

# School Safety Update

The Newsletter of the National School Safety Center

September 1999

## Dallas Public Schools: Responding to threats of violence in schools

The National Education Goals of 2000 state that all schools in America will be free of violence and the presence of unauthorized firearms, as well as offer a disciplined environment that encourages learning. With the recent events at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and similar events in schools across the country, we appear to be further from this goal than ever before. Student threats, both verbal and written, present school districts with a perplexing situation. Which threats should be taken seriously? Which students will act upon their threats? What consequences should the students undergo? What intervention strategies are most effective?

Faced with these questions, Dallas Public Schools developed procedures for assessing the potential for violence, which were implemented in the fall of 1998. The procedures were developed by a task force comprised of several departments including Crisis Management, Psychological Services, Health Services, Discipline Management and Student Wellness. Detailed instructions for school administrators and staff were created, as well as a "Risk Assessment Worksheet for Violent Juvenile Behavior."

Risk assessments involve "probability estimates of the chances for violence to occur" (Ferris et al., 1997, p. 1052). These estimates are determined by assessing the severity of "risk factors" that may affect whether an individual will become violent. While the accuracy rate of risk assessment has been the subject of debate, results for short-term prediction have been promising (Ferris et al., 1997). Validity studies on the instrument created by Dallas Public Schools are in progress at this time. Specific details of the instrument are highlighted in paragraphs below.

The Risk Assessment Worksheet for Violent Juvenile Behavior is used to evaluate students who have made verbal

or written threats of violence and then to identify those students who are more likely to commit acts of violence. The Risk Assessment Worksheet has 15 categories that are completed on each student; these categories are consistent with the research on the common characteristics of youth who commit violent acts. The following areas are addressed:

1. a plan for violence;
2. aggressive behavior;
3. discipline record;
4. academic performance;
5. exposure to violence;
6. history of previous threats;
7. victim of violence/abuse;
8. cruelty to animals;
9. harassment or discrimination;
10. gang membership;
11. family support;
12. empathy displays;
13. relationships;
14. preoccupation with violent themes;
15. substance abuse.

In each category, the user checks either a low, medium or high item, depending on the student's characteristics. The 15 categories in the Risk Assessment Worksheet and the description of each risk label are depicted in Table 1.

Information on each student is gathered from a variety of sources including the student, parents, and school staff using an interview format. Academic and discipline records are also reviewed. Several school staff members are designated and trained in each school to complete the Risk Assessment Worksheet on students who threaten violence. These staff members might include the school counselor, nurse, social worker, social provider or school psychologist. Training for completing the risk assessment is provided at the beginning of the school year and includes the following training points:

- Begin the interview by explaining why

you were asked to talk with the student and that you will ask some questions to get to know him or her better. Identify the feelings that you assume were present at the time of the threat and what you currently perceive about the student: "You must have been very angry when you said \_\_\_\_\_," and "I imagine you are worried about what is going to happen now."

- The student may be aware of consequences that could result from the threat and not be cooperative, remain silent or deny any intention of harm. If the student denies any intention of harm, respond with a positive statement such as "I'm glad to hear that," or "good," and continue the assessment.

- The best information may be obtained by asking the student to tell you what is going on and what led up to the incident. Listen and reflect what you hear. Refrain from accusing the student of lying or not telling the truth. Do point out inconsistencies or contradictions and ask for clarification without being accusatory.

- Suggestions are included in the administration guidelines to aid the user who needs more information to complete the Risk Assessment Worksheet. The following questions listed by assessment category provide examples of the kinds of questions that can be asked to gain more information from the student:

### A plan for violence

"You have threatened to \_\_\_\_\_. How would you do it? What did you have in mind? What are you planning to do? When would you do it? What would you use to do it? Who do you know that has a gun? Have you ever seen it? Do you know how to use it?"

### Aggressive behavior

"When you get angry, what do you do? Do people treat you fairly? Have you ever set fire to things or a building?"

**Table 1: Risk Assessment Worksheet**

<b>Risk:</b>	<b>Risk Present, But Lower</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Higher</b>
<b>Plan</b>			
A. Details	vague	some specifics	well thought out, knows when, where, how
B. Access to Weapons	unavailable, difficult to obtain	available, but will have to obtain	has in hand, close by, easy access
C. Time	no specific time or in the future	within a few hours	immediately
D. Viability of Plan	plan unrealistic, unlikely to be implemented	some details of plan are plausible	plan realistic
<b>Aggressive behavior</b>	when angry does not hurt or threaten to hurt others or property	displays little anger control, considered aggressive, has explosive outbursts, believes has been treated unfairly	has set fires, has frequent explosive outbursts, believes in violence to solve problems
<b>Discipline record</b>	no previous discipline record	record of fighting, harassing, verbally abusive	has history of disciplinary problems, criminal offenses, has been removed or expelled
<b>Academic performance</b>	no academic difficulties	history of learning difficulties	has been retained and/or receiving special education services
<b>History of previous threats</b>	no history of previous threats	friends are aware of threats	has been disciplined in past for terroristic threat
<b>Exposure to violence</b>	exposed to violence only through movies, stories, computer software, video games	has directly witnessed a violent argument or fight at home, in the neighborhood or school	repeated exposure to violence at home, neighborhood or school
<b>Victim of violence or abuse (verbal, sexual or physical)</b>	no evidence that child is a victim of violence or abuse	perceives self as being taken advantage of or a victim but no evidence that abuse has occurred	child has been a victim of violence or abuse, has been removed from home by Child Protective Services
<b>Exhibits cruelty to animals</b>	no tendency to be cruel to animals	discusses cruelty to animals with friends.	has tortured or mutilated animals
<b>Victim or perceived victim of discrimination or harassment</b>	no history of discrimination or harassment	has a history of being teased	documentation of being harassed or discriminated against
<b>Gang membership, member of antisocial group or cult</b>	no history of affiliation or interest in becoming a member of a gang, antisocial group or cult	has past affiliation or has interest in becoming a member of a gang, antisocial group or cult	currently an active member of a gang or cult, sees gang as source of power/protection
<b>Family support</b>	evidence of caring and supportive family relationships	history of neglect	no evidence of early attachment to primary caretaker, little or no parental supervision
<b>Empathy, sympathy or remorse</b>	displays normal capacity to feel for others	some indication the development of these feelings are delayed or absent	seems unable to express or feel empathy, sympathy or remorse
<b>Interpersonal /relationship skills</b>	has friends, respected among peers and teachers	identified as a bully, has poor interpersonal/relationship skills, has few friends	others afraid of child, intensely withdrawn, takes advantage of others, is considered a loner
<b>Preoccupation with weapons, death and violent themes</b>	no unusual history of thinking or talking about violence, does not enjoy reading about or watching violence	prefers and enjoys violence on TV or in movies, shows interest in weapons, talks about violence	preoccupation with violence and death in writings, fantasy, drawings or conversation
<b>Drug or alcohol usage, impulsivity</b>	does not use drugs or alcohol, is not considered impulsive	some experimentation with drugs or alcohol, one or two times a month	heavy use of drugs or alcohol, several times a week, has little impulse control

**Discipline record**

"Have you ever been suspended or expelled? Have your parents ever been called to school because of your behavior?"

**History of previous threats**

"Have you ever threatened to harm anyone before?"

**Exposure to violence**

"Have you ever seen anyone killed or seriously hurt?"

**Victim of abuse**

"Has anyone ever intentionally hurt you?"

**Exhibits cruelty to animals**

"Do you have a pet or have you ever had a pet? Have you ever intentionally hurt an animal?"

**Victim of harassment/discrimination**

"Has anyone ever teased or harassed you?"

**Gang affiliation**

What gang are you a member of? Would you like to be part of one? Do you see the gang as a source of protection?

**Family support**

"Who in your family are you close to now? Who were you close to when you were little?"

**Empathy**

"Is there anyone you feel sorry for? Do you ever wish you hadn't done something?"

**Interpersonal relationship skills**

"Do you see yourself as having a lot of friends? Do you wish you had more? How would your friends describe you? Do you think others respect you?"

**Preoccupation with violent themes**

"What kind of movies or TV programs do you like to watch? Do you like to make up stories about violence or do you talk to your friends about violent stories much?"

**Drug use**

"How much do you use drugs or drink alcohol each week?"

**Scoring the assessment**

After each item is scored, all the items in the low category are totaled, followed by the medium and high categories. Total scores in each category are then weighted according to their risk. (The

"lower" category is multiplied by one, the "medium" category by two, and the "higher" category by three.) The weighted scores are added together to calculate a total score. The total score is divided by three, and based on this score, a student is rated as low (a score of less than eight), medium (a score of eight to 14), or high (a score above 14). If all four sections of the first item, "A Plan for Violence," are checked high, the final risk for violent behavior is automatically assessed as high. However, regardless of risk level, all threats are taken seriously and are reported to parents or guardians.

After a Risk Assessment is completed, the parent is required to schedule an interview with a mental health professional— typically the school psychologist or social worker — to determine what additional services are needed, such as psychological evaluation, counseling or enrollment in a violence prevention program. In addition, follow-up services are provided by assigning a case manager through the school's multidisciplinary Student Support Team to monitor the progress of the student. The worksheet and a summary report is then placed in a file at the counselor's office, in a student discipline record at the school and at the district's Psychological Services department.

The implementation of these procedures has provided a structure to gauge how to respond to threats of violence in a public school setting. Although the effectiveness of this instrument for assess-

ing a student's risk for violence is still being investigated, the procedure used in Dallas Public Schools allows for the evaluation of a student's characteristics known through existing research to be associated with violence. It also serves as a platform from which referrals for services such as psychological evaluation, counseling or enrollment in a violence prevention program can be initiated. This allows school staff to intervene before the problems become more serious.

Looking back at the recent incidents of school violence in America, one observes that in most cases the violent juveniles have expressed their plans (verbally or nonverbally) of violence to others. These procedures demonstrate how a school district can intervene with youth who make threats in a public setting. It is hoped that through early identification and treatment of violent youth, school tragedies, such as those in Arkansas, Colorado, Oregon, Kentucky and Georgia, can be prevented.

*Submitted by Judie Smith, Director of Crisis Management and Child Abuse, and Judy Johnston and Trista Huckleberry, Interns, Psychological, Social and Diagnostic Services Department, all of Dallas Public Schools.*

**References**

Ferris, L.E., Sandercock, J., Hoffman, B., Silverman, M., Barkun, H., Carlisle, J., and Katz, C. (1997). "Risk assessments for acute violence to third parties: A review of the literature." *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 42, 1051-1060.

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## America's Safe School Week: October 17-23, 1999

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At the time this *School Safety Update* went to press, Governors from the States of Alabama, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma and South Carolina had signed and returned to NSSC state proclamations naming the third full week in October, October 17-23, 1999, as their state's Safe School Week.

**America's Safe Schools Week**, now in its 15th year, is sponsored annually by the National School Safety Center. NSSC's goal in this campaign is to motivate key education and law enforcement

policymakers, as well as students, parents and community residents, to vigorously advocate school safety. School safety includes keeping campuses free of crime and violence, improving discipline, and increasing student attendance. Schools that are safe and free of violence, weapons and drugs are necessary to enhance the well-being of all children and the quality of their education.

Please join NSSC and other local, state and federal officials and organizations in observing October 17-23, 1999, as **America's Safe Schools Week**.

## American Federation of Teachers offers "Tips for Student Discipline"

Here are some specific tips for the classroom, many of which can be used on the school bus, the playground or any other place where school employees supervise students.

**BE SURE TO:** Greet guests as they enter your classroom. **BECAUSE:** This not only models the kind of courteous behavior you want to instill in your students, but it also gives you an opportunity for "early targeting" of potential troublemakers. You may pick up early warning signs of potential trouble, e.g., anger, illness, arguments, fights, trouble on the way to school, inappropriate attire or paraphernalia, homework not done, etc. Without early targeting or intervention, small problems can escalate to major disruption or violence.

**BE SURE TO:** Make "Before-Class-Starts" activities available in the classroom to engage students in positive and productive interactions. Such activities could include board games, a five-minute "free conversation" period or simple calisthenics. **BECAUSE:** The "dead time" before the bell can be "deadly" if students don't have a way to channel their energies.

**BE SURE TO:** Have a designated place within your view for students to turn in homework assignments as they enter. **BECAUSE:** The failure of students to turn in homework on time can be a major disruption to the class. When asked why they have not completed their assignments, students will often engage in denials and excuses, resulting in a waste of learning time. With a homework box, or other designated place for students to turn in work, the teacher or paraprofessional can watch the students as they enter to see who has completed their assignments and who has not.

**BE SURE TO:** Have a few (three to five) basic overarching rules in place to help govern student behavior in the classroom or on the school bus. **BECAUSE:** Overarching rules provide parameters within which each student can function in the group and identify his or her own appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. This promotes individual ownership of

the rules and encourages responsibility. (Examples of four good overarching rules—be prompt, be polite, be prepared, be productive. Examples of bad rules—do not chew gum, do not talk). Recite the rules often at the beginning of the school year and make sure to explain why these rules are necessary.

**BE SURE THAT:** Your students know and understand the rules. Teach and reinforce the rules as if they were curriculum, repeating them as often as needed. **BECAUSE:** Many school employees believe that a read through and quick review of classroom or school bus rules are enough to ensure student understanding and buy-in. This is a dangerous misconception. Researchers have discovered that many students really don't understand the meaning of words in the rules, such as "courteous." Also, don't assume that students have been taught proper behavior at home. Learning how to respect one's self and others is something that must be taught and reinforced.

**BE SURE TO:** Develop expectations for behavior that are backed up by a set of fair, workable, enforceable, and hierarchical consequences. Do not promise a consequence you cannot deliver. **BECAUSE:** Consequences are an important link to the effectiveness of your discipline code. If the consequences fall apart, or are not there to begin with, the whole thing collapses. If they are not enforced, the teacher's credibility is damaged. Negative consequences should increase in severity (hierarchical). Rule breaking and the punishment should be documented so that you can prove that those students whom you disciplined exhibited unacceptable behavior. This is very important when dealing with parents. Proper documentation can also help to ensure that administrators give you the support you need to enforce your discipline plan.

**BE SURE TO:** When possible, involve your students in developing the rules. **BECAUSE:** By involving students in the drafting of the rules you help to create an environment in which the students have a role in enforcing the rules. Peer

pressure can be very effective in helping to keep an orderly class.

**BE SURE THAT:** Parents know and understand your rules, including the consequences. Make several different attempts to contact them. Phone calls and mailing letters to the home are the most effective means of contacting parents. Do not depend on students' hand-delivering the rules to parents. **BECAUSE:** Parents who are not aware of or are not well-versed in discipline policies are prone to side with their children and might feel that the school employee's actions (especially suspension or expulsion) are arbitrary or biased.

**BE SURE TO:** Move a child who acts up on a school bus to the front of the bus—perhaps at the next regular stop. If the action is severe enough to cause possible injury, bus drivers suggest pulling over immediately to a safe location off the road. **BECAUSE:** You should avoid, if possible, disciplining a child in front of his/her peers because this can result in a child feeling that he/she needs to show off by becoming more aggressive. Move the student away from other students and friends to a place where you can observe his/her behavior. It is usually best to wait until you arrive at the school site to continue following the standard disciplinary procedures.

**BE SURE TO:** Plan out the arrangement of furniture, desks, and supplies in your classroom for ease of traffic flow, access and visibility. Design seating charts that keep all students within eye contact. Do not put all the troublemakers together, and do not place them in the back of the room! Avoid, to the best of your ability, congested aisles and stumbling blocks to easy access of supplies. **BECAUSE:** Classrooms are places where there is constant traffic. The ease of flow can prevent traffic jams. Often, when students are placed in close and uncomfortable contact, flare-ups become common. Moreover, teachers should be able to see each student, and each student should be able to see the teacher. This provides opportunities for what is called "early desists" of potentially dis-

ruptive behaviors.

**BE SURE TO:** Learn all students' names as soon as possible—within the first three days of school. **BECAUSE:** Knowing students' names helps to develop a personal relationship between you and your students. It also helps with early targeting and early intervention by accurately identifying troublemakers. When you don't know names and try other forms of identification (boy-in-blue-shirt), students can play games of avoidance, denial and trickery.

**BE SURE TO:** Figure out ways of scheduling routine classroom procedures smoothly and with the least possible disruption (e.g., taking attendance, tardiness, leaving the room, bulletin boards, grades, make-up work). Teach your classroom procedures as if they were curriculum. **BECAUSE:** Student disruption and dissatisfaction can result from student anxiety and uncertainty about how to do things in the classroom. Procedures change from class to class, based on the teacher style. Students should know how to function in each class.

**BE SURE TO:** Educate yourself on the rules and policies concerning disruptive and violent behavior by special education students. **BECAUSE:** Rules governing what you can or cannot do to discipline special education students who have committed the same infractions as regular education students can be different. This can cause havoc in the classroom or on the school bus. If you are unsure of your authority or the rights of your students, ask your school's administration for clarification.

*Submitted to NSSC by Ed Muir, Director, School Safety Department, United Federation of Teachers.*

## Letter to the Editors, New York Times, supports improved security in schools

*Editors, New York Times; May 11, 1999*

Last week I downloaded a 24-page report of 136 kids and others murdered in American schools since 1992. The list comes from the National School Safety Center. The first one on the list was a kid stabbed to death in South Shore High School in Brooklyn. I remember it well as I do the three kids shot and killed at Thomas Jefferson High School and the girl whose throat was slit over a pair of earrings outside of Tilden High and died in Police Officer Herb Fisher's arms on the way to Kings County Hospital. They were killed for such trivial reasons as "He looked me down," made eye contact for a moment too long. For the most part it was payback for some real or imagined wrong.

I remember having to tell my boss, Sandy Feldman, that another kid was killed in school. After a while she hated to see me in her office doorway. When the two kids were killed on one day at Jefferson, Feldman took the lead in getting a multimillion dollar security effort in New York's high schools. The keystone of the program was the installation of airport type metal detectors in the city's roughest high schools; before that some schools had hit or miss hand held scanners.

I am a firm believer in prevention programs and was instrumental in getting the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence's "Straight Talk about Risks" program introduced into New York's public schools. I've appeared on such programs as "60 Minutes," warning of

the problem of kids and guns. However, I also believe in school security, which is the only component of a solution that the pundits have not discussed. It is one that we can't overlook.

As I looked over the list of those killed in and around schools from 1992 to 1999, we see fewer urban and more suburban and rural incidents as the decade progressed. Why? Urban schools have introduced many of the prevention programs now being talked about, and they improved school security.

"American parents don't want to send their children to armed camps" is a common response to suggestions of beefed up security. Why don't we hear similar arguments leveled at the use of metal detectors at the White House, Capitol, courthouses, government offices, airports and nightclubs?

When metal detectors were introduced in New York schools there were many of the same arguments. However, most parents and students approved as revealed by increased attendance at schools where the security measures were introduced. Best of all the killings stopped. Every other measure from better parenting, media cleanup, values education to effective gun control will take time and may or not work. However, two kids, like the ones in Littleton would not have gotten 60 bombs and all those guns into Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn this year.

*Submitted to NSSC by Ed Muir, Director, School Safety Department, United Federation of Teachers.*

## America Online's PACT – Parents and Children Together – pledge against violence

*American Online developed the following antiviolence pledge for parents and students who use AOL. While the pledge is largely symbolic, in the wake of the Columbine High School massacre, AOL Corporate Directors hoped that the pledge would get people talking about violence and doing more to prevent it. The pledge along with linked resources*

*can be found at <http://pact.aol.com/mynews/pact.adp>.*

Since the tragedy at Columbine High School, America Online's chat rooms, message boards and polls have reflected sadness, as well as a determination to make a difference. The subsequent school shooting in Conyers, Georgia, has made all of us even more concerned about vio-

lence in our schools and communities.

After hearing from families and educators who want to stop violence, we worked with experts to create PACT (Parents And Children Together).

We're asking you to take one small step and to join other Americans in taking this pledge. We hope you'll use it in a way

**(Continued on page 8)**

## Newport News, VA: Keeping children safe at school

The nostalgic image of the "little red school house" has always meant educational sanctuary, a safe and supportive learning environment for students throughout America.

For years the school building was safe and secure, with often the most critical disruptions being problems with the heating or plumbing, or possibly an epidemic of measles.

Unfortunately, things have changed. Society has become more aggressive, impatient, and violent. Schools are a reflection of society and many of these characteristics have found their way into our classrooms. Newport News Public Schools has long been aware of this disturbing transition and has been proactive in developing policy and procedure for ensuring safe and drug-free schools.

The following are strategies in place in Newport News Public Schools to address this issue:

### School Security Officer Program

Newport News Public Schools employs 52 School Security Officers. All officers are sworn Conservators of the Peace with full police powers on all Newport News School Board property. The School Security Officer Program in Newport News was established during the 1970-71 school year.

School security officers come from a wide variety of backgrounds, for example, retired military, former police officers, individuals with security backgrounds, and career school security officers who have been in the program since its inception. The majority of the officers have a range in education from two years of college through a Masters Degree level.

Officers receive annual in-service and specialized training throughout the school year. They attend conferences and seminars on various aspects of school security and safety. The security training officer holds an office in the National Association of School Security and Law Enforcement Officers.

Other officers participate on various school committees such as the SMART Team, School Safety Committee, School

Security Committee, School Discipline Staffing Committee, and the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook Committee.

### School Resource Officers

Newport News has eight School Resource Officers (uniformed police officers) at the high schools and middle schools to work with the administrators and security personnel as a team to enforce the law. They also work very closely with students and serve as instructional resources for topics such as substance abuse, laws, among others.

In 1995, the Newport News Police Department and the Newport News Public Schools developed and piloted the statewide program Class Action: Virginia Teens and the Law, taught to all eighth-grade and eleventh-grade students. This program was funded by a grant through the Governor's Office of Substance Abuse Prevention and the Secretary of Public Safety.

The purpose of this program was to introduce students to Virginia Law in a creative format taught by uniformed law enforcement officers. Many students were unaware of laws that affect them, their rights and responsibilities under the law, and the consequences for violating the law.

The program was evaluated for program effectiveness through a pre-post test format, and was rated as effective by students and school staff. Since 1996, the Class Action Program has been coordinated by the Governor's Office and is now made available to all school divisions in the Commonwealth.

### D.A.R.E. Program

The D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) Program is the backbone of a highly successful school/police partnership. This cooperative initiative began in 1987 serving fifth-grade students in both public and private schools. Since then, the program has expanded to the seventh grade and has served as a model program in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Several of the officers and Student As-

sistance Counselors have served the Eastern Regional Training Center as instructors and mentors for new D.A.R.E. officers. Officers from Newport News have also introduced the D.A.R.E. Program to the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind as well as some private programs for emotionally disabled students.

A hallmark of the Newport News D.A.R.E. Program has been the willingness to expand the role of the D.A.R.E. Officer into many facets of the school division. D.A.R.E. Officers have:

- served on elementary school core teams, crisis teams;
- conducted Conflict Mediation Training retreats for fourth- and fifth-grade students;
- co-sponsored PULSAR retreats for high school youth having frequent conflicts with authorities;
- coordinated summer programs for at-risk youth;
- co-sponsored the annual D.A.R.E. Day for students and families; and
- co-sponsored the annual D.A.R.E. To Parent Conference.

Officers have also provided extensive staff development to school faculties on subjects such as dealing with aggressive students, substance abuse issues, behavior management in the classroom and on school buses, the negative effects of music and the media on youth, and Virginia law.

The D.A.R.E. curriculum is currently taught to all fifth- and seventh-grade students, and students in grades K-4 receive visitation lessons from the officers.

### SMART Program

SMART is a computerized method of data collection regarding discipline incidents. This capability enables schools and the central administration to analyze and track incidents to spot trends, allocate resources, and utilize security and other personnel most effectively. This data collection process is essential as recommended by the National School Safety Center.

### Student Code of Conduct

The Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook clearly articulates what behav-

ior is expected of students and what consequences they will face if they commit discipline infractions. This document is correlated with the SMART Program.

### **Metal Detectors**

Security personnel and administrators use hand-held metal detectors to prevent individuals from bringing weapons and other devices into the school building. They may, as an example, randomly scan students exiting school buses in the morning. A walk-through metal detector is used to scan all spectators entering an athletic event at the school or at Todd Stadium, the division's athletic facility.

### **Video Surveillance**

Video surveillance equipment is in place in all high schools and in certain middle schools. This serves as a deterrent for undesirable behavior and activities in and out of the building and provides additional evidence for disciplinary proceedings.

### **Drugs and Munitions Dogs**

Officers from the K9 Corps in the police department, in cooperation with school administration, bring drug and weapon sniffing dogs into the schools to search for such contraband and to serve as a deterrent to students who may be inclined to bring weapons or drugs on campus.

### **Safe Line**

A 24-hour hotline has been established for students and community residents to call in tips anonymously or to make observations.

### **Substance Abuse Education**

All too often students become involved in the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Through the school division's Student Assistance Program (see below), students are provided with numerous services to address this area. If a student violates school policy regarding the use or possession of substances, a referral is made directly to SAP. Students may be mandated to participate in a 15-hour substance abuse education program, assessment, and consultation with parents. Students may also volunteer to participate

in the program. If a student is referred to one of the alternative school placements because of a substance abuse violation, completion of the program is required before a student can return to the regular education program.

### **Student Assistance Program**

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a cooperative strategy involving many different school staff members who work with students on issues that prevent students from achieving, such as substance abuse, discipline issues, court referrals, conflict mediation, truancy, personal crises, mental health issues, and dysfunctional family systems.

At the high school level, SAP is coordinated by a Student Assistance Counselor who works with the school faculty, staff, and administrative team to provide prevention and intervention services for students. In the elementary and middle schools, SAP staff and others provide services upon request. SAP serves students with high-risk behaviors in the areas of education, prevention, intervention, referral, and support partnerships within the community.

Components of SAP include:

- School Policy – provides intervention services to those who violate school policies, such as ATOD, fighting, etc.
- Program Awareness – educates faculty, parents, students, and agencies about SAP services.
- Staff and Parent Development – considers issues related to SAP (substance abuse, gang involvement, anger management, etc.).
- Internal Referral Process – identification of students for services.
- Problem Solving Team – interdisciplinary teams to address student behavior problems.
- Student Support Services – educational support groups for students (substance abuse education, children from chemically dependent families, anger management, grief issues, etc.).
- Cooperation and Referral with Community Agencies – relationships and partnerships with law enforcement, mental health, social services, juvenile court, etc.
- School Crisis Team – assists with in-

dividual and schoolwide crisis management.

- Evaluation – ensures continuous quality improvement of services and outcomes using research-based methodologies.

The video-based prevention education program, Parent To Parent, is an effort to train parents to be the primary prevention educators for their children. Both staff and parent volunteers are trained to facilitate small groups of parents in substance abuse prevention strategies, particularly for their own children in their home. This strategy begins with a belief that the most effective prevention agent in a child's life is not the school, or the police, or even the faith institutions, but mom and dad. Parents are taught how to deal with the influences of the drug culture and what to do if their child does become involved with substance abuse.

The Student Assistance Program allows schools, youth-serving agencies, parents, and students to work together for student achievement and safety.

### **Alternative Schools**

Students who have been long-term suspended or expelled from school attend one of NNPS alternative middle or high school programs. They are removed from the regular instructional program and are provided small group instruction with individual and group counseling.

### **Conflict Mediation Programs**

Peer Conflict Mediation Programs have been established at all grade levels and are utilized extensively at the middle and high school levels. Such programs have significantly reduced the number of fights in middle schools.

Each year school counselors train a cadre of students to join the mediation team to ensure a continuation of program services from year to year. Trained mediators promoted to high school immediately begin serving at that level.

### **School Safety and Security Committee**

This committee meets periodically to discuss security issues and develops procedures and documents for school use. Committee members include school ad-

ministrators, school security officers, fire and police department personnel, and city emergency operations personnel.

**Crisis Management Plans**

Each school has a crisis management plan; a crisis management plan for the central office is currently under development.

**School Safety Audits**

Teams of school personnel recently completed safety audits of all school sites as required by state law. The team recommendations are currently being considered and many of them have been completed.

**National School Safety Center**

Literature obtained through the NSSC is used in staff development and training with security officers and other school personnel. Recently, Administrative and Alternative Services sent out NSSC's checklist of behaviors that have been exhibited by students who commit violent acts on campuses. This checklist was to

be distributed to all staff (including custodians). NSSC has also conducted training for NNPS in school safety issues and school law at the Safe Schools Institute conducted last year.

Each of these defined safety measures are making a positive difference in this school division. However, Newport News Public Schools cannot take full credit. The success of our safe school efforts is the direct result of a strong, cohesive community partnership.

The ongoing support of the Newport News School Board, the leadership of the school superintendent, the committed involvement of the city police department combined with the resources of the local social services department and other community resources, all are essential components in this Consortium for Safety.

*Submitted by Wayne D. Lett, Superintendent, Tim Grimes, Student Assistance Coordinator, and Edward Brayboy, Supervisor of Administrative Services, of the Newport News Public Schools in Newport News, Virginia.*

**AOL's Pledge Against Violence (Continued from Page 5)**

that's meaningful to you — as a reminder of what you can do each day, or as a catalyst for a family or classroom discussion. After you've signed, you'll find resources that can help to build safer and stronger families, schools and communities.

**For Adults**

- I will talk with my children and the children I know, and listen to the issues they think are important.
- I will take a greater interest in my children's free time and their friends.
- I will, in my words and actions, condemn violence as a way to resolve conflict, anger or frustration.
- I will get more involved in my community and our schools.
- If I own a gun, I will make sure that children can't get their hands on it.

**For Teenagers**

- I will not put other kids down by labeling them with names or doing anything else that creates hurt feelings.
- I will talk to my parents, teachers or an adult I trust about problems at school,

with friends, or anything else that makes me feel bad.

- I will do everything I can to resolve trouble without violence — and when I can't, I will walk (or run) away.
- If I see or hear other kids talking about hurting people, or doing things that could harm others, I will tell an adult as soon as I can.
- I understand that violence is real and has permanent consequences. I will do everything I can to stay safe.

**For Kids Only**

- I understand that not all kids are the same, and that everyone wants to be liked and accepted.
- I will tell my parents or another adult I trust when I'm upset or angry about school, friends or anything else that makes me feel bad.
- I will look for ways to settle disagreements without violence.
- If I see or hear other kids talking about hurting people, or doing things that could harm others, I will tell an adult as soon as I can.

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