Federal School Safety Report Released

The federal government released the Annual Report on School Safety, 1998 in conjunction with the White House Conference on School Safety October 15.

The report, produced by the departments of Education and Justice, includes a comprehensive and concise overview of research on the nature and scope of the problem, suggestions for action, and a very useful list of resources.

Major findings of the report include:

- Students are less likely to be victimized but more likely to feel unsafe.
- Most schools are safer than the community at large.
- Serious crime and violence are concentrated in a small percentage of schools.
- Violence is more likely in larger, urban schools and with older students.
- Fist fights and theft are the most common crimes.

Other findings were:

- Fewer weapons are in schools.
- Violence and drugs are linked.
- Teachers are often crime victims.

The reports suggests that communities:

- Establish school-community partnerships.
- Identify and measure the problem.
- Set measurable goals and objectives. Identify appropriate research-based programs and strategies.
- Implement the comprehensive plan.

A pdf file of the 48-page report may be found at www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/news.html on the Internet. Single copies of the report can be ordered by calling 1-877-433-7827.

What is the story in Tennessee? See Inside.
The Tennessee House of Representatives has created the Ad Hoc Committee to Study School Safety Issues with Speaker Pro-Tempore Lois DeBerry, D-Memphis, as chairperson. The committee began meeting this summer, hearing from experts and researchers and from students.

House Speaker Jimmy Naifeh established the committee and told its members, “There are no limits of what you can do; there is no time limit to report back.”

The members agreed with Naifeh that they had taken on a difficult task, but they also shared his sense of responsibility to the people of Tennessee to address their fears.

As Dr. Peter Blauvelt of the National Alliance for Safe Schools, later warned them, “There is no silver bullet” or easy answer to solve school safety problems.

Some speakers, such as Dr. Pamela L. Riley, director of the Center for the Prevention of School Violence recommended tougher weapon laws and limiting access of minors to handguns.

Riley’s recommendations also included dealing with violent students, focusing resources on schools for funding school resource officers and alternative schools and for teaching violence prevention, and strengthening the juvenile justice system, as the Juvenile Justice Reform Commission is trying to do.

Dr. Helen Smith, a forensic psychologist in Knoxville, recommended “zero tolerance” for students who bully, tease, and stigmatize other students. She pointed out that schools in the South provided less one-on-one time with students and recommended an Oregon measure that calls for psychological observation of students who bring guns to school.

Smith said all the students responsible for recent school shootings had told others of their plans. Students should be taught it’s not tattling to warn school personnel, and schools should be listening, she said.

The committee, which is meeting in cities across the state, also heard from students and school and law enforcement personnel. It is expected to meet again in December.

The legislative addresses of committee members are listed below. Legislative offices are in Nashville.

- Lois M. DeBerry (D-91), 15 Legislative Plaza, 37243-0191, (2429 Verdun St, Memphis, 38114-5847) rep.lois.deberry@legislature.state.tn.us, (615) 741-3830
- John J. DeBerry, Jr. (D-90), 26 Legislative Plaza, Nashville, TN 37243-0190, (207 Sledge Ave, Memphis, 38104-4659) rep.john.deberry@legislature.state.tn.us, (615) 741-2239
- Jere L. Hargrove (D-42), 18A Legislative Plaza, rep.jere.hargrove@legislature.state.tn.us, 741-1875 (310A East Broad, Cookeville, TN 38501, (615) 526-2223, Fax (615) 528-2394)
- Mark L. Maddox (D-76), 109 War Memorial Building, 37243-0176 (245 Legens, Dresden, TN 38225, (615) 741-7847) rep.mark.maddox@legislature.state.tn.us, 741-7847.
- Steve McDaniel (R-72), 103 War Memorial Building, 37243, (97 Battleground Drive, Parkers Crossroads, TN 38388, (901) 968-7883), rep.steve.mcdaniel@legislature.state.tn.us, 741-0750.
- Kim A. McMillan (D-67), 32 Legislative Plaza, 37243, (P.O. Box 365, Clarksville, TN 37041-0365, (931) 906-0902, Fax (931) 906-0904), rep.kim.mcmillan@legislature.state.tn.us, 741-2043
- Page Walley (R-80), 213 War Memorial Building, 37243, (23085 Highway 18-N Toone, TN 38381-7975, (901) 658-2237, Fax (901) 658-2237), rep.page.walley@legislature.state.tn.us, 741-2054.
The Tennessee Department of Education is evaluating applications for Safe Schools Act of 1998 grant funding. Ten million dollars will be distributed to local school systems for:

- Innovative violence prevention programs;
- Conflict resolution programs;
- Disruptive or assaultive behavior management;
- Improved school security;
- Peer mediation;
- Training for employees on risk factors associated with perpetrators of school-related violence.

The funding amount and match required from grantees are based on the Better Education Program (BEP) formula that considers allocation and local fiscal capacity.

Local school systems are allowed flexibility to experiment with innovative approaches to school safety. Schools receiving funds for the 1998-99 school year will be considered for continuation funding.

According to DOE guidelines, applicants should:

- base programs on a thorough assessment of system needs;
- involve community stakeholders as well as building administrators, teachers, and parents;
- rely on research to determine the most successful program to meet local needs.

Grants will be administered by the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Programs and Office of Administrative Services. Reimbursement for grantees’ expenses may be requested monthly.

Other DOE safety-related programs include:

- Tennessee School Safety Center;
- School/Court/Community Partnership Grants – supports cooperative activity between schools, juvenile courts, and community-based youth service organizations;
- Youth Leadership for a Safe and Drug-Free Tennessee – provides leadership training for young people;
- Governor’s Conference for a Safe and Drug-Free Tennessee – hosts annual conference to share successful strategies;
- Drug Abuse Resistance Education – grants to local school systems and law enforcement agencies.

The Tennessee School Safety Center, which opened in 1995, provides other training and technical assistance to local schools and communities in the areas of violence prevention and school safety. Training programs include school safety planning, crisis management, verbal de-escalation techniques, and school disciplinary procedures. A clearinghouse for print and audiovisual resources is also maintained.

The School Safety Center cooperated with the Tennessee School Boards Association to sponsor a Safe Homes-Schools-Safe Communities Summit this summer. Experts from across the state and the nation shared information with educators, elected officials, law enforcement officers, and community members.

The DOE also administers federal funds under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program.

For more information, contact

Tennessee School Safety Center
7th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243-0375
(615) 741-3248
Mike Herrmann
mherrmann@mail.state.tn.us
(615) 741-8468
School Safety: A Concern in Tennessee and the Nation

Despite the dramatic nature of recent school shootings, schools are safer than the community and may be no more dangerous today than in the past, according to the Annual Report on School Safety, 1998.

In 1996, 26 of every 1,000 student were victims of serious violent crimes away from school, more than twice the rate of for students at school (10 per 1,000).

Two major research studies - the National Crime Victimization Study (NCVS) and University of Michigan Monitoring the Future Survey (MFS) - have been tracking school violence over time and in greater detail.

The NCVS, which interviewed 10,000 randomly sampled students, found little change in the percent of students who reported property or violent victimization between 1989 and 1995. The survey found violent victimization had risen from 3.4 percent in 1989 to 4.2 percent in 1996, a 10 percent increase. However, the study found the percentage of students reporting gang presence nearly doubled and that drug prevalence increased slightly.

The Monitoring the Future Study, which surveys 18,000 students per year, found rates of victimization reported for the previous 12 months have changed little since the annual surveys began in 1976.

In 1996, according to the MFS, 4.9 percent of students reported being injured with a weapon, down from 5.7 percent in 1976; 13.2 percent reported being threatened with a weapon; and 21.6 percent reported being threatened without a weapon.

According to the 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey, 7.1 percent of Tennessee students reported being threatened or injured by a weapon on school property. This figure was slightly lower than the national percentage of 7.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1997</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Nation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt too unsafe to go to school within last 30 days</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carried a weapon on school property</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened OR injured with a weapon on school property*</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a physical fight on school property*</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property stolen/damaged on school property*</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One or more times during the preceding 12 months.

Fear is a problem for schools. Nationally 46 percent of students said fear had prompted behavior changes.

Four percent of the nation’s middle and high school students report they never feel safe at school, according to pollster Louis Harris. Other 1994 national surveys found that 40 percent of parents of high school students were very or somewhat worried about their child’s safety and 80 percent of people responding said violence was a serious problem.

Last year, 126,813 Tennessee students were suspended, and 2,619 were expelled. Expulsions dropped, reversing a trend. While 14 percent of expulsions were for violence or threatened violence, 7.3 percent were for firearms, and 3.1 percent for other weapons. More than a third of expulsions were for possession/use of drugs. A new category this year, battery of staff, accounted for 0.6 percent.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expulsions in Tennessee Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/Threatened Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Possession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tennessee Department of Education
Preventing Problems and School Violence

Tennessee schools like other schools in the nation use a variety of tools to combat school violence.

The Tennessee Department of Education reports that research shows the best way to prevent violence is to have an educational program that engages the students and keeps them active/interested.

Schools across the country have instituted school safety strategies, including expelling students whose conduct makes them a risk to other students, restricting access to outsiders, placing school resource or law enforcement officers in the schools, and reducing potential for conflict and violence.

In 1995, the state legislature instituted a “zero tolerance” policy for state schools. Schools are required to expel for a period of one calendar year any student who brings a weapon to school. Students will also be expelled for illegally possessing narcotic or stimulant drugs and committing battery on a teacher. State law gives schools the right to search students or their possessions on school property.

Some experts point out that expulsion further isolates already disturbed students, as in the case of the student in Springfield, Oregon, whose shooting spree happened after he was suspended for bringing a gun to school. The first item on the Tennessee School Boards Association legislative agenda addresses this concern. It is a request for adequate funding for alternative schools for suspended and expelled students.

Nationally, 96 percent of schools required visitors to sign in before entering the school. Fifty-three percent controlled access to school buildings, and 24 percent, to school grounds.

Peaceable Schools

Schools in Tennessee can receive training in conflict resolution from the William J. Harbison Foundation of the Tennessee Bar Association. The training is funded through the Tennessee School Safety Center.

Approximately 900 staff members from 165 Tennessee schools have received the training during the past two summers. During the training, the schools design individualized school conflict-resolution plans based on school needs. Suzanne Stampley, Peaceable Schools director, reports a high degree of implementation. She said 98 percent of this summer’s participants reported that they are implementing the plan created during the training.

Recent studies show that implementation of conflict resolution programs has an academic payoff in rising test scores, Stampley said. Implementation is most effective if tied to classwork.

Characteristics of Effective Prevention Programs

A Clearinghouse on Urban Education study found that the most effective prevention programs:

- Make an accurate assessment of the problem, including gang activity.
- Use all community resources, including social service and law enforcement.
- Incorporate family services.
- Intervene early in a child’s life.
- Include positive experiences.
- Create and communicate clearly defined behavior codes and enforce them strictly and uniformly.
- Look at the effort as long-term.

A U.S. Department of Education study found that 78 percent of schools surveyed nationally had some form of conflict resolution in 1996-97. Sixty-eight percent of schools with programs included student involvement in resolving student conduct problems.
Warning Signs

Presenters to the Legislative Committee on School Safety were told that no list can predict which student will turn deadly, but risk factors are known. The National School Safety Center provides a checklist of characteristics associated with school violence. This checklist is a tool to identify students whose needs require more attention.

1. Has a history of tantrums and uncontrollable angry outbursts.
2. Characteristically resorts to name calling, cursing or abusive language.
3. Habitually makes violent threats when angry.
4. Has previously brought a weapon to school.
5. Has a background of serious disciplinary problems at school and in the community.
6. Has a background of drug, alcohol or other substance abuse or dependency.
7. Is on the fringe of his/her peer group with few or no close friends.
8. Is preoccupied with weapons, explosives, or other incendiary devices.
9. Has previously been truant, suspended, or expelled from school.
10. Displays cruelty to animals.
11. Has little or no supervision and support from parents or a caring adult.
12. Has witnessed or been a victim of abuse or neglect in the home.
13. Has been bullied and/or bullies or intimidates peers or younger children.
14. Tends to blame others for difficulties and problems s/he causes her/himself.
15. Consistently prefers TV shows, movies or music expressing violent themes and acts.
16. Prefers reading materials dealing with violent themes, rituals, and abuse.
17. Reflects anger, frustration, and the dark side of life in school essays or writing projects.
18. Is involved with a gang or an antisocial group on the fringe of peer acceptance.
19. Is often depressed and/or has significant mood swings.
20. Has threatened or attempted suicide.

Source: National School Safety Center.

Resources

Other useful federal publications include:
• *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* by the Department of Education and Department of Justice (1998);

Single hard copies of federal publications can be ordered by calling 1-877-433-7827. The TTY/TDD number is 1-877-576-7734.

U.S. Dept. of Education (www.ed.gov)
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202
Safe and Drug-Free Schools Programs Office (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS)

U.S. Department of Justice (www.usdoj.gov)
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001
Justice Information Center (www.ncjrs.org)

Continued on page 7.
The governor’s TNKids initiative has announced several activities for the future.

A statewide teleconference, “TNKids Growing and Learning,” on brain development is scheduled for Jan. 29. The teleconference will educate parents, educators, and caregivers on the importance of early childhood development.

A reading initiative for elementary students was announced at Pond Gap Elementary School in Knoxville. Hambleton Hill Publishers is donating books worth $1.2 million for students in grades kindergarten through three.

A free compact disc or cassette will be given to every baby born in Tennessee in 1999. “Listen, Learn and Grow,” music to stimulate and inspire young minds, is aimed at enhancing early childhood brain development. Music giant NAXOS is a partner with the state on this project.

Approximately 30,000 children will be given free eye screenings though the coordinated efforts of the Lions Clubs of Tennessee, Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital, the Pediatric Ophthalmology Division at Vanderbilt Medical Center, and the state.

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (www.hhs.gov)
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20201

Centers for Disease Control - Adolescent & School Health - www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash
Violence Prevention - www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/dvp.htm

Other Sources:

Tennessee School Boards Association (www.tsba.state.tn.us), 1130 Nelson Merry Street, Nashville, TN, 37203, (800) 448-6465, (615) 741-0666, Fax (615) 741-2824

North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence (www2.ncsu.edu/nscu/cep/PreViolence), 20 Enterprise St., Suite 2, Raleigh, NC 27607-7375

National School Safety Center (www.nssc1.org), 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290, Westlake Village, CA 91362

National PTA (www.pta.org), 330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100, Chicago, Illinois 60611, Phone: (312) 670-6782
Meetings and Events

Council Activities
Northeast Tennessee Regional Council
Nov. 12, CHILD WATCH activity
Nov. 20, 10:00 a.m.-Noon, Council Meeting, “Grant Search,” Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, Johnson City
Feb. 17, Council Meeting, TBA

East Tennessee Regional Council
Dec. 2, Public Officials Breakfast, TBA
Jan. 6, Council Meeting, Update on Department of Children’s Services/Non-Custodial Network, TBA
Feb. 3, Council Meeting, Juvenile Justice Reform Commission, TBA

Southeast Tennessee Regional Council
Dec. 1, 1:30-3:30, Hiwassee Council, “Parents Just Have to Be Blunt,” Cleveland State

Northwest Tennessee Regional Council
Nov. 13, 9 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Joint Northwest and Southwest Meeting. Paris Landing State Park, “Teamwork 98-Project Child”

Southwest Tennessee Regional Council
Dec. 16-17, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Meeting, Nashville, (615) 741-2633

C-PORT Review Schedule
Nov. 16-20, South Central Region, Exit Conference - Dec. 1
Dec. 7-11, Davidson County, exit conference - Dec. 18
Call TCCY at (615) 741-2633 for more information

Special Events
Dec. 3-4, Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Juvenile Court Information System Workshop, Regal Maxwell House Hotel, Nashville, (615) 741-3980
Dec. 8-9, Select Committee on Children and Youth Meeting, “School Health,” Meadowview Convention Center, Kingsport, (615) 741-6239
Dec. 15, 11:00-2:00 p.m., TennCare Partners Advisory Committee Meeting, Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute, Nashville, (615) 741-5949
Feb. 8-9, Tennessee Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges Mid-Winter Conference, (For Judges and Referees only), Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nashville, (615) 741-3980
Feb. 24, 9:00-4:00 p.m., Tennessee Conference for Child Care (TACC), “Communicating With Troubled Youth and Essential Elements of Good Teamwork,” Memphis, (615) 385-4433
Feb. 25, 9:00-Noon, Tennessee Conference for Child Care (TACC), “Helping Parents of Youths in Care,” Memphis, (615) 385-4433