
Introduction

THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL SAFETY

Over the past two decades, U.S. educational institutions have experienced a pattern of school violence that has shattered the sense of security that students, their families, educators, and community members once held about school facilities and the schooling process. Communities in Colorado, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and Virginia have been forever changed due to violence in the schools, and these are merely a representative sample of the incidents occurring in schools across America. Deadly occurrences are becoming more prevalent in schools in suburban and rural communities, crossing traditional socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic boundaries.

Yet, schools and classrooms across the country are relatively safe (Kingery & Walker, 2002). Children are more likely to be involved in a violent crime at home and in their neighborhoods than in school. The total number of students killed and wounded on school grounds in the 1990s was close in number to those in earlier decades (National Center on Education Statistics, 2007). Why then are schools now perceived as unsafe?

Indeed, the lack of perceived safety has much to do with the magnitude and impact of these tragedies. Characteristics of recent school shootings have been different due to the following:

- The number of killed and wounded per episode or tragedy
- The number and type of weapons used by the perpetrators
- The randomness by which victims were selected as targets
- The careful planning and conspiratorial nature of these school shootings
- The copycat nature of many of the shootings
- The use of school shootings as an instrument for settling scores for grievances, real or imagined

Nationally, school shootings have become matters of domestic terrorism. Following the 9/11 national tragedy, the federal government moved

elements of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools to the new Office of Homeland Security. Taking their cues from the federal government, school leaders across the country reacted by implementing school safety strategies that immediately impacted the quality of the school environment. Reactive, product-based strategies to create safe schools flooded the nation. Metal detectors, surveillance equipment, communication systems, and services of security guards were purchased. But do these measures improve safety on school campuses?

Students say surveillance cameras help to identify perpetrators only after the fact, and they report that metal detectors encourage some students to bring weapons to school to see if they can get away with them. Security guards are often afraid of violent students and do not have authority to arrest or detain students. Most significant is that reactive measures do not address the underlying causes and contributors to violence on campus.

Students need to perceive that their school is “safe”; in other words, the school is free environmentally and socially of any potential harm and danger. Clearly, learning cannot occur when safety issues distract students. Students often report fear of walking in certain areas of the school building, of using the restroom alone, even of the threat of violence on the school buses that take them to and from school. In 2005, approximately 6 percent of students ages 12 to 18 reported that they were afraid of attack or harm at school, and 5 percent reported that they were afraid of attack or harm away from school. Nine percent of Black students and 10 percent of Hispanic students reported that they were afraid of being attacked at school (including on the way to and from school), compared with 4 percent of White students (controlling for school location).

Hence, school leaders are becoming increasingly responsible for a new “primary” responsibility of creating safer schools for students concurrently with a “secondary” mission of developing and helping students realize cognitive goals.

The goals of creating safer schools and improving students’ cognitive skills can be linked through the concept of conflict. Rather than viewing conflict in negative terms as a result of the increase in violence in schools, school leaders should identify conflict as an opportunity for social and cognitive growth. Teaching constructive methods of conflict resolution provides school leaders with a student-driven mechanism for creating safer schools while improving students’ problem-solving abilities. This student-driven, proactive approach to school safety is a critical component in creating quality learning environments while improving students’ cognitive capabilities. Research indicates that children with more sophisticated problem-solving abilities demonstrate greater academic competence and greater ability to recover from such at-risk variables as low self-worth and poor peer relations (Johnson & Johnson, 1993). Students involved in conflict resolution programming excel in cooperative learning, demonstrating greater perspective-taking

skills and greater sensitivity toward student differences. In addition, teachers report fewer discipline problems with students exposed to constructive conflict resolution education.

THE NEED FOR A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL SAFETY

Through a proactive approach to school safety issues involving constructive conflict resolution education, students develop both academically and socially. Regrettably, since 1990, school leaders have increasingly adopted a reactive approach rather than a proactive approach by installing metal detectors, surveillance equipment, and hiring additional guards. Each day, students in middle and senior high schools stand in line to enter the school through machines guarded by hired security personnel. In reality, acts of violence continue in these schools but out of sight of the video cameras and without the use of metal weapons.

The school safety strategy of teaching conflict resolution methods in public schools began in the 1970s, when parents and educators faced a growing concern regarding violence among children. The first recognized conflict resolution education program was the Children's Project for Friends, a Quaker project that taught nonviolence in New York City's public schools. A number of organizations evolved from the project, including the Children's Creative Response to Conflict, Educators for Social Responsibilities, and the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies at Wayne State University.

Today, conflict resolution education programs are widespread. T. Jones (2004) estimates that approximately 15,000 to 20,000 of the nation's 85,000 public schools engage in some form of conflict resolution education. Across the country, school administrators and staff teach students violence prevention techniques and general school safety procedures through programs such as curriculum integration, peer mediation training, and school building safety education. Through curriculum integration and peer mediation programs, students also learn life skills such as conflict resolution, communication, cooperation, character, and anger management, while school safety programs teach students how to avoid dangerous situations, places, and people.

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS

Leadership Strategies for Safe Schools provides guidance to school leaders and school change agents primarily on proactive, preventive methods of building safe schools through student education. School leaders interested in developing and implementing new student-driven conflict resolution

education programs will find the recommendations particularly beneficial. However, school leaders who wish to augment a current program, such as a peer mediation program, with a schoolwide character education program or who wish to improve community involvement with the school programming will also benefit from the book. Finally, the book also assists school leaders in reviewing their current educational programs for purposes of evaluation and adoption of alternative programming.

The text assists with the assessment, development, implementation, evaluation, and revision of school safety plans. Perhaps most importantly, *Leadership Strategies for Safe Schools* emphasizes that conflict is a natural, human occurrence and its successful, constructive resolution leads to more productive social relationships, stronger problem-solving skills (academic competence), and, in turn, safer schools. The somewhat new connection between community involvement and safe schools is based on the acceptance by educational leaders, criminal justice experts, and others of more current research in the field.

Although it emphasizes a proactive approach, the text does not ignore the relevance of other safe school initiatives, such as environmental changes that may be necessary in school safety planning. The book describes these initiatives as possible charges of the school safety team and its assessment of school safety needs.

The book's recommendations for practical safe school strategies are not intended to serve as sole practices in ensuring every school and classroom a safe school year.

Please note that school leaders interested in developing safer schools should assess the readiness and capacity of the school to implement institutional changes. Successful systemic change around school safety includes involvement by teachers and school administrators in initiating and sustaining program support, flexibility and problem-solving ability, administrative and staff stability, and philosophical compatibility with change efforts (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002; Mihalic, 2004).

In addition, both fiscal resources and the availability and willingness of staff members to implement new safety strategies affect school safety program success. School leaders should take time to acknowledge how these organizational features may ultimately affect the success of the school safety initiatives (Elliot & Mihalic, 2004).

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Leadership Strategies for Safe Schools provides school leaders with practical strategies and information to develop, implement, and sustain safe school strategies in classrooms and schools. It provides a foundation for understanding the importance of constructive conflict resolution education, demonstrates direct applications and tools for successful programs, and suggests support for resources necessary to run effective programs.

Chapter 1: Creating a Safe School outlines current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and its impact on the definition of a safe school. Indicators of safe schools are discussed.

Chapter 2: Setting the Foundation describes methods building a safety school team and determining school safety needs. Successful school safety programs must meet the needs of the student climate, which varies greatly among schools. Efforts to prevent and mitigate violence must be targeted to the specific needs and assets of schools and school districts (Mihalic & Aultman-Bettridge, 2004). With the growing trend of violence in schools, school leaders are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of measuring issues related to school safety and their own role in assessment tool development, implementation, and evaluation.

Chapter 3: Positioning Character Development in School Curricula discusses the current trends in character education, or student responsibility, in school curricula. This chapter establishes the connection between character education and conflict resolution education and provides practical applications for both educational goals and objectives.

Chapter 4: Implementing Conflict Resolution Education describes the common goals and objectives for conflict resolution programming and demonstrates how school leaders can implement these goals within current curricula. The chapter discusses current programs available to educators and highlights how to refit current educational standards to include conflict resolution and violence prevention programming.

Chapter 5: Peer Mediation Programming serves as a practical overview of peer mediation, a common violence prevention technique.

Chapter 6: Integrating Diversity Into Conflict Resolution Education Programs describes the connection between student diversity and conflict in schools. Integrating the principles of diversity education with conflict resolution education is integral to the effectiveness of all school programming, even in nondiverse student populations.

Chapter 7: Evaluating School Safety Programs details methods school leaders can use to measure the effectiveness of school safety programs and ensure the stability of school safety in the future.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION

The second edition of *Leadership Strategies for Safe Schools* contains a number of modifications that will better assist school leaders with assessing, developing, implementing, and evaluating proactive strategies for safe schools. Case studies, scenarios, and classroom activities have been added throughout the book to provide real-life examples of the concepts and strategies presented. Research has been updated throughout, with a particular emphasis on marginalized populations, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT) adolescents.