

SLC Special Series Report

# Making a Safe Haven: A Review of School Safety Status, Perceptions and Practices in the South



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A Special Series Report  
of the  
Southern Legislative Conference

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Southern Office  
The Council of State Governments

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## **MAKING A SAFE HAVEN: A REVIEW OF SCHOOL SAFETY STATUS, PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN THE SOUTH**

School safety has become a primary concern for many state policymakers in recent years with parents, community leaders and lawmakers all focusing renewed attention on the safe and orderly operation of public schools. While much of this discussion has taken place against the backdrop of numerous school shootings, school safety efforts have a long history. Many states have had decades of experience working on this and the closely related issue of student drug, tobacco, and alcohol use, both in formal safe and drug-free school programs and through initiatives to combat truancy, juvenile delinquency and youth violence. Efforts to curb delinquency and truancy—seen as two key indicators of student anti-social behavior—date back well into the earliest part of the 20th century. The increasing incidence of drugs and gangs, the seeming prevalence of weapons among youth, and a general perception that young people no longer are protected from negative elements while in school, all have added to the recent sense of urgency surrounding school safety activities.

### **What Are Safe Schools?**

For the purposes of this report, safe schools are those where students, staff members and visitors feel safe and welcome and have the opportunity to learn, teach, work, and engage in activities without being threatened, intimidated, bullied, harassed, or made the victim of crime. Such schools provide an environment in which students are challenged academically, respected and supported socially and emotionally by peers and staff, held accountable for their actions, and are engaged in the life of the school. They also are places where staff are respected and able to work without fear. Perhaps most importantly, a safe school is one where students are connected and feel a part of the school. This broad definition of a safe school extends the concept of safety beyond the realm of physical well-being to include the related areas of social climate and order.

## Are Schools Safe?

In a presentation to the Southern Legislative Conference at its 1999 Fall Legislative Issues Conference, Bill Modzeleski, director of the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Office, noted that a study in the 1950s of urban school violence found a "steady stream of disruptions" which were "viewed as a relatively minor concern seldom involving more than a few sporadic and isolated incidents." As America passed through the 1960s, most schools continued to report relatively low levels of disruptive or violent activity, although by the end of the decade youth drug use and crime were on the increase. It was during this period that alternative schools and school security departments were first established, the former a response to problem students; the latter a response to desegregation. In the 1970s, the tide had turned and observers were no longer viewing disruptive or violent behavior at school as an anomaly. Writing at the time, Dr. Frank Brown, then-chairman of the National Commission for Reform of Secondary Education, noted that "[T]he major concern confronting secondary schools today is the climate of fear where the majority of students are afraid for their safety."

By the end of the 1970s, drug use among high school seniors passed 50 percent, and schools began in earnest to incorporate drug prevention programs into the curriculum. The 1980s did see a drop in drug use among this group, but also witnessed an alarming increase of gang activity in schools. Schools responded at this time with expanded drug-prevention programs and by instituting the first violence prevention programs. In the 1990s, drug use dropped slightly before rising again to over 40 percent of seniors reporting drug use in 1998. The number of students who were the victims of crime has remained fairly constant since the mid-1980s, but multiple homicides—the headline-grabbing events that color public perceptions of school safety—are essentially a phenomenon of this decade, with 16 episodes since the 1992-1993 school year.

Given the media attention surrounding the high-profile incidents of carnage in schools over the last several years, a casual observer could conclude that American school children spend their days amidst well-armed, disaffected youth who await their opportunity to visit random violence and death upon their peers. The coverage of the tragedies in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Conyers, Georgia; West Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; Springfield, Oregon; Littleton, Colorado; and most recently the fatal shooting of 6-year-old Kayla Renee Rolland by a classmate in Mount Morris, Michigan, serve as reminders that catastrophic school violence does occur, and that efforts need to be made to ensure that children attend schools free from fear. To develop sound policy, however, it is important to delve behind the headlines and place school safety in perspective. Statistics on school crime and climate generally reflect orderly, safe schools, with notable exceptions. A brief discussion of statistics relating to this area follows.



## Safe Schools: The Numbers

As part of federal safe schools legislation passed by Congress in 1994, the U.S. Department of Education began compiling data on crime and violence occurring in public schools. This has resulted in a wealth of recent data on school safety and crime. The statistics on school safety tell an interesting story. According to the *1999 Annual Report on School Safety*, produced jointly by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the percentage of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who have been injured with or without a weapon at school remained at about 5 percent and 14 percent, respectively, between 1976 and 1997. Students are nearly three times as likely to be the victims of a nonfatal serious violent crime, and far more likely to be the victims of fatal violence, outside of school than in school. A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance*, also found that violence in schools declined overall between 1991 and 1996, with student reports of physical fights down by 14 percent, injuries from fights down 20 percent, and weapons possessions down 30 percent.

The most common school crime reported by students is theft, with the 1.7 million thefts reported in 1997 accounting for about 61 percent of all crimes at school, according to the U.S. Department of Education's annual report *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1999*. Between 1992 and 1996, students were more likely to be victims of theft at school than away from school, but in 1997 the victimization rates at and away from school were essentially equal, with both figures declining slightly over the same time period. Overall, about 33 percent of high school students reported having property stolen or deliberately destroyed at school in 1997. The victimization rate for thefts declined slightly between 1992 and 1997.

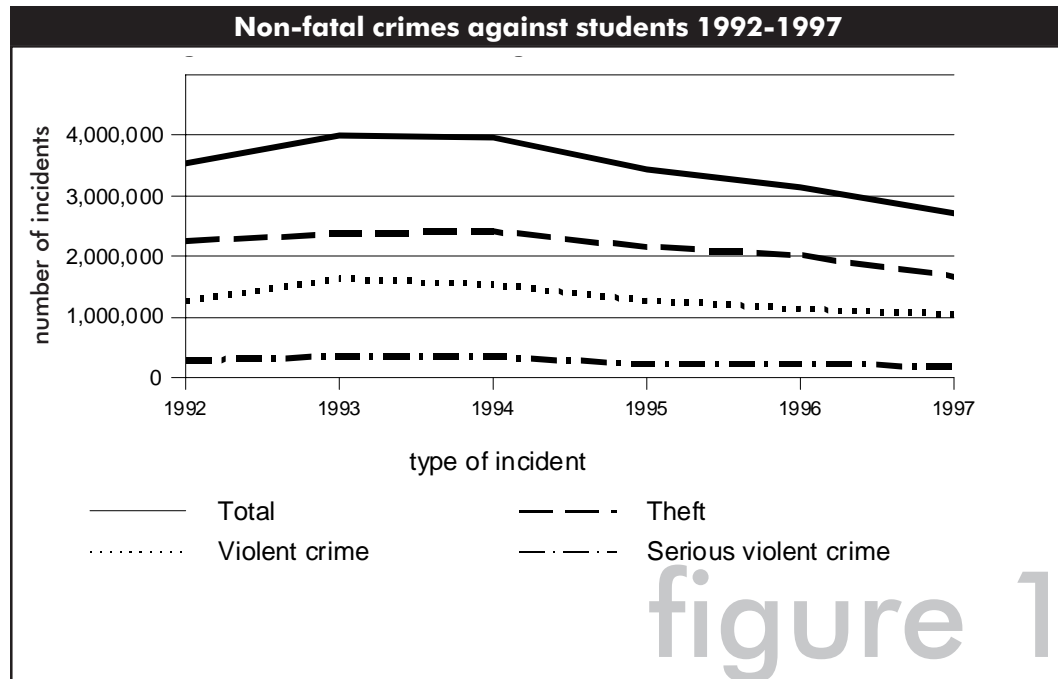
According to the *Indicators* report, violent crime, including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and simple assault, declined between 1993 and 1997, from 59 to 40 incidents per 1,000 students. In 1997, students were victims of about 1.1 million violent crimes at school (compared with 1.6 million violent crimes occurring away from school). Serious violent crime, which includes rape, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault, also declined from 287,400 incidents in

### *Highlight: Gangs*

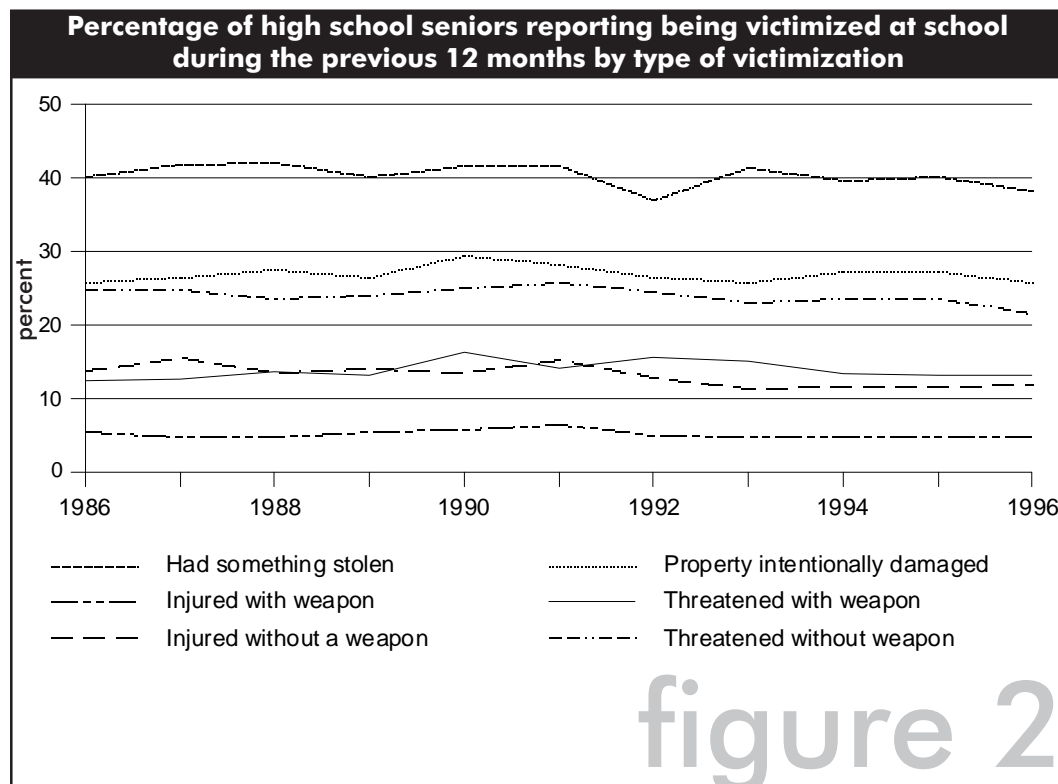
Gangs became a major part of the school safety debate in the 1980s and were possibly the single largest factor shaping actions at the federal level at that time. Many solutions have been proposed to reduce gang activity in schools, including dress codes and school uniforms, zero-tolerance policies toward gang membership, and anti-gang education programs. Unfortunately, according to the *Indicators* report, in the period between 1989 and 1995, student reports of gang activity increased, from 15.3 percent of students reporting gang activity in their schools in 1989, to 28.4 percent reporting it in 1995. Gang activity has increased in urban, suburban and rural schools alike, with two-fifths of urban students, one-fourth of suburban students, and one-fifth of rural students reporting gang activity.

Gangs can have a number of negative effects on schools. On the surface, they can create a climate of fear among both students and staff, to whom their presence in schools is noted to be disruptive. They also are often linked to drugs, weapons, and other criminal activity, creating an environment conducive to delinquency. According to the *Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher*, one-third of teachers and nearly half of law enforcement officers feel that gangs play a major part in daily life in and around schools. Thirty percent of students in middle and secondary school reported that they think gang violence is a very serious problem at their school, but only one in eight students felt that gangs play a big part in daily life in and around their schools.

1992 to 201,800 incidents in 1997. Figure 1 summarizes the *Indicators* report's historical findings on nonfatal crimes against students at or in transit to schools. Figure 2 provides more extensive historical data from the National Center for Education Statistics.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1999*.  
 Note: Serious violent crimes include rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.  
 Violent crimes include rape, sexual assault, robbery and simple assault.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of the Month, November 1998*.



The prevalence of weapons on campus is a major focus of numerous school safety programs. According to the 1999 *Indicators* report, the number of high school students who reported carrying a weapon to school in the month prior to the survey declined by 25 percent between 1993 and 1997, from 12 percent to 9 percent. In the 1997-98 school year, 3,930 students were expelled from school for weapons possession, a more than 30 percent decline from the 5,724 students who were expelled during the 1996-1997 school year.

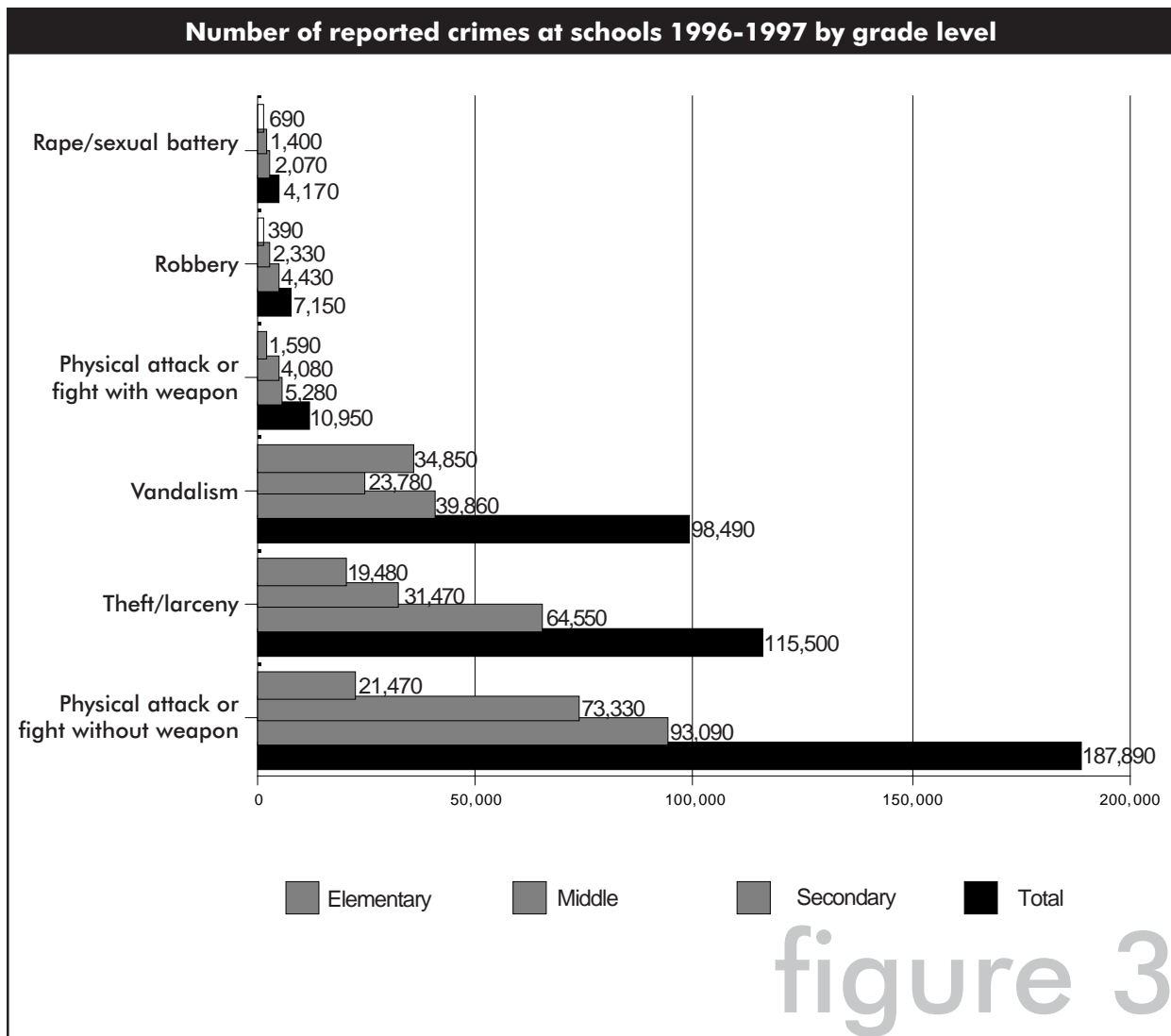
A second survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education of public school principals and disciplinary officers paints a similar picture of school safety. *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997* provides more detailed information on the incidence of school crime, breaking the data down into various categories. Unlike the annual *Indicators* reports, the discrete *Violence and Discipline Problems* report is not a longitudinal survey, although it does include some historical information. The *Violence and Discipline Problems* report includes only those crimes reported by school principals to the police, and does not, as in the *Indicators* reports, include student responses. For this reason, theft, reported as the top crime overall in schools in the *Indicators* report, is the second most commonly reported crime to police, after fighting and simple assault, in the *Violence and Discipline Problems* report. The reason for this is most likely that fighting, perceived as a more serious school safety concern than theft, is more often reported to the police, and theft may be under reported by students to school officials. Figure 3 summarizes the *Violence and Discipline Problems* report findings by type of crime and instructional level.

### *Highlight: Guns*

The United States is not alone in its concerns over student disorder and violence. As noted in the *1999 Annual Report on School Safety*, other industrialized nations have similar experiences with youth crime. The one element that set the United States apart, however, is the presence of guns in schools and the relative ease with which youth can obtain guns. According to the National Institute of Justice's 1998 report, *High School Youth, Weapons and Violence: A National Survey*, half of the high school students who participated in the survey reported that they would have little or no difficulty in obtaining a firearm. This does not mean that most youth carry or even possess firearms: the same survey found that less than one-third of students own any kind of firearm, with the overwhelming majority of students (94 percent) reporting never carrying a gun outside the home in the 12 months prior to the survey. Most students who reported possessing firearms had those most likely to be used for recreational purposes, such as hunting rifles. Only a small handful of students reported possessing guns

unlikely to have recreational uses, such as semi-automatic pistols and sawed-off shotguns. These figures track the data found in the *Indicators* report, which shows low and declining rates of weapon violations on school property.

While few students ever carry a firearm outside the home, student involvement in criminal, drug or gang activity strongly correlates to increased possession of automatic or semiautomatic handguns, revolvers, or sawed-off shotguns (but not firearms with more recreational uses) and for carrying these weapons outside the home. Among the reasons for carrying guns cited by the respondents, 43 percent claimed they needed the gun for protection, while fewer than 20 percent listed their reason as either to intimidate someone, to commit a crime, or for status enhancement. An important implication of this information is that it is very likely that the best way to reduce weapon possession by students is by improving student and community safety to reduce the perceived need for protection.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Violence and Discipline in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997*.

Teacher safety is another concern in creating a safe school environment. According to the 1999 *Indicators* report, between 1993 and 1997, an average of 8.4 percent of teachers were victims of nonfatal crimes while at school, with the most common crime being theft. Victimization rates vary by where a student attends school (urban, suburban or rural school) and grade level, with urban and

**Highlight: Multiple homicides**

While almost all indicators point to schools maintaining safety levels or becoming safer and more orderly, one measure of school safety stands out over the past several years: multiple homicides on campus. While homicides and suicides at school remain extremely rare—less than 1 percent of the more than 2,500 children who were murdered or committed suicide in 1996-1997 did so at school—the number of multiple homicides has grown in the

past five years. The incidence of homicide at school actually declined from 55 in the 1992-1993 school year to 46 in the 1997-1998 school year. Multiple homicides are on the rise, however, with at least one occurring in every year since the 1992-1993 school year and five reported in the 1997-1998 school year. These figures do not include the Littleton, Colorado, shooting, where one teacher and 14 students, including the attackers, died.

middle school teachers reporting higher victimization rates than their suburban or rural, elementary or secondary school peers. On average, teachers are the victims of about 354,260 crimes annually, including about 16,000 serious violent crimes and 131,400 violent crimes. In the 1993-1994 school year, 12 percent of all teachers reported being threatened with injury or attack by a student from their school.

*Highlight: Bullying and harassment*

Most commentators on the issue of safe schools stress the necessity of positive learning environments for schools to function properly. While the number of seriously violent acts occurring on campuses remains relatively low, school discipline and order are negatively affected by disruptive classroom behavior and bullying acts that are seldom regularly reported and thus much harder to quantify. National surveys of middle and high school youth report at least 45 percent of students aged 11, 13 and 15 are victims of some kind of bullying or harassment, and 15 percent of students in this age group reported being harassed because of their religion or race. Bullying, in this context, is roughly defined as abusive treatment of other students or staff or affecting others by means of coercion or force.

A survey conducted of junior high school students in small Midwestern towns cited in the handbook *Preventing Bullying*, from the U.S. Department of Education, found that 88 percent of students reported witnessing bullying, and nearly 77 percent reported being bullied by another student. Of this 77 percent, 14 percent reported severe reactions to the abuse. In a survey of fourth, fifth and sixth graders in the rural South, one in four students reported being bullied regularly in the previous three months, with 10 percent reporting being bullied on a weekly basis. One-fifth of students admitted to bullying another student with some regularity in the previous three months.

With respect to the incidence of sexual harassment and its impact on schools, a 1993 report by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) found an astounding 81 percent of students reported being sexually harassed in school, with over 30 percent of girls and nearly 20 percent of boys reporting being harassed often. While the most common places for this behavior are the hallways between classes, more than half of the students reporting some sexual harassment said they had experienced it in the classroom. The educational impact of such activity is significant, with one-quarter of students reporting sexual harassment saying that the activity made them not want to attend

school. The same number also reports not wanting to talk in class as much. Other impacts include lower performance in class or on class projects and difficulty paying attention in class.

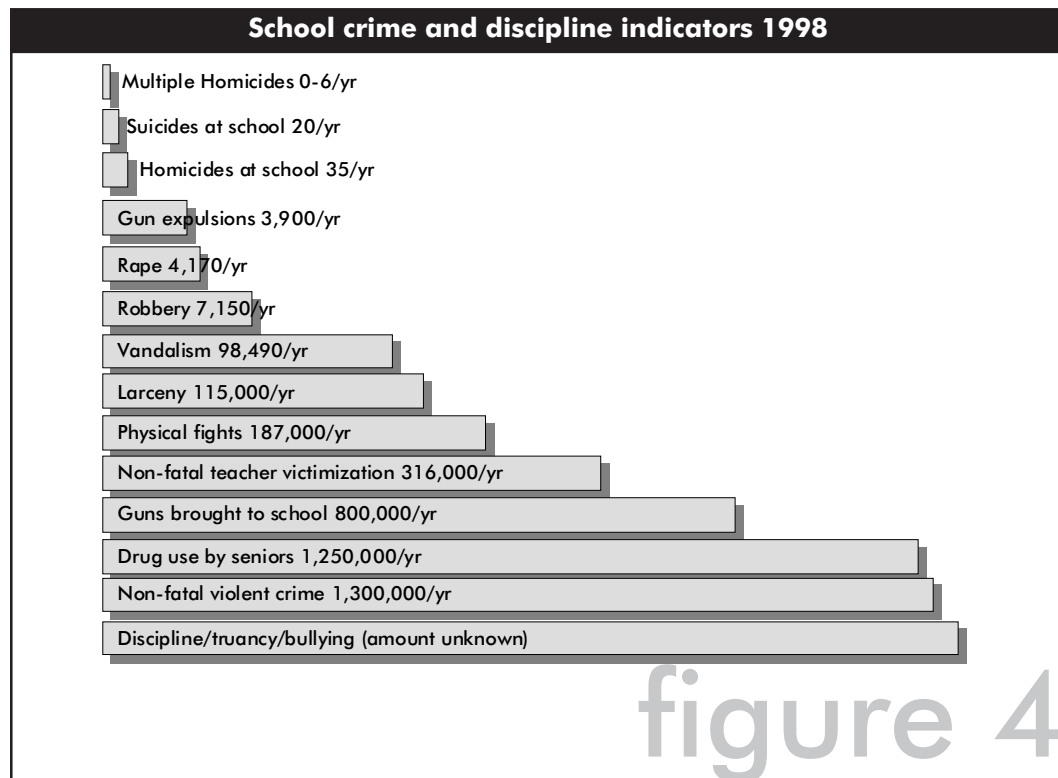
Sexual harassment became a school liability issue following a 1999 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* that allowed a school to be sued for failing to stop a student from sexually harassing another student. While the decision sets a fairly high bar for harassment, the Court established a school's responsibility to adequately respond to the sexual harassment of a student when it is severe enough to interfere with the victim's ability to participate in school. Despite this increased exposure to liability, most national education organizations, including the National School Boards Association, applauded the ruling for placing such harassment in perspective, while establishing criteria restrictive enough to avoid a flood of lawsuits. Indeed, in the six years that followed the case's initial filing, many schools have instituted student codes of conduct that would explicitly prohibit harassment and provide recourse for students who are victimized in such a manner.

There is a dangerous tendency, observers point out, to conclude that this behavior at schools—be it bullying, unwelcome sexual comments, or racial, ethnic or religious harassment—is essentially harmless play among young people. Its immediate impact on learning can be seen readily through the AAUW and a 1998 report, *Order in the Classroom*, published by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). In addition, as noted by the U.S. Department of Education's Modzeleski, the overall climate created by an environment permissive to some bullying or harassment seems to serve as an incubator for more serious disruptive behavior. Among the impacts of bullying noted in *Preventing Bullying* are declines in student performance, increased absenteeism due to fear, potential for the development of anti-social behavior and, possibly most serious in light of many of the recent school shootings, very dangerous forms of vengeance-seeking.

In *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1999: Violence in America's Public Schools - Five Years Later*, the authors noted that while the nation at large has seen a decline in crime as a whole, “trends in school violence have not paralleled the very positive national experience.” The study asks a sampling of students, teachers and law enforcement officers a series of questions to assess both their experiences and perceptions in the critical areas of safety, violence, alcohol and drugs, gangs, and victimization. In the study, students reported relatively unchanged levels of victimization (one in four students) and carrying a weapon to school (one in eight students) between 1993 and 1999. Possibly more troubling, teachers’ experiences with violence have actually grown worse over the intervening five years, with one in six public school teachers reporting having been the victim of violence in or around school, up from one in nine in 1993.

Equally disturbing is the survey’s indication that elementary schools—often perceived as being safer than middle or high schools—are as likely to be the site of a violent act, although older students are more likely to have carried a weapon to school. Also distressing is the increase over the past five years of girls’ involvement with gangs and as the aggressors in violent acts at schools. While boys are still much more likely than girls to have been the victim of violence, to have committed a violent act or to have carried a weapon to school, the upswing in violent behavior and gang involvement among girls offsets some of the positive news about school safety.

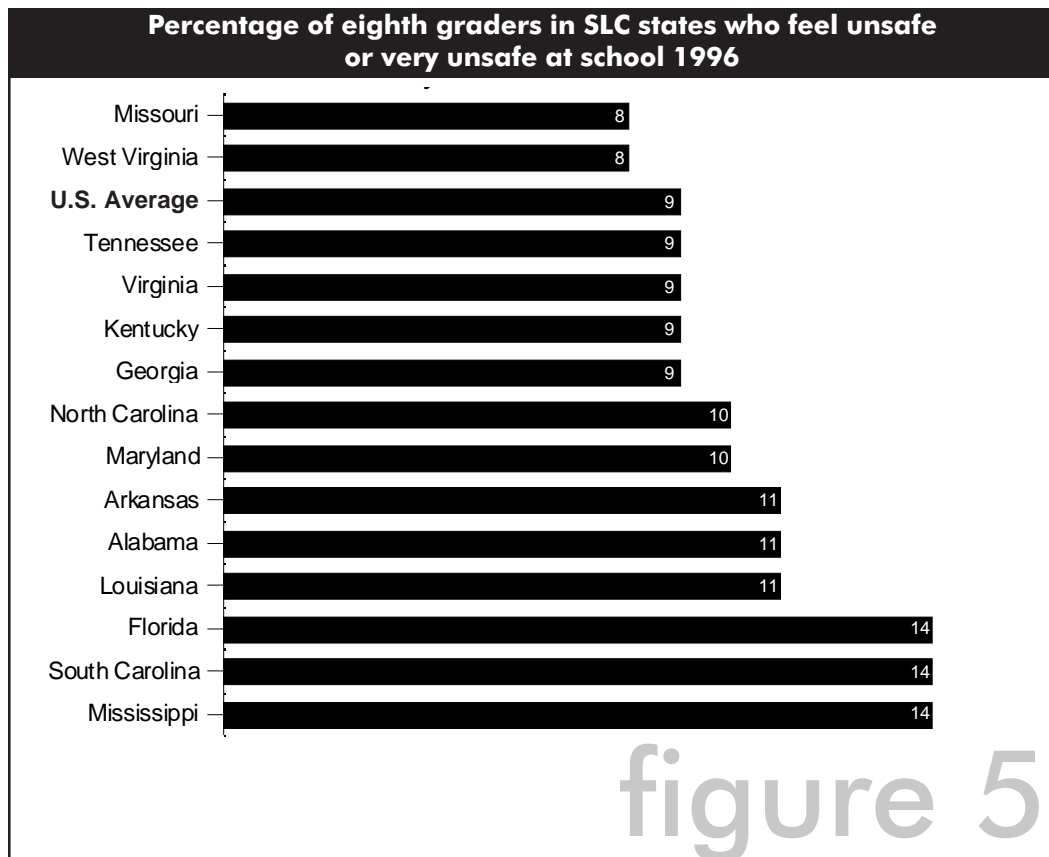
Figure 4 provides a summary of most major indicators of school crime and discipline, compiled from various surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999.

## Safe Schools: Perceptions

While most indicators of safety have remained relatively flat over the past two decades, students' perceptions of their safety and their reports of unsafe and illegal activity at school have increased. The U.S. Department of Education's 1999 *Indicators* report found a 50 percent increase between 1989 and 1995 in the number of students who reported fearing being attacked at school, from 6 percent to 9 percent. These figures were matched by the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress, which asked eighth grade students how safe they felt at school, with 9 percent nationally responding that they felt either unsafe or very unsafe. Distressingly for the South, three of the five states with the highest percentages of students responding that they felt unsafe or very unsafe are in the SLC region: Florida, South Carolina and Mississippi. Results for the SLC region can be found in Figure 5.

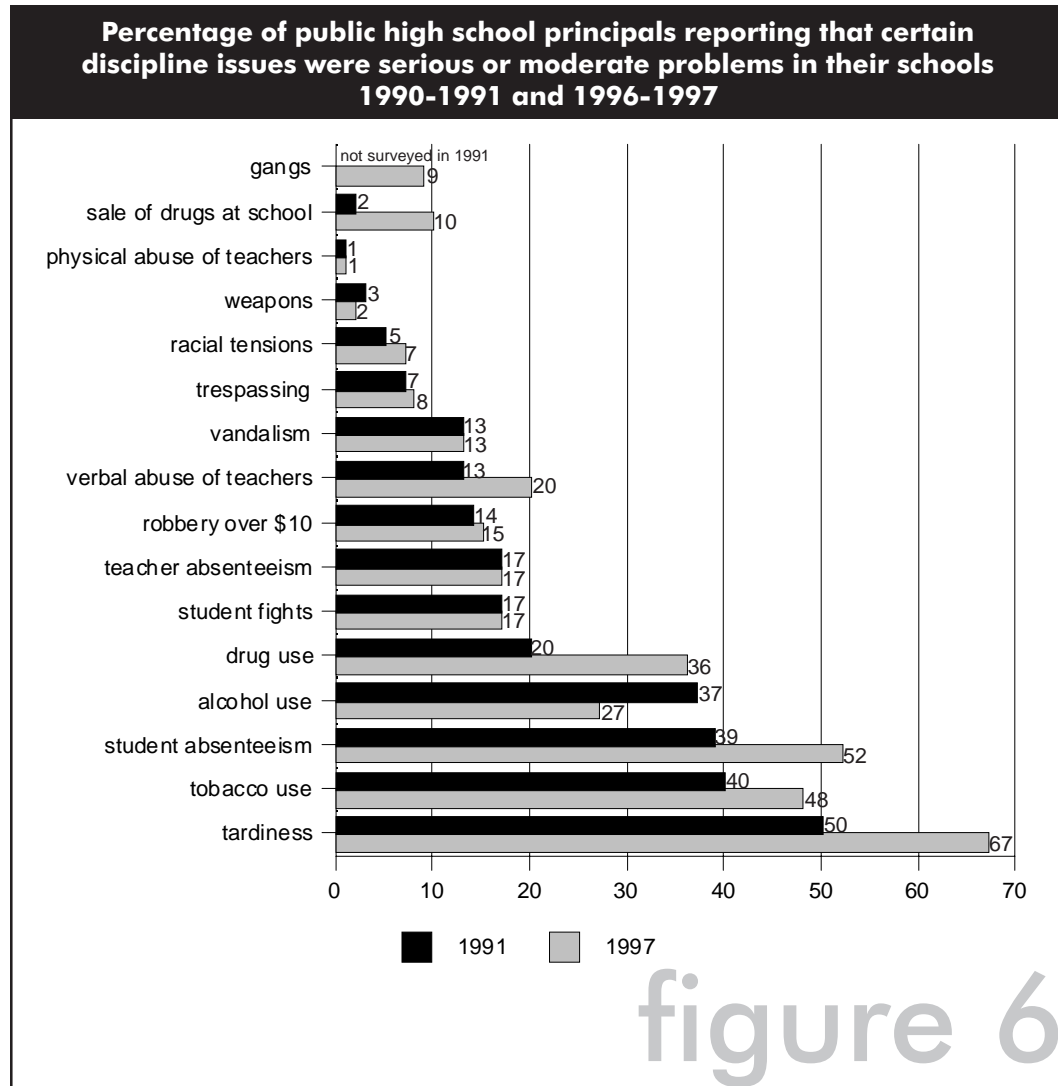


Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1996

Note: Texas and Oklahoma did not participate in the survey.

In *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools*, the U.S. Department of Education reported that only 16 percent of school principals felt that discipline issues were a serious problem, with 43 percent reporting discipline issues as either minor problems or not at all. Among schools which reported a crime in the year prior to the survey, nearly a quarter of principals considered discipline a serious problem, while only 5 percent of principals at schools without crime responded in this manner. In 1991 and again in 1997, the U.S. Department of Education surveyed principals on their perceptions of certain discipline problems in their schools. The three most commonly cited problems were the same between 1991 and 1997: student tardiness, tobacco use, and absenteeism.

These three issues, along with drug use and verbal abuse of teachers, also saw significant increases between 1991 and 1997 in the number of principals who reported them as moderate or serious problems. Significantly, only student alcohol use and weapon possession declined in the time between the two surveys as significant discipline concerns, with all other discipline issues increasing. Figure 6 summarizes the results.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Violence and Discipline in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997*.

Note: Gangs were not included in the 1991 survey.

For many, the decline in student perceptions of security is extremely troubling since it points to a disconnection between the indicators of school violence and order, which, as has been noted, have either remained stable or have improved over the past few years, and students' views of school climate, which are declining. This would indicate that, regardless of the statistical reports of violence at school, the atmosphere in which schools operate may be hampering the ability of some students to learn because of their concerns for safety. Some recent surveys seem to indicate that this situation may be improving somewhat, however.



A recent survey conducted by CBS News and *The New York Times* found that while half of all teenagers felt that a catastrophic violent event—such as happened in Littleton, Colorado—could occur in their school, most did not fear being victimized by crime. Only 10 percent of students responded that they did not feel safe at school, while 45 percent responded that they felt very safe or extremely safe. Students who feared being victimized while at school dropped from 40 percent in 1994 to 24 percent in 1999. Furthermore, the 1999 *Indicators* report did find a drop in the number of students expelled for weapons violations from the 1996-1997 school year to the 1997-1998 school year, a hopeful reflection that programs instituted to improve school safety may be having some impact.

In *The Metropolitan Life Survey*, overall respondents' perceptions reflected the national trend of a decrease in crime, with students in particular responding more positively about feeling very safe when at school compared to when the survey was conducted five years earlier. The Metropolitan Life report also notes that while there was an increase of students who felt very safe at school between the 1993 and the 1999 study (from 50 percent to 56 percent, respectively), nearly one-tenth of students do not feel safe at school, and two in 10 responded that they felt less safe at school than in their neighborhood. Fifteen percent of students reported being very worried about physical attacks in or around school, and 30 percent were very concerned about school shootings. The latter fear is matched by a concern of one-quarter of students in grades 7-12 that students at their school have easy access to firearms. When it comes to the causes of violence, school staff and law enforcement tend to trace them back to the family, specifically, to a lack of parental supervision at home and a lack of family involvement, with drug and alcohol use and peer pressure less frequently cited. Students in grades 7-12 inverted this ranking, placing much of the blame on peer pressure, followed by drugs and alcohol, a lack of parental supervision and, finally, a lack of family involvement.

## Is Safety Important?

Safe schools are critical to student achievement. In a school with unruly classrooms and hostile hallways, neither students nor teachers are free to conduct the business that has brought them to school in the first place: learning. In its 1998 report, *Order in the Classroom*, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) questioned whether discipline had an impact on student learning and, if so, what school policies seemed to encourage order and discipline. By studying longitudinal data, the ETS did identify a strong correlation between order and achievement in classrooms. According to the report, “in 10 out of 12 cases, lower levels of student delinquency are associated with higher levels of achievement and vice versa.” The only categories not affected by some kind of delinquency were social science and reading achievement, which were not, according to the report, negatively affected by student drug offenses. Other offenses, both serious and non-serious, had a varying level of impact on achievement in these areas, and all categories of offenses affected science and math achievement. The report concludes that “the consequence of student disorder is not merely more disorder; disorder also erodes the learning environment for all students.” Furthermore, in the *1999 State of Our Nation’s Youth* report by the Horatio Alger Association, 40 percent of public school students reported that other students’ behavior interfered with their academic performance.

If delinquency negatively correlates to achievement, it might be anticipated that academic achievement leads to improved discipline, and the ETS report confirms this. Building upon this are recent efforts to engage students in academic material that is challenging in an effort to reduce school discipline problems. Along these lines, the Accelerated Schools Project, directed by Dr. Henry Levin, Stanford University, which utilizes challenging subject matter and enriched experiences, has had documented success in reducing suspensions, discipline referrals and vandalism. A sustained effort to improve teaching and instruction will likely also result in reducing problem student behaviors and lead to higher achievement. This and other programs which have enjoyed measurable success in improving school discipline through enhanced learning opportunities led the ETS to conclude that “[I]t is expected that better teaching, better behavior, and higher achievement are intertwined.”

Drug and violence prevention programs are part of a comprehensive learning support system that encourages academic achievement for all students. A significant part of any program to reduce violence is high standards and expectations for students. Students who are not challenged by subject matter in class or who are not engaged by teaching strategies may become bored and seek out unproductive activities to relieve their boredom. Results from pilot programs in several states have determined that improvements in teaching methods, especially those which increase student participation, have the effect of not only improving student achievement, but also of increasing parental involvement and student and parental satisfaction, as well as reducing truancy and student discipline problems.

## Responses to the Problem

While many states and the federal government have supported school safety initiatives for decades, the seeming explosion of gang activity in schools and the perceived increase in the use of “hard” drugs in the 1980s led to a focused federal initiative to fund and support school safety efforts. In 1986, Congress passed the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA). The Act was reauthorized in an amended form in 1994 as Title IV of the Improving America’s Schools Act, with an emphasis on promoting drug education and prevention programming. The SDFSCA supports the seventh National Education Goal outlined in Goals 2000, which is that all schools should be free of alcohol, drugs, violence, and firearms and offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. Funds available through the SDFSCA must be used on a comprehensive alcohol, tobacco and other drug use prevention program for all students in all grades. Most states responded to this in the years following with legislation and programs to take advantage of the available federal funds and, in most cases, building on efforts which predate the SDFSCA.

The other federal action with the greatest impact on safe schools activities was the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act which required states receiving federal education funds to implement an automatic one-year expulsion for students who bring weapons to school. In 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court in *United States v. Lopez* struck down the Act as an unconstitutional extension of the commerce clause into non-economic activity and an intrusion of the federal government on state authority. Regardless, most states have enacted gun-related legislation requiring some kind of sanction, commonly expulsion. Table 1 provides a historical view of federal expenditures under SDFSCA for Southern states.

<b>Federal safe schools expenditures 1998-2000</b>			
<b>State</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000 (request)</b>
Alabama	\$8,102,900	\$6,790,339	\$6,646,247
Arkansas	\$4,936,749	\$4,145,498	\$4,095,874
Florida	\$23,895,922	\$19,869,610	\$20,298,804
Georgia	\$13,761,112	\$11,398,716	\$11,606,293
Kentucky	\$7,866,640	\$6,528,503	\$6,377,066
Louisiana	\$10,912,631	\$9,061,639	\$8,805,594
Maryland	\$8,058,578	\$6,601,567	\$6,569,747
Mississippi	\$6,922,204	\$5,822,877	\$5,660,445
Missouri	\$9,479,804	\$7,852,625	\$7,754,983
North Carolina	\$11,374,003	\$9,522,219	\$9,521,586
Oklahoma	\$6,235,664	\$5,149,345	\$5,166,260
South Carolina	\$6,588,518	\$5,560,162	\$5,573,647
Tennessee	\$9,248,139	\$7,607,750	\$7,431,154
Texas	\$41,294,348	\$34,278,436	\$34,262,946
Virginia	\$9,696,170	\$8,022,627	\$8,064,712
West Virginia	\$4,046,130	\$3,359,970	\$3,265,130
<b>Total SLC Region</b>	<b>\$182,421,510</b>	<b>\$151,573,882</b>	<b>\$151,102,488</b>
<b>Total US</b>	<b>\$530,000,000</b>	<b>\$440,000,000</b>	<b>\$438,000,000</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2000 Budget Request.

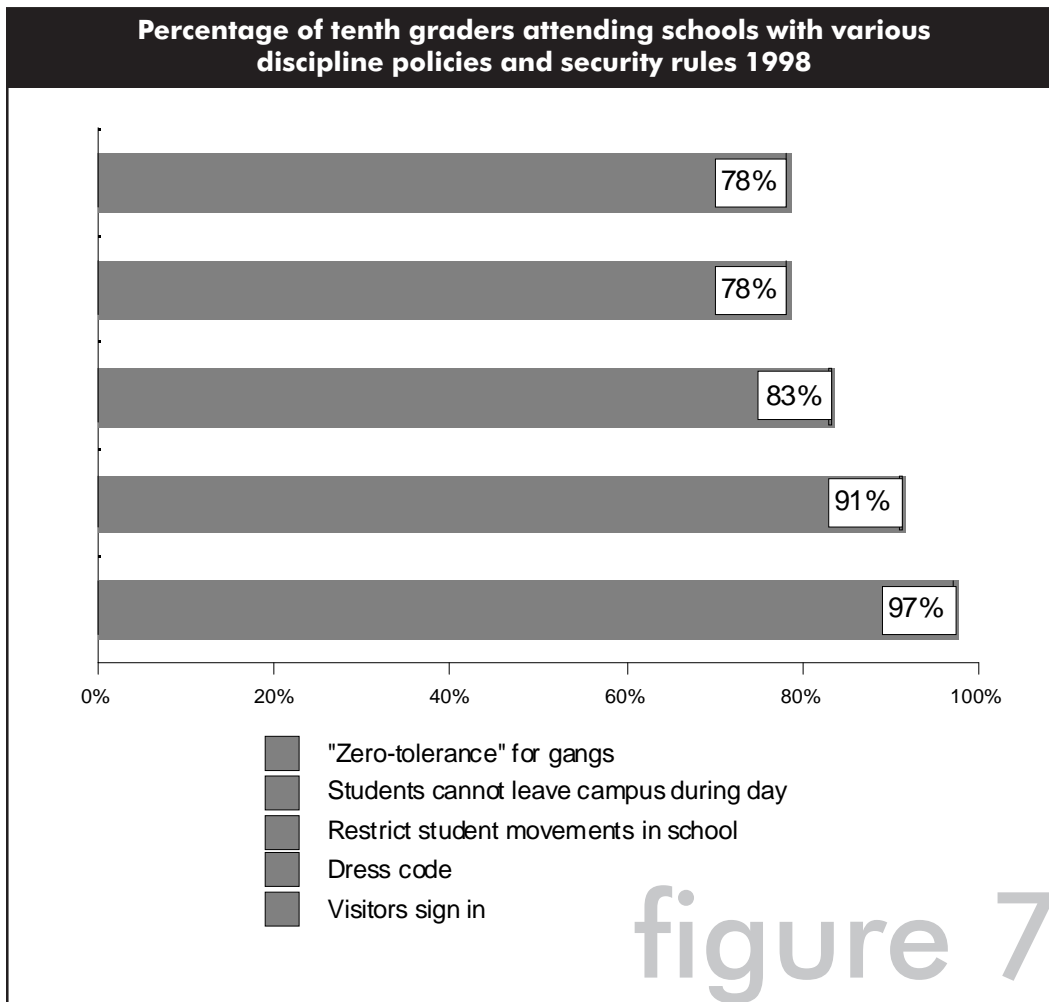
The Act requires that 30 percent of a state's SDFSCA allocation be distributed to target 10 percent of districts determined to have the greatest need for additional funds to carry out drug and violence prevention programs. This targeting allows states to focus their efforts on schools, communities or student populations which need the most support in resisting drugs and alcohol and avoiding violent and disruptive behavior. A criticism leveled at many of the broad brush programs of the 1980s is that they treated all students as at equal risk for antisocial behavior, a premise which is not borne out by research or experience. The 30 percent set aside has allowed states to target supplemental funds to provide enhanced program support for the highest risk populations.

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education made changes to the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) Program requiring local districts receiving the federal funds to implement the Program's Principles of Effectiveness. These are: 1) a thorough assessment of needs; 2) measurable goals and objectives; 3) programs for youth based on research or evaluation; and 4) periodic evaluation. Since federal funds for safe schools may constitute a significant portion of a state's targeted investment in this area, these principles affect most school programs.

A number of national and regional organizations have developed special projects focusing on school safety and school violence. Among them, the National School Boards Association and the National Association of Attorneys General have joined forces to work toward solutions to the problems of school violence. The partnership has resulted in an Internet-based information clearinghouse with information for concerned parents, school staff, law enforcement officers, and students. The web site (<http://www.keepschoolssafe.org>) features selected school safety resources; guidance on handling crisis situations; information on student, parent and law enforcement involvement; and effective prevention strategies for drugs, alcohol, gangs, conflict and weapons. The web site also features model approaches to school safety, effective discipline codes, state-by-state resources, and a school safety bibliography.

Much of the focus of many school safety programs is on violence prevention. However, experts maintain, the connection between youth violence and drug use should not be ignored. White House Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey noted recently that "the nexus between drugs and youth violence is undeniable." McCaffrey's assertion is supported by statistical data which link student reports of access to drugs with knowledge of or experience with violence at school. Furthermore, in its *1998 Report on School Violence*, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention noted that gang or drug disputes were cited as the leading cause of school gun violence. Drug-related violence is not limited to gun use; however, and drug activity strongly correlates to other serious and less serious non-fatal violent acts at school. The message this data sends is clear: violence reduction and prevention follows hand-in-hand with alcohol and other drug prevention. Prior delinquency also correlates with drug-related delinquency, according to the ETS's *Order in the Classroom*, with students who commit any delinquent act, from cutting class to assault with a weapon, being more likely to commit drug offenses. This correlation is an important justification for targeting drug and violence resistance programs at delinquent youth.

At the school level, responses to school safety concerns have taken various approaches. Evidence from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS 88), conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, indicated that discipline and security rules are relatively consistent for most schools. Schools were consistently found to have restrictions on dress, student movement and visitors entering school property. Results are summarized in Figure 7. It is important to note that the NELS 88 was conducted prior to 1994's major federal legislation requiring expulsion for guns and encouraging disciplinary sanctions for drug offenses.



Source: Werlinsky, as quoted in *Order in the Classroom*, ETS, 1998.

## Making Schools Safe: Approaches and Common Themes

In response to disruptive activity, violence and drugs, schools have adopted a variety of measures. These can be divided into five general categories: improved physical environment; increased school security; drug and violence prevention programs; targeting high-risk youth; and strong discipline policies. Specific activities include:

### *Improved physical environment*

- ▶ Security technology — Schools are investing in metal detectors, secured doors, surveillance devices, two-way classroom communication systems and other forms of security technology to serve as both a deterrent and a response to worst-case scenarios. Many schools are locking exit doors with “alarm-bars” which emit a loud signal when the door is opened and are restricting access to one main entrance. Furthermore, schools are installing video cameras and improved lighting to allow for greater monitoring of student activities on and around campus.
- ▶ School size/design — While few maintain that the problem of school violence can be stopped by creating fortress-like schools, changes in school design and size have been indicated to have a positive effect. Among the design changes often suggested are the elimination of dark, secluded or hidden places for students to gather. Research in several states has indicated that reducing a school’s size also may achieve a general reduction in violence (See appendix 1.) Dividing up existing large schools into distinct “learning communities” may achieve some of the advantages.
- ▶ Student identification cards — Many schools are finding that providing picture identification cards for students and staff is an effective and easy way to ensure that unauthorized people are not able to enter schools and roam the hallways. The cards also can be linked to other school services, such as school lunches and computer lab or library access.
- ▶ School crisis planning — Most states require schools to have crisis plans in place for natural disasters and other emergencies. Most of these were not designed, however, to address school shootings, bombings or student unrest. “Next generation” crisis plans include evacuation drills for terrorist attacks, responses for suicides, kidnapping, bomb threats, and traumatic events. They also include communication and response contacts with local law enforcement, emergency response, and state law enforcement offices, as well as plans for addressing student disruptions and unrest.

### *Increased school security*

- ▶ School resource officers — These are generally law enforcement officers or specially chartered security officers who are assigned to schools. School resource officers are very often asked to conduct drug, alcohol, gun, and violence awareness programs and may also provide counseling and other related services for schools. One of the regularly cited advantages of school resource officers is the opportunity for students to get to know a law enforcement officer in a non-confrontational environment which, it is hoped, leads to respect for the law and law officers. Related to these activities are school-law enforcement agency



partnerships and the inclusion of schools in community-oriented policing programs.

- ▶ Tip lines — Many states have implemented these typically toll-free and anonymous means for any interested party to alert state authorities of any threat or concerning behavior. Most systems provide an anonymous mechanism for informants to check back on what response has been made to the complaint. In some states, these tip lines are run by state law enforcement entities, although at least two states, North Carolina and Oklahoma, have turned to the private sector for management assistance.
- ▶ School safety centers — These serve as a clearinghouse for research, recommended programs, consultants, and other school safety information. They can also serve as the initial point of contact for local school districts for school safety activities, as well as a data-collection and-analysis arm of the state department of education. These centers are often managed as either a discrete unit within the department of education or as a project at a state university.

#### *Drug and violence prevention programs*

- ▶ Conflict resolution/peer mediation/teen courts — This category includes any of a number of curricular and extra-curricular programs designed to provide students, teachers, and administrators with the skills needed to peacefully de-escalate confrontations, resolve peer and student-teacher friction non-confrontationally, and teach tolerance and non-violent problem-solving.

#### *Highlight: Drug testing*

Testing students for drugs is often extremely controversial. In addition to the issues of privacy and a school's right to know, there are questions about subjecting students to a search for drugs without any evidence of drug use. Because case law in this area is still being developed, it provides limited guidance to school districts. In 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Vernonia School District v. Acton*, upheld a school's right to test athletes for drugs, but in March 1999 the Court refused to hear a case in which a lower court found that schools could not randomly test students for drugs simply because they have histories of discipline problems. A case in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, involving testing students engaging in any school-sponsored extracurricular activity, is before the state Supreme Court.

As testing technology has become more affordable, many school districts have implemented drug testing policies for student athletes or those involved in extracurricular activities. Students who test positive for alcohol or drugs are most often barred from school extracurricular activities and athletics for a set period of time and referred to drug or alcohol counseling. Repeat offenses can result in permanent bans on participation in school sports or extracurricular activities, suspensions, or referrals to

alternative education programs. An interesting approach to involve parents in such a program was piloted in the Miami-Dade County School system during the 1997-98 school year. All high school students were to be randomly screened for drugs through confidential tests conducted off campus in the presence of the student's parents. No student was to be tested without written parental consent, and only parents could obtain the results.

A report by Robert Taylor published in the *CATO Journal* in 1997, "Compensating Behavior and the Drug Testing of High School Athletes," concludes that such suspicionless drug testing may have either little positive effect on student drug use or actually increase it. The reason for this is that students involved in athletics and, by extension, those involved in extracurricular activities, are less likely than the norm to engage in drug or alcohol use. Testing, Taylor contends, may push marginal athletes out of these activities and thus remove a strong compelling factor that prevents drug use. He does note that some students will also choose to refrain from drugs in order to continue to participate in school activities but, even with this, the sum positive effect of testing could be negligible.

- ▶ Character education — This is a broad category generally covering curricular and extra-curricular programs designed to inculcate positive character traits, including citizenship, responsibility, courtesy, respect, and patriotism. Character education is often required to be infused across the curriculum at every age level as opposed to being relegated to a citizenship course.
- ▶ Before and after school programs — These are either structured educational or recreational programs designed to keep children out of trouble during the times when they are most likely to be unsupervised. Programs often are run by school systems and city or county recreation departments, and some are tied to academic achievement. Most states encourage such programs by providing matching grants and technical support. Although not technically a safe schools program, the connection between criminal activity outside schools and undesirable behavior at school is strong, and many schools facilitate these programs with multiple purposes in mind.
- ▶ Parental involvement — Strong parental investment in both students and schools is perceived to be a powerful deterrent to anti-social behavior by students. Efforts to increase parental involvement run the gamut from parenting courses for “at-risk” families; counseling for families of children who are habitually truant, disruptive, disrespectful or violent at school; educational programs for parents and children to participate in together; and parental mentoring programs. Schools also may require students and parents to sign contracts at the beginning of the school year outlining both the school’s code of conduct and its expectations for parental involvement.

*Highlight: Alternative schools*

Alternative education programs are intended to serve two primary purposes. The first is to separate the “bad apples from the good” by removing disruptive or dangerous students from the general student population. This provides students who abide by the rules and comport themselves appropriately an improved opportunity to learn without the distractions and the potential fear of seriously misbehaving peers.

The second purpose is to provide students who must be removed from class for dangerous, disruptive or disobedient behavior an opportunity to continue their education. It is on this second point that many observers note that alternative education fails to achieve its objectives. Alternative programs range from military style boot camps and residential facilities which focus on discipline, order and teamwork to individualized settings where students’ behavior is modified through counseling and mentoring. Some alternative programs are not required to teach rigorous material, and recent reports from Georgia and Florida indicate that not all

programs are adequately preparing students for high school graduation. In Georgia, only 39 percent of students placed in alternative settings return to their base schools, with more than one-quarter of these students returning to the alternative program because of misbehavior. Fewer than half the teachers of returned students surveyed indicated that these students were prepared for high school graduation in the alternative programs.

Alternative programs are required by many states, either at the district or regional level, although many states have historically provided extensive waivers for alternative programs in the area of instructor qualification and student academic achievement. Given the challenging nature of the students, teachers for alternative programs are particularly difficult to find. Recent actions by several SLC states have, however, resulted in mandates that alternative programs participate in state educational accountability measures and provide rigorous content and appropriate support to all students.

- ▶ Drug testing — Some schools have turned to random, and sometimes mandatory, drug tests for students in an effort to discourage drug use. Proponents support these tests as an effective tool for identifying students with drug problems as well as providing a credible threat of detection for students tempted to experiment with illegal drugs. Opponents of such tests believe they are an invasion of privacy and in violation of constitutionally-guaranteed protection from illegal searches. See *Highlight: Drug testing*.

#### *Targeting high-risk youth*

- ▶ Alternative education programs — In this context, alternative education programs essentially apply various strategies to segregate disorderly, disruptive or potentially dangerous students from the general school population. Alternative education programs can be residential settings, including boot camps, separate non-residential facilities, or “schools within schools” where disruptive students are remanded to a special classroom in their school. The underlying purpose of alternative schools is to provide all students with educational opportunities regardless of their behavior, while recognizing the need to remove disruptive influences from classrooms to create a safe and productive learning environment. See *Highlight: Alternative schools*.
- ▶ Partnerships with juvenile justice and family court authorities — Information and resource-sharing among the network of agencies that interact with youth, particularly those who are charged with juvenile offenses, is viewed as an effective way of providing opportunities for early intervention.

#### *Discipline policies*

- ▶ Zero-tolerance policies — States compounded federally-mandated expulsions for weapons possession on school property with similar mandatory sanctions for such offenses as tobacco, drug or alcohol possession or use, fights and assault. In some instances students may be held accountable for actions which occur off-campus, most often crimes which would be felonies if committed by an adult. A recent report by the U.S. Department of Justice found that most schools now have such policies for a number of infractions, a step that has led to increased suspensions and needs for alternative programs.
- ▶ Dress codes and uniforms — Although there is inconclusive research on the effectiveness of school uniforms and dress codes for reducing gang activity and improving discipline, the policy is increasing in popularity among educators and parents. While only a small percentage of schools require them, the number is growing quickly.

## Effectiveness and the Fortress/School Dilemma

The strategies just described comprise a fraction of the full range of options available to schools for improving school safety, order and discipline. Research on the effectiveness of any of these approaches is often inconclusive, when it is available at all. Schools' experiences with disruptive activity and violence may be complicated by circumstances outside the school's control. Further reducing the amount of research on effectiveness is pressure to implement programs quickly. As noted in the General Accounting Office's (GAO) 1995 report *School Safety: Promising Initiatives for Addressing School Violence*, program designers cite the high cost of evaluation as well as the imperative to put into practice programs which are perceived to address the issue as reasons for not performing adequate data collection and analysis in this area. While funding sources for these programs want outcome data, they often have focused much of their attention on implementation. It is anticipated that the SDFSCA and the new "principles of effectiveness" just established for federal funds will expand the available research base and lead to more adequate evaluation the performance of any given approach or combination of approaches.

Some research on program effectiveness does exist and, where it does, it is a valuable tool for directing policy. In discussing prevention programs aimed at modifying individual student behavior (such as anger management programs), the National Institute of Justice in its 1999 research brief *Crime in Schools* noted that "the evidence of impact is questionable." The same brief also raised concerns over efforts to improve the physical and environmental security of the school, but was supportive of the positive outcomes found in a student-based problem-solving approach.

With regard to effective strategies, the ETS in its report *Order in the Classroom*, reported that the more severe the sanctions for discipline problems, the less likely such problems were to arise. The report also noted that restricting student movement and increasing the monitoring of student activity reduced the incidence of non-serious discipline problems. Limiting student movements did not, the ETS report noted, have any impact on serious offenses, including violence and drugs. Stiff penalties for such offenses could have an impact on these activities, the report added. Furthermore, ETS did not find any correlation between student uniforms and gang activity or delinquency, an interesting outcome given the frequency with which administrators cite uniforms as a means to limit these kinds of school problems.

In a more general sense, the GAO highlighted seven key characteristics which are associated with effective violence prevention programs. They are:

- ▶ *Comprehensive approach:* Programs should address more than one area and involve a variety of services that link the school to the community.
- ▶ *Early start and long-term commitment:* Programs should reach young students to positively shape attitudes and behaviors and provide sustained intervention over multiple years.
- ▶ *Strong leadership and disciplinary policies:* School faculty and administration must provide leadership and strong support for programs. Clear, consistent, unambiguous student codes of conduct should be in place.

- ▶ *Staff development:* Key staff should be trained to handle disruptive students and mediate conflicts as well as be able to incorporate violence prevention strategies into school activities.
- ▶ *Parental involvement:* Programs should seek to increase parental involvement in school violence prevention activities, provide parenting support and encourage parental involvement in school activities.
- ▶ *Interagency partnerships:* Programs should establish collaborative relationships between schools, local businesses, law enforcement, social service agencies, and private groups to create a net of community support for schools to address the multiple causes of violence.
- ▶ *Culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate approach:* Programs should consider the racial, ethnic, and cultural norms and age of the target audience and reflect needs and expectations of the group.

A growing concern, voiced by parents, teachers and students alike is the impact increased security measures have on school climate, particularly those measures designed to restrict student movement and school access (e.g. secured doors and metal detectors) and increase student monitoring (e.g. video surveillance). In response to the annual *State of Our Nation's Youth* report, students noted to the National Press Club that schools with high physical security measures in place feel “like jail.” This sentiment has been echoed by students in several other news reports, although there is little research on the impact this has on achievement or students’ perceptions of safety. Indeed, in a *USA Today* report on a national summit on school violence held by state attorneys general in October 1999, students indicated that checkpoints and metal detectors were not entirely reassuring and would not be difficult to circumvent. Students at the summit and in other venues have pointed to a greater concern for improved school climate, which such “target hardening” responses cannot assuage.

## STATE SCHOOL SAFETY ACTIVITIES

Every state in the SLC region has undertaken actions to ensure that schools remain safe and effective centers for learning. The following pages summarize activities and initiatives SLC states have made during the past few years. For further information about specific programs, contact the resource person listed at the end of each state section.

<b>State funds for safe and drug-free schools FY 2000</b>		
<b>State</b>	<b>State Funds</b>	<b>Federal Funds</b>
Alabama	no additional funding	\$6,790,339
Arkansas	no additional funding	\$4,145,468
Florida	\$70,350,000 (FY 99/00)	\$19,869,610
Georgia	no additional funding	\$11,398,716
Kentucky	did not respond	\$6,528,503
Louisiana	no additional funding	\$9,061,639
Maryland	no additional funding*	\$6,601,567
Mississippi	did not respond	\$5,822,877
Missouri	no additional funding**	\$7,852,625
North Carolina	no additional funding	\$9,522,219
Oklahoma	no additional funding	\$5,149,345
South Carolina	no additional funding	\$5,560,162
Tennessee	\$5.6 million	\$7,607,750
Texas	no additional funding***	\$34,278,436
Virginia	did not respond	\$8,022,627
West Virginia	\$2 million for alternative education	\$3,359,970

Source: SLC survey of state education departments, November 1999.

\*Maryland has allocated funds for related programs, targeting pregnant teens, disruptive youths, etc.

\*\*\$7 million was appropriated for physical improvements (video cameras, etc.) in 1995, but there is no specific additional Title IV funding.

\*\*\* Texas does have prevention initiatives through the Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse.



## School Safety Activities in Alabama

In the 1999 legislative session, the Alabama Legislature formed a joint committee to investigate school violence. Throughout the interim the committee held hearings with local school and law enforcement officials as well as students, parents and community members to learn about preparedness and prevention activities. The Legislature also passed a bill which allows for the notification of school officials should a student be arrested for a crime which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony.

Additionally, the state now has a 24-hour, toll-free hotline which provides school children with an avenue to safely report the threatening or violent statements, actions and activities of their classmates. The hotline is run by the department of public safety and has promised to take seriously anonymous tips from callers and to follow up on reports.

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# Arkansas

## School Safety Activities in Arkansas

In 1997, Arkansas passed legislation creating a committee on safe schools. Its duties include developing model policies and procedures which may ensure a safe and productive learning environment and recommending legislation, rules and regulations for ensuring safe schools. The recommendations of the Arkansas Safe Schools Committee focused on three areas: awareness, prevention, and intervention.

The Committee encouraged local districts to integrate education and discipline with a systemic look at the influences on violence; coordinate collaboration between state agencies and local communities; create a curriculum that includes conflict resolution and character education, among other things; and develop instructional strategies to raise the awareness of violence and its impacts. The Committee further recommended developing awareness of district and building crisis response plans prior to the beginning of the school year, an annual review and updating of these plans, and regular drills to examine the plan's effectiveness. Schools also were encouraged to develop a positive climate of mutual respect; implement mentoring and peer education programs; assist students in developing problem solving skills; and encourage open lines of communication between administrators, teachers, students, parents and community groups.

In the 1999 session, the General Assembly passed four measures which addressed school violence. These included actions to hold parents responsible for allowing minors to possess firearms on school property; requiring school districts to complete the expulsion process for students with weapons on campus and to note the expulsion on the students' permanent record and creates a registry of students expelled for possessing weapons on school property; extending the prohibition on firearms on school property to buses or bus stops; and requiring school districts to vote on the adoption of a school uniform policy.

Additionally, the state department of education has worked with the state attorney general's office to develop statewide crisis prevention teams and has provided a model crisis management plan, training and materials to school districts. Among the materials distributed are a video and book which discuss gun violence and gun safety for middle school students and a conflict resolution curriculum produced by the state department of justice through the Arkansas Bar Association. The state also has distributed over \$5 million in funding and resources to schools through both state and federal programs for school safety. Arkansas was also selected as one of 11 states to participate in a grant program from the Community Oriented Policing Service of the U.S. Department of Justice to support training for students to help prevent violence in their schools.

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## School Safety Activities in Florida

School safety has been a priority issue of the Florida Legislature for several years. Most recently, legislation has been adopted which addresses issues ranging from teacher authority and enforcement of attendance to zero-tolerance policies and “second chance” schools. In 1994, Florida passed an omnibus reform of the state’s juvenile justice system, which had significant impact on school safety. The revisions to state law were extensive and included provisions for educational services for juvenile offenders; developing cooperative relationships between the department of education and the new department of juvenile justice; and requiring notification of school authorities when a juvenile commits a crime that would be a felony if committed by an adult. Furthermore, the state expanded existing programs and created some new programs addressing parenting and parental responsibility activities, counseling services, and other offerings for disruptive students and their parents.

The state made significant revisions to its student suspension policy, requiring an academic component for students on in-school suspension, greatly expanding alternative education programs and encouraging a transition program for students re-entering regular classrooms. Parental notification and involvement was strengthened for students placed on either in- or out-of-school suspension. The state also created after-school program grants to assist school districts in creating a safe environment for students during the periods when they are most likely to be unsupervised.

In 1996, the Legislature passed several bills which dealt with school safety. Provisions included giving teachers greater authority to remove disruptive students from the classroom and to use force to protect themselves and other students from injury, providing school systems the authority to hire school safety officers, and authorizing charter schools which can provide an alternative educational environment for students with learning and discipline problems. Also in 1996, the state created a toll-free safety hotline.

In 1997, the Legislature passed major school safety legislation that required students up to 18 years of age to notify the school in writing of their intention to drop out of school, which was amended in 1998 to include a requirement for parental consent. Also in 1997, Florida instituted zero-tolerance policies for crime, drug, alcohol and weapons possession. In the 1999 session, in addition to revising truancy reduction measures, the Legislature passed a bill that requires that a minor charged with possessing or discharging weapons or firearms on school property be held in detention with an initial hearing being held within 24 hours of the child being taken into custody.

Between 1990 and 1999, the state statute dealing with habitual truancy was fine-tuned several times. Among the significant changes were the redefinition of habitual truancy to include students excessively absent with parental consent and the simplification of school administrative procedures; the establishment of absence quotas for school intervention; the provision of extensive latitude for local districts; and the involvement of the department of juvenile justice in the process when necessary. The state also allows for habitually-truant students to have their driving privileges withheld or revoked.



The state established in 1999 a “contact, refer, enforce” policy which delineates the steps a public school must take to enforce regular school attendance. Under this policy principals must contact the parent or guardian of each student who has an unexcused or unexplained absence to determine the reason for the absence. If the student has more than five such absences in a month or 10 in 90 days, the student’s primary teacher must report the absences to the principal. The case is then referred to the school’s child study team unless there is clear evidence that the absences are not a pattern of nonattendance. If a pattern is established, regardless of whether the absences are excused or unexcused, the team must meet with the parent or guardian to identify remedies. Should the parent or guardian disagree with the remedies, they may appeal the decision to the school board. If, following this hearing the school board determines the interventions are appropriate and the parent or guardian still refuses to comply, the superintendent may enforce the policy by seeking criminal prosecution. Florida has taken a serious approach to truancy because it is considered a risk factor for disruptive behavior and has become an important issue for a number of Florida school districts. A recent *Orlando Sentinel* survey noted that one in six Central Florida high school students skips school more than 20 days a year.

The Florida Department of Education administers Safe and Drug-Free School (SDFS) funds to Florida’s 67 school districts, four university laboratory schools, and the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, benefitting over two million students a year. In the 1997-98 school year, this amounted to \$11.7 million in SDFS project monies and an additional \$5.2 million in special set aside funds. In that school year, nearly all school systems participated in some kind of alcohol, tobacco and other drug prevention program, with 60 reporting the use of SDFS funds for conflict resolution instruction; 54 using the funds for violence prevention curriculum, and 40 using them for parent education programs. Additionally, nearly every local education agency reported the use of some funds to support school resource officers, although only a handful used their SDFS funds for that purpose. In its 1998/1999 report the state expressed concerns over the ability of all school districts to purchase and implement effective programs given the decline in federal SDFS allocations even as program requirements expand. In the 1997-98 school year, local districts received \$10,000 annually. This notwithstanding, the state has increased its funding for school safety from \$50,350,000 in FY 1998-99 to \$70,350,000 in FY 1999-00.

For students who have been seriously disruptive, violent or have committed serious offenses, the state has authorized “second chance” schools. These district programs are provided through cooperative agreements between the department of juvenile justice, private providers, state or local law enforcement agencies or other state agencies to provide quality educational services for students who cannot be placed in regular schools or are in some form of detention.

In addition to having a substantial investment in safe schools programs, Florida is noteworthy for its extensive data collection activities. The state department of education is authorized to collect, compile and analyze data on school safety, student alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, and program implementation. The School Environmental Safety Incident

Reporting System (SESIR) was established in 1995 to assist schools, districts and staff of the department of education at the state level in assessing major need areas and the extent and nature of problems in school safety. The department of education compiles the results of SESIR surveys annually in a statewide report which lists district by district activities, expenditures and assessment activities for school safety and drug resistance programs. Respondents in Florida all noted that the annual reports provide a valuable snapshot of the program's activities and effectiveness. The Legislature will consider codifying SESIR during its 2000 session and will also investigate opportunities to remedy data quality issues relating to variations in perceptions of incident types and reporting.

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## School Safety Activities in Georgia

Georgia responded to school safety concerns in 1999 with the Improved Student Learning Environment and Discipline Act. The Act, introduced as HB605, requires local school boards to implement character education for all grade levels and to provide opportunities for parental involvement in connection with this program. The Act also:

- ▶ provides for professional development in classroom management and identification and remediation of student academic and behavioral needs for teachers whose students are returned to their classrooms after removal for disruptive behavior.
- ▶ requires local boards to adopt age-appropriate codes of conduct containing standards of behavior, a student support process, a progressive discipline process and a parental involvement process. The state board of education is charged with establishing minimum standards for such local policies.
- ▶ provides for written reports from teachers on students whose actions repeatedly or substantially interfere with the learning process and extends to teachers the authority to remove such students from class. Students can be expelled for committing a felony or delinquent act, although state policy is to try to assign students to individually oriented alternative settings if possible.
- ▶ provides for grants to local school systems from the state board of education for use in alternative education programs for middle and high school students who violate the system's code of conduct.

Two additional bills provided further support for schools in this area. Senate Bill 49 requires that student codes of conduct include provisions regarding verbal assault, physical battery or assault, or disrespectful conduct towards teachers, administrators, school personnel or other students. Senate Bill 74 requires local school systems to develop and annually review school safety plans for every public school in consultation with local law enforcement, fire service, public safety and emergency management agencies, which are then to be filed for approval by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA). These plans are to address accidents, acts of violence and terrorism both during the instructional day and for events held during non-instructional hours. In order to adequately develop and respond, the state directed GEMA to provide training and technical support to public and private schools.

In previous sessions, the General Assembly has authorized school districts to refuse enrollment to any student expelled or suspended from another district (1995) and required local districts to adopt student codes of conduct (1997). In 1997, the Georgia Department of Education formed the Statewide Task Force on Safety and Violence in Georgia Schools, which met throughout the year and presented its findings in August of 1998. Among its recommendations were increased emphasis on character education in all grades and increased funding for alternative schools. The Task Force also recommended the creation of a statewide, toll-free hotline, which became operational in August 1998. The hotline is directed by and housed in the



department of education, with certified Georgia peace officers and drug-abuse prevention specialists available, and operates in partnership with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

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## School Safety Activities in Kentucky

In 1998, the Kentucky General Assembly passed HB330 which established the Kentucky Center for School Safety and set up a statewide grant program to assist local school systems with alternative education programs and innovative programs to reduce violence. It also required all schools and school systems to assess school safety and student discipline and to prepare school and district safety plans. The Center for School Safety has nine major components, which are to:

- 1) establish a clearinghouse of information and materials concerning school violence and safety;
- 2) provide and coordinate training, technical assistance and program development to schools, justice and law enforcement agencies and communities;
- 3) analyze the data collected as a result of HB330;
- 4) evaluate existing school safety programs;
- 5) administer grants to local school systems;
- 6) promote interagency efforts to address school discipline and safety issues in collaboration with other post-secondary institutions and juvenile delinquency prevention councils;
- 7) prepare and disseminate information regarding best practices in creating safe and effective schools;
- 8) advise the state board of education on administrative policies and regulations; and
- 9) provide an annual report to the governor, board of education and Interim Joint Committee on Education on the status of school safety in the state.

Also in HB330, Kentucky required the state board of education to develop appropriate administrative regulations relating to school safety, school discipline and related matters. The state also required school safety and student discipline assessments by the 1998-1999 school year and district level analysis of this data, as well as local resources, policies, procedures and needs, by May 1999. Each local board of education is required to adopt a plan for immediate and long-term strategies to address school safety and discipline, which is the basis for any request for funds from the state safe schools grant program. The funding for grants to local school districts was \$4 million in 1998 and \$9 million in 1999, representing \$13 million of the \$15 million appropriation in HB330. The remaining funds were used for the operations of the Center for School Safety. Of the 176 school districts in the state, 126 have received benefit from the safe schools grant program. The state also included in the 1998 legislation a requirement for the department of juvenile justice to provide by August 2000 day treatment programs which are to combine therapeutic and academic services accessible to school districts in every judicial region of the state.

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## School Safety Activities in Louisiana

In 1997, the state superintendent of schools convened a Safe Schools Task Force to provide recommendations and guidance on school safety. When the Task Force presented its report to the superintendent in 1998, its recommendations centered on a set of core ideas including: student and parental involvement in school safety; security measures needed for school safety; a safe schools recognition program; collaboration and early intervention; and sustained training. Building on these core ideas, the Task Force recommended some immediate, specific actions including the design and adoption of a code of conduct with a focus on violent behavior, development of a security plan for every school, the development of a climate of trust in schools, and early and quick interventions for troubled students. The Task Force also identified model programs for schools to emulate.

The state has used much of its federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools funding to support school resource officers and other violence prevention programs in the schools. Due to the state's massive accountability initiatives, there is only limited state funding for these activities. The state has asked local school superintendents to include violence prevention as a dimension of these plans and is monitoring for voluntary compliance by districts before issuing a mandate. The state also has asked local schools to infuse character education throughout the K-12 curriculum. Many local systems, particularly Louisiana's larger districts, have implemented extensive safety programs, including adding resource officers and metal detectors as well as conflict resolution and violence prevention strategies.

In its 1999 session, the Louisiana Legislature passed HCR180 which established a legislative Task Force on School Discipline and Safety. The Task Force, which will hold hearings during the interim, will provide guidance to the Legislature on what legislative activities are necessary to ensure the continued safety and orderly operation of the state's public schools. Also during the 1999 session, the Legislature passed HB604 which required school boards to adopt student codes of conduct and discipline policies for students who violate the code. In the 1998 budget session, the Legislature appropriated \$2 million to a competitive grant program for the expansion or creation of alternative education programs, either in-school, out-of-school, or at a special school facility. Louisiana mandates that students expelled or suspended from schools be provided an education through alternative programs, with a waiver available to systems lacking the financial ability to create such programs.

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## School Safety Activities in Maryland

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has numerous programs and initiatives addressing school safety. In response to the need for crisis planning and coordination, the MSDE, in conjunction with representatives from several jurisdictions, has created guidelines for developing a crisis plan. Every school system has had such plans for the past 10 years, with the current effort focused on expanding them from a focus on individual loss issues to include school or community-wide crises. Additionally, the state has created the Interagency Steering Committee on School Safety which will coordinate new and existing initiatives aimed at enhancing the state's safe schools strategy.

In the area of prevention or intervention, the 1996 Maryland General Assembly passed legislation which requires each local board of education to provide a continuum model of prevention and intervention activities and programs that encourage and promote positive behavior and reduce disruption. The General Assembly also provides funding to local systems to support the development and expansion of programs for disruptive students in the schools and charged the Maryland State Board of Education to establish guidelines that define a state code of discipline with standards and consequences for violations. Guidelines providing a framework for updating local policies and procedures were disseminated to local school systems in 1997.

Other recent legislative activity includes a requirement for local school systems to investigate the causes of students' habitual truancy. This 1997 legislation allows school systems to provide students and their families with counseling and other intervention services and to notify the department of juvenile justice in the event of chronic truancy. Reports on habitual truancy must be submitted annually by local boards of education to MSDE. Also in 1997, the state extended the authority of school officials to deny attendance to a student expelled from a school in another state. Previous state law provided for this exclusion only for students expelled from Maryland schools. During the 1999 session, the General Assembly extended a court's discretion at assigning liability for restitution for a juvenile committing a delinquent act involving a destructive device to the child's parents. Courts may also order the motor vehicle administration to suspend the teenager's driving privilege.

The state has supported a regional alternative school as a pilot for the development of successful practices in working with habitually-disruptive students. The state also has sponsored a safe schools conference for information sharing and action plan development at the local level. School teams that participated in the conference were eligible to submit proposals for a competitive grant to implement effective strategies in their schools. Furthermore, MSDE is encouraging school systems to adopt locally relevant character education programs as a means to reduce disruptive behavior, alcohol and drug abuse and teen pregnancy, as well as to increase parental and community involvement and academic achievement.

The MSDE also has provided training to 10 local school systems in the Second Step program, a pre-school through grade 9 program designed to reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior and increase social competence by

teaching empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Furthermore, every school system has implemented either peer mediation or conflict resolution programs or both in selected schools to teach students appropriate ways to resolve conflicts and disagreements. Maryland also provides funding to support programs that prevent violence in and around schools and to strengthen programs that prevent the illegal use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and involve parents in the schools through the state's comprehensive Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program.

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## School Safety Activities in Mississippi

The Mississippi Legislature addressed school safety during previous legislative sessions, authorizing alternative programs (1990), providing funding for these programs (1993 and 1994), and extending the categories of eligible students from those who are discipline problems to requiring offering the program to suspended or expelled students, excluding those expelled for felonies (1994). In 1994, the state also required the state board of education to develop minimum guidelines for alternative education programs. The next year Mississippi added requirements for the maintenance and transfer of student discipline records and authorized the creation of a central reporting system on expulsions. In 1996, the state adopted a zero-tolerance policy requiring expulsion for certain violations and also clarified the requirements for district and school employees to notify law enforcement officials of crimes that occur on school property.

In 1999, Mississippi established a statewide school safety and crisis hotline for students, parents, teachers and others to use when they believe there is a threat at school. The hotline is a joint effort of the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Safe and Orderly Schools and the department of public safety. The departments also have developed a rapid response team to assist school districts in the event of a crisis.

The department of education sponsored two safe school conferences in June, 1999, with focuses on prevention, conflict resolution and preparedness. The state also conducted a training session shortly before the beginning of the school year for administrators and facility managers on conducting safe school audits. The Office of Safe and Orderly Schools will be creating a checklist to be used by the districts to assist in conducting school safety assessments.

Mississippi Attorney General Mike Moore has pushed a school safety initiative which would facilitate partnerships between schools and law enforcement and provide statewide information about successful programs. As part of this, Moore has met separately with community leaders, students, school staff and officials and law enforcement representatives in a dozen Mississippi communities. During the course of these meetings, each group's perspective on school violence and possible solutions was discussed, and were further developed in open town hall meetings held at the end of the day. The results of these meetings were compiled into a report—*Investing in Our Children*—identifying the common themes and comprehensive solutions to the problems presented during the discussions. The report also outlines successful programs as well as resources from around Mississippi and the nation.

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## School Safety Activities in Missouri

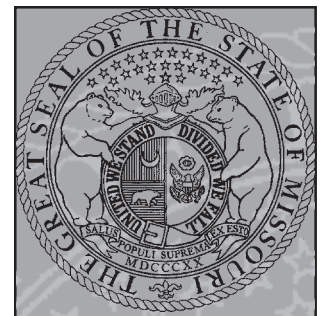
The Missouri General Assembly passed the Safe Schools Act in 1996. The Act established the crime of assault while on school property, a felony, and requires school administrators to report acts of violence to teachers and other affected school employees, as well as to notify law enforcement agencies of certain felonies or acts which would constitute felonies if committed by an adult on school property. The Act also requires juvenile officers to notify the superintendent of the school district when a petition has been filed alleging that a student has committed certain acts.

Through the Act, school boards are authorized to immediately remove any student who is determined to be a threat to himself or to others. Districts may refuse to enroll a student expelled from another district if the enrolling district determines that the pupil would have been suspended for the same behavior. Students who possess weapons on school property must, with some exceptions, be expelled. The Act further required the state department of elementary and secondary education to implement violence prevention and anti-gang instructional programs. The Act also provided for grants to school districts to establish alternative education programs for students who cannot be adequately served in traditional classroom settings.

Since 1996, the Act has undergone only minor modifications, and it remains a comprehensive tool for improving school safety in Missouri. The General Assembly has continued to support alternative and preventative programs for violent, abusive and chronically disruptive students, with an appropriation of \$9.3 million for fiscal year 2000 for initiatives including alternative education grants, anti-violence curriculum development and conflict resolution programs.

Also in 1999, Governor Carnahan appointed a school safety task force to provide recommendations on how to further ensure that Missouri schools continue to be safe. The task force met with communities throughout the state over the summer of 1999 and submitted a report to the governor in October, 1999, encouraging the further promotion of crisis management plans and increasing communication between authorities, schools and parents. A second initiative from the governor's office has brought representatives from the departments of education and public safety together to develop model crisis management plans for use by local districts as they develop their own. These plans, which are required for state accreditation, will, for the first time, require response to violence as a component in the 1999-2000 school year. The House of Representatives also created an Interim Committee on School Violence which held hearings throughout the state to consider such issues as appropriate school administrative measures for preventing school violence; community involvement and collaborative efforts among parents, school officials, school boards, teachers, juvenile courts, and the state departments of mental health, social services, and elementary and secondary education; and the causes and effects of youth violence. The Committee delivered its report to the speaker prior to the 2000 session.

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# Missouri



# North Carolina

## School Safety Activities in North Carolina

North Carolina has long been recognized as a regional leader in safe schools activity. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction surveyed a sample of school districts in 1992 to assess the nature of the school violence problem across the state. At that time the survey found “some increase in violent behavior in schools” over the previous five years, along with increases in the number of weapons in schools, and that “community levels of concern were at or near the ‘very serious’ level.”

In 1993, the Center for the Prevention of School Violence was created by an executive order, the result of recommendations by the Governor’s Task Force on Youth and School Violence. Originally part of the department of crime control and public safety, the Center is now a part of the University of North Carolina system. The Center focuses on helping communities and schools develop and implement strategies which address their particular school safety needs.

A 1994 special session of the General Assembly appropriated \$75 million for numerous prevention and intervention programs. Among these are the Support Our Students program run by the department of health and human services, which awards grants to organizations for local programs that provide high-quality after-school activities for school-aged children. Another program created in the 1994 special session provides grants to local school systems for innovative programs to improve the educational attainment of at-risk students.

In 1997, the General Assembly passed safe school legislation, including requirements for local boards of education to develop school-level safe school plans. These plans must include: standards of behavior and consequences for school employees and students; professional development; procedures for identifying and assessing the needs of students at risk of academic failure or of engaging in disruptive or disorderly behavior; and a plan to work with law enforcement officials and the courts to ensure that schools are safe and that laws are enforced.

The 1999 General Assembly added assault of school personnel to the list of Class A1 misdemeanors and clarified the existing requirements for a one-year suspension for students who bring weapons or explosive devices onto school property. The state also increased the penalties for making bomb threats to public buildings, including schools, and created the new crime of negligent supervision of a minor. This last measure allows for a civil action to be brought against the parent or guardian who has the care, custody, and control of an unemancipated minor to recover up to \$25,000 in damages from a bomb, weapon or bomb hoax. The state also made driver’s licenses for those aged 15 to 18 conditional on the students not being expelled or suspended from school because of alcohol or drug violations, bringing weapons or assaulting school personnel on school property.

According to the Center for Prevention of School Violence, efforts to deal with violent students have resulted in processes which allow violent students to be more easily removed from schools, more attention being paid to alternative programs and schools, the reporting of crime and violence on school property, more communication between and among school, law

enforcement and court officials, and the expansion of immediate school actions directed at safety. The last category includes the dramatic increase in the assignment of school resource officers to schools as well as legislatively-required safe school planning. According to the Center, there were 567 school resource officers working in schools across the state in 1999, more than double the number found in 1996. State funding has been critical in placing the majority of these officers.

Also in 1999, the Center for the Prevention of School Violence was asked to facilitate the Governor's Task Force on Youth and School Violence, which met to follow up on the recommendations of the 1993 Task Force and to provide direction for the state in meeting its goals of safe, orderly and caring schools. The 51-member Governor's Task Force returned six primary recommendations and 10 action items to the governor for consideration. The recommendations include focuses on parental and student involvement; follow-up on the state's safe school planning initiative to determine if it is being implemented; a commitment to ensuring a welcoming school climate for all students; early identification of problem students; and community responsibilities for safe schools. The Task Force conducted three weeks of hearings and discussions on violence prevention, intervention and response at the home, school and community levels. The Task Force also held town meetings across the state to gauge the needs and concerns of North Carolinians in their communities.

Among the action items outlined in the report is the creation of a statewide toll-free school safety tip line. Run as a public/private partnership with Pinkerton Services Group, which donated its services for several years, the tip line provides an intervention of last resort for anyone concerned about a school safety issue. Operational in January, 2000, the tip line is accompanied by an educational and awareness campaign designed to inform students, parents, teachers, administrators and others of the range of options for resolving and avoiding conflict along with providing, at a minimum, an opportunity for individuals to anonymously raise their concerns in an environment where they can expect results. Also among the action items was a community education and professional development program for the early identification of and intervention for violence-prone youth. As part of this effort, Students Against Violence Everywhere groups across the state are being asked to conduct student seminars on this issue and report on their findings at the statewide summit scheduled for spring 2000.

A further recommendation, and one that is gaining interest from outside the state, is to reduce the size of schools. Given the rising population pressures on North Carolina schools, replacing large schools with smaller facilities is not particularly feasible, but the state board of education, the department of public instruction, and the Center for the Prevention of School Violence are discussing ways to make even large schools feel small to the students who attend them and to make sure that all students feel that someone at the school knows them and is concerned for their well-being.

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## School Safety Activities in Oklahoma

Oklahoma was the first state to institute a statewide, anonymous toll-free hotline, called Safecall, for reporting threats or dangers in schools. Once a report is made to Safecall, callers are given a case number, which allows them to call back in three school days to learn what has happened as a result of their call. Callers are asked for the name of their school, the town where they reside and for specific information about any potential danger. The call is then immediately transcribed and sent to local school officials, who receive prior notification that a Safecall report is being faxed to them. If the call is of an emergency nature (threat of bomb, weapons or bodily injury, for instance) then school officials and local law enforcement officials are informed within five minutes by telephone of the potential danger.

In 1996, Oklahoma required schools to create school safety committees to provide community input on school safety and discipline issues. This legislation also asked for a determination of the feasibility of the reporting of in-house suspensions to the state department. In 1997, the state expanded and consolidated its alternative education programs and provided additional grant funding for school systems to develop such programs.

As part of its major education legislation in the 1999 session, the Oklahoma Legislature authorized schools to adopt discipline codes and required the transfer of student discipline records when a student enters a new school system. The legislation also requires law enforcement officers who arrest students for felony offenses to notify the school district administrator of the arrest. Other legislation directed the state department of education to survey random school safety committees for the frequency of their meetings, any recommendations they have forwarded to their school, and for teacher preparation programs in the state to include classroom management, discipline and safety training.

The department of education participates in the Oklahoma Council on Violence Prevention, which provides a link between schools, government agencies and communities on school violence issues. A recently completed survey on school violence problems and services was published in the fall of 1999. Also that fall, the state hosted a Safe and Healthy Schools Conference on readiness, intervention and related issues. The department of education will also release a revised and updated crisis manual for school districts with expanded information on prevention and intervention as well as aftercare. The Oklahoma Bar Association has developed a peer mediation program — Peaceful Resolution for Oklahoma Students (PROS) — which is available to schools free of charge. The state also encourages schools to use their federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools funds for research-based prevention and intervention programs. Included among these are the Enhancing Emotional Competence Program, Project Alert and the Life Skills Program.

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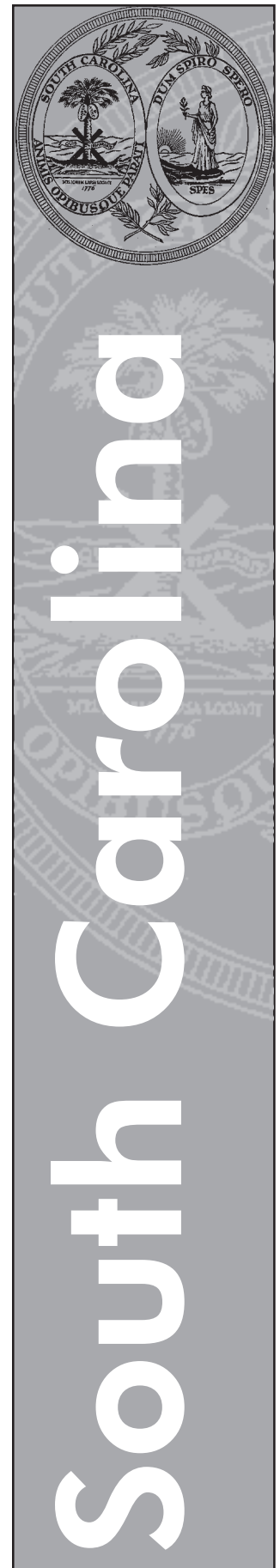
## School Safety Activities in South Carolina

School safety in South Carolina is governed by several laws. The South Carolina Gun-Free Schools Act of 1995 requires a one-year expulsion for students who bring guns to school and also provides for the student's referral to the department of juvenile justice. In 1997, the state increased penalties for crimes on campus, particularly those involving assault and battery on school personnel and required law enforcement officials to notify school officials in the event a student is charged with a felony or is convicted of assault and battery on school personnel. Schools are required to include records of students' violent behavior in their permanent record. The South Carolina School Safety Act of 1998 addresses threats to public officials and provides for the assignment of school resource officers.

Most recently, in 1999, the General Assembly allocated \$7 million to put school resource officers in every public high school in the state. In August 1999, the state attorney general's office established a toll-free tip line which offers students \$100 rewards for tips leading to the confiscation of guns or bombs. Tips also can be reported on an Internet site, [www.seeagun.com](http://www.seeagun.com). While students' tips can be anonymous, students must identify themselves to claim the reward. The state also will hold a statewide conference on school crime involving teachers, school resource officers, and school officials; a new, easy-to-read manual advising school staff and law enforcement officials about school crime; and a student essay contest on school crime prevention.

Governor Jim Hodges, Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum, and Attorney General Charlie Condon co-chaired the South Carolina Safe Schools Task Force in May 1999 to map a path to safe, disruption-free schools. The report of the Task Force, released in June 1999, made several recommendations. Among them:

- ▶ develop stronger collaboration among all concerned constituencies;
- ▶ identify and promote proven programs for involving high-risk parents in the education of their children;
- ▶ provide support for prevention and intervention programs;
- ▶ provide additional funding for alternative schools and establish guidelines for these schools to ensure effective practices are adopted;
- ▶ support additional funding to further implement the state's character education initiative and provide for teacher training in curriculum infusion and program development;
- ▶ train faculty and staff in violence prevention and conflict management and support the reduction of the student-counselor ratio at all levels to 350 to 1;
- ▶ provide all students with training in conflict and anger management;
- ▶ require mentoring programs in all schools;
- ▶ implement peer mediation councils in schools and communities to assist with resolving problems and teaching tolerance;
- ▶ collaborate with law enforcement in future training of school resource officers;
- ▶ expand school-based mental health services to all schools;
- ▶ require all districts and schools to implement comprehensive safety and crisis management plans for annual accreditation compliance;



- ▶ conduct safety audits and give priority to school districts based on incident report statistics;
- ▶ expand efforts to secure funding for social workers; and
- ▶ expand proven truancy counseling programs statewide.

Significant among the recommendations is a “coordinating council” which is to serve as a point of contact for representatives of the various government agencies. This council will ensure that the state’s agencies have open and designated lines of communication and will provide a group which is accountable for monitoring, evaluating, and troubleshooting the numerous efforts—many of them collaborative—which have been recommended by the Task Force. Those activities which can be undertaken without new funding or changes to existing law are anticipated to be implemented as soon as the affected agencies have had an opportunity to review and approve of the recommended action. The General Assembly will be asked to pursue the remaining recommendations during the 2000 session.

The South Carolina Department of Education’s (SCDE) Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program (SDFSC) provides training and technical assistance statewide to promote school safety and reduce youth violence. Training and professional development activities provided by the program include: an annual conference for Safe and Drug-Free Schools coordinators; workshops for school administrators addressing legal and administrative concerns regarding safe schools; training sessions for safe school planning; and regional workshops on effective safe and drug-free programs. In addition, the staff provides support to parent and community organizations requesting presentations on safe school and drug prevention efforts. The SDFSC administers funds from the federal SDFSCA grant program, with every school district in the state receiving funds.

The department of education also offers several programs to schools in support of school safety activities. These include:

- ▶ Principles of Effectiveness Training: Every school district is offered training to promote and support effective practices in youth substance abuse and violence prevention. As noted previously, the Principles serve as the framework for designing, implementing and evaluating programs to better target limited resources.
- ▶ Safe Schools Strategies Teleconference: In May 2000, the SCDE will hold a teleconference with state and national school safety experts. The teleconference will also be the debut of the video on school safety “Anyone’s Child, Everyone’s Responsibility,” segments of which will provide a springboard for further discussion during the teleconference.
- ▶ Assessment of the Risks of School Violence: The SDFSC program requests that all schools submit a copy of their safe school plans to the office for review by a consultant, who is available to provide technical assistance on how to improve the plans.
- ▶ Summer Institute: The Office of Safe Schools and Youth Services is co-sponsoring a weeklong summer institute with the National Resource Center for Safe Schools addressing a community-based team approach to creating a school and community environment conducive to physical, emotional and social safety and well-being.



- ▶ National Center for Conflict Resolution Training (NCCRT): During fall 2000, the NCCRT will hold in-depth training in conjunction with the state department of education in advanced topics of mediation through active involvement in conflict simulations, discussions and presentations.

Furthermore, the SDFSC staff actively collaborate with several state agencies, including the state departments of juvenile justice, mental health, health and environmental control, alcohol and other drug abuse services, the governor's office, the attorney general's office as well as numerous national, regional and local organizations. The program also is responsible for distributing the state's \$7 million allocation for the hiring and training of school resource officers and provides support to schools for their character education, homework centers, after-school support programs and dropout prevention.

South Carolina also has the "5 Goals 4 Kids" program which was developed by a coalition of state agencies to address five critical school issues: truancy, gun injury, after-school opportunities, alcohol and drug abuse and health insurance. In June 1999, the program was selected by the U.S. Department of Justice as a national model to combat school violence. Elements of the program include community-based mentoring, after-school programs and the creation of a confidential statewide hotline to allow youths and families to report safety concerns. The program involves the state United Way, the South Carolina Recreation and Parks Association, the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Council and the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice.

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## School Safety Activities in Tennessee

In 1995, the state created the Tennessee School Safety Center within the department of education to develop and evaluate training materials and guidelines on school safety issues, including behavior, discipline and violence prevention. The Tennessee School Safety Center is also responsible for the collection and analysis of data related to school safety, including alleged violent or assaultive acts against school employees and students. Analysis of data includes the number of arrests, the charges and whether civil damages were pursued by the injured party or school system. The Center makes periodic reports to the Select Oversight Committee on Education on the status of school safety efforts. The Tennessee School Safety Center also runs the Safe School Grants Program, which distributes federal safe schools funds to local school systems. In 1995, the state required local school boards to develop codes of conduct and encouraged them to adopt “zero-tolerance” policies for weapons, drugs and violence.

The School Safety Act of 1998 provided an appropriation of \$10 million for the creation and distribution of school safety grants to local school districts for prevention and intervention programs. Local school districts must devise and submit a proposal to the state department of education’s School Safety Center for approval. All plans must include a 25 percent local match and need to address one or more of the following: the development of innovative violence prevention programs; conflict resolution; disruptive or assaultive behavior management; improved school security; peer mediation; and training for employees on the identification of possible perpetrators of school-related violence. The General Assembly provided an additional \$5 million, or about \$4 per pupil, during the 1999 session to continue the program,.

Through this program, the state supports school resource officers and school resource centers where families, students, and school staff can find services for themselves or, in the case of school staff, their students, as well as referrals to social services. The program currently supports approximately 10 school resource officer programs and 60 school resource centers. Other activities supported by this program include the School/Court/Community Partnership Grants, which support cooperative activity to help young people who have been removed from their regular school setting as a result of a zero-tolerance violation or who are returning to their regular school setting after an extended absence because of disruptive or criminal behavior. The state also has the Peaceable Schools Program, conducted through a partnership with the Tennessee Legal Community Foundation of the Tennessee Bar Association and the Tennessee School Safety Center, which provides conflict resolution and classroom management training to teams of elementary and middle school teachers and administrators.

In April 1999, Governor Sundquist unveiled a statewide, toll-free tip line to connect community members with safety concerns or information about possible safety threats to school and law enforcement officials. A campaign to raise awareness of the new tip line is underway across the state.

In 1998, Speaker of the House Jimmy Naifeh established an *ad-hoc* committee on school violence which conducted hearings throughout the state

and issued its final report in September, 1999. In general, the committee recommended continued flexibility for local school systems in addressing the issue of school violence. Specific recommendations include:

- ▶ Each school should develop a safe school plan, including physical, social, cultural, political and economic considerations.
- ▶ Each school should conduct an annual school safety assessment.
- ▶ Each local education agency should develop a comprehensive approach to school safety involving teachers, parents, students, administrators, support staff, social workers, counselors, law enforcement, judges, business and community leaders.
- ▶ Schools should involve students and seek their input on possible solutions to school violence issues.
- ▶ The state needs to make more mental health services available to schools.
- ▶ The department of education should secure a recurring funding source for structured alternative school programs and develop a rigorous education-based curriculum that provides a quality education for students sent to alternative schools.
- ▶ Communities should be encouraged to develop more after-school, youth recreation, community service and mentoring programs that engage students in extracurricular activities during the hours when kids are most likely to get into trouble.
- ▶ Schools are encouraged to adopt aggressive discipline policies and codes of conduct for students with graduated sanctions with clear explanations of unacceptable behavior and unambiguous consequences for violations.
- ▶ Children are encouraged to report guns and weapons and threats of violence in schools to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's weapons hotline.
- ▶ Parents are encouraged to get involved in their child's life, to be good role models, to support them and supervise their activities. Schools should coordinate long-term parenting programs for high risk families and short-term information programs for all families of school-aged children that focus on teaching parents appropriate behavior for adolescents, communication skills, discipline, and how to deal with television and media violence.
- ▶ Schools should evaluate their curriculum and include character education, violence prevention programs, peer counseling, peer mediation, conflict resolution, tolerance, anger management, verbal de-escalation, critical-thinking, coping skills, life skills, parenting skills, and problem-solving courses as they see fit.
- ▶ The General Assembly should take a close look at the problem of truancy in the state and consider putting some "teeth" into the current law. The committee encourages the utilization of school resource officers or law enforcement officers in high schools and middle schools where funding is available.

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# Texas

## School Safety Activities in Texas

In its 1995 session, the Texas Legislature rewrote its entire education code and created Chapter 37, which deals specifically with school discipline and safety. Prior to 1995, school safety had been largely the purview of local jurisdictions, juvenile justice and *ad hoc* entities. In the intervening years, the code has been only slightly amended. Elements of Texas' code are:

- ▶ Requiring that every district provide alternative education programs for students removed for criminal or disruptive behavior. Alternative education programs must include appropriate basic educational opportunity. Students who commit certain acts within 300 feet of a school are placed in alternative education settings. These acts include: felonies; assault or terroristic threats; public lewdness and indecent exposure; retaliation against school employees; posing a threat to staff or students; and drug or alcohol possession.
- ▶ Requiring districts to adopt, and schools to post, a code of conduct with clear expectations and consequences for non-compliance. Any violations of the conduct code must be documented and reported to the student's parent or guardian.
- ▶ Giving teachers the authority to remove students from a classroom to maintain discipline. A student so removed may not be returned to that classroom without the teacher's consent.
- ▶ Requiring the expulsion of students who possess weapons, commit arson, murder or use alcohol or drugs at school. The school staff interacting with a student who is expelled for these reasons must be notified of the action. Parents of expelled students are responsible for their supervision.
- ▶ Having juvenile boards in counties with populations in excess of 125,000 develop juvenile justice alternative education programs for students who have been expelled from schools for serious offenses, including weapons violations and retaliation against school staff.
- ▶ Creating school-community guidance centers to assist children with problems that interfere with education and outline parental responsibilities for students who are admitted to these programs.

In 1996, the state provided an \$18 million grant fund to help school systems adjust to the new requirement of providing alternative education programs for expelled students, a grant pool which has since grown to \$36 million. In 1997, the Texas Education Agency was authorized to collect data from local agencies on these alternative schools. In the first year of available data (1997), a total of 70,000 pupils were placed into the programs. Because some pupils were placed more than once, the total number of placements was around 100,000. Students who commit certain felonies on campus are placed in the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program, which is funded in the state's 22 largest counties and is available to some smaller counties. These Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs also receive \$20 million from the state.

Texas offers decentralized services through its 20 regional educational service centers for a variety of needs, including school safety. Each regional center receives funding for the employment of a drug use prevention specialist

to assist local agencies within the region in the areas of training and technical assistance; development, identification, dissemination and evaluation of current available materials on violence and drug use prevention; dissemination of SDFSCA information; and technical assistance on the SDFSCA application for funding and the annual evaluation report. In addition, the state's Region IV Educational Service Center, which serves nearly one-quarter of Texas' public school students, is serving as the facilitator for the process of developing a system for addressing behavior and discipline management programs for students with disabilities.

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## School Safety Activities in Virginia

Since 1985, the Virginia Department of Education has been involved in supporting local schools in the area of school safety. The activity areas include: developing and distributing publications and educational materials; training school staff, parents, law officials and other persons who work with youth; providing direct technical assistance and consultation; collaborating with other organizations; and providing grant monies. Virginia is often cited for its programs designed to curtail student violence. Most recently, the state has produced several publications to help schools, parents, and communities identify risk factors, provide appropriate support, and intervene appropriately to prevent school violence. Recent publications include a guide to safe school planning, a manual for conducting school safety audits and a compendium of programs and activities the state has engaged in to support local efforts in violence prevention and school safety. Most recently, in response to a 1999 mandate from the General Assembly, the department of education developed and published the Model School Crisis Management Plan and has developed guidelines for local school boards to consider in developing their own plans.

Since 1994, the state has operated a School Safety Resource Center which serves as a clearinghouse for school safety and violence prevention information. The Center is charged with providing the most up-to-date information on school safety and has assumed several responsibilities for data collection, school safety audits, school resource officers, and responses to the needs for staff development. The Center is funded by a grant from the state department of criminal justice services. The state has also provided funds for the establishment of pilot alternative schools for students who had to be removed from their regular class settings. In 1997, the state required local school boards to adopt policies that allow teachers to remove disruptive students from their classes and have input on the return to their classroom of students removed for disruptive or disorderly conduct.

In 1999, Governor Gilmore pledged \$1.5 million to increase the number of school resource officers in schools as a means of deterring school violence. The state also moved this year to require districts to ensure that every school has a crisis management plan and to encourage districts to develop character education in programs. The state also operates the School/Law Enforcement Mini-grant Program, which provides 10 local school divisions and law enforcement jurisdictions with grants of \$1,000 to form collaborative partnerships that will enhance school and law enforcement relationships and provide a direct service to students. The state also actively encourages local school divisions to participate in the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Grant programs, which the state administers.

The Governor's Office for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities serves as a liaison between the governor and all state agencies dealing with prevention. In June 1999, the office took the lead in the development and implementation of school resource officer training in the state, using veteran officers to develop the curriculum. The office also



has begun a collaborative effort with the state's community services boards with grant programs focusing on three areas: youth leadership development; implementation of prevention programs targeting students in grades K-4; and implementation of prevention programs targeting families.

The state established a statewide anonymous tip line and Internet site for reporting school crime in 1999, with slightly more than one-third of the state's 134 school jurisdictions participating. Calls to the line are routed through the Virginia State Police to the appropriate local agency, usually the police. For districts which opt not to participate, tips will still be handled and schools notified, but the reporting process is not direct.

The state provides extensive training opportunities for school personnel, including conflict mediation training; school safety regional forums; school resource officer training; crime prevention through environmental design training (with the department of criminal justice services); a school safety summer institute for classroom teachers; school safety audit training; and training on re-enrollment of juveniles. The department also offers extensive training courses through outside contractors, including Conflict Resolution Skills for the Elementary School Classroom; Family Education Training-of-Trainers Workshop; Respect, Responsibility and Resolution: Conflict Resolution in the Middle School—Recognizing and Dealing with the Aggressive Student; School Crisis Management Workshops; and Youth Gang Prevention Seminars.

Upon request, department of education staff also will provide technical assistance to school staff and other professionals serving youth. This assistance may take the form of on-site visits, referrals to recognized experts, meeting facilitation and material dissemination, among other things. Department of education staff maintain close contacts with local Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Coordinators in order to remain current on the schools' needs and concerns, to provide timely notification of training and grant opportunities, and to serve as an easy point of contact with the vast array of resources, both state and national, available to schools.

In 1997, the state department of juvenile justice, in collaboration with the department of education, began training law officers in a 40-week school resource officers basic training course, covering community policing in a school environment, school law and criminal law, adolescent development and at-risk behavior, and classroom management and presentation skills. In 1999 the curriculum was adapted to include crisis management, critical incident response, effective strategies to deal with threats, safe response to school weapons incidents, cultural diversity, adolescent drug use and youth culture, and bullying and harassment intervention strategies. The department also offers advanced school resource officer training and provides a student law curriculum for officers to use to educate youth about their rights and responsibilities under the law.

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## School Safety Activities in West Virginia

In response to the 1994 Safe Schools Act passed by Congress, West Virginia passed legislation in 1995 which mandated expulsion of students who violate certain codes of conduct, including possession of guns or drugs at school. Subsequent state Supreme Court decisions required school systems to provide alternative educational opportunities for students expelled or suspended, unless doing so would endanger the safety or well-being of other students or school personnel. The Legislature responded in 1996 by providing funding for alternative education programs for students expelled or suspended for inappropriate or disruptive behavior.

The West Virginia Safe Schools Program, directed by the department of education, includes a character education component — Responsible Students — as well as peer mediation programs to help students resolve disputes with classmates peacefully and constructively and provides funding for select violence prevention and school safety activities through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Initiative.

In 1998, Governor Underwood created the “Operation Safe Schools” program to address the presence of firearms in schools. Included in the program are training for school personnel and collection of school floor plans for authorities’ use in the event of an emergency. Also included in this program is the use of dog units to detect drugs in public schools. Since its inception in August 1998, the program has trained about 12,400 school personnel, completed 848 site surveys and has established contacts between school principals, state department of education staff, and state troopers in all of the state’s counties to discuss emergency response procedures.

In 1999, the Joint Standing Committee on Education formed the Education Subcommittee on Safe and Productive Schools which is expected to report its recommendations to the 2000 Legislature. The Committee has held a number of hearings, drawing input from law enforcement, parents, students, teachers, school counselors, school administrators and school superintendents.

In an effort to facilitate better communication and dialogue, Governor Underwood has organized regional meetings between school officials and designated law enforcement personnel representing state police, county sheriff’s departments and local police officers. This forum has been beneficial in establishing relationships and better safe school plans.

State troopers also cooperated with the department of education in a statewide schools conference in May 1999 designed to assist counselors and administrators in identifying anti-social behavior, preventing school violence, improving classroom management techniques and increasing community agency support for safe schools.

A Safe Schools Conference was held in November of 1999 and involved 500 educators, community members, legislators, state board of education members and other individuals from interested agencies. The focus for the conference was on character education issues involving racial and cultural diversity, working with law enforcement in schools, and a student's perspective on violence in schools.

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For a school to function properly, students and staff need to feel safe and campuses must be orderly and well-disciplined. Students who attend safe schools are more likely to perform at their best than students who spend part or all of their school day preoccupied with concerns for their safety or distracted by the disruptive behavior of their peers. There is ample evidence to indicate that schools are, on the whole, safe, secure, and orderly. Recent state activities across the region have made great advances to further stabilize school environment.

Many state activities take the form of discrete elements addressing specific symptoms of school safety. Some, such as increased security and zero-tolerance programs, are specifically designed to isolate and mitigate disruptive and violent behavior. Others, including alternative education and after-school programs, focus preventative energies on high-risk youth. Still others, including character education and conflict resolution curricula, invest in all students to create a more positive atmosphere. As these programs mature and begin to find appropriate places within the context of the educational life of schools, there is a need to effect a paradigm shift from discrete activities to unified programs. Such a unified approach involves multiple governmental and non-governmental agencies, community members, school staff, parents, and students to create a seamless and self-correcting process to reach a common goal. Through this comprehensive approach, all of the elements which contribute to healthy schools are connected to one another in a sensible manner.

While there are many possible paths states can take in developing a comprehensive plan, the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence developed a planning and implementation process which is flexible and provides excellent guidance. Key elements in this process include:

- ▶ identification and measurement of the problem;
- ▶ identification of and collaboration with community, state and national resources;
- ▶ establishment of measurable goals and objectives;
- ▶ identification of appropriate strategies;
- ▶ implementation of recommendations;
- ▶ evaluation of results; and
- ▶ revision of strategies based on these results.

Additionally, research and practical experience suggest that there are some critical areas for states to consider when planning for school safety. Among them are:

- ▶ support for education reform, including smaller classes and schools, including “schools within schools” programs, requiring high standards for all students and adequate resources to reach these standards;
- ▶ school climate reform, including training on sexual harassment/hate crimes, implementation of bullying prevention programs, conflict resolution and violence prevention programs and infused character education;
- ▶ formation of school-community partnerships which include parents, students, teachers, faith organizations, businesses, mental health and social services, probation, parole, and law enforcement officers;

- ▶ improvement of teacher preparation and professional development, including anti-violence and classroom management training as well as general instructional and subject-area training;
- ▶ provision of high-quality educational alternatives with appropriate counseling for students who are removed from their regular classrooms;
- ▶ institution of school crisis management plans;
- ▶ establishment of school resource centers to serve as an information clearinghouse and data collection agency for state schools;
- ▶ implementation of age-appropriate conflict resolution curricula;
- ▶ establishment at the school or district level of clearly defined codes of conduct with well-defined sanctions;
- ▶ increased parental involvement and support programs; and
- ▶ smaller class sizes and schools and the development of schools-within-schools.

For the most part, schools are, and should continue to be, safe and orderly places. State and local officials are working with communities, schools, the federal government and one another to ensure that they remain so. The tragedies of the past few years have created an unwarranted perception of schools as unsafe and unwelcoming, but also have provided initiative and opportunity for schools and communities to put in place measures which will enhance school safety. Today schools find themselves in a position in which they are better equipped with the necessary research and can choose from programs that seem to fit their situations best. More program evaluation still is needed, but the future looks bright for school safety and discipline. While schools may never be fully insulated from the violence and disorder of the world outside, they are showing signs of becoming safe havens for students.

## APPENDIX 1

### The Size Issue

Research has found that students at smaller schools are more likely to feel connected and less likely to feel alienated than their peers at larger institutions. Both of these outcomes contribute to a positive school climate and a better learning environment. Not insignificantly, teachers and administrators in smaller schools tend to have higher morale, and report that change and reforms can be implemented more quickly due to reduced bureaucracy. Smaller schools offer academic advantages as well, with generally lower drop-out rates and higher achievement levels for at-risk students.

In relation to school safety and order, small schools are consistently found to have more positive climates for learning and teaching. Reports of bullying, violent crime and property crime all are higher in schools with larger student populations compared to smaller schools with similar demographics. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than one-third of schools with enrollments greater than 1,000 experienced serious violent crime compared with 4 percent to 9 percent of small (fewer than 300 students) and medium-sized (between 300 and 1,000 students). Arguably, these figures are slightly skewed because smaller and medium-sized schools are predominantly elementary and middle schools, grade levels in which serious violent crime is less prevalent.

Much attention has been placed upon the roles class size and school size have on the safe and orderly functioning of schools. Teachers' groups, the federal government, many state governments and parents' groups all have recommended smaller classes and schools to ensure more disciplined learning environments. The trend in school construction has been toward larger campuses, contrary to the conclusions of several studies which indicate numerous benefits of smaller school units. The construction of larger schools is driven in no small way by anticipated cost benefits and opportunities for curricular diversity, as has been noted in the *Safe School Facility Planner* produced by the North Carolina Board of Education. Advocates for larger schools, particularly larger high schools, contend that they are able to offer students a broader range of academic and extracurricular offerings. They also note that larger schools cost less to build, maintain and operate per student than smaller schools.

Interestingly, research published by the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs in the early 1990s indicates that large schools may not actually enjoy cost or curricular advantages over smaller school units. According to the *Source Book on School and District Size*, "Although it is often assumed that large schools are cheaper to operate and provide richer curricula than smaller schools, studies show that neither of these things is necessarily true." A number of organizations, including the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), are advocating smaller schools. In the case of secondary schools, NASSP has called for high schools to be no larger than 600-750 students, smaller than the typical new high school built in the past decade. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 71 percent of students attend high schools with enrollments over 1,000.

In light of a national shortage of classroom space and the need to provide classrooms for record numbers of students in the coming years, the discussion



over what kinds and sizes of schools districts should build becomes more complicated. Furthermore, while the evidence points to clear advantages for smaller schools, some research still is needed on the question of how small will make a difference. There is no uniform guidance on this, and, as the state of North Carolina points out in its Safe Schools Facility Planner handbook, “schools should reflect the nature and requirements of the communities served.” The handbook suggests that schools serving high percentages of economically-disadvantaged or minority youth should be smaller and presents suggested guidelines for establishing population levels for elementary schools at 300-400 students; for middle schools at 300-600 students; and for high schools at 400-800 students. The state of North Carolina notes in the same section of its handbook that its recommended school sizes, based on economies of construction, operation and maintenance, all are larger than research would suggest is ideal, by a factor of about 50 percent to 100 percent. Local school systems, which must make final decisions on school construction, often must make compromises among many variables, including fiscal implications and objectives for student climate and performance, when constructing schools.

School districts cannot realistically tear down existing large schools and build smaller ones, but there are efforts underway in some states to make large schools feel smaller. The division of large schools into smaller units, called “schools within schools” has been attempted in several places. There is some evidence that such programs can have outcomes similar to those of smaller schools provided the units have adequate separateness and independence. This is important both for the teachers who benefit from autonomy and greater freedom from the institutional bureaucracy and for the students who feel more connected to their sub-unit and have closer relationships with school staff.

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