
Foreword

Nothing makes headlines more quickly than a school shooting. Such an event violates an iconic safe haven and prompts parents in every community to wonder, “Could it happen here?” Suddenly popular media outlets are activated, archived Columbine footage is flashed across TV screens, and school safety consultants are answering insistent questions: “Are schools safe? Are we investing enough in security personnel and equipment? Or—gasp—do we need a national policy?”

“These kinds of situations are just like terrorist situations,” National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Specialist for School Safety Bill Bond said on the occasion of one school shooting. “When people have so much hate in them that they don’t mind dying, you don’t have any deterrents left. People want to have metal detectors and security guards and all of this, but the real thing that makes a difference is working with the kids and adjusting to the kids” (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Bond’s comments strike a stark contrast between how school safety is considered by the general public and by school leaders. For school leaders, safety isn’t just about preventing a tragic event: It’s about maintaining a personalized environment in which every student is known and feels valued. It’s about providing opportunities for every student to be successful. It’s about modeling and fostering a pervasive attitude—on the part of every adult and student in the school—that threatening and belittling behaviors have no place in any school.

Not surprisingly, the conditions that mitigate school violence are the same conditions that promote high academic achievement. *Breaking Ranks II* and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (NASSP 2004, 2006), NASSP’s handbooks on reform in high schools and middle schools, respectively, call for a school culture centered around personalization because, to quote educational reformer Ted Sizer (1999), “We cannot teach students well if we do not know them well” (p. 6). And knowing every student well encourages educators to work through their frustrations so that, even if those frustrations have not been resolved, at least they have been aired constructively.

From 2004 to 2007, members of the NASSP were regularly reminded of these themes in the “Safety Tips for Principals” column in *Principal Leadership* magazine. To their credit, column authors Dennis Lewis and Judy Brunner address the spectrum of safety issues—from the day-to-day behaviors that foster a positive climate, to warning signs of violence, to the specifics of crisis preparedness and response.

I commend Dennis and Judy on their work to ensure safe environments in schools and further commend them for taking their guidance to a broader audience. While the principal can provide leadership, it is only with a cooperative effort on the part of all with a stake in school success that educators can create truly personalized environments and can anticipate a day when news of a school shooting no longer hits the headlines.

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