, the frail Mrs. Amerson pulled a large revolver from her pocketbook, pointed it at Mrs. Kent and demanded to see Sarah immediately.

As the incident command post was set up, the police department duty officer noticed hundreds of frantic parents were already arriving at the school. From the flow of cars screeching to a halt in a haphazard fashion, he knew that soon several thousand people would swarm the scene. At that moment, an afterthought struck him. With a few hours of effort, his department could have programmed its \$500,000 computer-aided dispatch system to prompt communications personnel automatically. They, in turn, would dispatch officers to block off specific choke points around any school in the community affected by a major crisis.

He could not believe he had not thought to make sure all area schools were added to the list of critical facilities programmed into the CAD system.

Inside the school, Mrs. Amerson was now holding the principal, the assistant principal and several office staff members at gunpoint. Mrs. Kent was desperately trying to calm her down. However, since Mrs. Amerson had not taken her medication, it was to no avail.

Thoughts flooded through the principal's mind. He knew his staff would begin implementing the emergency operations plan immediately — except the plan was in the emergency evacuation kit less than

ten feet away! Then he remembered there was a second kit in Mrs. Johnson's office, and she surely would have taken it with her when she left the building.

At that very moment, Mrs. Johnson realized in her haste to evacuate the building, she forgot to take the evacuation kit with her. She felt like an idiot. She wished they had followed through with the regularly scheduled [drills](#) and [exercises](#) to make sure everyone would function properly under the stress of a real crisis like this one.

The S.W.A.T. commander could not believe what he was hearing. The maintenance director had just informed him that the school district had spent over \$100,000 to put each school's emergency operations plan, building schematics, interior and exterior photographs and even video tours of each school on CD-ROM, but the only two copies were in emergency evacuation kits still in the school!

"What about security cameras?" he asked excitedly. The maintenance director quickly informed him they had recently installed \$75,000 worth of top-end security cameras in the school, and two cameras were located in the main office area. At that moment, the maintenance director realized he should have heeded the advice of the consultant who suggested using fewer cameras to offset the cost of the system, and use the saved money for secure and remote viewing by computer through the Internet.

THERE'S GOT TO BE A BETTER WAY

While this hypothetical scene might seem far-fetched, I can assure you it is not out of line with actual incidents that have taken place. Often, schools make substantial investments in school safety technology without coordinating their efforts. It is easy for educators and public safety officials to get so focused on their many responsibilities they sometimes forget to take a few minutes to talk to each other before a crisis takes place.

Today's security technology is nothing short of extraordinary. The heightened awareness of school safety in recent years has created an enormous market for school safety products and services. Manufacturers responded with an array of useful and well-made products. And while there are definitely some poor-quality and even dangerous products and services available, there are many good ones that can help dramatically improve the level of safety in your school.

How can school officials reduce the odds of making simple but critical mistakes when acquiring and implementing school safety tech-

nology? With scores of salespeople and consultants telling you their products and expertise are what you need, whom should you listen to?

The answer is quite simple in concept, but it requires effort. You have to communicate — ask questions, verify answers, seek input and brief others.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

A basic rule is to understand your needs before you purchase equipment or services. Solicit feedback from students, faculty and staff to identify and prioritize concerns. I know of one district that spent \$250,000 to purchase an elaborate security camera system, when the biggest problem was the presence of [guns](#) and [knives](#) on campus. The district could have seen much more significant results by spending half that amount on [metal detectors](#) and X-ray units to establish an effective random weapons screening program.

KNOW YOUR HOME GROUND

Next, you must conduct [tactical site surveys](#) on all school facilities (see “How to Conduct Proper Tactical Site Surveys”). Whether coordinated through a state agency, a qualified consultant, a major vendor, your insurance carrier or your own personnel, [tactical site surveys](#) need to be completed before equipment is purchased. Spending \$500 to \$1,500 per facility is cheap compared to the purchase of a half-million-dollar system not properly suited to your situation.

WORK AS A TEAM

Regardless of who coordinates your site surveys, make sure your local public safety agencies are asked to participate. These are the same experts who will be responding to the facility in the event of a crisis.

In the same vein, be sure to involve all area public safety and emergency management agencies in the development of your emergency operations plan ([EOP](#)). I often point out to seminar participants that I can do a great job in helping them develop their [EOP](#). However, your local public safety and emergency management representatives must be actively involved. The “experts” will likely be far away when a crisis strikes your school, but your fire personnel, police officers and local county emergency manager will be by your side immediately. They must be involved in plan development, or your plan will not work properly. Beware the vendor or consultant who has a ready-made plan for your district or offers to write the plan for you without the assistance of your local responders. Using a qualified consultant

to guide you and your local public safety personnel can be cost effective and productive.

Do Some Homework

It is also important to listen carefully to vendors and consultants. If you do not understand what you are being told, ask questions — it's your money. Be sure you are listening to what you are being told. As with the security camera example, the extra features they suggest may be well worth the extra money. Also, carefully compare products offered by different companies. Carefully check out vendors and consultants. Ask for several names of people who have purchased the product, and contact them. Do not forget to ask about service after the sale.

Don't Stop Talking

Once you have acquired new school safety technology, make sure the communication process continues. Meet with your public safety and emergency management representatives to ensure they are aware of your new resources. Meet with all of them even if you don't think they would be interested. For example, the fire department will need to become familiar with your new access control system.

Don't forget the obvious need to educate students, staff and parents. A multiple-victim weapons assault recently took place at an elementary school with a new, top-of-the-line access control system. The assailant gained access to the school after a parent followed a staff member through a door. The parent then held the door open for the assailant.

Today's school administrators face many school safety challenges. Fortunately, there is a cornucopia of wares to help create a safer learning environment. By involving stakeholders in defining needs, seeking assistance from local safety experts and creating an open dialogue, these challenges can be met.

“Emergency Evacuation Kit” For School Emergencies

July, 1999

One essential item for school emergencies is the emergency evacuation kit. An emergency evacuation kit is a portable file box or briefcase that contains critical information on the people in the school, emergency phone numbers, emergency checklists, and important information about the building. The kit should be kept in the building administrator’s office with other emergency equipment such as a flashlight, portable cellular phone, and a bullhorn. The kit becomes the portable “command center” for the lead school administrator during the critical first few minutes of any crisis that requires the evacuation of the facility. The administrator or a designated staff member should take the kit with them whenever the building is evacuated. It is a good idea to take the kit during [drills](#) to help ensure it will be remembered during an actual crisis. A second duplicate kit that a backup administrator will also take with them during an emergency is advisable. The kit should be stored in an out-of-sight location so as not to be readily accessible by an offender such as a burglar or a hostage taker.

The kit should contain the following types of information and supplies:

1. A copy of the emergency checklist with all critical functions listed in the order they need to be carried out.
2. A copy of the school crisis response plan.
3. Sign out sheets, used to ensure all children released to parents and guardians are recorded properly. Sheets should also be developed to record all children and staff evacuated to medi-

cal facilities (always indicate how they are transported and the name of the destination of the victim).

4. A copy of the facility tactical site survey including floor plans.
5. Copies of photographs of the building exterior and interior.
6. A copy of a video that depicts the exterior and interior of the building.
7. Copies of all student contact or emergency cards.
8. An information sheet on all employees and parent volunteers in the school with emergency medical information and names and phone numbers of relatives who should be notified in the event of an emergency.
9. Emergency phone numbers for all key personnel who may be needed in an emergency (custodians, maintenance workers, and etc.).
10. Copies of prepared statements to be released to the press during a crisis explaining emergency procedures to help the press and the public understand those procedures.

Normally, the kit will be quickly taken to incident command site whenever students and staff are evacuated to ensure the school can provide critical information to public safety responders. The lead school administrator should assist the public safety official who is designated to be in charge of the incident scene. For legal, technical, and practical reasons, school officials should never attempt to assume the role of incident commander. A school administrator can cause needless additional suffering and ruin their career if they attempt to take on the role of incident commander once appropriate public safety personnel arrive on the scene. The administrator should ensure command of the scene is transferred to the appropriate public safety official immediately according to plans worked out in advance.

A second school administrator should proceed with a duplicate kit to the family reunification center. This will facilitate the process of transferring custody of students to parents and guardians efficiently. The student contact information will ensure non custodial parents and others not authorized to have access to a child do not exploit the crisis situation.

The school administrator at each scene (incident scene and family reunification center) should quickly make contact with the public safety site commander and ensure they have access to the information

contained in the kit. It is normally best for the kit to stay under the control of a representative of the school as public safety personnel will not be as familiar with the information in the box and will often need a school staff member to find and interpret the information needed.

A properly assembled kit that contains regularly updated information can help school administrators and public safety responders dramatically improve the way in which a crisis situation is handled. While school emergencies are chaotic under the best of circumstances, the information in an emergency kit can go a long way to make the process much more orderly and effective. More importantly, this information can save lives in a crisis.

How to Conduct Proper Tactical Site Surveys

April 1999

When a crisis strikes a school, proper [tactical site surveys](#) can mean the difference between life and death for those involved. Every year, unexpected disasters strike American schools. Lightning, tornadoes, fires, suicides, homicides, hostage situations, and explosions are tragedies we wish never happened at school, but on rare occasions do. When disaster strikes, ready access to a quality tactical site survey can enable crisis responders to work much more effectively.

A tactical site survey is a multidisciplinary risk assessment process that should be conducted in every school facility at least once each year. Your state or local emergency management agency may provide free technical assistance in preparing such a survey. There is also the option of hiring a consultant to come in and prepare a site survey, but this option is often expensive. If consultants are used, the most effective way to utilize them is to contract with them to train a local site survey team so your district can internalize the site survey process.

Many schools use a local safety team created specifically to conduct site surveys. A safety team of building level staff and public safety personnel makes a formal on-site assessment of the facility and grounds to spot potential hazards, record key information, and develop important contingency plans *before* a crisis occurs.

The results of the site survey are then recorded in written form and copies of the survey packets placed in secure storage in the office, at the main school system administrative office, and at various public safety facilities. This ensures the information can be retrieved quickly no matter where the crisis takes place or how widespread it may be.

Site survey work can be tedious, requires creativity, and demands attention to detail. Once the team is selected, team members should develop a site survey form if the organization does not already have one (for a sample site survey example, visit the Safe Havens International web site at www.safehavensinternational.org). The site survey checklist should serve as a ready checklist to ensure all pertinent information is recorded when the site survey is conducted. It is a good idea to supplement the form with photographs (or a video) of the interior and exterior of the building.

WHAT TO RECORD

The site survey should be a complete inspection of the facility and grounds to make sure every relevant feature of the building is recorded. Items that can be important to those who respond in an emergency first include:

- Location of power main and all electrical panels.
- Location of telephone boxes.
- Phone and address listings for all critical school personnel.
- Emergency phone listings for all possible emergency responders, maintenance personnel, and key system officials.
- Locations for assembly of evacuated students, suitable emergency command center spots, and rescue helicopter landing sites.
- Location and routes to nearby emergency medical facilities.
- An updated copy of the schematic plans for the building.
- Location of student emergency contact records.

It can be amazing how important some of those items are during an emergency. In one case, there was an accidental detonation on an anti-personnel grenade in a classroom (brought to school by a student who thought it was a dummy round). Because the school had plans for an emergency helicopter landing site, all injured students could be air evacuated out quickly when traditional emergency vehicles were overloaded by casualties. By planning for a category of incident (explosion on campus) most people would have found ridiculous before the fact, lives were saved by thoughtful and creative school officials.

One word of caution: “Canned” site surveys - where you simply change the name of the school and copy a survey in use elsewhere – are

not effective. An effective site survey instrument should be properly tailored to fit the specific needs of local schools and the community. Quality [tactical site surveys](#) require time and effort.

DISTRIBUTION IS IMPORTANT

Once the tactical site survey packet is completed each year, copies should be distributed for use by emergency responders. The packets should be used whenever a mock crisis drill is conducted. This will help to point out any deficiencies in the survey and will get local emergency service providers and school officials used to using the survey packets to manage an incident.

The good news is the process becomes much easier once the initial site survey is completed. The surveys conducted in later years need only to ensure all information is still up to date, no new hazards have developed, and any structural modifications to the building are recorded. However, you must not sit back and rely on the past surveys as an excuse to miss new problems by skipping the hard work and attention to detail required of the initial survey.

Mock Crisis Exercises: Don't Put the Cart Before the Horse

April 2000

Many schools across the country have conducted mock crisis [exercises](#) to increase their readiness for crisis situations. While it is good the staff members in these schools recognize the valid need for schools to conduct [exercises](#), they are often done prematurely. To avoid potential pitfalls and to obtain the optimum benefit possible, school mock crisis [exercises](#) should be a later component in the [crisis planning](#) process.

One of the most common and significant problems seen with school crisis [exercises](#) is when they are conducted before the school emergency operations plan is completed and all personnel trained on their roles in a crisis. If this occurs, the exercise will result in the testing of untrained people rather than the testing of the operations plan. One of the more significant goals of mock crisis [exercises](#) is to ensure the plan developed will work well in a real crisis. The best way to test plans is through a properly designed and thoughtfully developed series of [exercises](#). By following methods developed over decades by the emergency management community, valid exercises can be conducted.

Once the emergency operations plan is completed with input from all responding agencies and training of personnel completed, testing of the plan can begin using appropriate exercise types. Local, state, and federal emergency management agencies provide valuable expertise in selecting, developing, and coordinating appropriate and viable [exercises](#). While available assistance will vary from one region of the country to another, a little research can determine which agencies can help. These agencies can provide guidance in helping school administrators understand the concepts of proper crisis [exercises](#). Under the

emergency management structure, local agencies are often required to complete [exercises](#) periodically. Schools may receive the benefit of this expertise at little or no cost by partnering with their local emergency management agency.

There are a number of exercise types that have specific objectives and best serve certain functions. The following is a brief description of the standard exercise types and their functions as greatly abbreviated from the Federal Emergency Management Agency *Exercise Design Course* student manual:

Orientation seminar- This is a low stress, informal discussion in a group setting used to help participants from all involved agencies to understand roles, plans, and equipment that would come into play during a crisis. It serves as an opportunity to resolve coordination issues and to make sure responsibilities are assigned. This type of exercise is useful to review new procedures, plans, or policies, and it is an excellent first step in preparing for more complex [exercises](#).

Drill - Schools routinely conduct fire [drills](#), severe weather [drills](#), and the like. A drill is simply a coordinated and supervised activity to check out a specific operation or function in one agency such as a school or a police department. [Drills](#) are useful to allow personnel to get familiar with new equipment, procedures, or to practice and maintain current skills. [Drills](#) are an excellent way to test specific new concepts in an emergency operations plan to see how they would work in a crisis.

Tabletop exercise - These [exercises](#) should be used much more often in the school setting than they often are. They provide an opportunity for all relevant agencies to test their ability to implement emergency operation plans with low stress, low cost, and less chance of being embarrassed publicly by trying to execute a poorly planned full-scale exercise. A tabletop involves the simulation of a crisis situation in an informal and low stress setting. The participants talk through issues and work together toward solutions of problems posed by the scenario. It is a low key means to identify areas that need improvement and also build working relationships between agencies needed to function together during a crisis.

Functional exercise - These fully simulated interactive [exercises](#) occur in real time sequence with a high degree of stress and realism. They are the most realistic type of multi-agency exercise short of the full-scale exercise. Functional [exercises](#) can be used to test a component of the emergency operations plan such as the family reunification process or

to prepare for a full-scale crisis exercise of challenging proportions. Functional [exercises](#) are normally conducted in an emergency operations center setting using written messages delivered to role players by other personnel acting in the capacity of simulators. By using a well designed functional exercise, oversights can be identified and corrected prior to conducting a full-scale exercise.

Full-scale exercise- A properly designed full-scale exercise is the closest simulation of a real disaster possible. It will often take 12 months of preparation using combinations of the types of [exercises](#) described previously to prepare to conduct a well run full-scale exercise. An adequate full-scale exercise is a time consuming and expensive activity due to the number of resources that must be committed to fully test the communities' response to a crisis. These [exercises](#) are normally utilized after other basic issues are thoroughly addressed. Although it is tempting to jump to this phase of disaster preparation, it can be counterproductive to do so.

School crisis [exercises](#) can be an excellent means to test emergency operations plans and to provide valuable training to key players. If the concepts painstakingly developed by the emergency management discipline are followed, they can be extremely beneficial for any school.

Keys to Emergency Operations Planning Success

November 2002

The government school safety center where I work has formally evaluated more than 2,000 school emergency operations plans during the past four years. Our unit responded to more than 300 school emergency situations. We saw a direct correlation between common weaknesses in emergency operations plans and incidents of plan failure noted in many critical situations at schools. As many of the plans used by schools around the nation have either been purchased as a “plan in a can”, have been developed by consultants with no background in emergency management, or are merely slightly modified copies of another school’s plan, the same plan flaws are common in school emergency operations plans. This month’s column will address ways to avoid the most common problems that lead to plan failure.

ALL HAZARDS APPROACH

A good school emergency operations plan should address a wide range of potential emergency situations. Often, plans are developed with too much of a focus on rare acts of mass violence such as a shooting rampage while ignoring other types of situations. Plans should address natural disasters, utility failure, accidents, fire, hazardous materials, radiological incidents and other such situations as well as intentional acts like bomb threats and acts of violence.

AVOID COMBINING A PREVENTION PLAN AND AN EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN

Commonly, plans contain a mix of prevention measures and steps of action for emergency situations. A school administrator who has a

fire raging in their building does not have time to wade through pages of information on how to prevent a fire, instead, concise information is needed outlining what to do during an actual event.

A SOLID PLAN IS CUSTOMIZED TO FIT THE NEEDS OF LOCAL SCHOOLS AND RESOURCES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

While busy school officials may desire a “cookie cutter” plan that allows them to fill in the blanks with little time expended, these easy-to-use plans will rarely, if ever, be sufficient for a major crisis. While a purchased or copied plan may serve as a useful template or starting point, a viable plan is developed with meaningful input from all public safety, educational and community resource agencies and departments who would actually respond during a crisis.

LOGICAL AND CLEAR USER FRIENDLY FORMAT

The plan should be designed to allow staff members under extreme stress to locate critical information in a hurry. A surprising number of plans do not have an index or have an index that does not match the information in the plan. Color-coded sections and large font page numbers can help make the plan easy to use.

SOLID CONTENT

Plans often contain weak content such as statements such as “develop an emergency evacuation plan”. In this instance, the evacuation plan should be completed in advance and be included in the plan. Content should provide clear steps to be taken in a logical sequence.

CURRENT CONTENT

Information in the plan should be current. This requires attention to detail and an annual update of all emergency contact information, photographs, schematics and other information that can become out of date.

MATCHING COMPONENTS

A startling number of plans contain conflicting information. Information in the master plan, site procedures, [flip charts](#), software tracking system, CD-ROM, web-based versions, items posted in classrooms and any other components should not contain any contradictory information. The most common situation involves the addition of a supplemental component copied from another school or purchased from a vendor.

COMPREHENSIVE AND DETAILED

While plans should be clear and concise, they must provide enough detail to provide guidance during catastrophic events. Suffice to say that while [flip charts](#) are one of the most valuable plan components available, they are woefully inadequate as a complete plan for most schools.

INCIDENT COMMAND AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

School plans should incorporate the incident command structure and system in use by the local public safety community. When this is not done, conflict and confusion frequently result during a major event. Many communications problems can be significantly reduced through the use of incident command. Alternate means of communications should also be carefully considered in planning as well as when training staff.

PLANS SHOULD COVER INCIDENTS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER SCHOOL HOURS

Plans should address how incidents can be handled when limited numbers of staff members are on hand. Special attention should be paid to school bus incidents, field trips, athletic events, dances, graduation ceremonies and other special events.

ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL NEEDS PERSONS

Consider communication and movement difficulties for students, staff, visitors and parents who do not speak English well, or who have emotional or physical limitations.

REDUNDANCY

A solid plan provides back-up personnel for all key roles and includes multiple prompts for key actions. Remember, many things can go wrong no matter how carefully you plan.

By paying special attention to these critical areas, the chances a plan will work well under the most trying of circumstances will be greatly improved. Obviously, other issues such as plan distribution, testing of plans and regular refresher training for staff members is also necessary for emergency preparedness. Experience shows expending the time and energy to prepare will prove worthwhile when a crisis strikes.

Creating Safe Spaces in a Hurry

December 2002

The administrator's urgent voice boomed over the public address system "The chicken is in the pot – cook it" announcing the school's lockdown code. Confusion was in evidence immediately. One teacher ordered students in her class to lie flat on the floor, other teachers simply locked their classroom doors, several others evacuated students from the building and three substitute teachers took no action at all. This type of response is typical of what could be expected in schools without a well thought out and carefully communicated set of lockdown procedures.

Effective and properly used lockdown protocols have averted school hostage situations, acts of violence and reduced fear. In places where less attention is paid to the concept, needless panic and disruption occur, and in rare cases, students and staff are needlessly injured, killed or taken hostage.

How viable are the lockdown procedures in your schools? Have they been developed with input from area public safety and emergency management officials, and just as importantly, tested to see if they really work? There are many considerations to the development of a workable lockdown system for today's diverse school settings. The situation is often further complicated by schools not designed with security in mind as well as a broad range of situations where a lockdown may be needed.

The first step in developing or updating lockdown procedures is an assessment of the physical layout of the campus with an awareness of why a lockdown might be implemented. Seeking assistance from local public safety and emergency management officials is

highly advisable. Input from law enforcement officials will provide a perspective different from the viewpoints of fire service personnel and emergency management experts. By working with each of these disciplines, considerations that are at odds can be better harmonized into an approach that addresses the concerns of each. For example, law enforcement personnel will typically be focused on security of building occupants while fire personnel may be concerned with people becoming trapped in the event of a fire during a lockdown. By using this multi-disciplinary approach, common problems such as the installation of classroom door locks that violate local fire codes can be avoided. Administrators have been frustrated by installing locks at significant expense only to learn they must be removed after the next fire inspection.

Work with your team of experts to evaluate situations where a lockdown might be used. Many schools find having two distinct levels of lockdown make it more likely school officials can better adapt to the wide range of situations where a lockdown might be needed. By having one level of lockdown designed for prevention of an incident and another for response to an actual crisis, administrators can avoid being trapped by a one-size-fits-all approach. For example, many schools felt the need to go into a lockdown mode on September 11 of last year. Schools with only one level of lockdown often experienced difficulty because the situation was not appropriate for teachers to turn off lights and instruct students to lie on the floor. By having a preventive lockdown procedure where main and classroom doors are locked but teachers continue with teaching activities, administrators have the option of locking down more easily without significant disruption. For example, this type of lockdown might be useful if the police are chasing an armed robbery suspect near the school. A more intense response lockdown would be appropriate if the same individual actually ran into the school with a [gun](#) before administrators became aware of the chase. In one such case in Georgia, an elementary principal and his well-trained staff prevented a hostage situation at their school.

Another issue is the means used to effectively communicate so a rapid lockdown can be accomplished. Avoid the use of code phrases like the one provided in the first paragraph of this column (an actual code from a public school). The best approach is probably to use a color code combined with a simple phrase to avoid confusion. An example would be “Teachers, please implement the code yellow pre-

ventive lockdown now”. While some strive not to alarm students with cumbersome code phrases, the result can not only be confusion, but greater danger to students if for example, a teacher tried to evacuate students when they should lockdown due to an armed person on campus. Make sure your notification system covers all areas of the campus and all staff, substitutes and volunteers are provided a copy of a ready reference sheet to explain lockdown codes and procedures. Most schools find it is best to first test lockdown announcements and procedures without students on campus. Due to transfers and promotions of personnel, lockdown codes and procedures should also be standardized throughout public school districts and large private institutions. Also, be sure your protocols include a method of announcing a fire or bomb threat evacuation during a lockdown as well as a means to return to normal operations after the need for a lockdown passes.

By working with local emergency management and public safety experts, conscientious school officials can develop more realistic lockdown procedures than is possible by working alone.

Codes without Confusion

January 2001

“**T**he red ants are in the building,” chimes the message over the intercom. Have insects infested the school? No, the coded message is meant to inform faculty members they should follow established procedures to lock down the facility. Unfortunately, some teachers and substitute teachers misunderstand the lock down code and fail to properly secure their rooms. The failure to lock even a single door during an emergency can mean the difference between a cleanly executed lockdown and an out-of-control crisis.

Does this sound like an exaggeration? In a real situation a few years ago, an elementary school principal's efforts to prepare his staff for potential emergencies paid off immensely. When a crisis almost took place at his school soon after he had drilled his staff on the lockdown procedures, his staff functioned flawlessly. A staff member observed a man with a handgun being chased by several other men with [guns](#) near the school. The school employee ran into the front office and instructed the office staff members to order a lockdown. The phrase to indicate a lockdown of the facility was quickly given over the intercom, and each employee in the school did their part to secure the school. Because the principal had established a system where one of several designees could authorize a lockdown, a tragic situation was avoided.

The man with the [gun](#) who was being chased turned out to be a felony suspect. The men who were chasing him were plain-clothes police officers. The principal had properly trained and empowered office staff members to order a lockdown in an emergency. He had also trained and drilled the other employees in the school. Because of

his efforts, the doors to the school where locked when the man desperately tried to open not just one, but several exterior doors to take hostages. Because all of the outside doors to the school were locked, he was not able to gain access to his intended victims.

This real life example in a typical elementary school, in a typical community, on what began as a typical day, illustrates the importance of simple and effective lockdown procedures and codes. Simple phrases are required, phrases that will not confuse those who must understand them on rare but critical occasions.

Have you thought carefully about the terms you use? Are they more likely to cause panic than plain language? Have they been tested through properly planned [drills](#)? Will codes aid in effective emergency communications, or will they cause confusion during a crisis? All of these questions should be answered before, not during a crisis.

As a general rule, school emergency phrases should be extremely simple, with the emphasis on reliable communication over secrecy. A simple clear phrase beats “the red ants are in the building” any day. An even more reliable system is the combination of color codes with standardized phrases such as “Staff, please implement the code yellow preventive lockdown immediately”. If one critical door may not get locked due to desire for secrecy, the need for the “KISS” principle (keep it straight and simple) becomes apparent. It is more important to secure the facility than to try to control reactions.

Phrases should be standardized throughout the school district or institution. With many school personnel working in more than one building, it is important to prevent miscommunication through standardization. Again, the critical nature of the communication supersedes the need for “secret squirrel” covertness.

These phrases should also be limited to a few critical functions. Normally, it is best to restrict the use of phrases with color codes to such important tasks as lockdowns, evacuations, and other specific measures. It may be advisable to have phrases for bomb threat situations as well. Having a standard phrase to describe numerous types of emergency situations can cause confusion during an emergency.

It is important to weigh the need to use codes against potential problems caused by miscommunication when they are used. If there is not a significant benefit to require the use of codes, plain language should be utilized. For example, the only typical use of a code phrase that I recommend to schools is a duress code for personnel such as a bus driver who will have to communicate via phone or radio when

they call for help – potentially within earshot of a student with a [gun](#) hidden on their person on a bus.

A number of schools have had positive feedback after each employee is issued a flip chart containing step-by-step instructions for each key phrase. For schools that cannot afford [flip charts](#), instruction sheets can be inexpensively photocopied and distributed to all personnel. Some schools require the instruction sheets be kept at all times with the roll book.

Another key issue is the need to ensure everyone who will need to take action when a plain speak phrase is given is properly briefed on the phrases and procedures. Particular emphasis should be placed on training substitute teachers and volunteers on emergency phrases and procedures before they go to work in a school. In school crisis situations, critical actions may not be completed due to simple miscommunications.

Properly developed phrases and accompanying procedures can help to maintain effective communications during a crisis. Through careful consideration, testing, and a healthy dose of common sense, it is easy to develop a practical system of communication for your emergency operations plan.

An Effective Crisis Response Team

October 2000

Every school needs the ability to effectively implement its emergency operations plan in the event of a crisis. Unfortunately, few school systems can hope to escape the difficulty of someday managing a crisis situation. For moderate to large districts, crisis situations can be expected on somewhat of a regular basis. Whether the crisis involves the death of a student in an automobile accident following the senior prom, the suicide of a faculty member, a severe weather incident, or an act of senseless violence on campus, all situations related in any way to the school will have some effect on the school. No matter what the crisis, a measured and efficient response is needed.

These tragic situations require an effective and properly trained crisis response team be established ahead of time before an incident takes place. As we have seen repeatedly in the past few years, it is common for even large school districts to be caught off guard by crisis situations beyond their capability to handle. The problems that result from this lack of preparedness can take millions of dollars and many years of emotional difficulty to try to rectify. Unfortunately, many of the mistakes made can never be fully corrected.

We will examine some of the basics of developing an effective team. The first rule of thumb in developing a school crisis response team is you cannot be over prepared for school crisis situations. It is common for school crisis response teams to vastly oversimplify and underestimate what they may be called upon to do if a major crisis occurs. Through proper preparation, training, and the use of appropriate crisis [exercises](#), a team can be developed that can perform well under demanding circumstances.

School districts and larger private institutions should consider having a school or building level crisis response team at each facility and an overall crisis team to support the team in place at each school. It could also be advantageous for regional crisis response teams to be developed so small school systems and private schools in the same region can provide pre-planned response assistance in the event of a major incident. For example, five area school systems could have an agreement to provide trained counselors from each district to any of the participating systems that experiences a major crisis. This type of assistance is often provided following a major crisis, but without pre-planning, the response will not be as efficient.

Careful consideration should be given regarding the selection of the personnel who will serve on each crisis team. One school system recently conducted a realistic full-scale exercise to test its emergency operations plan. During the exercise, school officials found many crisis team members were not capable of functioning adequately under the stress and physical demands of a major crisis. Team members may be required to deal with physically and emotionally stressful situations for long periods of time. In many cases, team members may perform at high levels for days or even weeks without adequate rest.

A variety of backgrounds should ideally be represented on the crisis response team. The size of a team may be dictated by the number of employees on staff. In small schools, the crisis team may be limited to only three or four individuals due to the number of personnel. This situation lends itself to the creation of a multi-district crisis response team. In larger organizations, more team members will be practical. In any case, it is best if there is a back-up team member for each team member. Examples of the types of personnel who might be needed on the crisis team would include school administrators, school mental health personnel, custodial staff, maintenance staff, media center personnel, food service personnel, PTA parent volunteers, public information officers, and transportation personnel. Each organization has different needs and resources, and other categories of personnel may be appropriate for your situation.

The next step is to organize building and overall team members along functional lines. In a typical situation, the following teams might be formed within each team:

- Operations team- Designated to implement the varying aspects of the emergency operations plan in the event of a crisis.

- Mental health team- Responsible for all mental health support and coordination during the crisis response and recovery phases.
- Support team- Tasked with the coordination between various team components and with documentation of all crisis response and recovery efforts. The support team is also responsible for the preparation and distribution of all handout materials, briefings of district personnel, and with drafting and issuing of press releases.

Of course, crisis team members should be fully involved with the development of annual revisions of emergency operations plans, in-service training efforts, and all crisis [exercises](#). It is critical that crisis team members are involved with periodic [exercises](#) once the emergency operations plan is completed and team members are trained. Without the use of [exercises](#), it is impossible to accurately predict how well a crisis response team will function under actual conditions. Any major school crisis situation will provide challenges and some mistakes will occur under even the best of circumstances. Through the development of an effective crisis response team, the negative impact of a school crisis situation can be significantly reduced.

Establishing a Family Reunification Center

August 1999

One critical component for dealing with a major school crisis is the family reunification center. The crisis management process will work most effectively if students and staff are evacuated to a remote location and parents and loved ones go to that location instead of converging on the school.

WHEN A CRISIS OCCURS

A major obstacle for schools and public safety personnel during school crisis situations is the incredible number of people who rush to the school. The media monitor public safety radio frequencies for potential news and typically announce a crisis has occurred within minutes.

This problem is becoming even more severe following the highly publicized tragedies that have taken place at schools during the past two years. It is common for the enormous flood of relatives and onlookers to hamper public safety response. Often, several relatives arrive at the school for each student or staff member. If this process is not managed properly, vehicles block streets around the school, making it difficult or impossible for emergency vehicles to maneuver. Another concern is the collapse of phone communications from overload.

The school crisis response team should work with local public safety and emergency management personnel to plan a family reunification center protocol, including rapid movement of people to that site. For many school systems, it is a good idea to select one site for all schools in the community. The site must be available on a moment's notice every school day during the year. Having a different site for each school is likely to cause confusion during the critical early stages of the incident. For large districts, multiple sites may be required.

Back-up sites are a good idea, regardless of the size of the community as a primary site may not be safe or available at the time of a crisis for a variety of reasons.

Public safety officials must be involved in planning to ensure they can provide support. For large schools, the site must be able to accommodate several thousand vehicles and people. Public safety workers need to be prepared to deal with the problems posed by large numbers of emotionally upset individuals. Initial mental health personnel responses should be at this location rather than the incident site.

Have a command post near the incident scene with a second command post at the reunification center. Planning will ensure this command post can be quickly established to handle reunification. Often, agencies such as the local emergency management agency or the American Red Cross will accept responsibility. Members of the local school crisis team should immediately report to the reunification center to set up an orderly process. An emergency evacuation kit containing records of all students and staff should be rushed to the site to ensure students are properly released to the appropriate legal guardians.

INFORMING THE COMMUNITY

It is critical the local media be quickly contacted (within the first five to ten minutes of the crisis) to begin directing parents and relatives to the reunification center. Prepared statements should be on hand at all local radio and television stations for station personnel to read during a crisis. These instructions should explain to the public it is critical that:

- Parents and relatives should not respond to the incident site.
- Students will be released only to approved adults with photo identification, at the reunification site.
- All members of the community should avoid driving anywhere within several blocks of the incident site.
- All members of the community should avoid using cellular and digital phones for the first several hours of the situation. This is to help keep portable phone service from collapsing. School and public safety officials may be heavily reliant on cellular service during a crisis.
- Concerned parties should not call the school, school police or security office, school board office, or public safety dispatch centers to get information regarding particular students.

and employees. Personnel at these locations often do not have information regarding each evacuee. Inquiries severely hamper efforts to manage the crisis properly.

While these instructions should be on hand for all electronic media, the school system crisis team should have a procedure in place to fax additional copies to the media in the event statements are misplaced or forgotten. Simultaneously, a sheet containing the location of the selected family reunification site and a brief description of the crisis should also be faxed.

Timing is important. Announcing the location of the reunification site ahead of time will increase the danger to those who come to the site if a follow-up shooting or bombing is planned. Failure to send reunification location information will result in the massive response to the school that the protocol is designed to prevent. There are also a variety of products and services designed to ensure rapid mass communications with parents when the family reunification process must be used. Some service providers can rapidly notify thousands of parents and guardians in a matter of minutes with today's high speed rapid calling systems. These types of services can prove to be extremely beneficial during a major crisis.

While we all hope we will never need to use a family reunification center, we cannot wait for a major crisis to plan for one. Having a well thought out plan, developed in cooperation with area public safety officials, can be a tremendous asset if a crisis strikes a school.

Section Five

Motivational Columns

Icon

Miller Middle School in Macon, Georgia, was once well known in the community as a bad school. Consistently ranked last in the county for middle school academics with test scores far below state and national averages, Miller was unquestionably a failing school. The safety picture was just as bleak. Fights, gang activity, and serious disciplinary infractions were a normal part of the school scene. [Gun](#) and drug violations and even incidents where students were stabbed were a less regular but periodic problem. The school ten years ago would almost remind you of the school depicted in the movie *Lean on Me*.

Having attended this dysfunctional school in the 1970s, I can personally attest to the deplorable state of affairs that you just read about. After I was appointed Chief of Police for the district in 1989, I found the school was even more out of control than it had been a decade before. During the first week of school that fall, a gang member entered a classroom, pulled a [gun](#) and threatened to shoot a student in front of a teacher and his victim's classmates. The next week, the same thug entered the school's gymnasium, shoved a student against the wall and put the barrel of his weapon in the student's mouth. The following day, we finally located and arrested the perpetrator. The veteran principal at the school could cite an endless list of reasons why the school was and always would be in this pathetic condition.

When a new superintendent was appointed a few years later, he eliminated the position of community affairs director held at that time by Dr. Martha Jones. He appointed Dr. Jones as the principal of Miller Middle School. Dr. Jones felt, and the superintendent later

confirmed to her, that this move was made in an attempt to get her to retire or move to another school system due to political meddling by a district department head. When faced with such adversity, many people roll over like a dog that has been kicked around. Others just give up and show up for work each day, marking time to retirement. But truly exceptional people refuse to cave in. Dr. Martha Jones is one of those remarkable people.

Even though her building resembled a rundown fortress in the middle of a dilapidated high crime area, she did not give up. Faced with a burned out staff, trying to educate some of the more challenging youth in the community, Dr. Jones decided to make a stand. She could not seem to understand the school was destined to failure as her predecessor and countless others believed. Like Winston Churchill, she was determined to succeed regardless of the seemingly overwhelming situation.

Dr. Jones will be retiring from the district and embarking on a new career next week. She will be sorely missed, for her impact on thousands of students and hundreds of staff members has been nothing short of profound. Under her leadership, Miller Middle school became the flagship of the school system. The level of safety at the school was astounding. A new building was built to replace the one she inherited, and she has used it well. The school experiences only one to two fights each year, and no student was caught with a [gun](#) on the campus in more than six years (and with the strict dress code and random weapons screening program, a violator would be likely to get caught). The school is not fenced in, has no security cameras and is an extremely open and inviting school full of vibrant colors - it is a warm and fun place. During my numerous visits to the school in recent years, I have seen not one student's shirt tail out, not one piece of trash on the floor, and have not heard a single profane utterance from a student, for these behaviors are not accepted. The school stands as a refreshing oasis in the middle of a decayed neighborhood where gunshots are not at all an uncommon sound at night.

And how has the school done in the area of academics? It is now ranked first in the county for test scores, was named a Georgia School of Excellence, and was the first middle school in the nation to implement the Core Knowledge curriculum. The school had to turn away more than two hundred magnet school applicants last year and is equally popular as a place to work for teachers in the district. Miller was recently featured in a special on American education on PBS and

was visited by hundreds of educators and law enforcement officials from across the nation as well as from Israel, Germany, and England.

As Dr. Jones, her dedicated staff, supportive parents, and excellent students demonstrated, any school can be great place to learn. Dr. Martha Jones and her school are beloved by many. As a former literature student of hers, I know she was an inspiration to me. There are other examples from around the nation of incredible schools in places where we are conditioned to expect mediocrity. It is a good thing their principals, teachers, and children do not know they cannot succeed, or they might be as we expect them.

Make Time

May 2002

As a young child, I sometimes held onto the excuse I did not have time to complete the many chores and tasks my mother handed down, however, upon hearing my eager exclamations her stock reply would always be, “Make time.” She used this phrase on many occasions from my youth through adulthood in order to prod me to do the things mothers often tell their children must be done. And while I dreaded those words “Make time,” I have found many occasions over the years where circumstances made this response the only option. Today’s educational employees are tasked with many burdens. Ever tighter budgets, a plethora of social issues, government regulations, labor considerations, constant requirements to meet standards and heightened concerns over student safety all place great demands on you and your organization.

And each month, this column urges you to do even more than you already do to prevent and prepare for critical incidents. You probably do not have the time to implement many of the concepts you read in this and other publications, even when you feel they are particularly appropriate to your situation. As with many other areas, school officials must identify safety needs and prioritize responses likely to provide the greatest return for the time and resources invested. Proper management of time and money expended to address safety issues is a critical part in any school safety strategy.

By stepping back from the daily routine and asking tough questions, it is possible to remain focused on the most urgent safety issues before moving to other important, but less critical concerns. The time spent will also provide an important opportunity to take stock of the

improvements achieved. Many people find they achieve remarkable results that help to offset the feeling that much remains to be done.

Interestingly enough, a school superintendent asked me if he was correct in resisting board pressure to build an emergency helicopter landing pad at a school just in case helicopters ever needed to respond to an emergency. He correctly felt there were far more pressing issues to address than the unlikely event a helicopter would need a dedicated paved landing site. Furthermore, helicopters routinely land without landing pads; so, a dedicated pad might not be in the best location at a school for a particular type of emergency. Adding a pad would cost a lot and accomplish little, especially, with his district's limited funds. Now, the same superintendent has recently taken the helm of another school system and is methodically tackling numerous difficult challenges with school safety heading the list. Just as he was successful in averting the helicopter landing pad fiasco, he is succeeding in affecting meaningful and significant changes in because he prioritizes and focuses his team on the real safety issues.

Many practitioners find it to be beneficial to periodically set aside some of their precious time to conduct a needs assessment and make sure those efforts to improve safety are in line with what actual priorities should be. We can all find ourselves focusing our available time and resources on issues that are not our real priorities. While formal school safety task force approaches are the most effective means to address the many issues relating to campus safety, there is still room for periodic contemplation on an individual level. Making sure energies are directed toward the most pressing issues helps to make a tough job a little easier and increase the amount of improvement achieved for the effort expended.

An important consideration is the likelihood a particular problem will arise or the frequency with which it is occurring. There are many instances where efforts were geared heavily on a potential risk that hadn't yet occurred in an organization while a chronic problem was left unattended. For example, if truancy is a minor problem, but fights occur more frequently, physical altercations might need to be the priority topic. At the same time, it is important to remember that some situations, which might be statistically unlikely, should also rate high on the list. For example, if a school is located 75 miles from a nuclear facility, the chances the school will be affected by a nuclear disaster are slight, but the consequences of failure to prepare for such a possibility are enormous. One simple yet helpful technique is to

develop a list of safety concerns for your situation. After the list is compiled, assign priority rankings based on frequency/likelihood of occurrence. A second rating is then applied that addresses the gravity of each item. You may find this approach to be helpful in focusing your energies in the most efficient manner.

We do not live in an ideal world, and we must be realistic in our efforts to provide the highest level of service in all areas of our responsibility. While my mother urges you to “make time” to make the children and staff under your care as safe as possible, I encourage you to focus as well on the effective use of time and resources.

True Heroes

June 2000

One benefit of speaking at conferences around the country is the opportunity to hear many gifted presenters. I recently had such an opportunity while presenting at a conference in Kentucky. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms had assembled a diverse group of speakers including Judge Ted Poe from the 228th District Court in Houston, Texas.

Judge Poe is one of the best speakers I have had the privilege of hearing in some time. Judge Poe is well known for his creativity in making sure the punishment fits the crime. After hearing him speak, two thoughts immediately occurred to me:

1. I would never want to be sentenced by Judge Poe.
2. If someone I loved were the victim of a crime, I would want Judge Poe to be the judge to administer justice.

Judge Poe is controversial because he thinks outside the box and seeks ways to make the criminal feel real consequences for their acts. He also strives to send a message to the rest of us to think before we act inappropriately.

Although some consider him to be harsh, he makes a good case that we so often worry about those who prey on the rest of us while forgetting the rights of victims – particularly children — to be safe. This is a concern we hear expressed frequently by the average person when the topic of our criminal justice system arises. He also has a good track record — he has ordered 93 felons convicted in his court to wear large signs relating to their crimes in public places as a condition of probation. Only three of those violators were rearrested,

and all three of those were arrested for violating conditions of their probation. Compared to most superior courts, that is an incredible achievement. Using these and many other unorthodox consequences, he protects his county, gives justice to victims, and helps offenders learn to control their behavior. That sounds like what a judge is supposed to do.

Judge Poe feels our society has lost sight of the main purpose of the criminal justice system – the administration of justice. He feels our societies' ills are complex, but he also believes one core issue – lack of accountability — is a major contributing factor when it comes to our nation's incredibly high crime rate. As a police officer for two decades, I could not agree more. Having worked extensively in the school setting, it strikes me that this issue really hits home in our current concerns for the safety of our schools.

In so many cases, those who victimize others in school do so with little concern of facing significant consequences. Judge Poe's experience and mine is that when we begin holding people accountable for their actions, they typically learn to modify their behavior and stop bothering the rest of us who do respect the rights of others.

While being inspired by Judge Poe's humorous, articulate, and powerful message, I thought of how true his words are in relation to our schools. I reflected on how much improvement is seen when schools take the unique approach of truly holding students and parents accountable for their actions for their misdeeds. Of course, schools must find ways to gain the support of law enforcement, probation, and court officials to see the full benefit of this philosophy.

We should not dismiss the "softer" measures such as counseling for troubled children, but we should not excuse the wrongdoer from facing consequences while we are providing that type of assistance. There is a definite trend in our nation's schools and in the criminal justice system to focus on soft intervention measures while shying away from the use of significant punishments for the misdeeds of students. We have paid the price for this well-intentioned but incomplete approach.

As in Judge Poe's court, this is a daunting task and requires us to be what our children need – heroes. It requires much valor to effect significant and lasting change. That valor was seen in the soldier who faced a hailstorm of death and destruction when he hit the beach at Normandy to stop the atrocities of a madman who had gained control of a nation – and nearly that of Europe. It was also seen around the nation when an educator plants both feet squarely and vows "not in my school".

American society, the greatest nation on earth, is in dire need of heroes. We need them in our military, our public safety agencies, our government, and if we need them anywhere, we need them in our schools. I was blessed to have the opportunity to meet a true hero when I met a man who should make every Texan and every American proud. I have met a number of educators from around the country who I also consider to be heroes. I hope I am blessed in my travels to continue to meet many more heroes who will not compromise the safety of the children in their care.