

How Safe Are Oregon Schools? Status and Recommendations

Prepared for

The Attorney General's School/Community Safety Coalition

Hardy Myers, Attorney General

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Executive Summary

In the winter of 2000, Attorney General Hardy Myers convened an Oregon school and community safety coalition. This coalition involved participants from a variety of organizations representing schools, youth serving agencies, public safety, state, county and local government, school boards, and others (see Attachment A). The goals of the coalition were to (1) analyze the status of school/community safety in Oregon, (2) compile a resource guide of prevention, education, policy and program materials, including online information, that focused on programs and partnerships between schools and communities intended to ensure a safe school environment, and (3) provide a forum for educators, law enforcement personnel, and representatives from other community resources to discuss issues of mutual concern, suggest legislation and develop policy recommendations.

Regarding the threat of serious violence, most schools in Oregon and the Nation are safe places for today's children and youth and the adults therein who serve and support them (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education Annual Report on School Safety, 2000). In fact, notwithstanding the disturbing reports of multiple shooting incidents in our schools, they are becoming even safer in light of a number of important indicators presented in this paper.

This paper provides important statistics regarding the status of school safety in Oregon. We looked at administrative and management practices of the school, family and community characteristics, and student characteristics. A significant activity in our analysis of school safety in Oregon was to survey building administrators across the state regarding their perceptions of risk indicators underlying the four sources of vulnerability. We also looked at data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), The Oregon Progress Board, and other essential sources.

Recommendations for Oregon Schools

The recommendations are derived from the findings reported in the body of the report and reflect the wisdom and consensus of the coalition. This report is not intended to be a directive to policymakers but rather it is intended to inform and educate them and further assist them in their deliberations about public policies and use of resources. The recommendations included in this report are predicated on the assumption that the legislature must allocate funding for suggested new programs or expansion of existing programs. The committee does not support the creation of legislative mandated programs without concomitant funding separate from the State School Fund appropriation.

Our recommendations focus on the school as a critical context for action. Clearly, legislation and policy that better supports healthy family and community development is needed to accompany efforts to make schools safer, healthier and violence free. Prevention of school violence will require a multifaceted approach including progress monitoring, whole-school approaches, early prevention programs, family supports, school security, and community and family collaboration and contribution.

1. Encourage Oregon schools to use comprehensive approaches to reduce bullying, harassment, and mean spirited teasing, including school wide social skills curriculum (interpersonal conflict resolution, anger management, empathy, drug, alcohol, and tobacco resistance, dating violence, etc.). Bullying and harassment in schools emerged as a primary concern of school administrators. While exemplary programs exist in some schools, their use is not widespread and schools face challenges with access to funding for staff development.
2. Establish an Oregon Center for School Safety. We recommend establishing a school safety center in Oregon to accomplish the following:

- Provide technical assistance, training, and information to schools regarding research-based strategies for violence prevention and response.
 - Track the status of school safety indicators in Oregon schools in collaboration with the Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Health Division, and the Oregon Progress Board.
 - Seek federal funding for school safety initiatives
 - Report annually to the governor and legislature on the status of school safety in Oregon.
3. Encourage school wide discipline and safety programs for all schools (with appropriate staff training and accountability to reductions in discipline). Research clearly indicates that a well-disciplined school that provides abundant positive interactions between adults and children is safer and helps children grow into well-adjusted, achieving adults. Oregon schools are struggling to implement these research validated programs but often lack resources for staff release for training and planning purposes, access to expert training, and systems for evaluating the effects of these interventions.
 4. Support early prevention of antisocial behavior. Researchers at the University of Oregon's Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior have published the results of an evaluation of an intervention program (First Step to Success) that they developed for kindergartners and first graders who showed the early signs of antisocial behavior. Currently supported by the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, the legislature should continue to support this important and powerful intervention program.
 5. Examine policies and procedures regarding school security practices in Oregon schools. Oregon schools need to ensure that buildings are secure and prepared for crisis events. We recommend regular evaluation of these plans, including attention to principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).
 6. Encourage risk-reducing architectural school design and assessment of existing buildings. Deteriorating school facilities and schools designed without adequate attention to school security and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) practices can

impede learning and contribute to the risk of violent behavior. To address these concerns, we recommend that state and local jurisdictions work toward application of CPTED assessments for all Oregon schools and development of CPTED expertise in schools and law enforcement agencies.

7. Establish standards for school resource officers (SRO'S) in schools. Schools should adopt policies or protocols which include law enforcement in a cooperative, collaborative, and holistic approach in issues related to school safety where there has been a report of criminal conduct, actual criminal conduct, or an attempt at criminal conduct. Incidents of criminal conduct occurring on school property or having a relationship to school property or activities should be reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
8. Encourage community and family collaboration. Schools have been the focus of attention in recent years regarding school safety, but clearly are only part of the problem (and solution). To support community and family collaboration, we recommend include violence prevention courses in Oregon teacher training programs (including ongoing professional development for inservice teachers) and assisting schools to work in partnership with families and communities to build a school climate that honors and respects differences in cultures, groups and individuals.

Conclusion

Emerging public concerns regarding the safety of students in the school setting coupled with recent school shootings and media coverage of youth violence in general are generating enormous pressures on educators and communities to take ownership of the problems presented by antisocial, delinquent and violent youth. Over the next several years, an enormous amount of federal, state, and local resources will be invested in school safety and violence prevention. It is

extremely important that these precious resources be used to promote the adoption of best professional practices and that proven, research based screening systems and early interventions be implemented in addressing them. We hope that by adopting the recommendations of this white paper, a major positive impact can be achieved in making Oregon schools safer and violence free.

How Safe are Oregon Schools? Status and Recommendations

In the winter of 2000, Attorney General Hardy Myers convened an Oregon school and community safety coalition. This coalition involved participants from a variety of organizations representing schools, youth serving agencies, public safety, state, county and local government, school boards, and others (see Attachment A). The goals of the coalition were to (1) analyze the status of school/community safety in Oregon, (2) compile a resource guide of prevention, education, policy and program materials, including online information, that focused on programs and partnerships between schools and communities intended to ensure a safe school environment, and (3) provide a forum for educators, law enforcement personnel, and representatives from other community resources to discuss issues of mutual concern, suggest legislation and develop policy recommendations.

The purpose of this white paper is to describe the status of school safety in Oregon and to make appropriate legislative and policy recommendations, based upon research, data, and the results of a statewide survey of Oregon school administrators.

Introduction

Schools that are effective also are schools that are safe and less vulnerable to violence (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994). Effective schools have (a) clearly defined goals in a school improvement plan, (b) close monitoring and feedback regarding progress toward these goals, (c) high academic expectations for all students, (d) clear and positive expectations for behavior, (e) high levels of student bonding and engagement to the schooling process, and (f) meaningful involvement of parents and the community (Braaten, 1997).

Regarding the threat of serious violence, most schools in Oregon and the Nation are safe places for today's children and youth and the adults therein who serve and support them (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education Annual Report on School Safety, 2000). In fact, notwithstanding the disturbing reports of multiple shooting incidents in our schools, they are becoming even safer in light of a number of important indicators presented in this paper. Ninety percent of American schools report no serious violent crime and 43% of schools report no crime. There has been a steady decline (from 12 to 7%) in percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon to school. Thefts at school have declined from 95 per 1000 to 58 per 1000.

It also is true that some of our schools have crime and violence problems and many schools are dealing with more problem behaviors, such as bullying and harassment, drug and alcohol use, the effects of family disruption, poverty, and so on (Annual Report on School Safety, 2000). In light of these issues, we must consider the full range of safety concerns in our schools (e.g. weapon carrying, threats, fighting). It is very unlikely that we would tolerate the same safety problems in our airports, courts, churches, shopping malls, and so forth. Reducing the prevalence of school violence to near zero in Oregon is a most worthy goal for our schools as we begin the 21st century (Walker & Eaton-Walker, 2000).

Nationally, there is considerable evidence that schools are becoming safer. Since 1992, the total number of school-associated violent deaths has decreased. There is less than one in a million chance of violent death in school. The most common crime in schools is theft, which has been decreasing since 1993, as have student weapon carrying and physical fighting. All of these declines mirror drops in the overall crime rate in society.

Too many children and school personnel are the victims of violent crime in schools, weapon carrying remains a concern, students report that they do not always feel safe, drug and alcohol use on school property has not subsided, and a wide range of disciplinary problems continue to impede teaching and learning in schools (Annual Report on School Safety, 2000).

Antisocial behavior, youth violence, and school safety are of concern in Oregon and the Nation. An understanding of the complex, interconnecting issues and variables affecting and underlying these concerns is necessary for (1) identifying antisocial and violent youth early in their school careers, (2) assessing the status and needs of our schools regarding safety, security and discipline, and (3) developing strategies for intervening effectively in the context of schools, communities and families. To begin, we present an outline of the critical features that affect school safety.

What is a Safe School? Four Sources of Vulnerability to School Violence

Defining school safety as the absence of violent behavior is a primary concern, however such a narrow focus may lead policymakers and other stakeholders to adopt expensive, but narrowly focused strategies. If the only goal is to prevent school shootings, overuse of law enforcement and/or school security technology may be the result (Green, 1999). While often necessary and appropriate, these approaches need to be balanced with the overall mission of schooling, which is to promote academic excellence, socialization, citizenship, and healthy lives for our children.

Students with antisocial and violent behavior present serious risks to the safety and climate of any school. However, the presence of substantial numbers of antisocial students in a school is not the only risk to its safety. Figure 1 illustrates four major sources of vulnerability to the safety of school settings. These include 1) the physical layout of the school building, and the

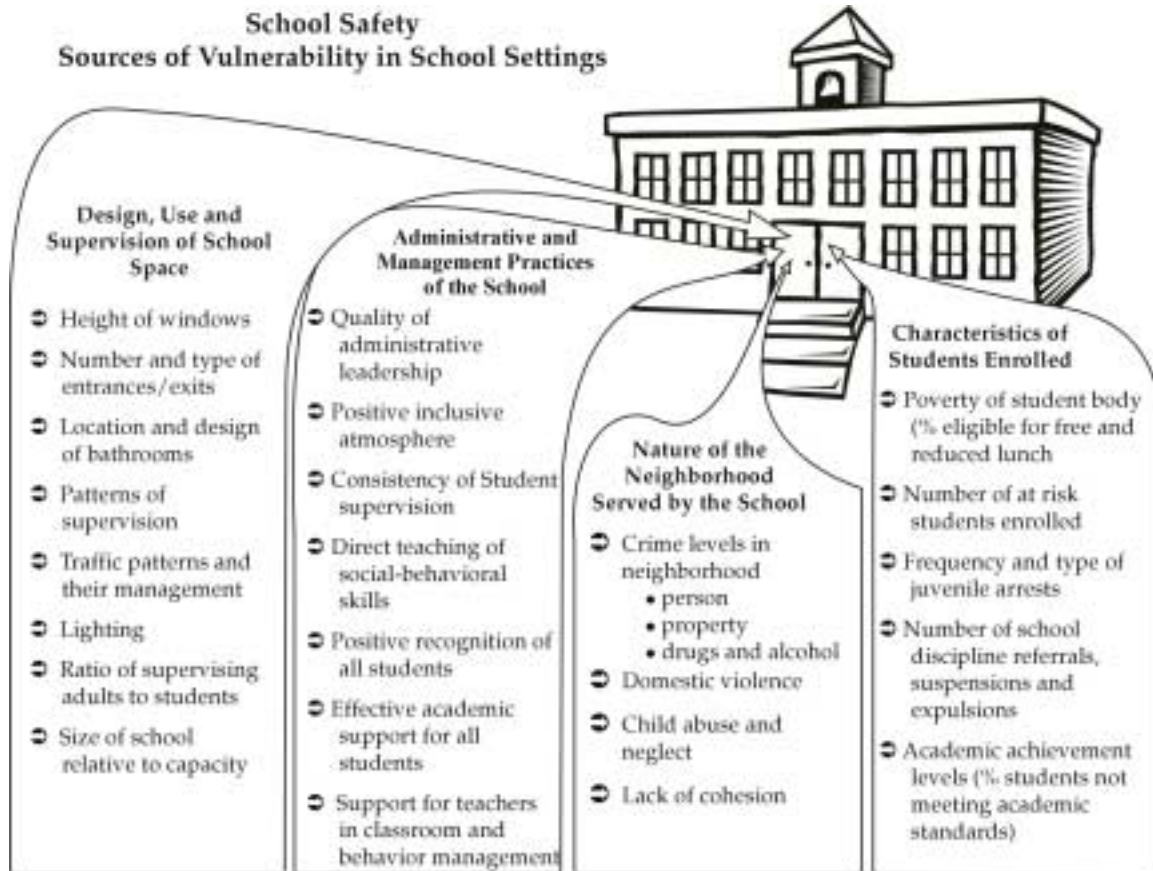


Figure 1

supervision/use of school space, 2) administrative, teaching and management practices of the school, 3) the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood(s) served by the school, and 4) characteristics of the students enrolled in the school. This section defines and outlines each source of vulnerability and provides sample measures for assessing it.

Typically, in the search for school safety solutions, the lion's share of educators' attention is focused on student backgrounds, attitudes, and behavioral characteristics. However, the remaining three sources of vulnerability in figure 1, can be very powerful in accounting for variations in the relative safety of today's schools.

Ensuring the safety and security of students and staff members in today's schools is a very daunting task that requires a comprehensive approach. Our society's myriad social problems (abuse, neglect, fragmentation, rage, interpersonal violence, and so forth) are spilling over into the schooling process at an alarming rate. It is essential that school officials address each of these four areas systematically in order to create safe and effective school environs. With proper and thorough assessment, school officials can identify, plan for, and reduce the risk factors that move schools in the direction of potential violence and reduced safety.

Physical Layout of the School Building and Grounds. Perhaps the most neglected of the four sources of vulnerability displayed in figure 1 is the architectural design of the school building and surrounding grounds (Schneider, Walker & Sprague, 2000). School safety and security were not dominant concerns when most of the current school facilities of our Nation were designed. School planners have paid relatively less attention to this area in the past, perhaps because school safety was not a pressing issue and ranked lower on the list of priorities that drive school design. However, the knowledge base required for designing safer schools has existed for sometime. This ecological knowledge base, relating to the influence of the social and physical

environment on safety and security, has emerged over the past four decades (see Schneider et al., 2000, for a recent review). This knowledge has been organized and formulated into a set of principles known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED helps us to understand how the physical environment affects human behavior. Thus, it can be used to improve the management and use of physical spaces in both school and non-school settings. It has been used extensively in the prevention and deterrence of criminal behavior in a range of community settings. CPTED also has been applied with considerable effectiveness in making school sites safer and more secure in recent years (Schneider, Walker, & Sprague, 2000).

CPTED assessment procedures are relatively straightforward (See Crowe, 1991; Schneider et al., 2000). Every school can benefit from an assessment of its environment in order to determine whether the school is a safe and secure place to learn and work. A school site at-risk for crime or violence carries 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. The assessment should begin with tools such as the National School Safety Center's School Crime Assessment Tool (Stephens, 1995) or the Oregon School Safety Survey (Sprague, Colvin & Irvin, 1995). These tools allow stakeholders to give input on particular areas of concern to them. Following this initial assessment, it is typical to employ a CPTED expert (local law enforcement or security personnel) to do a walk through of the school site and provide an intensive site assessment.

In the wake of recent, highly publicized school shootings, some have discussed a high-security, architectural design using metal detectors, locked gates, video surveillance cameras, etc. However, a well-designed school should look like a place to learn—not a locked-down fortress. Prudent application of CPTED principles can satisfy both perspectives. Architectural features

that allow school staff members natural surveillance, while providing controlled access to the school provides for an environment that can reduce violence risk while enhancing, rather than detracting from, the learning environment.

The Administrative, Teaching and Management Practices of the School. Many school practices can contribute to the development of antisocial behavior in children and youth. These include, among others: (a) ineffective instruction that results in academic failure; (b) inconsistent and punitive classroom and behavior management practices; (c) lack of opportunity to learn and practice positive interpersonal and self-management skills (e.g., conflict resolution, empathy, anger management); (d) unclear rules and expectations regarding appropriate behavior; (e) failure to correct rule violations and reward adherence to them; (f) failure to individualize instruction to adapt to individual differences, and perhaps, most importantly, (g) a failure to assist students from at risk backgrounds to bond with and participate fully in the schooling process (Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993; Hawkins et al., 1999; Mayer, 1995; Walker & Eaton-Walker, 2000; Walker et al., 1996).

Schools have been identified as an ideal setting for organizing an effort against the increasing problems of children and youth who display antisocial behavior (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). Effective interventions must be implemented that: (a) apply a multiple systems approach to school wide discipline aimed at all students, (b) support educators in today's classrooms and schools, and (c) adopt and sustain evidence-based, cost efficient practices that actually work as intended (Gottfredson, 1997; Walker et al., 1996). Effective approaches to school-wide discipline and management, for example, include (a) systematic social skills instruction (conflict resolution education, drug and alcohol resistance curriculum, etc.), (b) academic/curricular restructuring, (c) positive, behaviorally based

interventions, (d) early screening and identification of antisocial behavior patterns, and (e) alternatives to traditional suspension and expulsion (Biglan, 1995; Lipsey, 1991; Mayer, 1995; Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 1998; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker et al., 1996).

We recommend that program selection be based upon a thorough assessment of school discipline practices (Sugai, Todd, & Horner, 1999), disciplinary referral patterns (Sugai, Sprague, Horner & Walker, 2000), academic instruction, whole school social skills teaching, and so on. Thorough needs assessments can guide planning, avoid overlapping or conflicting services, and serve as the basis for evaluation of change. Accomplishing high magnitude change(s) in schools requires an appropriate and sustained investment in staff development (Hawkins et al., 1999; Sprague, Walker, Golly, White, Myers, & Shannon, in press).

The Characteristics of the Surrounding Neighborhood. The contexts in which school-influencing risk factors exist include the family, neighborhood, community and, finally, the larger society (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). Across these contexts, contributing risk factors can include poverty, dysfunctional and chaotic family life, drug and alcohol abuse by primary caregivers, domestic abuse, neglect, emotional and physical abuse, negative attitudes toward schooling, the modeling of physical intimidation and aggression, sexual exploitation, media violence, the growing incivility of our society, and so on. These risk factors provide a fertile breeding ground for the development of antisocial attitudes and coercive behavioral styles among the children who are pervasively exposed to them.

Assessment of neighborhood and family characteristics can be accomplished in large measure by using archival data collected (often routinely) by law enforcement, child protective

services, juvenile authorities, and health departments. We will illustrate the constructive use of these information sources later in this paper.

The Characteristics of the Students Enrolled in the School. Our schools are made unsafe by the attitudes, beliefs, and dangerous behavior patterns of antisocial children and youth that attend them. These characteristics are stimulated by the risk factors listed above regarding family, community, and society. The task of schools, families and communities is to promote resilience, teach skills for success, and develop positive alternatives to replace the maladaptive forms of behavior the child has learned to use in achieving his or her social goals.

In any school, we would expect to find three relatively distinct populations of students. These include (a) typically developing students, (b) those at-risk for behavioral and academic problems, and (c) high-risk students who already manifest serious behavioral and academic difficulties (Sprague and Walker, 2000). Differing but complimentary approaches are necessary to address the needs of these three student groups in any school. Figure 2 illustrates characteristic distribution of students of each type and indicates the level of intervention each needs. Assessing and identifying the characteristics of students in the school includes identifying rates of juvenile arrests or contacts with law enforcement, the frequency and severity of discipline referrals in school, the proportion of students in poverty, academic achievement levels, social skills development, and so forth.

Three-Tiered Model of School-Wide Discipline Strategies

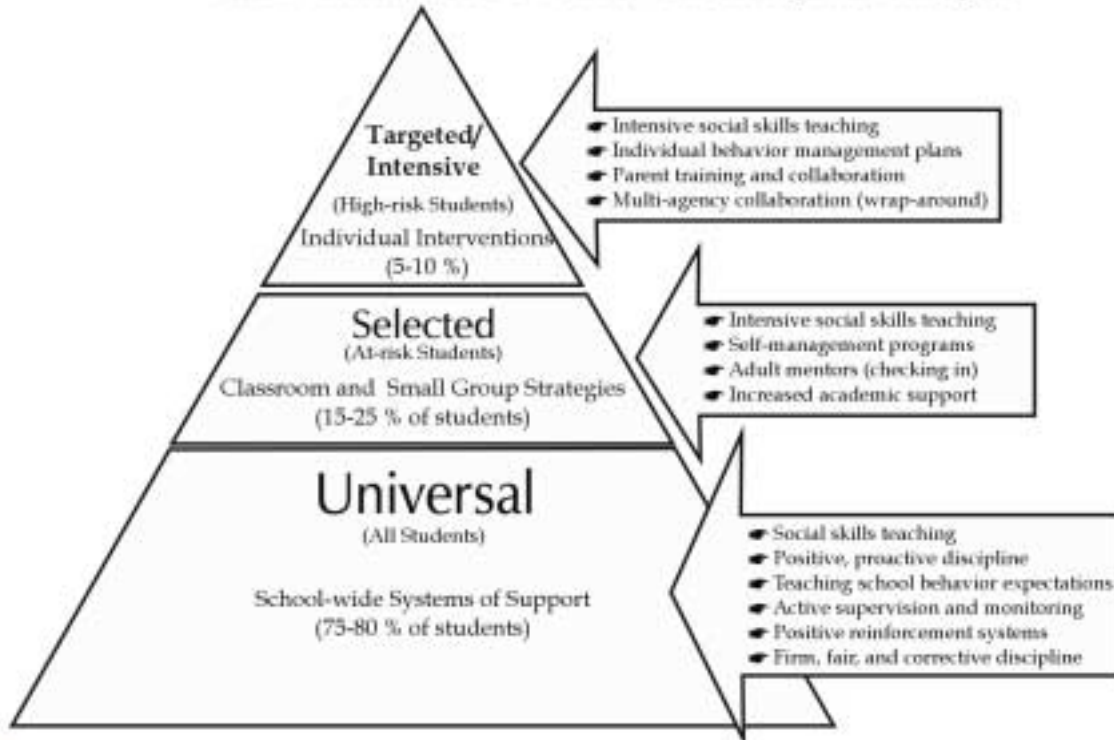


Figure 2

As seen above, the characterization of a school as safe or unsafe is a complex task involving assessment of several, interrelated factors. In the remainder of this paper we outline the status of school safety in Oregon and provide recommendations for lawmakers, schools, parents, students, and other Oregon citizens. This section will retain the organizational framework of the "four sources," using data from multiple sources to illustrate risk and protective factors in Oregon schools.

How Safe are Oregon Schools Today?

This section will provide important statistics regarding the status of school safety in Oregon, using the four sources of vulnerability as an organizing framework. We will look at administrative and management practices of the school, family and community characteristics, and student characteristics. A significant activity in our analysis of school safety in Oregon was to survey building administrators across the state regarding their perceptions of risk indicators underlying the four sources of vulnerability.

The Oregon School Safety Survey

In order to assess important safety concerns in Oregon schools we sent the Oregon School Safety Survey (Sprague, Colvin, & Irvin, 1995, Attachment B) to all school principals in Oregon. The surveys were mailed in the Spring of 2000 and provided an opportunity to repeat and compare results from the same survey administered in 1995. Thus, we had the opportunity to compare the school principal's perceptions of school safety in Oregon before and after the school violence tragedy in Springfield, Oregon and other schools in the United States. **Previous research has shown that principal's perceptions of the indicators on this survey are not substantially different from those of teachers and parents in the same building (Sprague, Colvin & Irvin, 1995).** For this reason, and to save time and resources, only school principals were surveyed.

Perceptions of school safety. We mailed the Oregon School Safety Survey (Sprague, Colvin, & Irvin, 1995) to all school principals in Oregon. The mailing list was provided by the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) and COSA mailed the surveys at their expense. The survey included a letter from Attorney General Hardy Myers, Ozzie Rose, and Executive Director of COSA, and Jeffrey Sprague, co-director of the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior. One Thousand One Hundred Surveys were mailed and 432 were returned completed for a return rate of 39.3%. This rate was similar to that obtained in the 1995 administration of the survey. Of the surveys returned, 236 (54.6%) were from elementary schools, 66 (15.3%) were from middle schools, and 81 (18.9%) were from high schools. The remaining eleven percent were returned by K-8 (n=15), K-12 (n=13), 6-12 (n=7), and Alternative Schools (n=11). This return pattern represents roughly the proportion of schools in Oregon.

The survey asked respondents to rate the extent of 15 risk and 15 protective factors shown to increase or buffer against school violence and discipline problems. Risk factors included poverty, child abuse, graffiti, and bullying, deteriorating physical facilities. The survey is included as an attachment to this paper. Protective factors included positive teacher-student relationships, parent involvement, student supervision, and high academic expectations. A rating scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (extensive) was used. In the 2000 administration of the survey, principals also were asked to rate on a scale of 1-4 (1 = low, 4 = high) the extent to which school safety, school discipline and student behavior, academic performance, and special education services were a priority for change or improvement in their school.

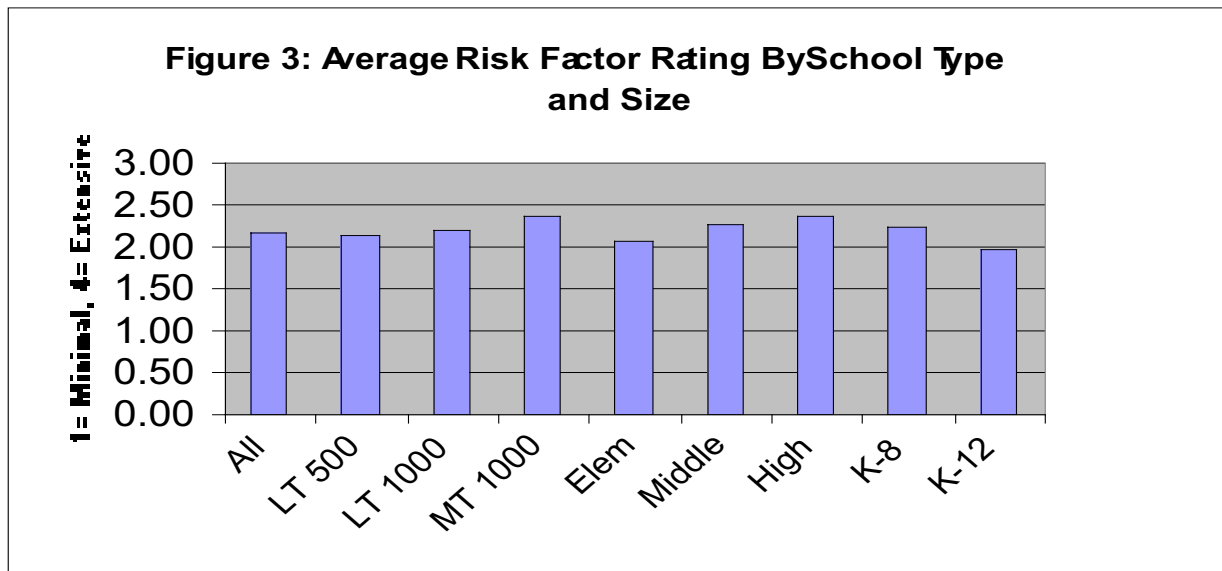
Finally, principals responded to five open-ended questions:

1. What is the most pressing safety need in your school?
2. What school safety activities does your school do best?
3. What topics are most important for training and staff development?

4. What are the biggest barriers to improved school safety measures?
5. What other factors not included in this survey do you believe affect school safety?

What did the principals tell us? Figures 3 & 4 provide results from the 2000 administration of the survey. Overall, principals rated risk factors as minimal (average of 2.16) with larger schools (more than 1000 students) indicating slightly higher risk (average 2.36). Elementary schools rated risk as lower (average 2.06) with high schools indicating minimal to moderate risk. K-12 schools provided the lowest overall risk ranking (average 1.95).

The average rating for protective factors in participating schools was 2.99 (moderate to extensive) with larger schools (More than 1000 students) indicating the highest overall average (3.16, moderate to extensive). K-12 schools posted the highest protective factor ratings (3.04, moderate). These data are consistent with national statistics indicating that students and teachers in K-12 and K-8 schools report feeling safer and experiencing less victimization (Kingery, 1999).



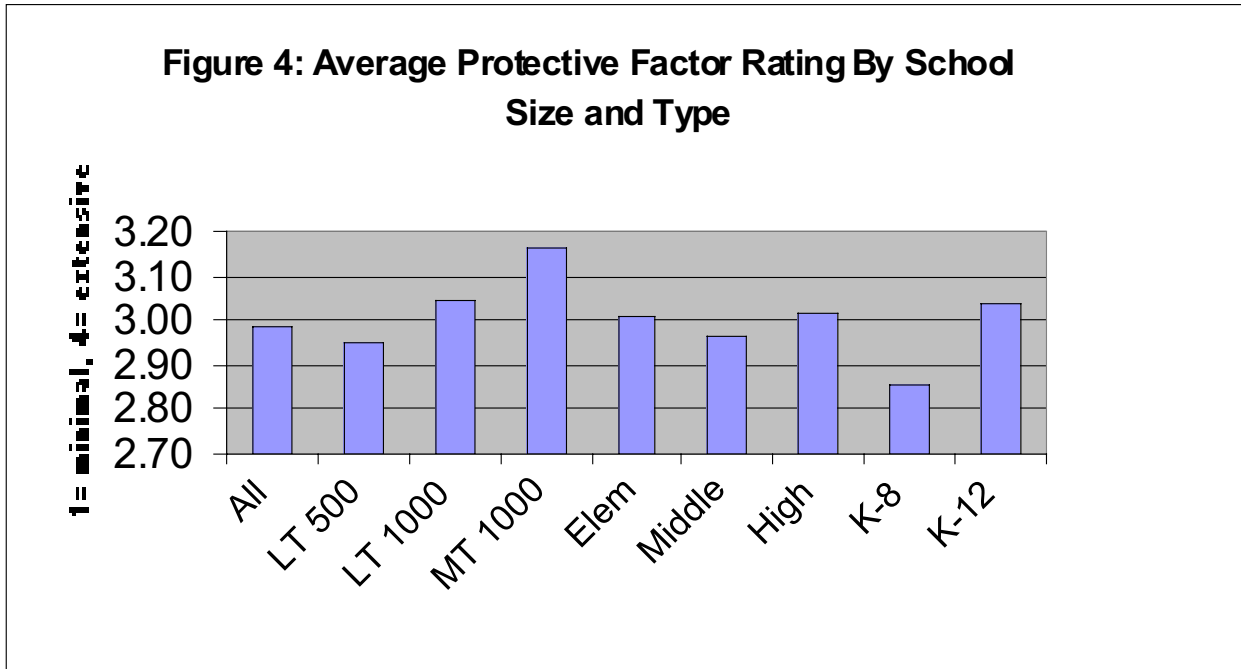
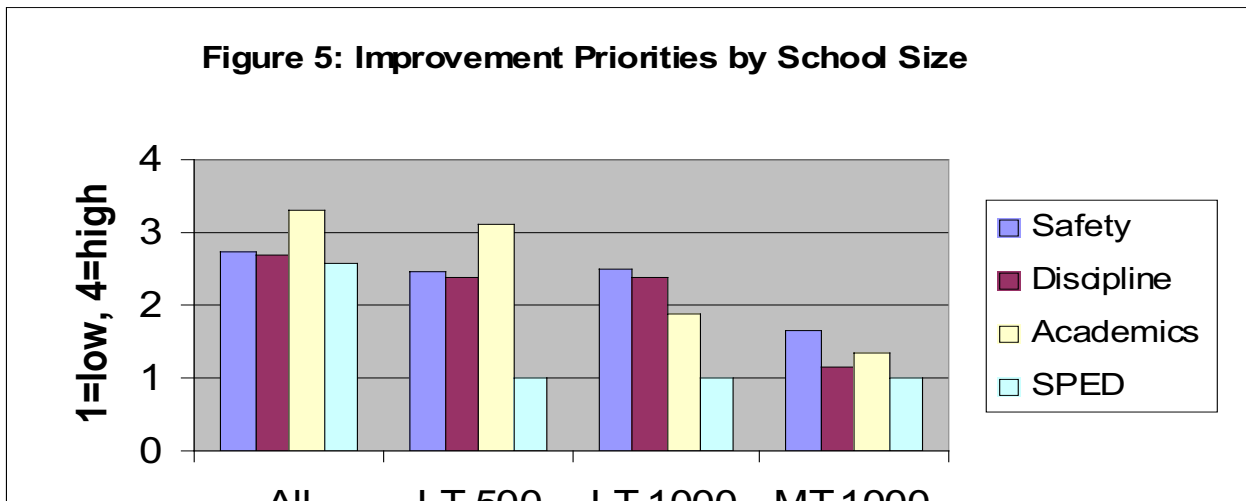


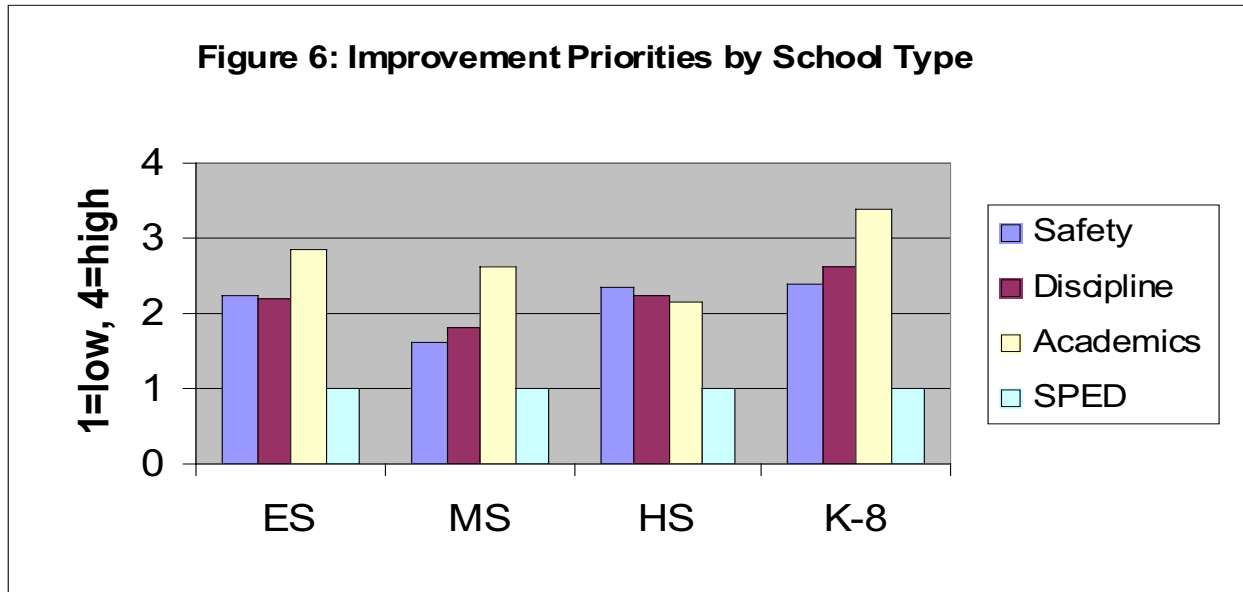
Table 1 below provides a comparison of the top five rated risk and protective factors from Oregon principals in 1995 and 2000. While top-rated risk factors in 1995 focused primarily on issues outside the school (poverty, transiency, child abuse), the 2000 ratings focused **on school bullying and deteriorating school facilities, ahead of poverty, transiency and child abuse in the home**. Top rate protective factors in 1995, an indicator of what schools do best to support students, included positive teacher-student relationships, positive school climate, school discipline, high academic expectations, and student supervision. The rankings changed dramatically in 2000 and included response to conflict, suicide prevention programs, staff training, high academic expectations, and parent involvement. These changes likely reflect renewed emphasis on staff development as a result of academic reforms, increased funding for school discipline reform, school safety initiatives, and an emphasis on violence prevention resulting from the school shootings in Oregon and elsewhere.

Table: 1: Top rated risk and protective factors from full sample

<i>Top Risk Factors</i>				<i>Top Protective Factors</i>			
<i>1995</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Poverty	2.96	Bullying	3.1	Teacher-Student Relationships	3.63	Response to Conflict	3.6
Transiency	2.90	Deteriorating Facilities	3.1	Climate	3.60	Suicide Prevention	3.6
Child Abuse	2.56	Poverty	2.9	Discipline	3.60	Staff Training	3.5
Truancy	2.52	Transiency	2.8	Academic Expectations	3.59	Academic Expectations	3.4
Bullying	2.47	Child Abuse in the Home	2.4	Supervision	3.52	Parent Involvement	3.4

Improvement priorities. Principals also were asked to rate on a 1-4 (**1=low, 4=high**) scale the extent to which school safety, school discipline, student behavior, academic performance, and special education services were a priority for change or improvement in their school. Figures 5 & 6 list the outcomes of these responses.





Overall, principals rated improvement of the academic program as their highest priority (average =3.29), followed by school safety and discipline improvement (average = 2.25 and 2.21 respectively). Improvement of special education was rated lowest (average=2.56). This pattern was repeated for schools with less than 500 students (n=285). In schools with 500-1000 students (n=100), school safety was rated higher than academics, school discipline and special education. Schools with over 1000 students (n=37) rated school safety, academics, school discipline, and academics in priority order.

Elementary principals rated academics highest, followed by school safety, discipline, and special education. Middle school principals rated academics, discipline, safety, and special education. High School principals rated highest safety, discipline, academics, and special education. K-8 schools rated academics highest, followed by discipline and safety.

Responses to open-ended questions. Principals were able to respond to six open-ended questions:

1. What is the most pressing safety need in your school?

2. What safety activities does your school do best?
3. What topics are most important for training and staff development?
4. What are the biggest barriers to improved school safety measures?
5. What other factors not included in this survey do you believe affect school safety?

Replies to the questions were categorized by use of key words or conceptual clusters. For example, separate replies of “ fire drills,” “earthquake drills” and “ lock down procedures” were clustered in the category “emergency procedures.” Not all respondents answered all questions. Additionally, some individuals gave multiple answers to some questions. In those cases, each discrete answer was categorized as a separate reply.

What is the most pressing safety need in your school? Twenty six percent of the respondents rated establishing and improving building security followed by 23% for dealing with inappropriate student behavior. The remaining issues included dealing with non-violent hazards, additional resources and services, and behavior management systems. Figures 7 & 8 provide a graphic illustration of these findings.

Figure 7: Most Pressing School Safety Needs

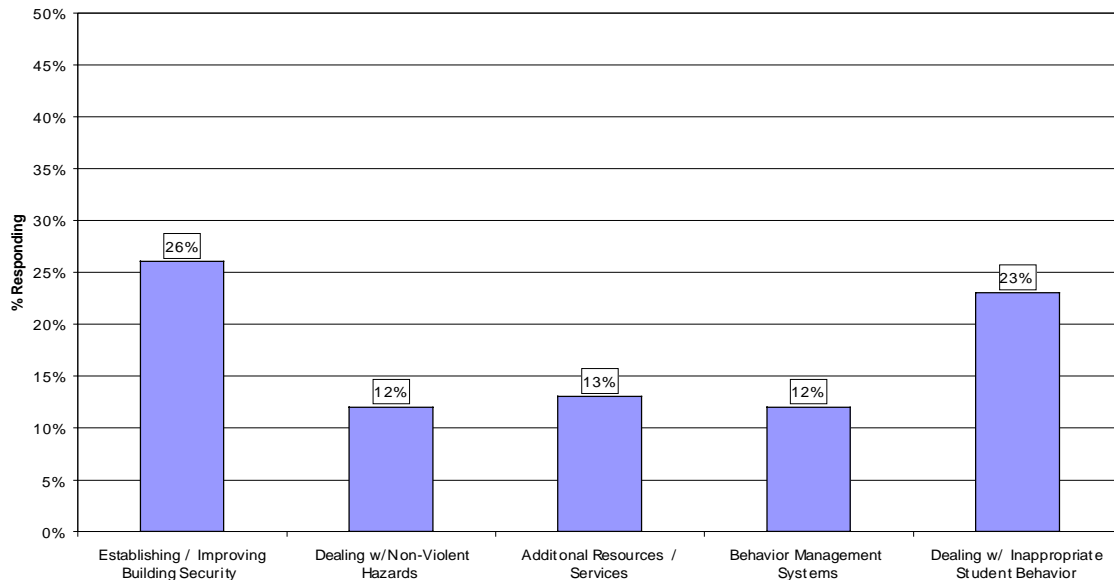
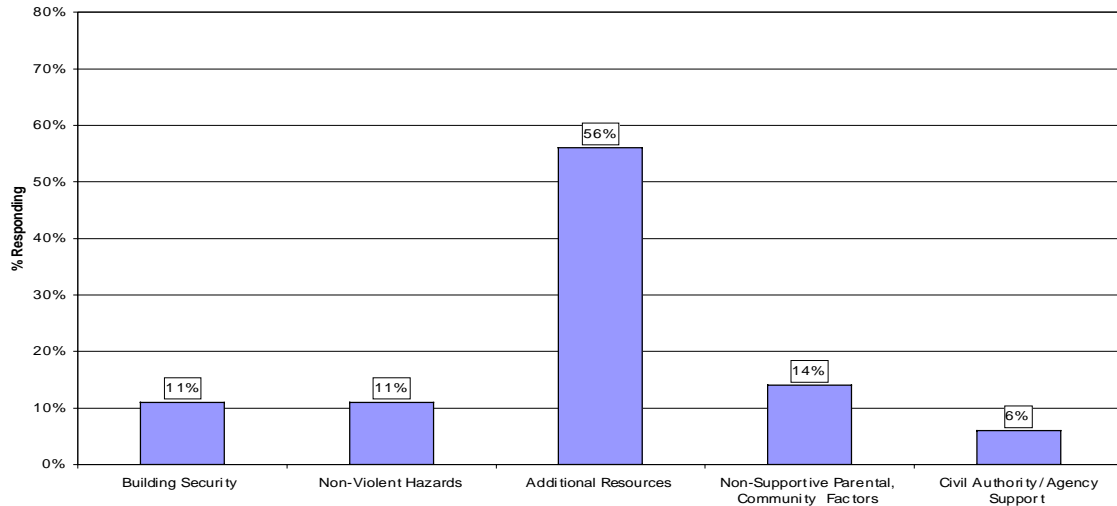


Figure 8 Biggest Barriers to School Safety



What safety activities does your school do best? Regarding best school safety activities, emergency procedures (43%) were listed most often, followed by in school primary prevention plans (38%)(e.g., violence prevention curriculum), and behavior management programs (18%).

What topics are most important for training and staff development? Most important staff development and training topics included (in order) behavior management systems, in-school primary prevention programs, how to deal with inappropriate behavior, emergency procedures, and academics.

What are the biggest barriers to improved school safety measures? By far, the most frequently cited barrier was additional resources (56%). Figure 9 provides a graphic display of how these comments were distributed.

Implications of the survey results. The findings are consistent with national data indicating that schools, overall, are relatively safe for students regarding risk of serious, violent

victimization, and that bullying, harassment and mean-spirited teasing remain substantial concerns (Annual Report on School Safety, 2000; Sprague, Colvin & Irvin, 1996). Principals' ratings highlight an increased recognition and emphasis on changing how students interact with each other and with the adults in the school. Nationally, nearly 40% of middle and high school students report that bullying, harassment and mean-spirited teasing negatively affect their academic performance, attendance, and peer relationships. This pattern of chronic negative interactions is strongly related to more serious forms of violence and delinquency in schools and communities (Colvin et al., 1993; Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992). As such, changing the culture of harassment and bullying in schools would likely move us closer to the goal of violence free schools. Supporting schools to offer school-wide instruction in conflict resolution, anger management, and empathy increasingly is recognized as effective in improving school climate.

The protective factor ratings and open-ended comments reflect an increased emphasis from principals on supporting staff (staff development) and children's and families' mental health needs (suicide prevention and parent involvement). State of the art recommendations for creating safe schools emphasize family and community partnerships and involvement in support of students, teachers and families (Hawkins et al., 2000). In addition, response to conflict emerged as a top protective factor. This would indicate recognition by building leaders that bullying and harassment in schools are major concerns. Clearly, ongoing monitoring and assessment of this problem, along with appropriate response is warranted.

Oregon's Families: Key Safety and Health Indicators

The Oregon Progress Board provides outcome-based indicators of family and community health in our state. The publication To The Well Being of Oregonians: Public Policy for a Changing Economic and Social Context (Kissler & Fore, 1999) focuses on three broad social outcome indicators: social capital, social problems, and other social problem indicators. These

indicators include birth cohort size, stress on families, juvenile arrest rates, teen pregnancy rate, overall crime, non-marital birth rate, and child abuse rates.

The Well Being Report shows a strong correlation between two factors (large birth cohorts and stress on families) and negative outcomes such as, juvenile arrest rates, non-marital birth rates, and overall crimes. These effects appear 15 years after the birth year of the cohort. In other words, children born into families (divorce, non-marital births, low parental monitoring and engagement) stressed by economic and social factors are more likely to engage in high-risk behavior (delinquency, high-risk sex) as adolescents are. Oregon has seen dramatic increases in all of these negative outcomes in the past 20 years. Economic growth and prosperity has not been associated with social well being.

From 1975 to 1997, Oregon has seen increases in stress on families, juvenile arrest rates, and non-marital birth rates for teens, child abuse rates, and adult crime rates. Kissler and Fore conclude that the increase in divorce, the alarming rise in non-marital births and the faster pace of modern life have left too many children in single-parent *and* intact families to be raised with less parental attention and adult supervision. Single parent families (result of non-marital births and divorce) tend to spend less time with their children. Reduced parental monitoring and engagement is a significant predictor of negative outcomes such as delinquency and pregnancy. Children and youth that are not as engaged with parents are more susceptible to negative influences from peers and the media. These data **do not** imply that single parents can never give as much love, warmth and attention as an intact family can provide. Rather, these findings simply reflect the fact that it is harder for one parent, fulfilling multiple roles, to do as much as two parents. There is a strong need to address this difficult challenge to child rearing in Oregon.

Oregon's Children and Youth: Key Indicators of Safety and Health

The Oregon Department of Human Services, Health Division, regularly administers the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to a representative group of Oregon adolescents. In addition to these data, the Division uses additional national and state data to describe the behaviors and experiences of Oregon Youth (Hopkins, 1999). The YRBS consists of self-reported demographic and behavioral data from Oregon high school students.

We present data here to provide a snapshot of school violence, safety, and health in Oregon. We want to strongly acknowledge that most Oregon students *do not* engage in serious violence, substance abuse, or weapon carrying but that many students do. In this regard, it is important to note that some students place themselves at risk because they are perpetrating illegal or high-risk behavior while others are at-risk by attending school, or interacting with, those who display these behaviors.

In 1997, nearly 35,000 Oregon students participated in the YRBS, the largest sample ever. Some important findings include:

- Approximately 1 in 5 (19%) Oregon adolescents reported carrying a weapon to school (guns, knives, and clubs) in a 30-day period.
 - Younger, (e.g., freshmen) and minority students were most likely to carry a weapon to school.
 - Students in schools with lower socioeconomic rank were most likely to report weapon carrying.
 - Students who did not have caring support from an adult, were victims of physical abuse, smoked heavily, used alcohol or drugs, had multiple sexual partners or attempted suicide were most likely to report weapon carrying. Students most likely to carry weapons to school engaged in multiple risk behaviors.
 - A remarkable finding is that weapon carriers are more likely to be injured at school.

The YRBS found certain forms of violence prevalent in Oregon schools as follows:

- Nearly one-third (31 percent) reported being harassed at school during the previous 30 days.
- Harassed students were more likely to carry weapons to school.
- Seven percent of students reported being physically threatened or injured during the previous 12 months.
- Thirteen percent of students reported being in a physical fight at school during the previous 12 months.

Behavioral crimes, and crimes against persons increased dramatically from 1988 to 1996. While the rate of these crimes has leveled off recently, the overall rates of these behaviors far exceeds that of other industrialized countries.

As stated earlier, most Oregon students are developing typically and will avoid engaging in the serious risk behaviors outlined above. Nonetheless, there is a substantial proportion of students (i.e. one in five carry weapons) or display other high-risk behaviors. We must remain diligent in prevention of these behaviors and reducing the risk of violence in our schools, homes, and communities.

Discussion and Recommendations for Oregon Schools

This section provides a set of legislative and policy recommendations from the School Safety Coalition. These recommendations are derived from the findings reported in the body of the report and reflect the wisdom and consensus of the coalition. The recommendations included in this report are predicated on the assumption that the legislature must allocate funding for suggested new programs or expansion of existing programs. The committee does not support the creation of legislative mandated programs without concomitant funding separate from the State School Fund appropriation.

Our recommendations focus on the school as the central context for action. Clearly, legislation and policy that better supports healthy family and community development is needed to accompany efforts to make schools safer, healthier and violence free. Prevention of school violence will require a multifaceted approach including progress monitoring, whole-school approaches, early prevention programs, family supports, school security, and community and family collaboration and contribution.

1. Encourage Oregon schools to use comprehensive approaches to reduce bullying, harassment, and mean spirited teasing, including school wide social skills curriculum (interpersonal conflict resolution, anger management, empathy, drug, alcohol, and tobacco resistance, dating violence, etc.)

Many, but not all, Oregon schools include interpersonal skills training such as conflict resolution, anger management etc. Research has clearly that these programs are effective and cost efficient in reducing this serious and widely prevalent problem. Integration of these types of programs into the existing curriculum can help students meet Oregon CIM/CAM benchmarks or standards by giving them skills in communication, problem-solving, working with others, and dealing with conflict. These programs are most effective when all students have an opportunity to practice these skills.

2. Establish an Oregon Center for School Safety

A major challenge to our understanding of school violence is a relative lack of information regarding the extent of violence in our schools. To this end, we recommend establishing a center on school safety in Oregon to accomplish the following:

- Provide technical assistance, training, and information to schools regarding research-based strategies for safe schools conducive to learning, violence prevention and response.
- Track the status of school safety indicators in Oregon schools in collaboration with the Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Health Division, and the Oregon Progress Board.
- Seek federal funding for school safety initiatives.

- Report annually to the governor and legislature on the status of school safety in Oregon.

Model school safety centers of this type have been established successfully in several states, including Kentucky and North Carolina.

3. Encourage school wide discipline and safety programs for all schools (with appropriate staff training and accountability to reductions in discipline)

Research clearly indicates that a well-disciplined school that provides abundant positive interactions between adults and children is safer and helps children grow into well-adjusted , achieving adults. Oregon schools are struggling to implement these research validated programs but often lack resources for staff release for training and planning purposes, access to expert training, and systems for evaluating the effects of these interventions. While there are several model schools and programs in schools in Oregon, there is a need to empower all schools to move to this level of effectiveness.

These programs should help schools achieve the following:

- Teach school rules and positive expectations for all children.
- Provide school-based mentors for at-risk students.
- Offer targeted behavioral programs (including alternative education programs) for at-behaviorally at-risk students.
- Expand before and after school programs.
- Provide alternatives to out of school suspension and expulsion.

4. Support early prevention of antisocial behavior

Researchers at the University of Oregon's Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior have published the results of an evaluation of an intervention program (First Step to Success) that they developed for kindergartners and first graders who showed the early signs of antisocial behavior. Consisting of multiple components (screening of all students, school, and home intervention), the program, currently supported by the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, can divert young children from a path to delinquency and adjustment problems through

adulthood. The legislature should continue to support this important and powerful intervention program to accomplish the following:

- Early screening and intervention for at-risk children, beginning at the point of school entry (e.g., First Step to Success).
- Training and support to school personnel who implement the program.
- Evaluation and long-term follow-up of First Step outcomes for children, families, and school personnel.

5. Examine policies and procedures regarding school security practices in Oregon schools

While early prevention holds great appeal and promise, Oregon schools need to ensure that buildings are secure and well prepared for crisis events. To this end, we encourage schools to consider the following activities:

- Annual evaluations of each school's safety status (e.g., regularly scheduled school safety audits and public reporting of results).
 - Physical facility and grounds (CPTED assessment).
 - Violent incident and illegal behavior tracking and reporting.
 - Administrative and management practices regarding safety and discipline.
 - School safety drills (fire, intruder, etc.).
 - Procedures for responding to violent threats.
- Close school campuses or find alternatives in open campus settings that assure both safety and the level of openness required to function as a center of excellence.
- Allow open sharing of student behavioral information between schools, youth and family services (e.g., OYA, SCF).
- Establish anonymous "hotline" reporting systems for potential violence.
- Modify existing statutes disallowing concealed weapons on school campuses.

6. Encourage risk-reducing architectural school design and assessment of existing buildings.

Deteriorating school facilities and schools designed without adequate attention to school security and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) issues can impede learning and contribute to the risk of violent behavior. To address these concerns, we recommend that state and local jurisdictions work toward:

- Application of CPTED assessments for all Oregon schools.
- Development of CPTED expertise in schools and law enforcement agencies.
- A district-by-district survey of the extent building security needs, practices, and risk.
- Active community involvement in promoting safety and access in architectural design decisions.

7. Establish standards for school resource officers (SRO'S) in schools

Schools should adopt policies or protocols which include law enforcement in a cooperative, collaborative, and holistic approach in issues related to school safety where there has been a report of criminal conduct, actual criminal conduct, or an attempt at criminal conduct. Incidents of criminal conduct occurring on school property or having a relationship to school property or activities should be reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

School administrators and staff should make efforts to cooperate and assist law enforcement in criminal investigations as conditions allow. Law enforcement personnel should engage in a reciprocal relationship with schools in matters related to school safety and criminal investigations as the conditions allow.

8. Encourage community and family collaboration

Schools have been the focus of attention in recent years regarding school safety, but clearly are only part of the problem (and solution). To support community and family collaboration, we recommend the following:

- Include violence prevention courses and training (conflict resolution, social skills, and at-risk student intervention) in Oregon teacher training programs (including ongoing professional development for inservice teachers).
- Establish programs in Oregon schools that involve parents, families, community groups, community dispute resolution centers, and other interested organizations to assist schools with teaching, modeling, and reinforcing conflict resolution education and skills training.
- Provide parents with conflict resolution education and information regarding school programs.
- Assist schools to work in partnership with families and communities to build a school climate that honors and respects differences in cultures, groups and individuals.
- Support adequate mental health services for children and families.

Conclusion

Emerging public concerns regarding the safety of students in the school setting coupled with recent school shootings and media coverage of youth violence in general are generating enormous pressures on educators and communities to take ownership of the problems presented

by antisocial, delinquent and violent youth. The production of four public documents by the U.S. Justice and Education departments reflect the government's response to this growing public concern (See the *Early Warning/Timely Response Guide*, the *First and Second Annual Report on School Safety*, and *Safeguarding Our Children, A Guide to Implementing the Early Warning Guide*).

Over the next several years, an enormous amount of federal, state, and local resources will be invested in school safety and violence prevention. It is extremely important that these precious resources be used to promote the adoption of best professional practices and that proven, research based screening systems and early interventions be implemented in addressing them. These developments also create significant opportunities for school professionals (related services personnel, general educators, special educators) to collaborate more effectively and to forge new working relationships with families and community agencies. If we can implement with integrity that which we currently know regarding these problems, a major positive impact can be achieved in making schools safer and violence free. The stakes are high for our society and school systems. Yet the potential gains are well worth the investment and effort.

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