

TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL SAFETY FOR TENNESSEE SCHOOLS

2.300

SCHOOL SAFETY

~~For Tennessee's schools to be safe, three general objectives must be achieved: [1] schools must initiate violence prevention programs and be prepared to respond properly, prior to incidents of violence or threats to the safety of teachers and students; [2] schools must accept responsibility for instructing children and school personnel in the importance of mutual respect and the avoidance of violent actions and reactions; and [3] schools must establish a working relationship with other community agencies, especially the juvenile justice system, in order to properly respond to individual students exhibiting violent or threatening behaviors.~~

~~BEING PREPARED - SCHOOL SYSTEM RESPONSIBILITIES~~

- ~~1. By July 1, 1995 each school system will develop and adopt a school safety plan. The plan can be modeled after examples already developed by some systems or designed using guidelines provided by the State Department of Education. School systems are encouraged to form a committee with wide representation to assist in the development and implementation. Furthermore, the State Board of Education, in support of its Master Plan commitment to school based decision making, encourages school systems to allow individual schools to develop plans based on their specific safety needs.~~

~~The emergency preparedness plan required by State Board Rule 0520-1-3-3(17) should be reviewed and expanded to include nonviolent crisis intervention procedures and training for emergencies such as an armed person, an armed student, massive injury, hostile situation, school bus accident with severe injury, and evacuation plans which address special needs students. School personnel should be informed of existing statutes, rules and regulations which promote school safety.⁺~~

- ~~2. All school systems are responsible by statute to have a code of conduct.² The school safety plan should ensure the code of conduct is distributed to all faculty members, students and parents. Parental signatures certifying receipt of a code of conduct should be on file. The code of conduct should be posted in each school. School systems are encouraged to publish codes of conduct in the local newspapers.~~

Instruction

- ~~1. The State Department will prepare for approval by the Board, adjustments to the curriculum frameworks designed to intergrade violence prevention~~

⁺ Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 49-6-4201, 4214 and 4301; *see also* SBE Rule 0520-1-3-.03(17).

² Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 49-6-4001-4006.

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~~and conflict resolution instruction into school programs beginning in the primary grades.~~

- ~~2. Professional development activities should be provided to key school leaders through the Tennessee School Safety Center to help intergrate school safety activities into the classroom.~~
- ~~3. The Advisory Council for Teacher Education and Certification will ensure that teacher preparation programs provide adequate pre-service training to teacher candidates on school safety issues.~~

SCHOOL - COMMUNITY AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

- ~~1. The State Board will encourage the cooperation of state youth-related groups, business, and the media as well as partnerships with other education organizations such as TEA, TOSS, TSBA and TASSA to promote school safety.~~
- ~~2. The Tennessee School Safety Center will engage school leaders, judges, law enforcement personnel and youth-related agencies of the community to establish standard working relationships and to coordinate response to disruptive or violent students and identify and make available successful practices.~~
- ~~3. The State Board through the School Safety Advisory Council will convene school and judicial representatives as well as representatives from youth-related agencies in the community to clarify the procedures for petitioning courts for intervention. Specific information related to how schools can use the justice system and how the justice system can help schools should be developed. Additionally, ways to hold parents accountable for their children's behavior in school should be identified and disseminated to all judges and school administrators statewide.~~
- ~~4. The School Safety Advisory Council will make recommendations to the State Board for alternative placement options in addition to school-based alternative schools.~~
- ~~5. The State Board through the School Advisory Council will convene a group to study special education as it relates to federal and state statutes and regulations to develop recommendations which promote school safety.~~

~~The committee heard from students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school security officers, counselors, local school board members, judges, law enforcement personnel, legislators, and community service agency representatives. In addition,~~

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~~representatives from educational organizations such as the Tennessee Education Association and Tennessee School Boards Association were asked to participate due to their involvement in the school safety issue.~~

~~In an effort to keep the entire board informed as this process of gathering information on school safety continued, the committee organized a presentation by Memphis City Schools during the May Board meeting with respect to the comprehensive approach taken by this system on the issue of violence in schools.~~

~~The result of the meetings convened by the State Board's School Safety Committee indicated there was variation among this state's school systems with regard to the threat or actual experiences of violence in schools and with regard to the resources deemed necessary to eradicate the problem. Several issues, however, were raised at all meetings and provided a common thread of concern as state policies beneficial to all systems were considered.~~

Guns

~~Juvenile gun possession remains a concern statewide. Some students feel possession of a weapon is an acceptable risk. Apparently, others lack an appreciation for the destructive power of guns. Suggestions such as harsher penalties for those responsible for student weapon acquisition were mentioned. A member of the law enforcement community promoted the idea of holding parents strictly accountable for their child possessing a gun. He recommended removing the "reckless act" provision which is necessary to hold a parent criminally responsible. Some advanced the idea of promoting gun safety classes for parents noting that is unreasonable to assume parents won't have guns in the home. School personnel noted the importance of procedural guidelines on how to approach students with guns and other crisis situations.~~

Student Placement

~~Alternative school placements were a major topic of these meetings. The types of alternative schools vary widely across the state. Some involved separate physical structures with lower pupil teacher ratios, appropriate counseling services, and close cooperation with juvenile courts while others may simply be a separate classroom. A common theme heard across the state was the need for and the lack of sufficient alternative placement options for disruptive students. Questions about funding for these alternative schools were raised. Permanent expulsion of students was not viewed by some participants as a viable alternative since this seems to escalate crime in the community.~~

PROMISING PRACTICES

~~While these meetings brought to light the problems schools face in maintaining safe environments, they also raised an awareness of successful approaches in dealing with the~~

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~~issue. The committee learned of well planned, comprehensive approaches may school systems have undertaken. These approaches include assessments of school physical plants to make them safer and creation of procedural guidelines for handling crisis situations. Some schools are integrating conflict resolution into the curricula and developing peer mediation and problem solving activities as early as the primary grades.~~

~~Other promising activities include clarification of student codes of conduct, use of student IDs to control access, use of school uniforms, locker searches, weapons hotlines, student advisory committees, and creation of "student watch" or "parent patrol" programs. Data collection activities are being expanded to provide better information on such things as student perceptions and gang activity. Faculty training in crisis response and crisis prevention has been initiated. Safety committees are forming to identify needs at the school level and plan safety initiatives. Parent participation in safety efforts is being solicited.~~

~~Communication with the community on issues related to school violence is increasing. Enhanced relationships with the law enforcement and justice systems are growing. School resource officers are being used to not only help maintain order but also to counsel students.~~

~~It is clear that local boards of education must assume responsibility and be proactive in building safe school climates. This cannot be done in isolation nor can it be accomplished with a single approach. Students, parents, educators, law enforcement agencies, judges, legislators, community service agencies and others must collaborate with local boards to find the appropriate methods for their communities to promote and maintain safe schools.~~

WHAT NEXT

~~The information gained in the series of public meetings has been critical to the understanding of the current status of safety in schools and to the formulation of effective statewide school safety policies. Based on this experience, the Board must move ahead in its proper role as planner and policy developer.~~

~~The question is, what should be done? While the emphasis for the design and implementation of a plan to assure safe schools is at the local level, the Board has a responsibility to facilitate, provide needed resources and information, and monitor progress toward safe schools in Tennessee. One way the Board can accomplish this is by assuring that its policies and regulations promote safe schools. It can also recommend appropriate actions to the General Assembly.~~