

Creating a Safe School Building

Safe schools not only have proactive prevention and intervention plans, well-organized crisis teams and clear lines of communication—they also provide physically safe havens for students and staff. To assure a safe learning environment:

- Light all hallways adequately during the day.
- Close off unused stairwells or do not leave areas of the school unused.
- Install all lockers in areas where they are easily visible, or remove lockers altogether.
- Minimize blind spots; use convex mirrors by portable classrooms or to allow hall monitors to see around corners.
- Prohibit posters in classroom windows.
- Install an alarm system and/or a closed-circuit television monitoring system.
- Keep buildings clean and maintained.
- Locate playground equipment where it is easily observed.
- Limit roof access by keeping dumpsters away from building walls.
- Cover drainpipes so they cannot be climbed.
- Avoid decorative hedges; plant trees at least ten feet from buildings.
- Trim trees and shrubs to limit outside hiding places for people or weapons.
- Keep school grounds free of gravel or loose rock surfaces.
- Ensure vehicle access around the building(s) for night surveillance and emergency vehicles.
- Design parking lots to discourage through traffic; install speed bumps.
- Mix faculty and student parking.
- Create a separate parking lot for students and staff who arrive early or stay late, and monitor these lots carefully.
- Use fencing and gates with discretion and choose attractive wrought iron styles instead of chain link fences. Secure them with heavy-duty padlocks.
- Establish a policy to have the school campus fully lighted or totally dark at night.
- Keep a complete list of staff members who have keys to the building(s).
- Do not allow graffiti to linger on walls. Follow the three "Rs" after discovery-- read, record (i.e. photograph or videotape) and remove. Inflammatory bathroom graffiti needs to be removed daily.
- Offer school- or community-based activities for students after school and on the weekends. Institute after-school academic and recreational programs for latchkey students.
- Conduct a thorough background check on anyone applying to work in the school to assure that no one is hired who has been convicted of sexual assault, child molestation, or pornography, or has a history of violent criminal behavior. Do not make a hiring decision before the check is completed.

—Adapted from *Reducing School Violence: Building a Framework for School Safety*, produced by Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (associated with the University of North Carolina-Greensboro) and the Florida Department of Education, with assistance from the Southeast Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

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