

CHAPTER 10

Building Safe and Healthy Schools to Promote School Success: Critical Issues, Current Challenges and Promising Approaches

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INTRODUCTION

Creating and maintaining a safe and healthy school environment, one in which children and youth can be free of fear from all forms of violence and able to learn and develop freely, remains a major concern in the United States. Improving school safety is an important priority, even though the most serious forms of violent juvenile crime (i.e., rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and homicide) rarely occur in schools.

Every school in the United States has been affected by the changed landscape of school safety and security. Electronic and mechanical approaches that involve the use of sophisticated technology to solve school security problems are now standard fare in many school settings, especially those serving urban areas (Green, 1999). Crisis intervention planning and staff training for a potential school tragedy are now required elements in the operational procedures of many school districts and individual schools (Paine & Sprague, 2002). Schools serving deteriorating urban communities and neighborhoods routinely employ public safety and school resource officers as part of the regular school staff, and this practice is spreading rapidly to suburban communities as well (Atkinson & Kipper, 1999). Violence prevention curricula are used routinely to teach anger management and conflict-resolution skills to all students in thousands of schools. For example, the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum, developed by the Committee for Children (2002, 2008), is currently used in 25,000 U.S. schools.

Federal agencies, including the U.S. Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (now under the Office of Homeland Security), have created expert panels and technical

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INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

assistance documents to review and recommend intervention approaches that will enhance school safety and guide schools and communities when responding to a violent incident (Poland, 1994). School officials are now open to preventive approaches that were given scant attention just a few years ago. More ominously, enormous pressures are mounting among educators to profile potentially at-risk students and to identify those considered most likely to commit an act of school violence, even though acceptable and valid methods for accomplishing this goal remain obscure, and the risks to the individual student can be severe (Cornell, 2006). With the exception of attempts to profile potential school shooters, the *collective* impact of these changes is generally positive and has contributed to safer and more effective schools.

Although most schools in the United States remain relatively safe places for children, youth, and the adults who teach and support them (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007), no school is immune from antisocial behaviors and the potential for violence, and some schools have serious problems with violence. The extent of the challenge will differ in intensity and frequency across schools, districts, and communities. It is well known that the onset and development of antisocial behavior are associated with a variety of school, community, and family risk factors (Sprague et al., 2002; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). The challenge is to reduce the number and intensity of these risk factors and to buffer their impact where possible.

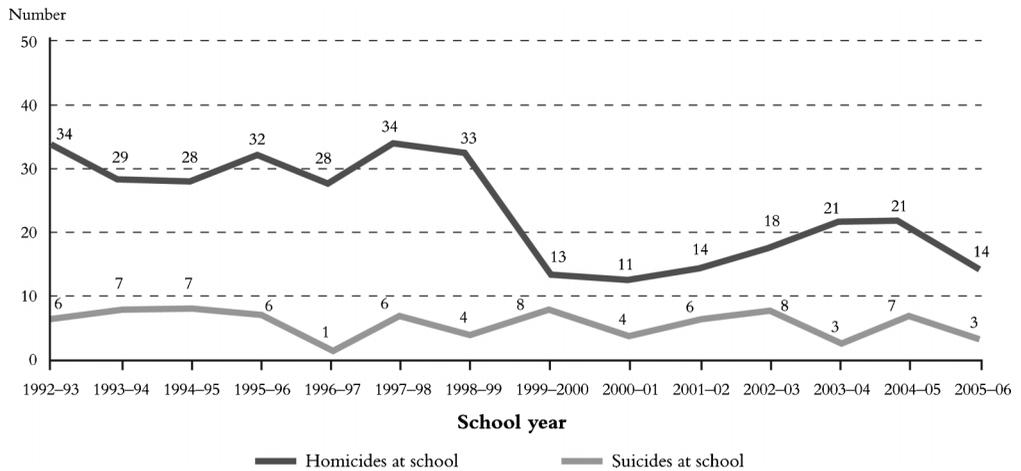
School leaders and administrators face extreme challenges in this regard and seek access to the best, most reliable information available for making schools safer and free of violence. Federal reports now regularly provide a detailed picture of school safety and school climate. In general, the picture is clearer than it was 10 years ago, and, fortunately, some forms of violence are on the decline.

From 1992 to 1999, a consistent pattern was observed in the number of homicides at school (Dinkes et al., 2007). During this period, between 28 and 34 homicides of school-age youth occurred at school in each school year. The number of school-associated homicides declined from 33 to 13 between the 1998–1999 and 1999–2000 school years. Homicides at school increased from 11 to 21 between the 2000–2001 and 2004–2005 school years, and dropped to 14 in 2005–2006. The percentage of youth homicides occurring at school remained at less than 2% of the total number of youth homicides, even though the absolute number of homicides of school-age youth at school varied across the years. Between the 1992–1993 and 2004–2005 school years, from one to eight school-age youth committed suicide at school each year, with no consistent pattern of increase or decrease. Figure 1 illustrates this multiyear pattern.

TRENDS IN SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION

Traditionally, schools have been considered havens where our children and youth could learn, achieve, and develop in relative safety. Over the past two decades, however, our society has been galvanized and shocked by the growth in youth violence and crime. The spillover of youth violence and crime into school settings has changed

Figure 1. Number of homicides and suicides of youth ages 5–18 at school, 1992–2006.



Note. Data are from the National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs. Data for the 2005–2006 school year are considered preliminary.

our collective perceptions of school safety and caused severe disruptions in the social ecology of schools. The following material provides an overview and analysis of these developments and offers some solutions as to how educators and the larger society should respond to them.

Factors Contributing to School Violence

A major variable influencing school violence is today’s deviant peer culture (Dishion, Dodge, & Lansford, 2006). Increasingly, youth are immersed in a peer culture that is coarse, crude, cruel, uncaring, and often destructive to an individual’s self-esteem. Bullying, sexual harassment, and mean-spirited teasing are common behaviors in many of today’s school settings, and they poison the schools’ social climates (Swearer & Cary, 2007). These destructive processes are often encouraged and supported by the presence and attention of peer bystanders. Bullying and harassment may lead students to perceive schools as unsafe places, and in trying to ensure their own safety, they may begin to skip school activities or avoid certain places within school (Schreck & Miller, 2003). In the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005), students ages 12–18 were asked whether they had avoided school activities or one or more school places because they were fearful that someone might attack or harm them. In 2005, some 6% of students reported that they had avoided a school activity or one or more places in school in the previous 6 months because of fear of attack or harm (2% and 4%, respectively). Fully two thirds of school shooters interviewed by the U.S. Secret Service were teased and bullied in their school careers.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Students' experience of theft and violence at school and while going to and from school can lead to a disruptive and threatening environment, physical injury, and emotional stress, and can be an obstacle to student achievement (Walker & Epstein, 2001). Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey show that in 2005 students ages 12 to 18 were victims of about 1.5 million nonfatal crimes (i.e., theft plus violent crime) while they were at school and about 1.2 million nonfatal crimes while they were away from school. These figures represent total crime victimization rates of 57 crimes per 1,000 students at school, and 47 crimes per 1,000 students away from school (Dinkes et al., 2007).

Between 1992 and 2005, the total crime victimization rates for students ages 12 to 18 *declined* both at school and away from school. This pattern held for the total crime rate as well as for thefts, violent crimes, and serious violent crimes. However, theft was more likely to occur in school than outside of school (868,000 reported incidents, compared with 610,000). This translates into 33 thefts per 1,000 students at school, compared with 23 thefts per 1,000 students away from school. At the same time, the rates for serious violent crime were *lower* at school than away from school in each year from 1992 to 2005. Students in suburban areas had a lower rate of violent victimization at school and away from school than students in urban areas, while no difference was found between the rates of violent victimization in suburban and rural areas.

It is remarkable that so many of today's youth are, in some instances, willing to "write off" the rest of their lives to settle their grievances by using violence against their peers, teachers, and even parents. Many of these youth are very likely suicidal, extremely depressed, and in urgent need of mental health services and support (Cornell, 2006). At-risk students who hold these views and manifest these behavioral characteristics are at severe risk to themselves as well as to key social agents in their lives. In addition, they can represent a serious threat to the safety of the entire school population.

Children and youth in the United States are at increased risk for antisocial behavior and negative school and life outcomes. This increased risk is largely due to the changing social, economic, and cultural conditions of our society over the past several decades (Loeber & Farrington, 2001; Sprague & Walker, 2005). Growing numbers of children and youth are exposed to a host of risk factors such as poverty, abuse, neglect, criminal or substance use by parents, harsh and inconsistent parenting practices, and limited exposure to language and reading prior to the beginning of their school careers (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Reid & Patterson, 1989). As a result, the number of children and youth with aggressive, noncompliant, and acting-out behaviors in schools has been rising steadily. These students are entering the public school system unprepared for the experience of schooling and often bring emerging antisocial behavior patterns with them (Loeber & Farrington). Antisocial behavior and high levels of aggression evidenced early in a child's life are among the best predictors of academic failure and delinquency in later years (Patterson et al., 1992).

The statistics cited above leave little doubt that the declining social conditions in American society have spilled over into the process of schooling in very unfortunate ways. Thousands of students today enter school with a history of exposure to multiple

and overlapping risks, such as the violence described above, in addition to poverty, divorce, and domestic violence. These risk factors negatively affect today's students in family, school, neighborhood, and community contexts. The cumulative effect of these risks is to place vulnerable children and youth on a pathway to destructive outcomes that are manifested in adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, violent acts, and criminal behavior). In the absence of off-setting protective factors or the ability to access key support services and structures, it is unlikely that these individuals will be able to get off this destructive path if it has not been accomplished by the end of the primary grades (Biglan, Wang, & Walberg, 2003; Kauffman, 1999). Rather, these individuals will likely require continued supports and services throughout their lives to reduce the ongoing harm they cause to themselves and others.

These noted problems compete directly with the instructional mission of schools. The result is decreased academic achievement and a lower quality of life for students and staff alike. These outcomes illustrate the clear link that exists between declining safety in the school, school violence, and academic achievement. It is not possible to achieve national educational goals and meaningful reform without addressing these disturbing conditions (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Elias et al., 1997).

Major Trends in Youth Violence Prevention and School Safety

Efforts to improve school safety have been expressed in five major trends over the past two decades, each of which continues to shape and define the critical issues regarding school safety. These five major trends, which now overlap and blend together, include (a) responses to violent juvenile crime, (b) prevention of and responses to mass school shootings, (c) integration and implementation of universal prevention initiatives in schools, (d) interpretation of school violence as domestic terrorism, and (e) national efforts to address child and youth mental health issues, with schools as a center of intervention efforts.

Responses to Violent Juvenile Crime

The overall juvenile crime rate and the alarming rates of interpersonal violence in families and communities have been associated with a dramatic escalation in the number of children who bring antisocial behavior patterns to the schooling experience. In the past several decades, the number of children and families displaying antisocial behavior patterns has surged significantly and remains high (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002). Although violent juvenile crime peaked in 1992 and has since declined, concerns about the proportion of antisocial and violent youth in schools and communities remain (Dinkes et al., 2007; Loeber & Farrington, 2001). Rates of incarceration of adults and youth in the United States are among the highest in the world, and clearly represent an ineffective response to this growing problem (Lipsey, 1992).

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Prevention of and Responses to Mass School Shootings

In the 1990s, the United States and its public schools were profoundly shaken by a series of school shootings that changed the landscape of school security and destroyed, perhaps forever, the sense of relative safety that students, families, and educators traditionally held about the schooling process. All concerned with the schooling of vulnerable children and youth were powerfully affected by these terrible events. Even though schools are one of the *safest* places for children and youth, compared with other social settings, Americans no longer regard school settings as safe havens, in which students are free to develop academically and socially, unburdened by concern for their personal safety (Kingery & Walker, 2002). In the wake of the school shootings in the mid- to late 1990s, students and parents were traumatized on a broad scale by fears of school tragedies and concerns about lack of school security.

The pattern of school shootings has continued into the 21st century, punctuated by the 2005 incident in Red Lake, Minnesota, where a 16-year-old killed his grandfather and a companion, then went to school, where he killed a teacher, a security guard, five students, and finally himself, leaving a total of 10 dead. In addition, school shootings occurred that involved adults as perpetrators, including the 2006 incident in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, where a man entered the one-room West Nickel Mines Amish School and shot 10 schoolgirls, ranging in age from 6 to 13 years, and then shot himself. Five of the girls and the criminal died. The phenomenon has also spread to college campuses, including the 2007 incident at Virginia Tech, where a student killed two other students in a dorm, then killed 30 more 2 hours later in a classroom building. His suicide brought the death toll to 33, making this shooting rampage the most deadly in U.S. history.

An early significant response to these shooting tragedies was the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which almost 15 years ago required that any child or youth possessing a weapon in school be expelled for 1 calendar year. This act has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions in schools, but little is known about the follow-up support or treatment of these youth (Cornell & Sheras, 2006).

Integration and Implementation of Universal Prevention Initiatives in Schools

Mass school shootings, while alarming, remain extremely low-frequency events (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). However, schools and communities need to be prepared to prevent and respond to such incidents. The U.S. Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center (<http://rems.ed.gov/index.cfm>) has been established to provide technical and grant assistance. School personnel also have recognized the power and positive impact of their daily interactions with students. This need has been expressed best in the national initiative to promote school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS; <http://www.pbis.org>; Sugai & Horner, 2002), funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Program. (Chapter 16 in this book describes these practices in more detail.)

Evidence suggests that sustained use of SWPBS practices can alter the trajectory of at-risk children toward destructive outcomes and prevent the onset of high-risk behavior in typically developing children (O'Donnell, Hawkins, Catalano, Abbott, & Day, 1995). Effective and sustained implementation of SWPBS is expected to create a more responsive school climate that supports the twin goals of schooling for all children: academic achievement and social development (Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 1998; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002).

As of 2008, more than 7,000 schools across the country have actively implemented SWPBS. These schools are reporting reductions in problem behavior, improved perceptions of school safety, and better academic outcomes (Horner et al., in press). Although no direct evidence links SWPBS implementation and reduced school violence, there is some evidence of an increased perception of safety in SWPBS schools (Horner et al., in press).

Interpretation of School Violence as Domestic Terrorism

Two series of events sparked an interpretation of school shootings as domestic terrorism. First, there were the famous planned mass school shootings that occurred in the United States in the mid- to late-1990s and those that still occur nearly annually. Second, events following the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks spurred the federal government to move the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools under the newly established Office of Homeland Security.

A watershed event in the history of school shootings occurred on March 24, 1998, when the safety of the Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, was shattered by an act of domestic terrorism planned and carried out by two young students who attended the school. Five people were killed—four students and a teacher—and 10 were injured, including one teacher. The perpetrators were two students, 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden, who were wearing camouflaged clothes and shooting ambush style from the woods. The youth arranged for a fire alarm to be set off; then they shot at teachers and students leaving the building. Many of the school shooting tragedies that followed Jonesboro were similar in type and scope, and their cumulative effect was to permanently alter approaches to school security and student safety. The total number of students killed and wounded on school grounds in the decade of the 1990s was close to the number of casualties in earlier decades; however, the magnitude and impact of the tragedies during the latter half of the decade tended to be *qualitatively* different in terms of the following factors:

- The number of people killed and wounded *per incident*
- The randomness by which victims were selected as targets
- The careful planning and conspiratorial nature of these school shootings
- The use of school shootings as an instrument in settling scores for grievances, real or imagined

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Because these features also characterize acts of terror, the tragedies generated unprecedented levels of concern and outrage. In particular, the tragedy at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado, stands out. On April 20, 1999, two students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, embarked on a planned massacre, killing 12 students and a teacher and injuring 24 others before committing suicide. It is the fourth-deadliest school massacre in United States history, after the 1927 Bath School disaster, the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre, and the 1966 University of Texas massacre, and the deadliest for an American high school.

The event reflected a dedicated commitment by two high school students to redress their grievances through revenge-seeking actions aimed at innocent students and school personnel. The shock, grief, and outrage that followed the tragedy of Columbine galvanized the federal government into taking a series of dramatic actions geared toward improving school safety. One of these actions was the creation of the *Early Warning/Timely Response* document to help schools enhance their overall safety (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998). The document, jointly sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, was produced by a 25-member panel of experts that included the authors of this chapter. All 125,000 public and private U.S. schools received a copy of *Early Warning/Timely Response* during the fall of 1998.

In a related action, the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice developed the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative in 1999. The initiative is a discretionary grant program that provides students, schools, and communities with federal funding to implement a coordinated set of activities, programs, and services that focus on promoting healthy childhood development and preventing violence and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Grantees must demonstrate a partnership with their local public mental health authority, law enforcement agency, and juvenile justice program and be able to submit a single application for federal funds to support a variety of coordinated activities, curricula, programs, and services. Approximately grants totaling \$50 million–\$100 million have been awarded to communities annually since this program's inception in 1999. Although a local evaluation is required of grantees, little is known about the relative efficacy of these initiatives (Jimerson & Furlong, 2006).

Finally, analyses of the characteristics of school shooters by the U.S. Secret Service and a threat assessment protocol developed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provide valuable information aimed at helping school personnel assess the level of risk presented by student threats (Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). These actions have raised awareness of the factors that contribute to a lack of school safety and have stimulated a broad range of protective activities by schools and communities.

Integration of Mental Health Interventions in Schools

Mental health conditions that directly interfere with students' ability to meet the academic expectations of schools certainly contribute to an increased risk of academic and social failure, including school violence. Students whose mental health needs are

unidentified or inadequately addressed are at increased risk of juvenile delinquency and involvement in the criminal justice or mental health systems as young adults (See Mash & Dozois, 2003).

The surgeon general's report on mental health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001) indicated that 3–5% of school-age children are diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in a 6-month, 5% of youth age 9–17 are diagnosed with major depression, and the combined prevalence of various anxiety disorders for children ages 9–17 is 13%. About one fifth of the children and adolescents in the United States experience the signs and symptoms of a mental health adjustment problem in the course of a year.

In a recent survey of 83,000 representative elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States, Foster et al. (2005) found that 73% of the schools reported that “social, interpersonal, or family problems” were the most frequent mental health problems for males and females. For males, aggression or disruptive behavior and behavior problems associated with neurological disorders were the second and third most frequent problems. For females, anxiety and adjustment issues were the second and third most frequent problems.

Although these data suggest that a substantial percentage of students manifest conditions that negatively affect their mental health, many who have such needs are not identified (Hoagwood et al., 2007). The failure to adequately address students' mental health adjustment as dynamic, or changing, may be related to a lack of proper screening and identification practices; that is, much of the knowledge is based on discrete points in time for a child or a context for behavior, rather than taking into account the changes that occur in children's mental health status over time (Mash & Dozois, 2003).

CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF SCHOOL SAFETY

The *absence* of violence is only one element among a larger constellation of positive factors that characterize safe and effective schools. Researchers have reframed the issue of school violence within a conceptual model of school safety that (a) includes both developmental and educational concepts, and (b) emphasizes prevention and schooling effectiveness (Jimerson & Furlong, 2006). Effectively coping with school violence requires careful attention to a broad range of considerations; for example, schools that are free of violence are also effective at teaching and evince a caring, nurturing, inclusive, and accepting environment.

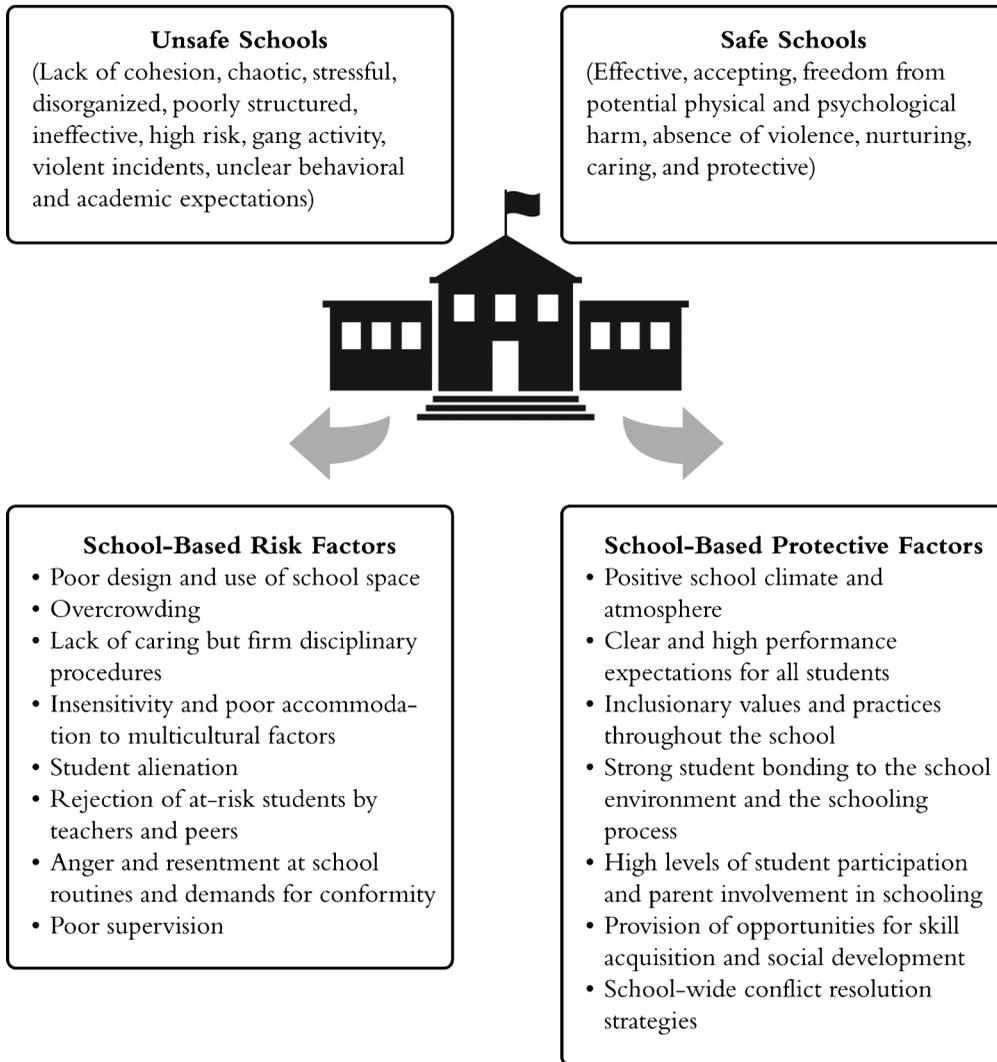
Recognizing that no school can ever be made 100% safe, we wrote in 2005 that school safety is best conceptualized along a *bipolar* dimension (Sprague & Walker, 2005). This conception is illustrated along a continuum from unsafe to safe (see Figure 2). The relative safety of schools is represented in terms of the number and nature of the *risk* factors and *protective* factors that are present. As with individuals, risk factors and conditions move the school in the direction of *less safety*. The greater the

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Figure 2. Bipolar dimensions of school safety.

Bipolar Dimensions and Attributes of Unsafe and Safe Schools With Associated Risk and Protective Factors



Note. From *Safe and Healthy Schools: Practical Prevention Strategies*, by J. R. Sprague & H. M. Walker, 2005, New York: Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission.

number of risk factors or conditions, the greater the risk, and the longer they are in evidence, the greater is their destructive impact on the school's safety.

The protective factors listed in Figure 2 have the potential to buffer, offset, and reduce the destructive impact of risk conditions on the school's status and operation. Schools can be distributed along this dimension in terms of performance indicators that document how relatively safe or unsafe they are—for example, the number of victimization incidents in school; school and neighborhood crime; the number of

disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions per student and for the whole school; academic achievement levels; attendance; the quality of the school's disciplinary practices; the school's social climate; the presence or absence of gang activity, and so on. Although there is no reliable composite index of these measures, one could be developed and used to locate an individual school along this continuum.

The continuum of school safety should not be thought of in absolute terms such as safe or unsafe, but rather in comparative terms such as *safer* versus *less safe*. It is the responsibility of school and community leaders to do everything in their power to maximize the safety and security of their schools. As the social conditions (e.g., family and community environments) in the neighborhoods continue to deteriorate, the challenge for educators—of maintaining acceptable school safety levels—grows more difficult. A focus on school safety requires a greater investment of resources that would otherwise be allocated to the positive social and academic development of students.

More than 15 years ago, the American Psychological Association produced a superb synthesis of the knowledge base related to the prevalence of violence among youth and associated causal factors (APA, 1993). The Commission on Violence and Youth's report recommended approaches for addressing this problem that are still highly germane to the safety of today's schools and can be used to move a school toward greater security (Table 1).

Within the context of schooling, McEvoy and Welker (2000) analyzed the evidence base relating to academic underachievement, learning problems, and antisocial behavior. They make a persuasive case that the majority of failed attempts to make schools safer tend to have three negative characteristics in common:

1. The efforts have failed to take into account the *interrelationship* that exists among these three dimensions (i.e., academic underachievement, learning problems, and antisocial behavior).

Table 1. Youth Violence: Observations of the APA Commission on Violence and Youth

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- Violence is not the human condition; it is learned behavior that is preventable.
 - Violence cuts across all lines of culture and ethnicity; it is not exclusive to any single group or class.
 - Prevention of violence requires education of and by all segments of society; it also requires a reassessment of how conflict is viewed and resolved.
 - There are four individual social experiences that contribute powerfully to the increase in violence among children and youth: easy access to firearms (especially handguns), early involvement with drugs and alcohol, association with antisocial groups, and pervasive exposure to violent acts portrayed in the media.
 - Schools must be a hub or key center of activity in the development of comprehensive, interagency interventions for the prevention and remediation of violent behavior.
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Note. From *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response. Volume 1: Summary Report of the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth*, by the American Psychological Association, 1993, Washington, DC: Author. Reprinted with permission.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

2. They have tended to focus on characteristics and attributes of *individual* students, to the exclusion of the known risk factors and conditions that are predictive of antisocial behavior and underachievement.
3. They overlook the fact that school climate is a powerful variable in the *mix of causal factors* and needs to be addressed in the school safety agenda.

There is strong support for these school-wide interventions because they clearly communicate and enforce consistent behavioral expectations for all students and create a climate of competence and mutual respect within the school setting (Hahn et al., 2007). Examples of such programs include the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000), the school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) model (Horner, Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2001), the Best Behavior staff development program (Sprague & Golly, 2004), and the school-wide ecological intervention approach (Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). All of these intervention models are empirically based; when assessed using both school-wide measures and measures of individual student behavior, they are shown to be effective if implemented with fidelity.

Although much remains to be discovered regarding the general and specific effects of the school-wide interventions listed above, there is encouraging evidence of their effectiveness. These programs typically are designed to be delivered to all students in a school, regardless of students' risk status. Hahn and colleagues (2007) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of school-wide programs, including those using cognitive and affective instruction, social skills instruction, environmental change strategies at the classroom or school level, peer mediation, and behavior modification programs. The results provide evidence that universal, school-based programs can decrease rates of violence among school-age children and youth. Program effects were consistent across all grade levels.

The knowledge base outlined above in Table 1 documents the broad range of progress that has been made in understanding the origins of antisocial behavior patterns, how they develop over the long term, and the risk and protective factors that account for them. However, the gap between what is known about effective intervention with these problems and actual practice in schools is far too wide and needs to be systematically addressed as part of larger community efforts (see Biglan et al., 2003). This gap is especially true in the context of school safety.

SOURCES OF VULNERABILITY OF SCHOOL SAFETY

Major areas of vulnerability with regard to school safety and security have been described and analyzed by Sprague and his colleagues (Sprague et al., 2002; Sprague & Walker, 2005). These authors designate the following areas as vulnerable to significant threats:

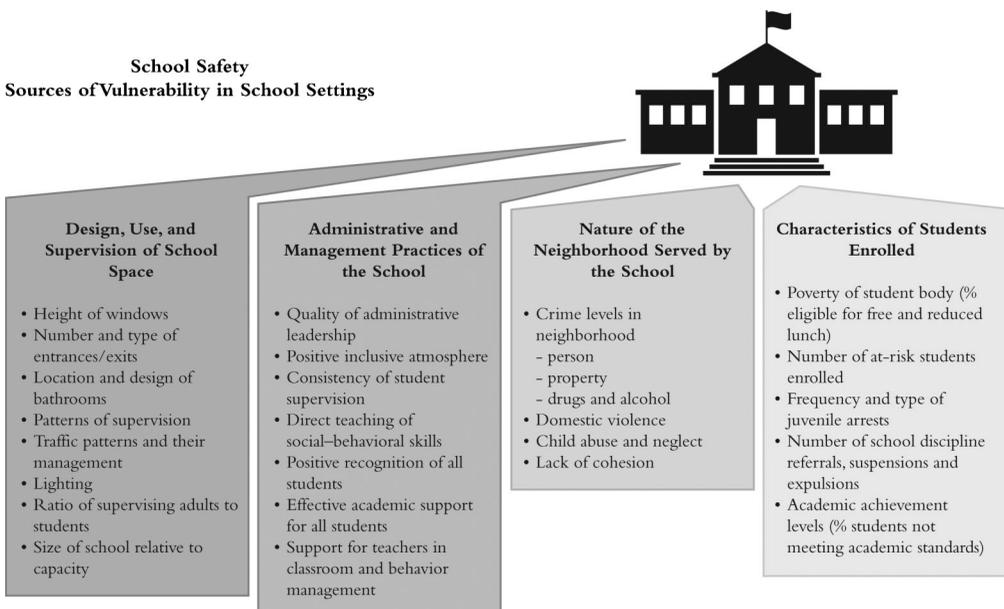
1. The design, use, and supervision of school space.
2. The administrative and management practices of the school.
3. The nature of the neighborhood and community served by the school.
4. The characteristics of the students enrolled.

These four factors are illustrated in Figure 3, which provides indicators of each type of school safety vulnerability. If an individual school registers a *positive* profile across these dimensions, it is much more likely to experience acceptable levels of safety and security than if it registers a *negative* profile, where many sources of vulnerability are in evidence. Any comprehensive approach to ensuring a school’s safety should evaluate and address these dimensions of risk.

Design, Use, and Supervision of School Space

The architectural design and operation of school space can be an important source of vulnerability with regard to a school’s overall safety, making the prevention and response to incidents of school violence more difficult. For example, the number of unlocked and unmonitored entrances to the school, the nature and amount of supervision available for common areas (e.g., hallways, playgrounds, cafeterias), the location of bathrooms, the ability of school personnel to conduct surveillance of school grounds, and the size of hallways that are typically crowded with students during certain periods of the day are all areas that could be vulnerable. Areas that are found to

Figure 3. Sources of vulnerability in school settings.



INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

be vulnerable require architectural retrofitting or allocation of staff resources, such as security personnel or additional supervisory staff members. School design and retrofitting to enhance school safety comes from the work of experts in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED; Crowe, 2000). Schneider, Walker, and Sprague (2000) provide a thorough treatment of this topic specific to schools. The Schneider et al. book includes a description of key CPTED concepts and principles, the relevance of CPTED as a strategy for improving school safety and security, school-site CPTED evaluation procedures, case-study applications of CPTED principles, the role of architects in school design, and CPTED-based policy recommendations for consideration by school districts.

Administrative and Management Practices of the School

Research indicates that safer schools tend to be more effective schools and vice versa (Sprague et al., 2002). As such, the administrative and management practices of the school's leadership and staff have a tremendous influence on the social climate and overall safety of the school. All students should perceive themselves as accepted and valued members of the school's population; as fully able to participate in the extracurricular activities of the school; and as free from bullying, mean-spirited teasing, discrimination, or harassment. It is of critical importance that at-risk students who are socially marginalized and/or show signs of depression or other serious mental health problems receive the appropriate services and types of support (Stormshak, Connell, & Dishion, 2007). Effective administrative practices include using alternatives to traditional out-of-school suspension, systematic use of an objective threat assessment protocol, and frequent monitoring of disproportionate application of these procedures to minority children and youth (Cornell, 2006; Cornell & Sheras, 2006; Johns, Carr, & Hoots, 1997; Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

The Nature of the Neighborhood

The neighborhoods and communities served by schools have a direct influence on the school and its overall safety. Schools that serve neighborhoods with high frequencies of police calls, street crime, poverty, unsupervised youth, and deteriorating infrastructure and buildings are much more likely to be unsafe than those whose attendance areas do not have these characteristics (Crowe, 2000). It has been said that an individual school can be no safer than the neighborhoods and communities it serves. This statement may or may not hold true, depending on the social and environmental conditions under which the school operates. For example, some schools located in chaotic and dangerous urban environs are fortress-like structures that *appear* to be safer than their surrounding neighborhoods. Whenever possible, schools should be integrated into the communities they serve and be viewed as partners with the other local agencies that serve children, youth, and families. However, when violence and serious crime are common

occurrences in proximal neighborhoods, realizing this goal may be difficult. In such situations, schools have very few options for improving the safety of the neighborhoods and communities they serve.

Characteristics of the Students Enrolled

The fourth source of vulnerability in Figure 3 is the overall school profile in terms of poverty level; number of students at risk for antisocial behavior and mental health problems; frequency and types of juvenile arrests; number of school referrals, suspensions, and expulsions; and academic achievement levels. These dimensions are related, to a very large extent, to how students behave in school and whether they display rule-governed forms of behavior. This vulnerability source provides the most direct avenue whereby the toxic conditions of society infiltrate and disrupt the process of schooling. Students who come from highly at-risk backgrounds and experience chaos and family and neighborhood stressors on a daily basis typically reflect these influences in how they behave in the school context. Too often, the consequences of these stressors are negative for the individual as well as the school environment.

The majority of attempts to make schools safe have focused on the student population and its behavioral characteristics, and a comprehensive school safety plan should include universal screening procedures (Sprague, Cook, Wright, & Sadler, 2008; Walker et al., 1990; Walker, Severson, & Feil, 1995). Universal screening procedures are designed to detect teacher-related adjustment problems (such as compliance with requests), peer-related adjustment problems (such as bully victimization or perpetration, affiliation with deviant peers), and school adjustment (such as attendance and work completion; Sprague et al., 2008). However, any comprehensive and successful school safety effort also must address the other three sources of vulnerability. The following section provides information and guidelines about how to assess a school's relative safety and to recognize the danger signs early in the risk-escalation process.

SCHOOL SAFETY STRATEGIES IN A THREE-TIERED MODEL: MOVING FROM ASSESSMENT TO INTERVENTION

Educators are inundated with advice regarding effective school safety interventions but receive scant help in integrating and sustaining effective practices. Any selection of interventions must be based on a thorough assessment of the school's overall functioning, with special attention to disciplinary referral patterns, suspensions and expulsions, self-reported violence perpetration and victimization, and the security of the school building and grounds (Boles, Biglan, & Smolkowski, in press; Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Schneider et al., 2000; Sprague et al., 2002; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2000). Thorough needs assessments in these areas (and others) can guide planning, avoid overlapping or conflicting services, and serve as the basis for evaluating change over time.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Recommendations from the surgeon general's report on school violence (2001) provide a compelling rationale for adopting a prevention approach in which the school is organized as a hub of intervention activities that focus on preventing the development of destructive antisocial peer networks and the reinforcement of deviancy. This report recommends, first, that "an intolerant attitude toward deviance" be established by focusing on breaking up antisocial peer networks and changing the social climate of the school. Second, it recommends that the public increase its commitment to school, so that academic success is accessible to all children and positive school climates are established. Third, the report recommends that students be taught and encouraged to display the skills and forms of behavior that enable them to respond adaptively to events that occasion and promote antisocial behavior, such as bullying and harassment or drug use.

This landmark report is buttressed by parallel recommendations from at least two other reports that address the challenges of bringing effective interventions to scale. Greenberg and his colleagues have outlined the research on effective, school-based interventions for antisocial behavior at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of prevention (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 1999). The authors and others recommended that schools offer coordinated, integrated interventions at all three levels (Gottfredson, 2001; Walker & Epstein, 2001).

The challenge then becomes how to give schools the capacity to adopt and sustain the processes, organizational structures, and systems that will enable them to carry out promising and proven interventions (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Gottfredson and Gottfredson conducted the National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools, the first of its kind. They argue convincingly that the problem is not the availability of *effective* programs (i.e., those that work), but rather that the problem is one of *efficacy* (i.e., helping typical schools adopt and carry out the interventions and approaches in a manner that demonstrates their effectiveness). It is likely, therefore, that the problem of overlapping or poorly implemented intervention approaches is affected by a lack of useful needs assessment information to guide the implementation process (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Czeh, 2000).

Schools have always been judged by how well their students perform academically. Although destructive or violent behavior is a top concern and a direct influence on academic performance, systematic approaches to assessing schools on the basis of *behavioral* success or failure are not currently well developed. However, U.S. schools are experiencing a strong push toward accountability on just that front (Sprague et al., 2008). We recommend the following broad strategies for integrating school safety and prevention initiatives that are based on empirical evidence as well as on practical experience:

1. Conduct a school safety needs assessment.
 - a. Begin with the Oregon School Safety Survey (Sprague, Colvin, & Irvin, 1995).
 - b. Conduct a CPTED analysis and make needed changes in school architecture and supervision.
 - c. Use a standardized threat assessment and follow-up protocol.

2. Develop a comprehensive school safety and crisis-response plan.
3. Conduct universal screening for antisocial behavior.
4. Develop and implement a three-tier intervention plan.
 - a. Create a positive, inclusive school climate and culture.
 - b. Address the peer culture and its challenges of deviant peer group formation, bullying, and harassment.
 - c. Collaborate with parents to make the school safer.
 - d. Support at-risk youth throughout their school careers.

Conduct a School Safety Needs Assessment

Parents, schools, and community leaders need to make informed judgments about which systems are in place to prevent school violence and antisocial behavior. Title IV of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires public schools to focus on information from a comprehensive needs assessment in building and maintaining a school environment that is safe and conducive to learning.

To receive funds under Title IV, Part A, schools must adhere to the NCLB Principles of Effectiveness, as follows:

1. Assess the school safety, risk, and protective influences on the school.
2. Establish measurable goals and objectives for improvement that are based on those identified needs.
3. Base projected changes on appropriate measurements.
4. Use evidence-based interventions for effecting improvement.

School safety plans must target what is required for the school to become safer and describe the activities or programs to be adopted that will address those targets. These activities and programs must show research evidence of effectiveness in improving school safety, involve parents in the assessment process, and include performance measures to gauge effectiveness. In addition, each school district must have a comprehensive plan for school safety that includes policies, security procedures, prevention activities, crisis response procedures, and a code of conduct for students that incorporates a “wrong and harmful” message about illegal drug use and violence. The plan needs to be made available to the public for review and comment.

Because of the importance of gathering and maintaining consistent data that provide a picture of how a school is performing, Title IV requires school districts to monitor and report truancy rates; suspensions and expulsions related to drugs and violence; the incidence, prevalence, and age of onset of alcohol use, drug use, and violence by youths; and incidents of criminal activity on school property. As part of this process, youth are also asked about their perceptions of health risks.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

School safety needs assessment procedures can be relatively straightforward. The assessment process should begin with tools such as the Oregon School Safety Survey (Sprague et al., 1995). A tool such as this allows stakeholders to provide input on particular areas of concern to them. The free survey should be completed annually by all key school stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, administrators, classified staff, and students). The survey asks respondents to rate the presence and extent of 17 risk and 16 protective factors associated with increases or decreases in school violence and discipline problems. Risk factors include poverty, child abuse, graffiti, bullying, and deteriorating physical facilities. Protective factors include positive teacher–student relationships, parent involvement, student supervision, and high academic expectations. A Likert rating scale of 1 to 4 (“Not at all” to “Extensive”) is used to produce average ratings for each item. The survey has been shown to be sensitive to intervention effects (Horner et al., in press).

Conduct a CPTED Analysis and Make Changes in School Architecture and Supervision

Every school can benefit from an assessment of its environmental design to evaluate whether the school is a safe and secure place to learn and work. A school site riddled with criminal activity has an obvious need for such an assessment, but even campuses that seem at first glance to be orderly and secure may, when inspected, be found to present a multitude of risks.

It takes only one tragedy to make the benefits of preventive assessment crystal clear in hindsight for any school. Even relatively minor environmental flaws are worthy of attention and action. For example, if someone trips over broken steps and is injured because of deferred maintenance, serious litigation may result. If nothing is done to actively discourage drug dealers or other criminals from entering school campuses, the district incurs a risk of liability that may threaten its insurability. Whenever there is a history of trouble, or if future problems can be anticipated, one can reasonably anticipate eventual personal injuries, as well as subsequent legal actions.

CPTED assessment procedures can be relatively straightforward to apply in schools (Crowe, 2000; Schneider et al., 2000). The CPTED assessment process begins with a close look at the neighborhood. Typically, neighborhood and community problems spill over into the school setting. Conditions noted during evaluation of the community or neighborhood will give school officials clues as they devise remedies geared toward making both the school and the neighborhood safer for their students. An evaluation team begins by working slowly around the outside of the school while taking notes, starting away from the school building and circling back in. A team may include an administrator, a teacher, a student, a custodian, and a school resource officer. A diverse team can provide a broad perspective and valuable information to this process. Once the walk-through is completed, more extensive planning and recommendations are completed by a CPTED expert, such as a local architect, or by a police expert in school safety.

Use a Standardized Threat Assessment and Follow-Up Protocol

A child who threatens violent behavior obviously cannot be ignored, and a threat assessment protocol must be in place (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). The work of Cornell and his colleagues at the University of Virginia is exemplary and represents the best empirical knowledge of threat assessment protocols for schools. They recommend the establishment of a threat assessment team that includes school administrators, school resource officers, a school psychologist and/or counselor, and teachers. A clear set of steps are specified in conducting a student threat assessment, including a follow-up school safety plan, and are based on the standards put forth by the U.S. Secret Service and the FBI (Fein et al., 1995).

The investment of effort and resources needed to create and enact these components will vary by school site and neighborhood. The higher the crime-risk status of the neighborhoods served by a particular school, the less safe that school is likely to be and the greater the effort and resources that will be required. Regardless of the degree of risk that exists, individual schools can systematically assess and address a number of risk and protective factors as part of an overall school safety enhancement plan.

Develop a Comprehensive School Safety and Crisis-Response Plan

The four primary approaches to consider when securing a school to address identified safety concerns are (a) the appropriate use of school security technology, (b) employment of school resource officers, (c) use of CPTED principles and techniques, and (d) use of a standardized threat assessment protocol (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Applied in combination, these approaches can be effective in reducing the probability of a school shooting tragedy. Currently, the first, second and third approaches are built into the federally funded Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative being implemented in many school districts across the country. Considerable progress has been made in the development and appropriate use of security technology to make schools safer without turning them into fortresses (Green, 1999).

The key elements that should be addressed in a comprehensive school safety plan are as follows:

1. School safety audits that evaluate vulnerabilities due to structural characteristics of the building and patterns of building usage.
2. A crisis intervention plan that allows school personnel to respond to and control crises that have potential for violence or reduced school safety (Paine & Sprague, 2002).
3. A well-established communication plan that provides interactive linkages between school personnel, public safety, and parents.

These three elements would be essential to improving the safety and security of any school building and grounds. Well-developed procedures exist for assessing a school's

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

degree of risk and for implementing each of the components listed above. These elements are also being used increasingly in schools across the country. School administrators should be aware of the status, advantages, and limitations of these elements when considering implementation of school safety options and strategies.

Conduct Universal Screening for Antisocial Behavior

In the past decade, the use of universal screening procedures to identify students who are struggling academically and behaviorally has been expanded considerably. For example, the emergence of comprehensive progress monitoring procedures to detect early reading failure and to monitor strategies to address reading problems has now expanded into broad-based applications by educational specialists (Good & Kaminski, 2002; also see chapters 1 and 9 of this book). As a result, educators are currently in a far stronger position to prevent reading problems and failure because all primary-grade students can now be screened for these problems in an accurate, cost-efficient manner. Universal screening methods can also help school personnel understand the distribution and types of risk factors for violence and antisocial behavior among their students.

Similarly, schools now have the ability to detect, early in their school careers, those at-risk students who may develop serious antisocial and externalizing behavior problems. It is well recognized that comprehensive early intervention—involving parents, teachers, and peers—can result in the prevention of later negative outcomes for this subpopulation (Reid et al., 2002). Albers, Glover, and Kratochwill (2007) recently published a review of the current knowledge base in this area, which shows considerable progress in schools' capacity to achieve this important goal. As with academic problems, cost-efficient procedures are now available that allow professionals to identify students with antisocial or externalizing behavioral challenges. Schools provide an ideal setting for the universal screening and early detection of students who are at risk for such behavior patterns. Early screening that is brief, accurate, research based, and simple to implement, when combined with exposure of identified students to evidence-based interventions, can produce valuable outcomes for at-risk student populations.

Walker and his colleagues identified and described three recommended approaches to conducting such screening, as summarized here (see Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). The following sections summarize Drummond's Student Risk Screening Scale (1994), Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist (1991), and Walker and Severson's Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (1990). (Also see chapter 25 in this book.)

Drummond Approach

Drummond (1994) developed and investigated the efficacy, as well as the psychometric properties, of the Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS), which asks teachers to provide assessments of recognized indicators and precursors of emerging antisocial behavior

patterns among elementary-age students. The SRSS consists of seven items that teachers rate along a frequency dimension, as follows: 0 = never; 1 = occasionally; 2 = sometimes; and 3 = frequently. The SRSS items are

1. Stealing
2. Lying, cheating, and sneaking
3. Behavior problems
4. Peer rejection
5. Low academic achievement
6. Negative attitude
7. Aggressive behavior

The teacher rates each student in the classroom on the SRSS items using a matrix rating form on which student names are listed down the left side of the form and the SRSS items are arrayed across the top. The teacher enters a single rating per item opposite each listed student's name. SRSS scores can range from 0 to 21. Drummond has established three levels of risk based on total SRSS score: high risk = 9–21, moderate risk = 4–8, and low risk = 0–3. It is recommended that each high-risk student be further evaluated for possible referral to receive specialized mental health or behavioral support services.

Drummond has demonstrated that the SRSS discriminates between high-, moderate-, and low-risk students on a range of academic and behavioral measures, including grade point average, number of classes failed, achievement test scores, number of students receiving academic remediation services, and both minor and major disciplinary offenses. Lane, Kalberg, Parks, & Carter (2008) recently published a study to investigate the score reliability and validity of the SRSSs used at the high school level. Their study involved 674 high school students, and they found high levels of internal consistency, inter-rater reliability, and test-retest reliability for the SRSS, with moderate convergent validity coefficients obtained with Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The SRSS is a highly recommended tool for conducting universal, school-wide screening for antisocial behavior and has been well received by educational practitioners and researchers alike.

Achenbach Approach

In this approach, the classroom teacher uses teacher nominations of students and Likert ratings on the aggression subscale of the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist to identify and evaluate the behavioral status of students with challenging behavior (1991). The Achenbach approach has emerged as the gold standard for assessing psychopathology among children and youth. The aggression subscale of this instrument has a relatively small number of items that define an antisocial, aggressive behavior pattern, such as explosive, defiant, cruel, bullying, and fighting. The psychometric properties of this instrument are superb and have been well established through a broad array of studies.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Parent ratings of teacher-nominated students can also be used to supplement the screening process and may or may not confirm concerns regarding the student's school behavior. Those students who show elevated profiles on the aggression subscale (i.e., two or more standard deviations above normative levels), in both home and school settings, very likely have serious behavior problems that warrant systematic attention from educational specialists and mental health professionals.

This screening approach is relatively simple to implement. Teachers should be provided with a clear definition of an antisocial, externalizing behavior pattern characterized by both examples and nonexamples. Then, using the definition, teachers would simply nominate those students in the class whose typical or characteristic behavior most closely matches the definition. The final step would be to have the teacher and/or parents of the nominated students rate the student's behavior on the aggression subscale of the Achenbach checklist.

Walker and Severson Approach

Walker and Severson (1990) developed the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) multiple-gating procedure for use in providing universal screening for all students in elementary classrooms to detect students who may be at risk for either externalizing or internalizing behavior problems. The SSBD uses a combination of teacher nominations in screening stage 1 and Likert ratings on measures of adaptive, maladaptive, and critical events forms of behavior in screening stage 2. An optional third screening stage can be used to record behavioral observations in classroom and playground settings (see chapter 25). All the measures used in stages 2 and 3 of the SSBD are based on national norms and provide the basis for deriving cutoff points to determine which students move on to additional screening and evaluation.

The three screening stages of the SSBD are linked or interconnected so that only those students with the most serious behavior profiles move on to additional screening stages. Stage 1 provides each student in a classroom with an equal chance to be nominated by the general education teacher for either an externalizing or an internalizing behavior pattern based upon thoroughly test definitions of both. The teacher then rank orders all nominated students on each dimension (i.e., externalizing, internalizing) as to which students' typical behavior matches the definition most closely. The top three ranked students on each dimension then move to screening stage 2, where they are rated on frequency-of-occurrence measures using the stage 2 rating instruments. Only those students exceeding stage 2 normative cutoff points are recommended for further screening in stage 3 using the classroom and playground codes. In stage 3, a stopwatch recording of academic engaged time is used in the classroom; the playground code records the target student's social behavior with peers in terms of its frequency, quality, and distribution across playground activities. Those students exceeding stage 3 cutoff points are recommended for referral to school-based specialists (e.g., mental health, special education, or school-wide assistance teams) for further evaluation and decision-making.

The SSBD has been used extensively by educational practitioners and researchers alike. It has excellent psychometric characteristics and has been recommended as a best practice in a number of reviews of school-based screening. A comprehensive update of the screening system and recent research conducted on the SSBD was included in a recent special issue of the *Journal of School Psychology*, which was devoted to universal screening procedures and critical issues (Albers, Glover, & Kratochwill, 2007; Severson, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill, & Gresham, 2007). In addition, Caldarella, Young, Richardson, Young, and Young (2008) successfully validated the SSBD for use with middle and junior high school students. Finally, Walker and his colleagues extended the SSBD downward into a preschool version that is appropriate for use with 3- to 5-year-olds (see Walker, Severson, & Feil, 1995). Research on the SSBD and Early Screening Project has continued over the past two decades, supported by a series of competitively awarded federal grants, expanding the knowledge base and broadening the applications of these screening systems.

Regardless of which universal screening procedure a school team selects, it is important that such screenings occur proactively and on a regular basis, in accordance with the school safety plan. Ideally, systematic screening efforts should be initiated after the beginning of the school year and again following the start of the new calendar year. At least 1 month should be allowed at the beginning of the school year for teachers to become familiar with their students' behavioral characteristics.

Develop and Implement a Three-Tier Intervention Plan

This section contains recommended strategies for building a three-tier intervention plan for the school. These recommendations are based on best practices, and the available evidence supports their application in today's schools (Jimerson & Furlong, 2006).

Five strategic approaches have the potential to move schools in the direction of greater safety and reduce the likelihood, over time, of a school tragedy erupting. The more at risk a school is perceived to be, the more important and relevant these strategies become and the greater the investment required. Furthermore, their relevance and importance increase from elementary to middle to high school settings.

Create a Positive, Inclusive School Climate and Culture

Research shows that a school climate that is positive, inclusive, and accepting is a key component of an effective school (Gottfredson et al., 2000). School-wide approaches are the best for dealing with the challenges of youth violence prevention and school safety and security (Hahn et al., 2007). Too often, there is a singular focus on the most serious student offenders without a concomitant plan for addressing the potential needs and problems of the full population of students in the school. A comprehensive, school-wide plan ultimately prevents or reduces serious offenses. School-wide approaches can change the climate of a school and reduce the likelihood that the problems characteristically presented by at-risk students will escalate out of control.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

To prevent minor, as well as serious, antisocial behavior, educators are turning to a comprehensive and proactive approach to discipline commonly referred to as school-wide positive behavior support (Gresham, Sugai, Horner, Quinn, & McInerney, 2000; Sprague & Golly, 2004; Sugai et al., 2002). SWPBS is based on the assumption that when faculty and staff in a school actively teach and acknowledge expected behavior (such as be safe, respectful, responsible), the proportion of students with serious behavior problems will be reduced, along with a reduced risk for violence, and the school's overall climate will improve (see chapter 16 in this book).

Address the Peer Culture and Its Challenges

A primary target for prevention and safer-schools efforts should be the peer culture (Dishion et al., 2006). The norms, actions, beliefs, and values within broad sectors of today's peer culture are socially destructive and demeaning. Many youth experience a "trial by fire" process in negotiating the complex and difficult social tasks involved in finding their place in this peer culture. Far too many fail this critical test, become lost within it, and wander aimlessly while seeking an acceptance that is generally not forthcoming. They become homeless persons within the larger peer group and their lack of fit is well known to their peers and teachers (see chapter 28 in this book). This painful reality forces many marginalized youth to affiliate with atypical or deviant peer groups, which can prove highly destructive for them.

Transforming this destructive peer culture is perhaps the most formidable task in the area of school safety. This culture is not of the school's making, but schools, collectively, make up perhaps the only social institution, excluding the family, that is capable of addressing it effectively. The following strategies are recommended for consideration in this regard.

1. Involve students as key partners in making schools safe and free of violence.

Encouraging students' school engagement and commitment to conventional pursuits is increasingly recognized as essential to promoting academic achievement and preventing antisocial and violent behavior (Blum, 2005; Gottfredson, 2001). One example of such a program is Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE; Riley & Segal, 2002). SAVE is a student-initiated program that promotes nonviolence within schools and communities. The program teaches about the effects and consequences of violence and helps provide safe activities for students, parents, and communities. As reported by students and advisers, SAVE improves school environments by teaching students how to manage and resolve conflict, reduces violence, and helps more students get involved. Students report that they joined SAVE to improve the school environment by making the school a safer place, and students who participate in SAVE demonstrate increased self-esteem and confidence, conflict resolution skills, presentation and public speaking skills, and knowledge about different violence-prevention strategies.

Programs like SAVE are designed to transform peer attitudes and beliefs about the risks to school safety that emerges from their culture. The programs promote

peer ownership of the tasks involved in preventing school tragedies and are highly recommended as a first strategy for enlisting a school's peer culture in this effort.

2. Bully-proof the school setting by adopting effective antibullying and antiharassment programs. In addition to the common elements of SWPBS, other evidence-based bully prevention programs are available, such as Bully Proofing Your School (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 2000) and Steps to Respect (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009).

The best disinfectant for bullying, mean-spirited teasing, and harassment is sunlight—that is, exposure. These events need to be defined as clearly unacceptable by everyone involved in the school—administrators, teachers, other school staff, students, and parents—and made public when they do occur. Students should be given strategies for reporting and for adaptively coping with these events. Furthermore, the reporting of those who commit these acts should be made acceptable. The programs cited above incorporate these basic principles and strategies.

A new challenge for educators and parents is the practice of cyberbullying, which is the use of social aggression, threats, and harassment via the Internet and mobile technologies (Willard, 2007). Students post harmful or fraudulent material or engage in other forms of threatening behavior through these media. Very little is known about the patterns and outcomes of cyberbullying, and much research is needed on both school policy and methods to deter this damaging and potentially wide-ranging form of bullying and harassment.

3. Teach anger-management and conflict-resolution techniques as part of regular curricula. Universal school-based programs that are intended to prevent violent behavior have been developed and tested at all grade levels, from prekindergarten through high school. These programs can be targeted to high-risk schools and to selected grades. All students in targeted grades receive the programs in their own classrooms, not in special pullout sessions. There is strong evidence that these universal programs decrease rates of violence among school-age children and youth, although the effect sizes vary greatly across programs and age groups (Gottfredson, 2001; Hahn et al., 2007).

These programs are designed to teach all students in a given school or grade about the problem of violence and its prevention or about one or more of the following topics or skills intended to reduce aggressive or violent behavior: emotional self-awareness, emotional control, self-esteem, positive social skills, social problem solving, conflict resolution; and teamwork. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL; <http://www.casel.org/about/overview.php>) is a not-for-profit organization that works to advance the science and evidence-based practices of the field of social and emotional learning (SEL). CASEL synthesizes and integrates scientific findings regarding the teaching and management of social-emotional strategies for students. It is a widely used and highly recommended resource by educators in the teaching and development of socially effective behavior in children and youth.

INTERVENTIONS

for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI

Collaborate With Parents In Making The School Safer

With each new school shooting tragedy, parents of school-age children and youth seek greater assurances that their child's school is safe, and increasingly they are asking for a voice and role in helping the school attain this goal. Parents have much to offer in this regard and can be a powerful force in bringing greater safety and a sense of security to the school setting. Four strategies are recommended involve parent in making a school safer:

1. Create a parent advisory group devoted to school safety issues for that school, and ensure that parents are involved in all aspects of school planning. Such an advisory group would bring valuable knowledge, experience, and advocacy to the process of dealing with school-related safety challenges. The group could also serve as a forum for reacting to district-and state-level policy directives in this area.

2. Encourage parents to teach their children adaptive, nonviolent methods of responding to bullying, teasing, and harassment at school and to teach children not to fight back. In the majority of cases, fighting back is not effective and may escalate the situation to dangerous levels. Furthermore, it is more likely to increase the probability of the offensive behavior recurring, rather than reduce it. A school-based, antibullying program that has parental support and involvement is likely to be much more effective.

3. Make information on effective parenting practices available to parents, and provide access to parent training classes and supports to those parents who seek additional guidance. Five generic parenting practices are instrumental in determining how children develop: (a) discipline, (b) monitoring and supervision, (c) parent involvement in children's lives, (d) positive family-management techniques, and (e) effective crisis-intervention and problem-solving methods. A large number of available parent training programs address these parenting practices (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2003; Patterson, 1982; Patterson et al., 1992; also see chapter 5 in this book).

Support At-Risk and Antisocial Youth Throughout Their School Careers Using Indicated or Tertiary Interventions

Youth with serious mental health problems and disorders who are alienated, socially rejected, and taunted by peers can be dangerous to themselves and others. These students are often well known to peers and staff in the school and should be given appropriate professional and parental attention, access to services, and social support (Dishion & Stormshak, 2007; Patterson et al., 1992).

CONCLUSION

As a general rule, policy lags well behind the research that validates the evidence-based approaches on which practices are based. This is especially true in the areas of school

safety and violence prevention. The pressures and demands of the moment force school administrators into making decisions about school safety strategies and tactics that may appear promising but might not prove effective through the research process (for example, zero tolerance, which is appealing to some schools but is not effective). Thus, schools are left to choose among practices that appear promising, relying on experience and using best judgment, until the knowledge base on school safety becomes more solid, cohesive, evidence based, and widely used. The strategic actions described briefly above represent what is currently known about these complex issues.

Historically, schools and school systems have remained comparatively detached players in the prevention of youth violence. Unfortunately, society's problems have now spilled over into the process of schooling, so that ensuring school safety has emerged as a very high priority among parents of school-age children and youth. Bullying, mean-spirited teasing, sexual harassment, and victimization are relatively commonplace occurrences on school campuses. Schools will continue to respond reactively to these crisis events as they occur. However, they also must begin investing in proactive, preventive approaches that will reduce the likelihood of future occurrences.

An enormous amount of federal and state resources has been and continues to be invested in school safety and violence prevention following the school shooting tragedies of the past three decades. It is extremely important that these resources be used to promote the adoption of best professional practices and that proven, evidence-based interventions be implemented. These developments also create significant opportunities for school professionals, including counselors, general educators, school psychologists, special educators, and social workers, to collaborate more effectively and to forge new working relationships with families and community agencies.

If schools can implement with integrity the practices that are currently known regarding these problems, the effort will achieve a major positive impact. The stakes are high for U.S. society and its public and private school systems. Yet the potential gains are well worth the investment and effort. Careful assessment and planning for school safety provides the cornerstone for any school's success.

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INTERVENTIONS

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