ABSTRACT
          This paper, based on a study conducted in Tennessee in fall
1998, discusses ways that teachers perceived issues concerning safety and
violence within their schools. The data were collected at three "Safe
Schools" conferences for teachers, school administrators, and law-enforcement
officers; 263 usable questionnaires were collected. The findings show that
most teachers were familiar with the intricacies of their school's policy for
safe schools. Teachers felt personally safe at school and believed that their
students were also safe. However, some teachers reported that they had been
victims of violence and that school discipline had deteriorated during the
past 5 years. Even so, most teachers did not favor having police officers
stationed in schools but did feel that they should be provided additional
legal protection against those who harass them. Some suggestions that school
leaders can use to develop a safe-school environment include: (1) restrict
access to the school campus; (2) maintain a system of surveillance with a
procedure to challenge visitors and nonstudents; (3) initiate a
conflict-resolution and peer-mediation program; (4) cooperate with local
law-enforcement officials in developing a safe-school plan; and (5) review
the procedures in a safe-school plan and conduct safety drills periodically.
(RJM)

A STUDY CONCERNING SELECTED ELEMENTS
OF A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

PRESENTED AT THE FIRST ANNUAL
CONFERENCE ON SAFE SCHOOLS
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BY

DR. THOMAS L. REDDICK, PROFESSOR
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
TENNESSEE TECH UNIVERSITY

DR. LARRY PEACH, PROFESSOR
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
TENNESSEE TECH UNIVERSITY

A STUDY CONCERNING SELECTED ELEMENTS OF A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The issues of youth violence and disruptions cannot be ignored. Destructive and sometimes violent behavior have become frequent occurrences in many schools. A recent U.S. Department of Education survey mirrors this escalating phenomenon. In a sample of 1,200 schools it was found that there were nearly 11,000 incidents where weapons were involved annually. Some three million criminal incidents occur each year on school grounds. Over 200,000 students are attacked each month while at school. Assaults on teachers have increased 50 percent during the past ten years, and almost 100,000 students carry lethal weapons to school each day (Kimbrough, 1998, p.4).

It is disturbing to note that according to a 1997 survey by the Morgan Quito Press, an independent research bureau, Tennessee ranks ninth among the 50 states on their "danger list". This survey takes into consideration such factors as murder, rape, assault, theft and other school disturbances (Associated Press release, 1997).

The Tennessee General Assembly has taken notice of the gravity of school safety. An ad hoc committee to study school safety issues is operational, hearing testimony, and will make recommendations to address this complex matter. Representative Jere Hargrove of the Tennessee Legislature said it well when he stated, "We all owe it to our children to keep searching for solutions to school violence"(Press Release, 1998).

It is incumbent upon policymakers, administrators and community leaders to prepare for those unthinkable violent

occurrences that happen all too often. By and large, schools are safehavens for teaching and learning; but, they are a reflection of society as a whole. It is important to be as prepared as possible for any unexpected disruptions.

The General Accounting Office of the U.S. Government identified seven components when developing a violence prevention program for schools. They are:

*a comprehensive approach that recognizes the complexity of violence;

*an early start and long-term commitment (a K-12 approach);

*strong school leadership and clear, consistent discipline policies and procedures;

*training for administrators, teachers, and staff in behavior management, mediation, and violence prevention strategies;

*parent training and involvement;

*links to law enforcement and social service agencies and the community; and

*culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate materials and activities for students (Gregg. p.2).

A Tennessee study entitled "An Assessment of Perceptions Involving School Safety Issues", was conducted in the fall of 1998 to investigate how teachers perceived issues concerning safety and violence within the schools where they taught. The data were collected at three "Safe Schools" conferences for teachers, school administrators and law enforcement officers held in Middle Tennessee. Some 320 teachers were surveyed concerning safe schools. A total of 263 usable questionnaires were collected.

A summary of the responses of the teachers, those on the "firing line", follows.

1. Are you familiar with the procedures prescribed in your school's "Safe School's Plan"?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
218	83	45	17

2. Did you participate in the development of your "Safe School's Plan"?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
52	20	211	80

3. Do you feel safe, personally, while at school?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
242	92	21	08

4. Have you every been the victim of a violent act at school (other than verble abuse)?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
23	09	240	91

5. If yes, please check the type of incident or incidents in which you were involved.

	Number*
Physical Attack	6
Being Threatened and Pushed	18
Display of Weapons	2
Robbery	3
Improper Touching	8
Vandalism of Personal Property	12

*Note: Multiple responses were possible on this questionnaire item.

6. Are students safe at your school?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
245	93	18	07

7. Have dangerous weapons been confiscated at your school during the past school year?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
171	65	92	35

8. Should law enforcement officers be stationed in schools?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
100	93	18	07

9. Do teachers need more legal protection against those who harass them?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
245	93	18	07

10. Is discipline worse in your school than it was five years ago?

Yes	Percent	No	Percent
229	87	34	13

Most teachers in the study were familiar with the intricies of their school's policy for safe schools. It was interesting to note that a majority of the teachers felt personally safe at school and that students were safe in the school environment. Some teachers reported that they had been victimized through a violent act and school discipline was said to have deteriorated during the past five years. Still, a majority of the teachers did not favor having law enforcement officers stationed in schools.

The teachers believe that they should be provided additional legal protection against those who harass them.

Schools should be safe for teaching and learning. The following suggestions are presented to guide school leaders in developing a safe school environment.

1. Restrict access to the school campus and especially to school buildings.

2. Maintain a system of surveillance with a procedure to challenge visitors and non-students.

3. Investigate the initiation of a conflict resolution and peer medication program.

4. Cooperate with local law enforcement officials in the development of a safe school plan.

5. Review the procedures in your safe school plan and conduct safety drills periodically.

6. Develop a plan to manage and monitor student movement throughout the buildings and grounds.

7. Implement a crisis intervention plan for emergency situations.

8. Establish a school-based response team to provide leadership in crisis situations.

9. Promote the philosophy that maintaining a safe school is dependent upon the support of all school personnel and students.

10. Establish an open system of communication which encourages students, parents, educators, and community residents to express concern and suggestions about school safety.

The issue of providing for safe schools is challenging and complex. It is a community-wide responsibility to initiate programs and students service which will help to address comprehensive efforts to reduce violence in schools. Even one incidence of violence in a school is not acceptable.

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