

School Safety Center

Preventing School Violence –What Schools Should Consider When “Thinking Safety”

Provided by: My Community Workplace (9/2014)

President Obama recently proposed a \$120 million plan for improving school safety. Many of the measures focus on the need to "intervene early in the childhoods of troubled children, aiming at reducing bullying and boosting children with specific mental health needs."

Included in the budget is \$50 million to "train teachers and staff in evidence-based strategies that reduce violence and bullying."

According to school safety experts, "targeted hardening" measures—devices including metal detectors, school safety officers, and video surveillance—that make schools more difficult to attack are a part of what is necessary to increase school safety.

The U.S. Secret Service's 2002 report on school shootings found that creating a safe mechanism for students to report suspicions anonymously is important for school safety because often peers knew information before violence occurred in 81 percent of school shooting cases.

Screening and assessing students for signs of trauma and violence can also help administrators provide counseling to those in need and reduce the risk of a school shooting. In 93 percent of cases of school violence, the student shooter showed warning signs before the act.

An important step school administrators can take to protect children is to **build a positive school culture**. To create a safe school culture, policies must address all forms of school violence and create a culture where "slights never escalate to violence."

Ways to do so include "supporting parents and helping them raise emotionally healthy children, making sure children aren't in harsh environments, and teaching children how to regulate their own emotions." Elizabeth Lopatto "Obama's \$120 Million School Safety Plan," *thedailybeast.com* (Jun. 16, 2014).

COMMENTARY

All school administrators should review the safety plan at their schools.

Prevention is better than a cure. Examine ways in which your administrators could test for or monitor student behavior to identify students who may need counseling to help them cope with difficulties at home or at school, and then provide those students with the ongoing help they need.

CHECKLIST

Here are some other ways you can work to build a positive school culture while reducing the risk of violence:

- ✓ Although it is important to teach students the school's emergency procedure in case of a threat, students should also be told that schools are statistically very safe places for children.
- ✓ Tell students (and teachers) the importance of immediately reporting to school administrators if they hear any threats of violence. Provide safe avenues of reporting. If possible, provide an anonymous school violence hotline that includes a texting option.
- ✓ Administrators should take all reports of threats seriously and immediately assess the likelihood of each reported threat. If the threat poses a high risk, immediately contact law enforcement.
- ✓ During safety training, teach students that making verbal threats is against the law. School violence is no joking matter, and students must know they could be punished or even arrested for such comments.
- ✓ Have strict anti-bullying policies in place, and take action immediately to stop any bullying behavior. Provide school counseling for those engaging in bullying behavior and those who are the targets of it.
- ✓ Provide skilled school counselors to work with students who may be having difficulties at home or at school. Or, refer students who are struggling with emotional issues to a mental health provider in the community.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR:

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