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ABSTRACT

With the support of a grant from the Metropolitan Life Foundation, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) sought to broaden discussion of violence in schools and link it to efforts to restructure schools and coordinate social services. The grant enabled ECS to use the Metropolitan Life Foundation's 1993 survey of violence in the public schools as a centerpiece as it convened a panel of specialists and practitioners in 1994 to consider the issues involved in youth violence. The ECS also sponsored cross-role group meetings in five states to discuss policy alternatives for dealing with violence. This document brings together recommendations from the policy discussions and information about state activities gathered from the ECS Information Clearinghouse. It reviews what is being done at federal and state levels, and highlights prevention approaches at state and local levels. Policy recommendations center on gathering and sharing information, researching strategy effectiveness, providing services for youth and families, and working in other ways to reduce the stress that results in violence, particularly in urban schools. An appendix lists 19 resources, and another lists 11 selected model programs. (SLD)

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YOUTH VIOLENCE

A POLICYMAKERS' GUIDE

ECS
EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

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March 1996

Metropolitan Life Foundation

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EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

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The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The mission of ECS is to help state leaders develop and carry out policies that promote improved performance of the education system, as reflected in increased learning by all citizens.

Forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS offices are at 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427.

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FOREWORD

Almost everyone agrees that violence and crime, especially in our nation's public schools, are among the most serious issues facing our society. As a growing social issue, violence is at an all-time high. Violence is a social problem that cuts across governmental sectors and socioeconomic levels — it is a health-care problem, an economic problem, a welfare problem, a justice problem, an education problem. Comprehensive strategies to stop the spread of violence in our society, and particularly in our schools where the youngest of our citizens are affected, are absolutely necessary.

The Metropolitan Life Foundation's *Survey of the American Teacher, 1993: Violence in America's Public Schools*, came at a time when there was a new sense of urgency about this issue. The survey noted that "violence or the threat of violence has an impact on the way teachers and students work in the classroom." Responding to growing public demands to end youth violence, many state policymakers focused on finding solutions. Much of the debate in the early part of the decade centered around law-and-order legislation at the state level and severe disciplinary actions at the school level. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) felt the time was right for a more thoughtful discussion of this issue.

With support of a grant from the Metropolitan Life Foundation, ECS sought to broaden the discussion of violence in the schools and link it to efforts to restructure schools and coordinate social services. The Metropolitan Life grant, using the survey as a centerpiece, enabled ECS to: (1) convene a panel of specialists and practitioners at the 1994 ECS National Forum and Annual Meeting, (2) sponsor cross-role group meetings in five states (Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Nevada and New York) in 1994-95 to discuss policy alternatives dealing with violence in and around schools, and (3) provide small grants to additional states to assist them in convening policymakers on this issue. The statewide meetings included representatives of criminal justice, education, mental health, social services, legal, law enforcement and substance abuse agencies, as well as communities.

Finally, the grant supported the production and dissemination of this publication for policymakers, other ECS constituents and the many other people interested in education.

This document brings together recommendations from the policy discussions and information about state activities gathered from the ECS Information Clearinghouse, which regularly tracks state activities across the nation. The document looks at what states, districts and the federal government are doing to reduce school violence. It concludes with policy recommendations gleaned from the statewide meetings and other discussions. We hope this publication serves as a useful discussion guide for policymakers and others seeking ways to end the violence afflicting too many of our nation's young people.

INTRODUCTION

Violence. It is too common in American homes, neighborhoods, workplaces and schools. The entertainment industry glamorizes it. The media exploit it. Too many children learn it and live it.

According to a 1995 report by the U.S. Justice Department, one in four people arrested for weapons crimes is a juvenile, and weapons offenses are the fastest growing youth crime. A 1993 Justice Department report found that approximately three million thefts and violent crimes occur on or near school campuses each year — one crime every six seconds. About 15% of 9th-12th grade students questioned said their school has gangs; 16% said a fellow student has threatened or attacked one of their school's teachers; and almost 20% said they have carried a weapon at least once.

In 1993, when the Metropolitan Life Foundation focused its annual survey of teachers on violence, it found that the threat of violence affects teachers' ability to teach. Because of violence or the threat of violence, teachers said they were less eager to go to work. One-third felt their colleagues were less likely to discipline students, and half said students paid less attention to learning in the classroom.

In the same survey, 22% of students admitted that violence and the threat of violence made them less eager to go to school. About 12% said violence actually made them stay home or cut a class; 16% said it made them reluctant to participate in class discussions; and 25% said it lessened the quality of education at their school.

In the latest Metropolitan Life survey, 41% of junior and high school teachers said the incidence of violence in and around schools is "very" or "somewhat serious." One-fourth rated the number of students carrying handguns, knives and weapons to school with the same severity.

High school students say they:

- **Have gangs in their school — 15%**
- **Have carried a weapon — 20%**
- **Have cut classes because of violence — 12%**
- **Think education quality has declined because of violence — 25%**

Teachers say violence or the threat of it:

- **Makes them less interested in going to work — 33%**
- **Makes them less likely to discipline students — 33%**
- **Makes students pay less attention — 50%**
- **Is serious or very serious around schools — 41%**

This much personal exposure to violence has a detrimental effect on students' ability to learn in school. A 1994 National Governors' Association publication entitled *Kids and Violence* concluded that "children who are exposed to violence often have difficulty focusing on school work or engaging in other activities that are the treasured experiences of childhood .... Children must be safe at school ... to learn successfully."

A 1995 Louis Harris and Associates survey of 7th-12th graders in public, private and parochial schools nationwide supported that conclusion.

In that survey:

- About 11% of students said they had stayed home from school or cut certain classes because they were afraid of violence.
- Some 12% said their grades had dropped.
- For at-risk students, the problem is even more serious; 34% of those students said they had missed school, and 31% said fear of violence had negatively affected their grades.

Obviously, something must be done. But youth violence cannot be isolated as simply a school problem. Violence in schools has become so frightening that the federal government and almost every state is dealing specifically with the question of how to stop it and, more important, how to prevent it. In the first month of 1996 alone, seven states proposed legislation designed to make schools safer.

WHAT IS BEING DONE — FEDERAL LEVEL

"[T]o ensure ... students work and learn in a violence-free environment, clear and consistent policies which state that violence and weapon carrying will not be tolerc : need to be in place and need to be enforced in an equitable manner."

— U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley

A 1994 federal law has had a huge effect on the direction states are going to deal with the issue of violence in schools. Responding to the increasing incidences of school violence, President Clinton in October 1994 signed the Gun-Free Schools Act as part of the Improving America's Schools Act (PL 103-382). The act required each state receiving funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to put in effect, by October 20, 1995, a law mandating that weapon-toting students be automatically expelled from school for at least one calendar year. States and school districts that already had "zero-tolerance" weapons policies were required to adjust them to match the federal mandate.

The federal law defines weapons as guns, bombs, grenades, rockets and missiles. Knives and fireworks are not weapons according to the law, but state 'awmakers can choose to define knives as weapc ns. Also exempted from this federal weapons lis . are guns used in hunting clubs, military classes or similar activities.

"Expulsion" is defined in the law as removing a student from the school location where the violation occurred. The law does not require expelled students to attend alternative education classes, nor does it prohibit them from doing so. It does require schools to refer offenders to the criminal or juvenile justice systems.

A student's right to due process or a hearing cannot be waived by the law, and superintendents or school boards can modify the one-year expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis. The law, however, does not allow the use of case-by-case exceptions to avoid overall compliance.

Conflict with other laws

The law presents some problems, including the fact that other federal laws may prevent or make it difficult to expel a disruptive student. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for example, requires that all students with disabilities receive a "free, appropriate, public education ... [in the] ... least restrictive environment."

Responding to the increasing incidences of school violence, President Clinton in October 1994 signed the Gun-Free Schools Act as part of the Improving America's Schools Act (PL 103-382).

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The law presents some problems, including the fact that other federal laws may prevent or make it difficult to expel a disruptive student.

According to IDEA, a disabled student may be suspended for up to 10 days if he or she commits an infraction proven to be related to his disability. If the student's behavior is not related to his or her disability, schools may follow routine disciplinary actions. If routine disciplinary action means suspending the student for more than 10 days, parents must give their consent and may request a due process hearing.

During the hearing, the student in question must remain in his present school.

The contradiction these two laws present has wreaked havoc for education policymakers, educators and others involved, including students with disabilities who were caught somewhere in the middle of the storm.

In fall 1994, Congress took action to calm the storm and amended IDEA to be consistent with the gun-free schools legislation. Now, if a disabled student violates a zero-tolerance weapons policy, he or she may be sent to an alternative education setting for a maximum of 45 days and must remain there during a due process hearing.

Draft legislation currently circulating in Congress would make it easier for school officials to reassign or expel disruptive disabled students.

Some states already are dealing with this issue. When the Colorado legislature, for example, passed the state's zero-tolerance mandate, it also passed legislation (HB 93-1095) allowing a disabled student who is a discipline problem to be suspended or expelled unless the student's action was directly attributable to his or her disabling condition.

WHAT IS BEING DONE — STATE RESPONSES

"Schools aren't shooting galleries. The chances of anyone getting shot are very, very small. But we haven't yet come to grips with the core of kids who are becoming more violent, more armed and unaffected by the norms of society. It's a real cancer, and we're not addressing it."

— Frank Newman, ECS president

Most states have passed legislation to comply with the federal mandate of the gun-free schools legislation. Many of these laws require some level of collaboration among schools, law enforcement agencies and other public service agencies, especially when it comes to reporting offenses. All have an effect on district and school operations. To date:

- At least 40 states have enacted some kind of law that requires **automatic expulsion of students** who carry weapons to school or school-sponsored activities.
- Approximately half of the states have established or **increased penalties** for young people who violate weapons rules.
- At least six states have passed legislation to **hold parents and guardians more responsible** for the behavior of youth, including access to weapons and willful destruction of property. For example, Alabama's "Safe School and Drug-free School Policy," enacted in May 1994, makes parents or guardians financially liable for damage to school property caused by their children who are under 18 years old. Nevada's "Felonies Committed on School Property" law (AB 385) "removes the limitation on the civil liability of parents for the delinquent act of a minor."
- A few states **suspend or revoke driving privileges** for young people who violate weapon- and violence-related laws. More commonly, more than a dozen states suspend drivers' licenses for excessive school absences, so students in those states would lose their licenses if they were expelled or suspended for weapons violations.

States that hold parents and guardians responsible for their children's actions:
- Alabama
- Florida (access to guns only)
- Michigan
- Nevada
- North Dakota
- South Carolina (have to participate in correction)

- At least eight states have passed or recently proposed laws to allow school boards to require public school students to wear **uniforms** or adhere to dress codes.
- About 10 states have approved or proposed laws to increase the **exchange of information** about violent students between school districts and law enforcement agencies.

States with dress code bills:
- California
- Indiana
- Louisiana
- Tennessee
- Utah
- Virginia

In just the first month of 1996, at least seven states proposed legislation to deal with increasing youth violence. In Colorado, for example, proposed legislation would authorize a school district to transmit to another school district

discipline information concerning a transfer student. Another bill would create four pilot schools for 6th-9th graders who have been or are at risk of being expelled. An Iowa proposal would provide **legal protection** for people who try to stop fights at school or school functions.

COLORADO is among states leading the way in passing zero-tolerance legislation and requiring parental responsibility. In 1993, before enacting the federal law, state legislators, encouraged by Governor Roy Romer, passed a law (HB 93S-1001) requiring mandatory expulsion of weapon-carrying students under the age of 18. But the law also states that "when a pupil is expelled by a school district for the remainder of the school year, the parent, guardian or legal custodian is responsible for seeing that the [state's] compulsory school attendance statute is complied with during the period of expulsion...."

As part of this legislation, each Colorado school district must designate at least one employee to act as an attendance officer. Non-complying students and parents may be summoned to court where, according to the state law, "... proceedings shall be initiated to compel compliance." If a student does not comply with the court order, the court may require him or her to perform community service, participate in supervised activities and "other activities having goals which shall ensure that the child has an opportunity to obtain a quality education." The court may not incarcerate the child, but may jail or fine a parent $25 a day if the parent refuses or neglects to obey the order.

SOUTH CAROLINA has been addressing the issue of school violence for several years. Its Safe Schools Act of 1990 increased penalties for carrying weapons on school property and for distributing drugs near schools. The act also made it possible for minors 15 years or older who violate sections of the act to be tried in general sessions court rather than family court. Additionally, the Safe Schools Act required school districts to report school crimes and use a checklist to assess safety strengths and weaknesses. Act 506 of 1992 allowed public schools to bar enrollment of students convicted of activities defined as "violent crimes," possession of a weapon and drug trafficking. In 1993, Act 117 added assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature to the list of reasons students could be denied enrollment in a public school.

South Carolina's Schoolhouse Safety Alliance Act of 1994 made its anti-violence efforts more comprehensive by focusing on interagency collaboration, parental responsibility and judicial response. The act encourages violence prevention strategies that specify clear roles and responsibilities for schools, law enforcement officials, local community agencies and parents. Responses and information about juveniles taken into custody are coordinated and shared among school officials and law enforcement agencies.

Restructured schools

Restructuring schools to improve teaching and learning can pay dividends in student behavior as well. Studies of several networks with schools around the country have found improvements in school climate and reduced incidences of discipline referrals. The Accelerated Schools Project, for example, headed by Henry Levin, emphasizes enriched learning experiences for all children. A study of its more than 700 elementary and middle schools in 37 states found improvements such as these:

- Suspensions dropped more than 50% in a Massachusetts middle school after it embraced the Accelerated Schools philosophy.
- At a Missouri elementary school, discipline referrals to the principal's office dropped from more than 90 a year to only 21, and the retention rate declined from 7% to 2%.
- During its first three years as an Accelerated School, a Texas elementary school saw incidents of vandalism decline by 78%.
- In the same time period, a California elementary school showed a drop from 103 days of suspensions to 34 days even though enrollment had increased by more than 100 students. The number of robberies and vandalism dropped from seven to zero. Unexcused absenses and the number of tardy and truancy referrals also dropped.

The Coalition of Essential Schools, headed by Ted Sizer, found similar gains. For example:

- A Virginia high school showed a sharp drop in suspensions and disciplinary referrals after one year as a coalition school.
- A California middle school reported a 99% attendance rate and a 95% decline in discipline referrals after several years of following the coalition's principles.
- Essential school students in a Texas high-school-within-a-school were responsible for only 3.75% of all discipline referrals, although they made up 14.5% of the school population.

In a North Carolina school district, efforts to set performance standards, establish an accountability system, involve parents and the community, eliminate tracking and lower-level courses, and other reforms resulted in a drop of suspensions of black students from 38% in 1991 to 24% in 1993.

Restructuring schools to improve teaching and learning can pay dividends in student behavior.

In Kentucky, researchers studied 42 Jefferson County Public Schools by dividing them into three groups: schools with a three-to-five year record of commitment to systemic restructuring, schools with a history of moving from one reform to another, and schools that were satisfied with current teaching and learning approaches. The studies found that 83% of restructuring elementary schools showed increases in attendance, parent and student satisfaction, and parental involvement, and decreases in suspensions and retentions. The 83% rate compared with 44% for schools that frequently changed their approach and 50% for those that stayed with traditional methods. Rates of improvement were higher for restructuring middle schools as well as the elementary schools.

Alternative schools

While seemingly appropriate and giving states the support they need to rid schools of violent students, the mandatory expulsion required by federal law creates problems for states, particularly of what to do with ousted students. On one hand, it is easy to recognize that students expelled for carrying weapons and violent behavior are a threat to others and themselves, but expelling them from school to the streets and their own devices can worsen an already bad situation. Expelling students from their regular school to an **alternative education** program seems to be one successful option.

The mandatory expulsion required by federal law creates problems for states, particularly of what to do with ousted students.

The Tupelo (Mississippi) Public School District established two alternative schools as a way to prevent and intervene in violent situations. Continually disruptive students are sent to the Bissell Center where they receive a heavy dose of **behavioral counseling** along with regular academic instruction. At the Youth Discipline Center, more violent or criminally prone students receive extensive behavioral counseling, guidance and academic instruction; a special feature of this program is the **collaboration** that takes place among the school district and local law enforcement and court system officials.

> **"All too frequently, the 'alternative' involves little more than a watered-down version of the traditional school program, where students are warehoused rather than educated ...."**
>
> — John Kellmayer, principal, Atlantic County Alternative High School, Mays Landing, New Jersey, January 1995 *NASSP Bulletin*

A district spokesperson said neither school was created with the intent of being a permanent alternative; returning students back to the regular classroom when they are ready is the goal. While enrolled in an alternative school, however, a student is not allowed to be on a regular school campus or even at a regular district football game; there are no exceptions — students are completely isolated. It is this **isolation of students**, the communication between schools and outside agencies, and a focus on each individual child and his or her personal circumstances that seem to make Tupelo's alternative schools work.

The Syracuse, New York, school district also has an alternative education program for expelled students. But this district adds a twist to its program by requiring expelled students not only to attend a separate school, but also to participate in counseling and perform **community service**. "We went beyond the requirements of the federal gun-free law and developed a very aggressive approach to school violence which has shown significant results," said Robert DiFlorio, district superintendent. "Among students, the word is out — if you bring a weapon to school, you won't be sent home to watch TV and party with friends. You'll be sent to a separate school and excluded."

While creating alternative schools for problem kids may seem to be the way to go, this strategy is not without its critics and its problems.

"[S]chool administrators spend a great deal of time dealing with chronically disruptive students. An alternative program is one of the solutions proposed to help these students," notes John Kellmayer, principal of the Atlantic County Alternative High School in Mays Landing, New Jersey, in the January 1995 *NASSP Bulletin.* In the article, "Educating Chronically Disruptive and Disaffected High School Students," he writes: "All too frequently, however, the 'alternative' involves little more than a watered-down version of the traditional school program, where students are warehoused rather than educated, [where] there is little to distinguish these alternatives from traditional schools."

Kellmayer suggests using local **college campuses** as alternative education settings for disruptive students. His high school, located on the campus of Atlantic Community College, models this suggestion. Although high school classrooms remain separate from college classrooms, "... integrating these students into the adult environment of the college campus ... significantly improve[s] their behavior and motivation," Kellmayer explains.

Officials at community colleges, however, disagree with Kellmayer, saying the idea simply transfers problems from the high schools to the colleges. A 1987 North Carolina state law, for example, requires public high schools to counsel dropouts on how they might finish their education; those options include community colleges which may admit dropouts at age 16. A dropout who enrolls in a community college is counted as a high school transfer student, not a dropout, a regulation that favors the high schools, say college officials.

"It makes the K-12 schools look better because it looks like the [students have] transferred," Linda Douglas, public-affairs director for the North Carolina Community College System, says in a

recent *Education Week* article. Supporters of the idea argue that it forces high schools to take care of their dropouts.

Other opponents of alternative schools to segregate troublemakers from other students argue the schools put the focus in the wrong place. In a recent commentary in *Education Week*, Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, says some data indicate that only 1% of teachers feel unsafe in their school buildings during the day and that children are safer in school than anywhere else. He argues that "throwing out" disruptive students focuses "on the wrong set of people" — it is the adults who model violence, encourage fighting and manufacture guns, not the kids. Any effort to establish alternative settings for troubled students must ensure they do not turn into "the warehouses and detention centers of old," he says.

To avoid this, Casserly recommends:

- Clear policies about behavior
- Due process mechanisms
- Individual education plans
- Adequate staffing, including counselors and mentors
- Accountability mechanisms
- Services connected to other community agencies
- A plan and incentives for getting students back into a regular school
- Collaboration among teachers, school leaders and others to keep students in school in the first place.

Another problem for districts wanting to try the alternative school option is that many have no budget for an alternative school and have only a small population of students who are expelled. In such cases, school districts interested in alternative schools may want to examine the option of pooling resources with neighboring districts to create a regional alternative school.

State policymakers should look at the issue to determine if they want to support or encourage alternative schools, allocate more money for this approach, place the burden of educating problem students on their parents or not worry about this issue at all if it does not seem feasible for the school population in their state.

1. Life Threatening Risks

- Guns, weapons on school campus
- Drive-by shootings in school neighborhood
- Very serious environmental dangers of pollution
- Very serious deterioration of campus equipment or facilities (poorly maintained transformers, furnaces, etc.)
- No emergency response plan
- Hazardous traffic patterns near campus
- Unsafe sex practices widespread among students
- Inadequate suicide prevention/response program

3. Risks of Personal-Social Intimidation and Menace

- Bullying situations, "psychological" harassment
- Intimidating gang influences felt on campus
- Moderate frequency of school crime incidents — fights, extortion, theft, hazing
- Campus intruders a common occurrence
- School is in a community with crime problems
- School discipline rules unclear
- School discipline rules inconsistently enforced
- Issues related to order and discipline procedure are a concern

THREATENING SCHOOL CONDITIONS

LEVEL OF RIS

1. Life Threatening

3. Personal-Social Intimidation & Menace

2. Physical Harm

4. Individual Isola

2. Risks of Physical Harm

- General lack of order & security
- Frequent serious fights & conflict
- Severe fragmentation & alienation among groups
- Gang activity very visible on campus
- Poorly maintained & dangerous facility and grounds
- Dangers of physical assault coming to and leaving school
- Child abuse going unrecognized and unreported
- Use of corporal punishment at school
- All students not properly immunized
- Communicable diseases in community

4. Risks of Indiv Rej

- Homogeneous tracki
- Ineffective response diversity
- No programs promot diversity
- Limited monitoring
- Concern about equal
- Nonparticipation and
- Specific educational (vulnerable, disenfra special education stu
- Limited opportunity activities

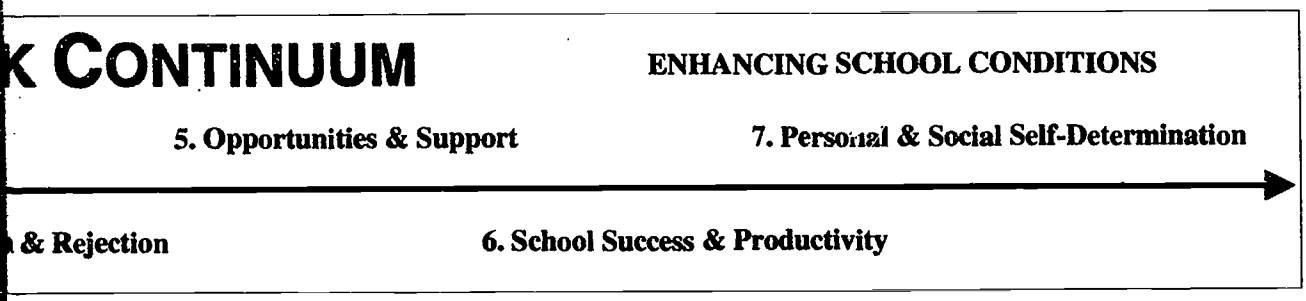
Source: "School Violence to School Safety: Reframing Thesis for School Psychologists," *School Psychology R* permission of the publisher.

5. Risks Related to Opportunities and Support

- Instructional program narrow, limited electives
- Students locked into curriculum tracks
- Conditions for learning not warm & nurturing
- Inadequate school renewal and planning process
- No schoolwide dialogue & problem solving
- Underdeveloped student support services (enrollment, monitoring, personal counseling, student study team system)
- Poorly prepared and unskilled teaching staff
- Limited parental involvement
- Limited collaboration of community resources

7. Risks Related to Personal and Social Self-Determination

- Limited whole-child focus
- Inadequate personal-social skills instruction
- No peer advisors or natural helpers
- Inadequate integration of curriculum
- Limited use of cooperative groupings for instruction
- Minimum input from students about instructional issues and in solving campus problems
- Student-teacher relationships are not empowering



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6. Risks Related to School Success and Productivity

- Curriculum and instructional approaches are outdated
- High expectations for learning are not shared
- Academic focus is emphasized exclusively
- Lack of clarity and agreement about schoolwide mission
- Teachers unprepared to work with diverse and multi-need student populations
- Limited vocational training opportunities
- Inadequate programs for school transitions

A DIFFERENT APPROACH — PREVENTION

"For too long, [America] has pursued essentially a one-track strategy for attacking crime: 'lock-'em-up.' Our nation has more than doubled the number of prisoners behind bars. Yet violent crime remains persistently high."

— Richard A. Mendel, *Prevention or Pork? A Hard-Headed Look at Youth-Oriented Anti-Crime Programs*

Although society is best served by incarcerating habitual, dangerous criminals, prevention may be the best medicine. Logic dictates and evidence proves it is especially effective to deal with the problem of youth and school violence, and states and school districts are taking this approach, too.

It makes sense to "do something today about the kids who otherwise are likely to be committing violent crimes 10 years from now," notes Del Elliott, director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, in Boulder, Colorado. "If we do not address prevention, we will spend more and more money maintaining prisons and have less for the education system."

State approaches

Following are some of the various programs states are using to stop school violence before it starts.

- Data confirm that quality **early childhood and preschool programs** reduce the incidence, severity and costs associated with crimes committed by participants. Twenty years after completing the program, for example, only 7% of participants of Ypsilanti, Michigan's, well-known and thoroughly studied High/Scope Perry Preschool Project had been arrested, compared with 35% of a control group. The Perry Project also has shown that good preschools can reduce costs associated with crime by almost $150,000 over each participant's lifetime.
- Because it makes sense and saves dollars, several states and locales are formulating and implementing violence prevention strategies that target youth of all ages. According to the National Governors' Association, at least 30 states are providing more **comprehensive services for children and their families** in an attempt to prevent crime. Such programs include early intervention, family support and preservation, and public preschool expansion and availability. Recognizing the important connection between a healthy family environment and positive child development, these programs are an investment in violence prevention rather than intervention.

> **"If we do not address prevention, we will spend more and more money maintaining prisons and have less for the education system."**
>
> — Del Elliott, director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Boulder, Colorado

- The state of Illinois amended its school code to require districts to provide **conflict resolution or violence prevention education** for 4th-12th-grade students. As a result, the Illinois Council for the Prevention of Violence formed a curriculum task force which "created a framework that tells schools how to assess

their violence problems and identifies key elements to include in a violence prevention strategy," says Barbara Shaw, executive director of the violence prevention council. The task force also will pilot comprehensive violence prevention programs in three districts — urban, suburban and rural — to determine how schools can best be assisted in developing and implementing such programs.

In August 1995, the Illinois Violence Prevention Act was signed into law. "The act creates the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, an entity composed of public and private members, which will pl..., coordinate, fund and evaluate local and **statewide violence prevention efforts**," Shaw explains. Initial funding for authority activities "comes from the sale of specially designed violence-prevention license plates, which are expected to raise $3-$5 million annually."

- The Minnesota Department of Education's Office of **Community Collaboration** released a guide to help schools and communities promote the emotional well-being and safety of all individuals. *Unlearning Violence* came together after months of interviews and focus groups with more than 600 Minnesota citizens and youth. These activities reflect the notion that "people [at the local level] ... are most likely to share a common vision and go for it," says Carol Thomas of the Minnesota Department of Education. "To really buy into the concept of violence prevention, there must be some ownership."

  The Minnesota Legislature also allocates millions of dollars annually for **violence-prevention education.** These allocations have allowed for the implementation, continuation and expansion of K-12 violence-prevention programs such as peer mediation and conflict resolution training for students and staff, and skill building and self-esteem enhancement for students.

- Many states also are **reconfiguring their justice systems** to deal with youth violence. Colorado's Youth Offender System sends violent youth to a special facility designed for them alone where treatment strategies are more intensive and educationally oriented than adult strategies. Florida has created a special Juvenile Justice System with the input of diverse agencies, including the Department of Education, the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, and the Office of the Attorney General. The new justice system takes an interdisciplinary/interagency approach to the problem of youth violence.

Local efforts

Many effective violence-prevention strategies also exist at the local level and should be studied to determine their effectiveness on a larger scale. As with statewide efforts, however, local efforts that include **collaboration** among key people and agencies seem especially worthwhile. Four long-term programs are documented in a 1995 U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report — *School Safety: Promising Initiatives for Addressing School Violence.*

In 1983, the Anaheim (California) Union High School District created School Management and Resource Teams (SMART) which combine "five ... components that operate together and provide a **unified approach to school safety and discipline,**" according to the GAO report. The components are: (1) a commitment of school and school system personnel to make schools safer; (2) an audit of school district policies pertaining to drugs, crime, discipline and safety; (3) a computerized data collection system used to track school infractions and law violations; (4) SMART teams that include students, parents, teachers, support staff, law enforcement and security officials, and administrators to access current problems and develop solutions; and (5) interagency coordination among the district and juvenile justice, social service and law enforcement agencies.

Funding for the $37,000 a year SMART Program has varied since its onset, but comes primarily from the National Institute of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education. The district also allocates monies from its general budget for SMART's operating expenses.

The City of Paramount, California, and the Paramount Unified School District teamed up to start the Alternatives to Gang Membership (ATGM) Program in 1982. The GAO report says the program "seeks to **reduce gang membership** by teaching students the harmful consequences of a gang lifestyle, how to not participate in it and how to choose positive alternatives.... The program bases its approach on the belief that interest in gangs begins at a young age and, therefore, the focus is on reaching ... students in the 2nd, 5th and 7th grades."

Program evaluations show that only 4% of students who participated in the ATGM program have been identified as gang members. The district's general fund financially supports the program, which runs $150,000 a year for 1,000 students.

The Dayton, Ohio, Positive Adolescents Choices Training (PACT) Program, created in 1989, works to prevent violence among middle-school African-American youth. Implemented by staff from the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State University, PACT uses African American role models to give African-American youth **communication, negotiation and problem-solving skills** needed to solve interpersonal problems.

According to the GAO report, "PACT participants had less involvement in fighting and fewer referrals to juvenile court in comparison to a control group that did not receive training." Federal, state and private sources, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Bureau of Maternal and Child Health, the Ohio Commission of Minority Health and the Mathile Foundation, fund the PACT program.

Training is provided at the district's Roth Middle School. Costs average $287 per student per year.

Established in 1985 as a collaboration between Educators for Social Responsibility and the New York City Board of Education, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program provides students with appropriate **conflict-resolution skills and intercultural understanding**. According to the GAO report, the program "focuses on changing the school climate and requires a strong commitment" from all participants, including district personnel, principals, teachers and parents.

During an evaluation, 71% of teachers said "the program led to less physical violence in the classroom, and 67% observed less name-calling and fewer verbal put downs." Participating school districts and private foundation grants fund the program, which costs $2 million per year and serves 70,000 students.

Many communities sponsor a variety of programs that link adults one-on-one to young people through **mentoring programs**. A study of one such program found in many communities showed that teenagers who have regular mentors are less involved with drugs and alcohol, do better in school and have better relationships with their parents and peers than youth not in the program.

Public/Private Ventures, a national program development and research organization in Philadelphia, studied nearly 1,000 young people taking part in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America program. It found that teens who met regularly with their Big Brother or Big Sister were 46% less likely than their peers to use illegal drugs and 52% less likely to skip school. They also were more trusting of their parents or guardians and felt more supported and less criticized. The effects were even more positive for minority youth. The program does not offer drug counseling or tutoring, but rather provides consistent, supportive attention from an adult.

Other local violence prevention programs receiving praise include:

- L.A. Teens on Target, located at a Los Angeles, California hospital, features teens and young adults (many of whom have been paralyzed from gunshot wounds) **educating peers** about the consequences of violence and the dangers of weapons.
- Success Through Academic and Recreational Support in Fort Myers, Florida, provides youth between ages 11 and 14 with **positive alternatives and support**. Midnight sports leagues, modeled after the original midnight basketball league in Glenarden, Maryland, provide youth with safe activity alternatives during night hours when most crime occurs. Attendance of life-skills workshops and strict conduct codes often are required of participants.
- Sobriety High, in Edina, Minnesota, offers students who have drug, alcohol and violence problems opportunities to complete **drug treatment programs** and learn coping skills that emphasize problem-solving and nonviolent means of communicating.

Obviously, the responses to school violence are as diverse as the people they serve. One way to view these various programs is to think of them as tools in a toolbox, each designed for different purposes and each serving different needs. Policymakers considering such efforts should take the pieces that seem most relevant and adapt them to local or state situations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

When searching for solutions to school violence, policymakers must remember there is no one "best" approach. The guiding principle should be attention to state, district and local contexts and needs. But experiences of others and successful models offer components that may be appropriate to local needs and contexts.

The five statewide meetings sponsored by ECS resulted in a plethora of recommendations, many designed specifically for individual state problems. The consensus of the hundreds of participants, however, was that **states and districts need to develop a policy for dealing with youth violence even if they do not seem to have such a problem currently.** This policy must be long-term, coordinated and comprehensive — focused on the individual, family, school and community levels — and including prevention as well as intervention and rehabilitation strategies.

The following recommendations outline the various facets of a comprehensive policy approach to preventing and reducing school violence. Because most of the recommendations are applicable to both the state and school district levels, policymakers must be careful to delineate responsibilities appropriately.

Gather information

Before a state-level approach to school violence is developed, collect baseline data from every school in the state about the frequency and kinds of violent acts committed, who commits the acts, what prevention and intervention policies exist already, and what approaches are used to deal with violence. This information-gathering process should be as standardized as possible to allow for accurate comparisons between schools and districts; it also should be mandatory to insure compliance. South Carolina's Schoolhouse Safety Alliance Act of 1994 created the Schoolhouse Safety Resource Center in the state department of education. One of the mandated functions of the center is to collect baseline data from schools on school violence.

When searching for solutions to school violence, policymakers must remember there is no one "best" approach. The guiding principle should be attention to state, district and local contexts and needs.

Share information about youth and school violence

Share information about youth and school violence among schools, school districts and law enforcement agencies. Specific guidelines must be followed when sharing information so as not to infringe upon a student's right to privacy (see the ECS publication, *Confidentiality and Collaboration: Information Sharing in Interagency Efforts,* for more information on this issue). Nevertheless, information sharing and open communication lines between schools and public safety agencies are crucial for the success of a school violence prevention or intervention program. Utah's Senate Bill 230, enacted in June 1994, provides for notification to schools when a juvenile is adjudicated for a violent offense.

Concentrate on alleviating risk factors and promoting protective factors

Identifying community or state risk factors for violence can help target prevention efforts where they are most needed. Addressing risk factors associated with higher levels of violence, such as teen pregnancy, drug or alcohol abuse, child abuse and poverty through policy action can help prevent future youth violence. Strengthening protective factors that inhibit violence, such as linking at-risk youth with adult mentors through local Big Brother and Big Sister programs, also can help prevent future youth violence.

Research the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of various strategies

Author Richard Mendel reviewed a wealth of scholarly reports on the causes and correlates of delinquency and existing research examining how well various approaches succeed. He writes that repeated tests show certain strategies to be ineffective, including shock incarceration (i.e., boot camps); short-term, quick-fix job training; and traditional psychotherapy and behavior modification. "[America] cannot solve crime ... solely through deterrence or by 'shocking' trouble-prone youth or 'scaring them straight,'" he says.

Provide integrated family support services

Services to help alleviate risk factors such as domestic and family violence, and inadequate nutrition, health care and child supervision must be coordinated to eliminate duplication of efforts and the damaging effects of turf battles. One of the major components of Washington's 1994 Violence Prevention Act is the establishment of "Community Public Health and Safety Networks" — broadly representative community councils responsible for planning and coordinating local services and strategies to reduce the number of young people at risk of juvenile crime, abuse and neglect, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, suicide, substance abuse and dropping out of school.

Provide classes to enhance parenting skills and family relationships

According to a panel of experts who met at the National Summit on Youth Violence in 1994, "programs that attempt to work with and modify the family system of a high-risk child have great potential to prevent the development of aggressive and violent behavior." Part of South Carolina's Schoolhouse Safety Alliance Act requires parenting/family literacy programs to include instruction in nonviolent living skills and the developmental and transitional stages of children.

Foster school-family/community cooperation and collaboration

Efforts to bring the school into the community and the community into the school can help broaden prevention efforts, gain support from parents and the broader community for policy actions, and provide information about family and community needs and ideas about policy actions. Schools and districts need family and community support for prevention efforts to succeed. Families and communities need school direction and action to help them keep their children away from violence. The 1994 Texas Compact for Safe Schools is intended to establish partnerships with all portions of communities in the design of a comprehensive plan of action to deter violence.

Identify risk factors and start intervention efforts early

Elementary schools need counselors as much as high schools do. Violent teens almost always had serious behavior problems in early childhood, Mendel notes. Other experts on youth violence argue that children as young as 3rd- and 4th-grade need opportunities to belong to groups with positive effects, such as Little League, Scouts and afterschool clubs and activities. (See chart on pages 10-11 for a continuum of risk factors.) The Hartsville Elementary School in Hartsville, South Carolina, offers such options through its Partners Assuring Student Success program.

Create smaller schools

It is widely documented that smaller schools have fewer disruptions and incidences of violence. Deborah Meier, co-director of Central Park East Secondary School in New York City, puts it this way: "In my school, there are two floors and four bathrooms; I have two security guards who mainly guard entrances. I can see everything. Everyone knows everyone, and everyone knows me.... We don't need metal detectors, [and] we don't use them."

Restructure schools to engage students actively and meaningfully in the learning process

Early results show that successfully restructuring schools experience declines in discipline referrals and increases in school attendance. Restructuring schools usually leads to more student choice, better integration of student experience into the curriculum and recognition of individual student expression.

Limit young people's access to weapons

According to the American Psychological Association, guns are used in more than 75% of youth killings. Arizona's House Bill 2131, enacted in April 1994, amended several statutes regulating firearms and minors, including making the sale of a firearm to a minor a low felony instead of a medium-high misdemeanor.

Be careful not to discriminate against students with disabilities

According to the National Association of State Boards of Education, "angry educators, parents and community leaders often point to students labeled 'emotionally disturbed' as the prime perpetrators of school violence. Yet students labeled emotionally disturbed represent less than 1% of the overall student population, making it highly unlikely that the current rates of school violence could be solely — or even chiefly — attributed to [these] students."

Secure diverse funding sources for violence-prevention efforts

Diversification of funding sources is one of the best ways to ensure continued support of such efforts. At the federal level, money for school-violence prevention strategies is available as part of the National Education Goals effort. The Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 also includes funding for youth-crime prevention strategies. States and/or communities may allocate a portion of general funds for prevention efforts or use existing sources, such as health and human services programs. Grant money from private entities such as foundations or large corporations often is available for specific prevention initiatives. Furthermore, many curricular and informational materials may be obtained at no or a relatively low cost. Refer to Appendix A for a resource list.

Conduct long-term evaluations of violence-prevention efforts

One of the fundamental gaps in violence-prevention research and a crucial component to determine program effectiveness is the lack of comprehensive, long-term evaluation data. Legislation should require and fund evaluations of all violence prevention programs, and tie program continuation, expansion or termination to evaluated effectiveness.

Violence is a growing problem in the United States, but not an insurmountable one. However, no single entity, such as schools, can solve it alone. Schools, communities, state and local government agencies, churches and parents must team up to provide safe environments for children and appropriate models of behavior.

Policies dealing with violence must be clear and firm, starting with approaches to prevent violence among the youngest citizens. Federal, state and

local officials must commit to supporting violence-prevention efforts, including providing funding where needed.

Only with all segments of society working together will violence in our schools and our lives become less common and our children helped to feel more secure.

APPENDIX A — RESOURCES

A variety of resources is available to states, school districts, schools and communities interested in beginning or broadening violence-prevention efforts. Selected publications include:

Between Hope and Fear: Teens Speak Out on Crime and the Community. Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 111 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10003.

A Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1993. Available free of charge from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, 301-251-5194; 800-638-8736; 46 pages.

Confidentiality and Collaboration: Information Sharing in Interagency Efforts. Education Commission of the States, 1992. Available from ECS, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; AR-92-1; $6; 55 pages.

Elliott, Delbert S. *Youth Violence: An Overview.* Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1994. Available from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado at Boulder, IBS #9, Campus Box 442, Boulder, CO 80309-0442; 303-492-1032.

Furlong, Michael et al. "Mini-Series - School Violence." *School Psychology Review 23* (2 1994): pp. 139-262.

Mendel, Richard A. *Prevention or Pork? A Hard-Headed Look at Youth-Oriented Anti-Crime Programs.* Available from the American Youth Policy Forum, 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 719, Washington, DC 20036-5541; $5; 32 pages.

Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1993: Violence in America's Public Schools. Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 1993. Available free of charge from Metropolitan Life, 1 Madison Avenue, NY, NY 10010-3690; 212-578-4587; 154 pages.

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1994, Violence in America's Public Schools: The Family Perspective. Available from Metropolitan Life at the address above.

Kids and Violence. National Governors' Association, 250 Hall of the States, 444 N. Capitol St., Washington, DC 20001.

PAVNET Resource Guide (Volumes 1&2). Available free of charge from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850. Also on the Internet.

The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC) 1993. Available free of charge from CDC, Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Mail Stop K-60, 4770 Buford Highway NE, Atlanta, GA 30341-3724; 404-488-4646; 95 pages.

Prothrow-Stith, Deborah. *Deadly Consequences: How Violence is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.

Reiss, Albert J., Jr. and Jeffrey A. Roth, eds. *Understanding and Preventing Violence.* Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1993. Available for $49.95 prepaid plus $4

shipping from National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20418-0001; 202-334-3313 or 800-624-6242; 464 pages.

School Safety: Promising Initiatives for Addressing School Violence. U.S. General Accounting Office, Washington, DC. Ask for GAO/HEHS-95-106; 202-572-6000.

Tolan, Patrick and Nancy Guerra. *What Works in Reducing Adolescent Violence: An Empirical Review of the Field.* Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1994. F-888. Available from The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado at Boulder, IBS #9, Campus Box 442, Boulder, CO 80309-0442; 303-492-1032.

Unlearning Violence. Minnesota Department of Education, Office of Community Collaboration. Call 612-296-4081 for a copy.

Violence in the Schools: How America's School Boards Are Safeguarding Our Children. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association (NSBA), 1993. Available from NSBA, 703-838-6722; $15 or $12 for NSBA members.

Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response. Volume 1: Summary Report of the American Psychological Association (APA) Commission on Violence and Youth. Washington, DC: APA, 1993. Available free of charge from APA, Public Interest Directorate, 750 First Street NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242; 202-336-6046.

Wilson-Brewer, Renee, Stu Cohen, Lydia O'Donnell and Irene F. Goodman. *Violence Prevention for Young Adolescents: A Survey of the State of the Art.* Newton, MA: Education Development Center, 1991. Available from EDC, 800-443-3742; $10.59.

APPENDIX B — SELECTED MODEL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Boston Violence Prevention Program
Health Promotion Program for Urban Youth
Department of Health and Hospitals
1010 Massachusetts Ave., 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02118
617-534-5196

The Community Board Program
1540 Market Street, Suite 490
San Francisco, CA 94102
415-552-1250

The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
1225 I St. NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005
202-289-7319

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence
University of Colorado at Boulder
IBS #9; Campus Box 442
Boulder, CO 80309-0442
303-492-1032

Children's Creative Response to Conflict
Box 271523, N. Broadway
Nyack, NY 10960
914-353-1796

Educators for Social Responsibility
23 Garden St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-492-1764

National Association for Mediation in Education
205 Hampshire House, Box 33635
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003
413-545-2462

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
4770 Buford Highway, NE
Mailstop F36
Atlanta, GA 30341
770-488-4696

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
805-373-9977

Resolving Conflict Creatively
New York City Public Schools
163 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10003
212-260-6290

Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse
Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20850
800-688-4252

Urban Education Publications Available from ECS

A Framework for Urban Hope. Gives options for improving urban school districts despite the seemingly overwhelming odds.
1995 (UE-95-1), 8 pp., **$5.00** plus postage and handling

The New American Urban School District. Examines how our urban school systems might change to do a dramatically better job of serving young people — and our cities and nation. The essays — by Chester E. Finn, Jr., Kenneth J. Tewel, Paul T. Hill, Ted Kolderie, Michael W. Kirst and Stephanie Pace Marshall — are thought-provoking and inspiring.
1995 (UE-95-2), 37 pp., **$10.00** plus postage and handling

Order BOTH urban education publications for $13.50, a 10% savings!

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EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES
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Denver, Colorado 80202-3427

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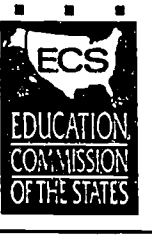

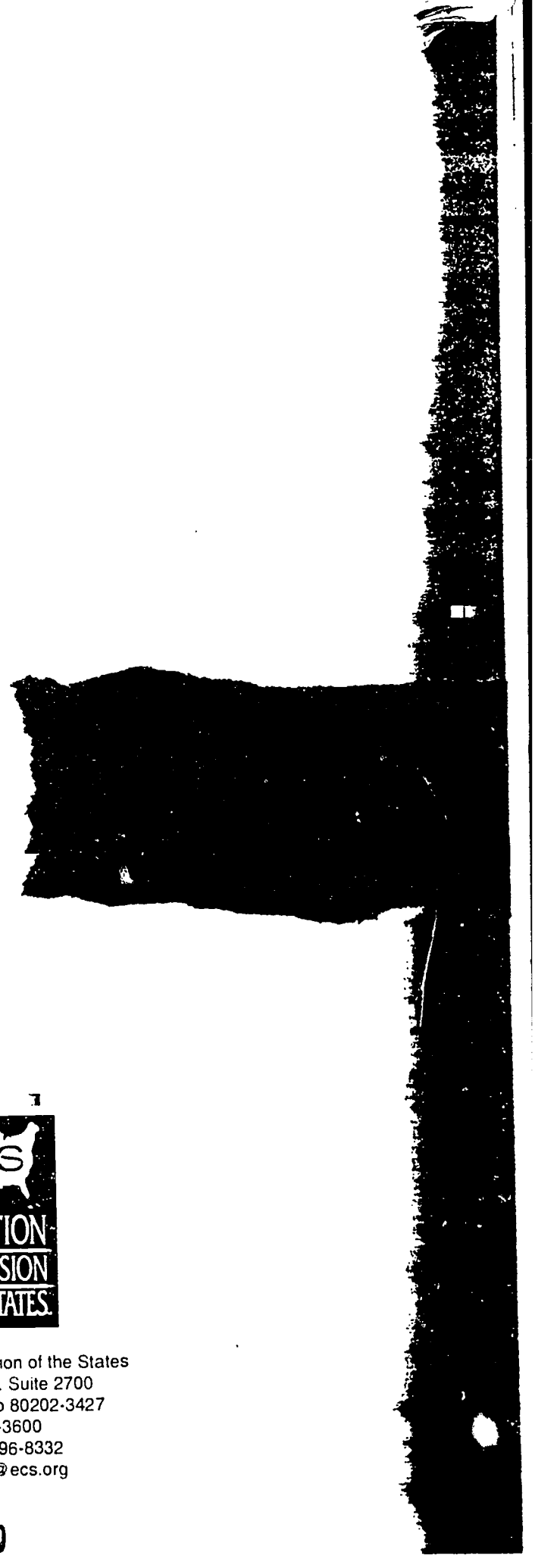

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