School Safety: What Schools Can Do

A safe school is one that is free from violent and criminal behaviors and allows staff, students and community members to feel connected to the school and able to participate in its major functions – teaching and learning. Violent or criminal behaviors at school compromise the learning environment and put health and safety in jeopardy. The question is often asked, "What can we do to make our schools safer?" Unfortunately there is no simple solution to creating safe environments or to prepare for all possible emergencies. However, the following is a list of ten action items for schools to consider. Appropriate physical features, campus layout, prevention programs, policies, and procedures of schools can minimize the impact of disruptions and intrusions. Utilizing multidisciplinary teams to discuss safety issues based on school and community needs unify efforts to support a safe learning environment. An attached bibliography provides the research that supports the effectiveness of these action items.

1. **Include safety in the district and school mission statements**[17,18,19]
    - Reference a safe environment that is conducive to learning in the district and school mission statements
    - Support the mission by dedicating resources to safety

2. **Develop a Comprehensive School Safety Plan**[2, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 17, 18]
    - Form a multidisciplinary school safety committee of key personnel that meet regularly to plan and implement prevention and safety efforts based upon data
    - Utilize a comprehensive and standardized safety and discipline tracking and reporting system
    - Base the safety plan on a comprehensive needs assessment that includes incident data, student prevalence data, crime statistics, and climate survey information
    - Develop measurable goals and objectives for the plan
    - Monitor data and evaluate programs and policies to ensure that goals and objectives of the plan are met
    - Share information with stakeholders

3. **Ensure a Supportive Climate**[2, 6, 8, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21]
    - Make the campus welcoming to students, staff and visitors
    - Ensure that students are engaged in school work that is challenging, informative and rewarding
    - Display diligent and impartial behavior when supervising students
    - Respond to students in a caring and non-shaming manner
    - Establish an engaging system of extracurricular programs and services
    - Be proactive in connecting with students and parents

4. **Implement Drug and Violence Prevention and Early Intervention Programs**[2, 3, 6, 16]
    - Target prevention efforts on the needs identified through a comprehensive needs assessment (Item 2)
    - Utilize research-based prevention curricula, programs and strategies that build knowledge and skills and are likely to change behavior
    - Emphasize school-wide (universal) approaches to prevention but also include strategies for at-risk and high-risk students (select and targeted)
    - Involve families and the community in drug and violence prevention trainings
    - Reinforce pro-social behaviors through adult modeling
    - Ensure prevention and intervention programs are sustained, coordinated, and comprehensive

5. **Utilize a Threat Assessment Protocol**[7, 10, 18, 20, 22, 23]
    - Form a well-trained threat assessment team that convenes as needed
    - Utilize the Arizona Threat Management Protocol or comparable protocol
    - Develop the capacity to evaluate information that is useful in determining whether a threat might materialize
    - Share information regarding potentially dangerous conditions or people with appropriate school personnel and service providers
    - Identify and provide resources or referrals for students with behavioral health needs

6. **Collaborate with Community Agencies**[6, 8 11, 15, 18, 21]
    - Develop written agreements with community agencies to provide for a continuum of services for students and families
    - Coordinate with law enforcement, including advance coordination on type of student infractions that warrant their involvement and law enforcement access to students
    - Coordinate with juvenile justice on the needs of students on probation and for services for the general student population
    - Screen students for mental health concerns and refer to behavior health providers for services
    - Coordinate with social service and health service providers for the health and well-being of the school community
    - Coordinate for the provision of youth development programs, such as mentoring and recreation

7. **Screen and Monitor Employees**[19]
    - Conduct a thorough background check and fingerprint clearance of potential new employees and volunteers that work directly with students but without certificated supervision
    - Establish job performance criteria and an equitable system of periodic observations and evaluations
    - Develop a system for recognizing and handling employees who are arrested for criminal offenses
    - Promptly remove staff who are incompetent or pose a risk to students

8. **Secure the Campus**[2, 8, 9, 15, 17]
    - Conduct an annual school security site assessment that is based on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) concepts
    - Utilize CPTED recommendations when possible
    - Control access to the campus
    - Ensure campus is clean and inviting
    - If utilizing security technology, ensure that it's use will improve needs identified in your site assessment

9. **Develop and Practice School Emergency Response Plans**[4, 5, 7, 8, 12]
    - Form a multidisciplinary emergency response team that includes first responders
    - Develop a multi-hazards plan based on the *Arizona School Emergency Response Plan: Minimum Requirements* and utilizes the state template
    - Train school personnel and practice the plan school-wide
    - Plan for the mental health needs of students and staff post-crisis so that learning can resume as quickly as possible

10. Implement Effective Policies and Procedures[8, 11, 18, 21]

- Develop policies and procedures that are consistent with state and federal law
- Develop and consistently implement a school discipline code of student behavior that supports and rewards pro-social behavior
- Train school personnel on policies and procedures including the need to take immediate and appropriate action on all reports of alcohol and drug use or sales, threats, bullying, weapon possession, or victimization
- Train students and inform parents on discipline and safety policies
- Utilize best practice approaches to safety situations which consider alternatives to disciplinary approaches and identify and support behavioral health needs of students
- Incorporate Items 2 – 9 on this list into the school/district policies and procedures

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