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## In the Face of Danger : Comprehensive Emergency Preparedness and Response for Schools

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### **Abstract**

*Schools presently operate without a method for recognizing how the relational aspects of the school environment impacts physical safety. Using two previously unrelated frameworks, NIMS/ICS and the Taguri model, this paper connects the formal curriculum to relational, administrative and physical safety. The first model presented, National Incident Management System/ Incident Command System (NIMS/ICS), is a standardized emergency response framework developed by the U.S. government. The second model, Taguri's, is a framework for examining school climate. This paper argues that by integrating the NIMS/ICS framework with the Taguri model, schools can implement a comprehensive method for planning effective safety and security protocols. This paper further argues that both models should be applied to persistently dangerous schools. Furthermore, because the highest reported concentration of persistently dangerous schools occur in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, these measures should have particular relevance and applicability there. This paper concludes that safety must extend beyond securing the physical environment, and include normative, organizational, and social-emotional safety.*

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### **Introduction**

At the national level, our country's response to violence falls under the National Incident Management System/Incident Command System (NIMS/ICS). NIMS/ICS is an operational framework that enables responders from various organizational levels and agencies to work together consistently and comprehensively to plan for, respond to, and recover from incidents. This readiness process and partnership is called incident management and, necessarily, applies to all citizens and entities, including schools.

Protecting lives, preventing injury, and minimizing property damage are among the primary goals of NIMS/ICS. These goals are important and relevant because they address our basic need for physical safety. However, the need for safety extends beyond the physical to the social-emotional, the organizational, and the cultural. One framework that recognizes and integrates all four aspects: physical, social-emotional, organizational, and cultural safety is the Taguri model. The Taguri model is then an appropriate framework for examining school climate and the related aspects of safety. Based on this model, we should see that learning not only requires a secure physical setting, but also a caring, welcoming, and predictable environment.

First, this paper will provide an overview of safety using the framework of NIMS/ICS. Second, this paper will review Taguri's model of climate to provide the reader with a framework for evaluating an effective school environment and to underscore the importance of systemically addressing social-emotional, organizational, and cultural safety. Third, this paper contends that the integration of both models is critical in the development of comprehensive safety practices and protocols. Last, this paper argues for the application of both models to persistently dangerous schools.

### **Developing An Effective School Safety Plan**

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What is safety? In a post-Columbine/Nickel Mines environment, a common term like "safety" has been redefined. Previous definitions of safety may have included phrases such as: freedom from harm or risk, and secure from the threat of danger, harm, loss, failure, damage or accidents. Today's redefinition equates safety with readiness and incident management. In large measure, safety is assessed as relative to the degree of one's preparedness. Preparedness is established by the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

In the spirit of preparedness, the President of the United States, on February 28, 2003 issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5, thereby directing the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a National Incident Management System (NIMS). According to NIMS, 2004, the system provides a consistent nationwide template to enable all agencies, organizations and entities, including schools, to work together effectively and efficiently to prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from incidents regardless of cause, size, complexity or location. In short, NIMS is a comprehensive framework for incident management that presents all responders with a core set of doctrine, concepts, principles, terminology, structures, mechanisms, and operational directions. Incident management, at the classroom, district, or state level, must be aligned with the NIMS framework. Furthermore, the connection between the NIMS framework and school-based incidents is even more directly prescribed. Schools receiving Title IV funds are required to have a Safety Plan. Safety Plans should address a broad range of possible incidents including the types of violent incidents that result in arrests.

The mounting number of well-publicized tragedies confirms our nations need to establish and expand school preparedness as much more than periodic fire drills. According to School Safety in the 21st Century, 2004

During times of crisis, schools must function temporarily as a parent, a nurse, and a physician. They must do so until families can be reunited. Feeding, sheltering, administering first aid, and handling mental health needs could become extended school responsibilities. They must handle an array of special needs students. [For instance], visually/hearing impaired and physically/mentally challenged may need to be evacuated, relocated, and/or sheltered-in-place. Also, [schools] may have to translate safety information and directions to non-English speaking students. Senior experts from the military and law enforcement communities agreed that superintendents, principals, and others in charge carry 'by name accountability.' This means that parents and members of the school community will specifically hold individuals in these positions responsible for the prevention and effective management of incidents. (p. 7)

Schools must dramatically increase their ability to develop, practice, and effectively implement functional safety plans.

### **School Safety Plans and NIMS**

School Safety Plans, also known as Emergency Operation Plans, should be based on the four phases of incident management (see following diagrams): a) Mitigation/Prevention, b) Preparedness, c) Response, d) Recovery. The following two diagrams outline the four phases and illustrate two important aspects of incident management. First, the life cycle of incidents can be depicted as on-going, overlapping activities or phases. Second, while prevention, preparedness and mitigation activities tend to be on-going, response and recovery activities tend to have starting points while response tends to also have an end point. The four phases, identified above are depicted in the following diagrams.



Prevention

Preparedness

Response

Recovery

Mitigation

### Mitigation and Prevention

Both Mitigation and Prevention occur during the first phase. Mitigation is defined as on-going actions taken to identify assets and risk factors, steps taken to reduce and/or eliminate harm to persons or property, and efforts undertaken to protect the environment. Such actions may include school policy and rules, community education, environmental assessments and subsequent implementation of countermeasures. Prevention is defined as actions taken to protect life and property and avoid or intervene in incidents. It requires the application of intelligence and other information and may include surveillance, immunizations, inspections, warning systems, public notification, development of response partnerships, and exercise or testing various aspects of the school's Safety Plan.

There is a general agreement that the broad range of social and environmental hazards, whether slip and falls, fights, school shootings, fires, chemical spills, infectious diseases, winter storms, or earthquakes, should be assessed and addressed in an All-Hazards Safety Plan. Incidents, or crises cannot always be controlled and will vary in scope, intensity, impact, and location. Furthermore, a crisis could occur before, during, or after school. Additionally because, each school is unique with its own needs, resources, and assets, it is critical that each school conduct its own assessment of possible hazards and develops effective countermeasures. According to the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, 2003,

Schools cannot always control fights, bomb threats, and school shootings. However, they can take actions to reduce the likelihood of such events. Schools may institute policies, implement violence prevention programs, and take other steps to improve the culture and climate of their campuses. Mitigating emergencies is also important from a legal standpoint. If a school, district, or state does not take all necessary actions in good faith to create safe schools, it could be vulnerable to a suit for negligence. (p.2-1)

Mitigation actions, related to school violence, could include identifying high incident areas and developing countermeasures such as redeploying more personnel to the area; identifying school personnel who are trained in a broad range of safety and life saving techniques (including First Aid, CPR, de-escalation, and peer mediation); developing early intervention policies to address students with a pattern of disruptive behaviors; and communicating school expectations and rules to students and families.

Most schools have policies, programs, and often time various kinds of curricula and programs aimed at promoting positive behaviors. Quoting the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, in its publication entitled *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities, 2007*, "Social problem-solving or life skills programs, anti-bullying programs, and school-wide discipline efforts are common across the nation as a means of helping reduce violent behavior." (p.21) What these efforts lack is a common, unifying, comprehensive structure that transfers seamlessly into other environments such as homes, hospitals, private businesses, and city halls. NIMS provides such a structure.

### Preparedness

The second phase in the incident management cycle is Preparedness. Preparedness is defined as pre-determining responses prior to incidents, developing contingency plans, practicing the plan with school and first responders such as local police and fire departments, and identifying transitional steps necessary to move the school environment from incident response into recovery. Preparedness actions could include identifying a Safety Team to develop the plan including recognizing the triggers that move schools from normalcy to crisis response, identifying the various resources, detailing response roles and responsibilities, developing methods and protocols for communicating with staff, students, parents and the media, practicing the three school-wide response (Evacuation, Shelter-in-place, Lock-down), and identifying and incorporating lessons learned from other incidents into updated Safety Plans.

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The focus of the Preparedness phase is on planning and exercising aspects of the plan. Schools are becoming more adept at planning for the various environmental factors such as earthquakes, fires, chemical release, and winter storms. In addition to environmental factors, an All-Hazard Safety Plan should also address a broad range of violent acts that could occur in the schools, including bullying, fights, assaults, school shootings, etc. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2003, there were 154,200 incidents of serious violent crime in schools; in 2004-2005, there were 21 student homicide victims in schools. Despite these numbers, schools are still among the safest environment for children and youth. However, as reflected in the data, occasionally incidents do occur. Albeit, what NIMS/ICS teaches us is that preparedness will facilitate an effective and efficient response. Furthermore, given the broad areas covered by incident management, plans developed in the preparedness stage provide schools with a comprehensive response for a broad range of incidents that may vary daily in scope, size, and complexity. However, given that change is a constant, updating the plans and sharing the updates with key partners is a necessary component of the process.

Preparedness actions therefore requires partnerships with local agencies including police, fire, medical personnel, public health, utilities, and family and youth serving agencies. Pre-planning and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) should identify strategic partners, document partnership agreements with specific roles, responsibilities, and the triggering events. Additionally, safety plans should anticipate and address various physical disruptions. Specifically, the plan should identify the full range of disruptive behaviors common to the school environment including disruptions caused by aggressive or unusual behaviors. Prior preparation for a broad range of possible incidents ensures a rapid and effective response.

### **Response**

The third phase of the incident management cycle is response. Response is defined as providing emergency assistance to save lives, protect property, and speed recovery. Response actions generally include the mobilization of emergency personnel and equipment to assess the situation, save lives, protect property and the environment, and contain the incident. Within NIMS, there is a proven, effective operations management mechanism, Incident Command System (ICS) that provides organizational structure to small, large and multi-jurisdictional/ multi-agency incidents. ICS provides effective transition from normal operations to crisis response-to recovery through efficient communication, coordination protocols, and proven resource integration practices.

The goal of response is rapid, effective containment of the incident while preserving life, property, and the environment. Effectiveness includes recognizing that every incident is local and efficiency requires a clear chain of command between all responders. Chain of command and other major elements required for a successful response has been fully identified and developed in the Incident Command System (ICS). According to *Practical Information for School and Communities*, every crisis has certain major elements. As further elaborated in The Emergency Management Institute, *Introduction to ICS for Schools (IS-100 for Schools)*, while

Effective incident management relies on a tight command and control structure.. [and] strict adherence to top-down direction. ICS emphasizes effective planning, including management by objectives, reliance on an Incident Action Plan, ...chain of command and unity of command. ... ICS [also] helps ensure full utilization of all incident resources [and] supports responders and decision makers through effective information and intelligence management. The mobilization process helps ensure that incident objectives can be achieved while responders and students remain safe. (Lesson 3)

ICS must be adopted by schools and all first responders. It provides a seamless transition between school based staff and local first responders such as police and fire personnel through a shared and viable Safety Plan. It is of utmost importance to have a viable Safety Plan that is operational and capable of supporting an effective response until help arrives, be it twenty-minutes or three days. A viable Safety Plan subsequently becomes the initial Incident Action Plan. A smooth transition, from the initial school staff response to incident management directed by police, fire or medical personnel, rests on the strength of the partnership with responders prior to an incident. Local Emergency Management should be required to review and advise schools on the viability of their plan. Incorporation of lessons learned, from testing the plan, ensures that possible gaps are identified and addressed. Rapid containment of the incident and the initial assessment of incident impact and damages are the first steps towards the recovery phase.

### **Recovery**

The fourth and final phase of incident management is Recovery. Recovery is defined as long-range actions taken to restore the community to some degree of normalcy, as quickly and completely as possible through the provision of services and programs. Within a school setting, recovery usually includes a plan for academic, social-emotional, physical facilities, and fiscal recovery. Recovery actions may include cleaning the area, repairing the structure, restoring disrupted services, providing counseling or grief support, and preparing for the

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resumption of classes. Once started, the Recovery phase often continues for a period of time. There are usually well devised, albeit time-consuming strategies for restoring the physical environment. However, restoring the social and emotional environment is generally more complex.

The complexity of recovery is most evident in urban settings where a large number of students are in recovery mode. Social emotional recovery is particularly complex because it entails numerous uncontrollable factors. For instance, students often struggle with multiple recognized and unrecognized losses, social and academic disruptions, and relational and informational fractures, resulting from inadequate or inefficient response or recovery decisions within the school, the neighborhood and the broader community.

Additionally, schools may often have a social-emotional recovery plan but offer little guidance to assist teachers as they transition back to the core curriculum and some level of normalcy. Granted, teachers should not provide mental health services. However, they are commonly among the first to recognize that a student is distressed and increasingly they are referring those students immediately to the counselor. In addition to being able to recognize and refer distressed students, teachers are asking for more guidance on providing an academic bridge back to some semblance of normalcy through the curriculum. Consequently, in addition to struggling to adapt the curriculum, teachers are dealing with the stress of accommodating anxious students.

School recovery plans should not only address the social emotional environment, but also the physical facilities and the financial impact. The physical plant and financial management are often relegated to specific departments and officials within the school district.

In short, pre-planning for the four aspects of recovery: academic; social-emotional; physical plant; and financial management; is key to ensuring safety and restoring normalcy in the school setting.

In conclusion, incident management provides the stages of managing an event. NIMS/ICS further identifies the essential functions for preparedness and response, and then standardizes these efforts for the nation, including schools. This standardization is incorporated in school safety plans, creating a safety network by establishing partnerships around a shared plan with key community stakeholders.

### The Critical Role Of School Climate and the Taguri Model

The aforementioned framework provides a foundation for structuring safety. Safety is preparedness planning and partnerships. Safety is also the foundation for effectiveness and therefore growth. Like the NIMS/ICS safety framework, effectiveness also requires a framework. To that end, Taguri's model is introduced to provide a framework for defining and developing an effective school climate. The passages that follow introduce the Taguri model and explore the four components of climate that establishes an effective school.

An effective school is one with a positive school climate. Climate is significant in that it either supports or undermines meaningful student learning. Climate also clearly involves multi-dimensional sets of elements that highlight social-emotional, organizational, and cultural threats and dangers. Taguri's model enhances the readiness framework presented by NIMS, by expanding the sphere of danger beyond the physical environment, to the relationships, administrative structures, and decision-making/problem solving practices that create situations and conditions that can escalate rather than diminish unresolved conflicts.

Taguri presents four components of organizational climate: culture, ecology, milieu, and organization or structure. According to Taguri, as articulated by Lindahl, 2006, organizational **culture** includes:

Assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, ways of thinking, behavior patterns, and artifacts; this definition seems to parallel closely many of the prominent authorities in the field. However, his construct of organizational climate tends to be more encompassing than that of many of his peers. Within **ecology**, he included buildings and facilities, technology, and pedagogical interventions. Within **milieu**, Taguri subsumed the race, ethnicity, socio-economic levels, and gender of organizational members and participants, their motivation and skills, and the organization's leadership. His organization or **structure** construct includes communication and decision-making patterns within the organization, the organizational hierarchy and formal structures, and the level of bureaucratization. Although this definition is so comprehensive as to resemble French and Bell's (1998) organizational systems model and can somewhat blur the core definition of organizational climate, it serves as a good reminder of the interrelatedness of all these factors with organizational climate and culture. It also illustrates the broad range of organizational issues that must be taken into consideration when planning for large-scale organizational improvement. (p.4)

Basically, the role of culture and climate in schools are complex constructs because they are the by-products of human relational systems. However, because they are systems, there are elements of culture and climate that can

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be explained. Those elements have been categorized as four functions highlighted by the Taguiri model. Manipulating these four functions (Culture, Social systems, Milieu, and Ecology) should assist schools in creating and maintaining an effective school environment. A diagram of the model follows. The [overlapping circles](#) demonstrate how the various components of climate build on and impact each other to create an effective school environment.

Unfortunately, schools have been operating blindly. Before NIMS/ICS, they were without a consistent method for defining and evaluating safety. With NIMS/ICS, schools can establish safety as mitigation/prevention, readiness in responding to, and recovering from, a broad range of incidents. NIMS/ICS provides schools with a formula for accountability and foresight. It allows schools to proactively allocate their resources and structure planning and preparedness to increase environmental safety. Through NIMS/ICS, clarity is provided through the incident cycle and across schools, districts, agencies and jurisdictions. However, areas of blindness in the school community remain.

To provide clarity on those blind spots, we propose the use of Taguiri's systematic model of climate. The model provides depth, or clarity by focusing on the essential elements of school climate, making lucid the physical, emotional, organizational, and relational aspects of the environment. Furthermore, it underscores the various relational connections that keep the school environment safe. Specifically, the model shows that an effective school environment promotes: A). a positive, caring culture; B). responsive, transparent administrative structure; C). connectedness through membership; and D). physical safety as captured in Taguiri's ecology. All four elements reinforce school safety. Additionally, Taguiri's framework provides a correlation between non-instructional programs and services provided to students, staff, and families, and the formal curriculum, classroom instruction, and student achievement.

Both the NIMS/ICS framework and Taguiri's model provide scaffolds for the allocation of limited school resources. In addition, both include proactive elements to assist schools in preparing for and responding to incidents. However, while the NIMS/ICS framework focuses on essential functions and incident operations, the Taguiri's model focuses on the importance of meaningful relationships in a school setting. Developing a comprehensive model requires the integration of both essential functions and meaningful relationships. Further explanation of the four elements of Taguiri's model follows:

### **Culture**

Taguiri's first element, and the broadest element of an effective school environment, is culture. Culture is commonly defined as shared values or norms. It was articulated and popularized by Asa Hilliard (1991) as "the way things are done around here". Additionally, culture is the conscious and unconscious assumptions of how things operate including ideas about what is normal during interactions, who has power, why, how it is used, and where one stands in relation to power. It is particularly the power aspect of culture that frames school staff behavior and assumptions. Therefore, in identifying qualities that create safe, responsible schools, *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide, Implementing Early Warning, Timely Response, 2000*, first highlighted the beliefs and behaviors of staff. Moreover, The Guide states, in an effective school environment, the staff is "compassionate, caring, respectful, ...model appropriate behaviors, create a climate of emotional support, and are committed to working with all students." (p.2) The behaviors identified in *Safeguarding Our Children* are only evident on the part of staff when they themselves are treated fairly and collaboratively. When decision-making is transparent, and leadership is thoughtful and strong, then staff tends to assume that their basic need for safety has been met and they are better able to focus on the needs of their students. They, in turn, then articulate and model care and concern to each other, students, and families. In this manner, the beliefs for the school community are communicated and expectations are standardized and modeled.

Expectations are the behavioral goals, or norms, that successful students adopt. They often include broad concepts such as being: responsible, respectful, and a peaceful-problem solver. Teaching behavioral expectations should be tied to the acknowledgment of students' rights to a peaceful, predictable, productive learning environment. Additionally, students' rights must be connected to their role as active, responsible citizens and learners. When students are provided with convincing arguments for behavioral expectations, rules then make sense. Students can buy into the rules because they believe them to be fair and/or reasonable. More importantly, they understand how they benefit from the environment that the rules create and protect. Students can thereby connect their right to a safe, productive learning environment to their mutual responsibility to follow the rules and model active citizenship.

Rules are defined as codified behaviors that often have sanctions attached to them. They are

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developed to provide clear boundaries for acceptable behaviors. When acceptable behavior is clearly communicated, and consequences are equitably imposed, then students learn it is important to manage their own behaviors and, furthermore, that their behavior impacts the community around them. Specifically, helping students understand why rules exist is part of creating an effective school culture. Ideally, expectations, rules and routines should be reviewed at the start of the school year, and provided in writing to families.

To ensure an effective school climate, school safety plans should also include cultural supports, or plans to promote a common, positive, culture of learning. Despite race, ethnicity or gender, the predominant values nurtured should promote student connectedness to: a positive school environment, the high expectations held for each student, and the caring relationships established with the adults in the building. Programs such as *School Wide Effective Behavior Support* or *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)*, explicitly set expectations, identify, teach, model and reinforce positive behavior for students and staff. Thus, they provide a continuum of structures and procedures to promote positive behaviors. Especially important with such programs is the training and the behavioral expectation of all staff – instructional and support staff in the building. If every interaction with a child results in some lesson being learned, then training all staff on how to recognize, model, and reinforce positive behavior is an essential aspect of achieving a positive learning environment. Furthermore, while classroom management is one aspect of monitoring student behavior, equally important is supervision of students during non-instructional times such as lunchtime, recess, and during hallway transitions. Managing student behavior during these social times requires active supervision and all staff, both instructional and support, should be expected to demonstrate reinforcement skills consistently.

The necessity and importance of non-instructional services and programs in schools, specifically programs and services such as: non-instructional staff as School Resource Officers/School Police personnel; pro-social curricula; and counseling interventions, are directly related to school climate and safety. Quite often, schools are indifferent to non-instructional services until routines are disrupted by negative behaviors. Staff often overlook the human element and operate as if teaching and learning is primarily about the delivery of state and federally mandated information, and behavioral compliance. True teaching and learning is a lesson in caring. One cannot care and ultimately remain unchanged and uninvolved. Students, teachers and staff must choose to care. Given various challenges in the school environment, the individuals who are consistently available to demonstrate a concerned ear, an encouraging word, or a word of caution are, more often than not, the support staff. Providing training to support staff on the modeling, coaching, and reinforcing of pro-social skills is a mitigation/prevention measure that could be implemented.

Developing and institutionalizing pro-social norms through initiatives such as *Single School Culture*, providing social emotional supports through classroom instruction and schoolwide modeling and reinforcement, all require schools to partner in new and different ways with parents and other local agencies to reinforce those skills across multiple environments such as the home environment and the community. Accomplishing these and similar tasks will require the empowerment of staff and students to support in new and different ways. Institutionalizing the new behaviors requires structural backing and administrative support.

### **Administrative Structure**

Taguiri's second element is the social system that can also be referred to as the administrative structure. Changes in social interaction, as introduced in the first element, require administrative support. Specifically, in addition to cultural supports, an effective school climate includes the following: plans and supports for staff leadership; clear, comprehensive climate policy integrated with academic policy; streamlined, transparent, communication and decision-making patterns; a stable organizational hierarchy; a consistent system of recognition and enforcement; an early warning process for providing targeted interventions; intensive interventions, generally through referral services; strong communication channels between school and homes; and equitable access to positive social groups or clubs. More to the point, formal structures and processes provide stability and predictability, a sense of order and direction especially during times of change. Furthermore, based on Taguiri's model, the new structures and systems' effectiveness is determined by the degree to which they proactively engage and empower staff and students to accomplish their educational goals. Regrettably, those goals are easily derailed by negative behaviors.

School plans and supports should also include protocols for responding effectively to disruptive behaviors. This level of planning is critically important in elementary schools when early intervention is often most effective. Notes from a transcript from Safe And Drug Free Schools And Communities, Advisory Committee Meeting on Monday, October 23, 2006 echo similar concerns:

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“Early, aggressive, disruptive, behavior is the most important risk factor we know that tracks kids over the life course. So, I would say that we need to discuss integrating information systems, understanding the developmental trajectories, and understanding how this [information] can be used for formative issues, like moving teachers to be more skilled at managing classrooms. ...Roughly 50 percent of [first grade] teachers in Baltimore don't do it very well and have not gotten the training. About 50 percent can do it intuitively or whatever way.... In other words, the teachers who are socializing kids in the first grade are not able to do that.”

Basically, children who exhibit aggressive behaviors at a young age are identifiable. These children can often be taught replacement behaviors that make it easier for them to successfully navigate the classroom environment. However, most elementary classroom teachers and support staff are unsuccessful at teaching and reinforcing pro-social skills because they either lack the tools, the administrative support, and/or the tools they were provided were either ineffective or unproven. Teachers and staff need consistent, effective, supports for addressing problematic behaviors. An effective school climate provides policy, plans, protocols, curricula, training, resources and time to develop organizational goals based on caring and clearly articulated expectations. Those supports must begin in the classroom and expand throughout the entire school community.

Evertson and Harris (1992) strongly believe that classroom management and classroom instruction are interwoven and that the connection between the two is clearest from students' perspective. For example, “students have two cognitive demands on them at all times: academic task demands (understanding and working with content) and social task demands (interacting with others concerning that content). Thus, in order to be successful [students], management and instruction are intertwined”. (p.74) Consequently, part of the core curriculum for future teachers should be courses on classroom management. Instead of discovering independently, how to integrate management and instruction, teachers should have guided experiences that emphasize that the goal is not controlling behavior, but, in the words of Evertson, Harris, 1992, rather on “creating, implementing, and maintaining a learning environment within the classroom” (p. 75) Increasing the number of classrooms with positive learning environments would require teacher education to include classes on integrating social skills curricula, such as Second Step, or I Can Problem Solve, across all content areas, such as Social Studies, Science, History, English and Physical Education. These curricula could be used to introduce positive behavioral skills while reinforcing information from the various content areas. Inclusion of pro-social skills need not dominate instructional time. Various social skills curricula, including Second Step, emphasized that lessons should not be taught everyday; thereby leaving students time to practice the skills that were introduced. In addition, the lesson could be chunked into 15-20 minutes portions.

Adequate teacher preparation is one important aspect of managing classroom behaviors. In addition, students should also arrive at school with some basic social skills. However, for a broad range of reasons, ranging from changes in family and community composition, to the impact of negative media images, this is no longer the case. In general, many students lack the skills necessary to navigate peacefully and effectively through various classroom interactions. As a society, we can no longer assume that children arrive at school having learned pro-social skills, or, if these skills were learned, that children had sufficient opportunity to practice pro-social skills elsewhere. Therefore, school-wide implementation of an evidenced-based curriculum is another critical aspect of normalizing positive behaviors in schools. However, the multiple challenges of daily school activities often make inclusion of a social skills curriculum difficult to adopt and fully implement. Given that all children can benefit from instruction in pro-social skills and from the opportunity to practice them, the inclusion of an evidenced-based, social skills curriculum must be a basic requirement for ensuring a positive school climate. Furthermore, schoolwide implementation must include teaching, modeling, and reinforcing prosocial skills. The Safety Plan should document the entire process. Such initiatives build a strong foundation for relational safety as represented by Taguiri's Milieu or membership. Moreover, social skill instruction provides a natural and necessary bridge between the classroom and non-instructional environments.

### **Milieu – Connectedness Through Membership**

Taguiri's third element is milieu or membership. A sense of belonging and being connected to co-workers, classmates, and the school community is a significant factor in decreasing the likelihood of negative adult and student behaviors. In fact, The Add Health study, from the National Resilience Resource Center (2004), found just one school variable to be consistently associated with positive behaviors and resiliency. The study reveals that the most important variable for adolescent health is a school connectedness. In particular, connectedness is perceived as fair treatment, meaningful relationships, and meaningful participation in the life of the school. Caring relationships and high expectations are particularly difficult to maintain when working with challenging students. However, it is the challenging students, in particular, who need the supports identified above the



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most, including the use of a pro-social curriculum.

An initial investment in pro-social skill instruction reaps the end reward of additional teaching time. Teaching time is often limited because teachers may spend more time managing behavior rather than providing academic instruction. Admittedly, learning is a social process. In urban settings, it often takes place in the presence of more than thirty people. Therefore, academic success requires students to consistently interact well with each other and with the teacher. Student must be able to: manage strong emotions (such as anger, excitement or fear); resist impulsive behavior (such as shouting out answers in class); resolve conflicts, that are often part of encountering differences, peacefully; and consistently understand and predict the consequences of their actions. Schools that are unable to comprehensively incorporate the teaching and reinforcing of these skills while addressing the additional social-emotional needs of targeted students, tend to spend more time reacting and responding to incidents. Having spent insufficient time at the top half of the incident management cycle mitigating, preventing, preparing and planning for possible physical and hazards, they now spend an inordinate amount of time in the bottom half of the incident cycle, where the academic instruction is not the priority. This same conclusion was drawn by the October 23, Safe and Drug free School and Communities, Advisory Committee meeting. Their observation follows:

“...We looked at the schools that have been deemed as persistently dangerous by all the states and then tried to find out where they were with their education progress... About 75-80 percent of those schools who were persistently dangerous were also in need of adequate yearly progress, and they were having challenges there.”

In summary, particularly at the elementary level, integrating pro-social skills into the curriculum and into the Safety Plan will positively impact instructional time and ultimately impact student achievement.

Social emotional needs, at the middle and high school levels, tend to become more complex. However, Resnick, Ireland, and Borowsky (2004) tells us that the most salient predictors of violence perpetration at the time of incidents were: violence involvement and a history of violence victimization. Specifically, by gender:

“For males, repeating a grade and carrying a weapon to school were the next most salient predictors, followed by marijuana and alcohol use. A history of treatment for emotional problems as well as self-reported learning problems comprised the final significant predictors. Among girls, ...the most salient risk factors at time of incident were: violence involvement and prior violence victimization included carrying a weapon to school, alcohol use, and emotional distress. (The latter was not a significant risk factor for boys.) Marijuana use and having repeated a grade were the next most salient risk factors. Unique to the girls, somatic complaints were a risk factor, followed by learning problems.” (424.e5)

In short, providing timely interventions and supports to students identified by these behaviors is critical. Supports should be standard procedure, and as consistent as the academic supports offered to students retained in grade. Both groups of students are at-risk for dropping out, stopping out and or perpetrating a violent act. Victimization and weapon violations should automatically result in immediate consequences, where necessary, in addition to social-emotional supports. These supports should include:

- Additional opportunities to learn practice prosocial skills including emotion management and impulse control, perhaps through a service learning projects
- Opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills, including refusal and communication strategies, perhaps through the development of a social marketing campaigns, volunteer opportunities and internships
- Opportunities to identify and explore post-secondary goals
- Opportunities to develop a meaningful relationship with a caring adult

Delayed interventions generally results in many of these students being caught in the crosshairs of the school's disciplinary process and/or the legal system. Theoretically, the disciplinary process is designed to assist students as they connect their decisions and actions to academic and social consequences. However, meaningful dialog seldom occurs during this process and the student learns few, if any, positive lessons. The result is a pattern of repeated offenses and suspensions that often ends with delinquency. Unfortunately, the initial red flag of violence involvement and/or a history of violence victimization are often unidentified and overlooked.

Regrettably, given the large number of students who could potentially need supports, missing the initial red flag, in some instances, is bound to occur. Still, schools, with parental support, must develop and implement strategies and protocols designed to identify and assist targeted students with necessary interventions in a timely manner. *K-12 Coordinator Online Event on Truancy* agrees that admittedly, "schools cannot address all the issues and problems that some students bring along with them still, studies show that schools can play a major role in how students feel about attending." (Day 2, p.1) Furthermore, if the problem impacts the student's ability to learn, schools have an obligation to assist in resolving the problem. Moreover, protective factors for these students include improved grade point average, and a sense of connectedness to adults outside of the family. Therefore, schools and the various social agencies serving these students need to deepen communication channels and implement a shared action plan to assist students to access services while making academic progress.

### **Ecology- Physical Safety**

Taguiri's fourth and final element is ecology. The ecology, or physical safety, is often the first aspect of safety to be addressed. Given increased threats and incidents targeting students and schools, supports in physical safety have increased drastically over the years to include hand held scanners, buzzers and cameras on doors, single, manned, entry points, and trained safety personnel. Schools are also institutionalizing mitigation techniques such as: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED); hazard assessments and identification; early warning systems; identification of "hot spots" where higher number of incidents tend to occur and judicious use of a staff deployment plan to address the "hot spots"; systematic, coordinated dissemination of vital information; and joint training and exercises to increase the physical safety of the school environment. However, Taguiri's model encourages school personnel to broaden their understanding of physical safety to include an examination and review of items such as signage, pictures, sculptures, or other artifacts that could potentially alienate community members rather than embrace and reassure them.

In summary, Taguiri's model provides schools with a four-element framework for examining a broad range of factors that could strengthen or negate school climate. While schools tend to operate in silos, Taguiri's model integrates academic, behavioral and safety initiatives. Additionally, the elements in the model all cascade, spiral, and at times, bleed into each other. Each element impacts upon each other and, as school staff move around the spiral, each element presents a different perspective of their school environment depending on where one stands in relation to the model. The varying perspectives allow school staff to identify and develop specific recommendations for strengthening their Safety Plan and the various partnerships that support it.

### **A Comprehensive School Safety Model and Persistently Dangerous Schools**

In reviewing the major points established thus far, this paper finds that safety as been defined as preparedness planning, and partnerships. Additionally, an effective school environment has been defined as a climate with a positive, comprehensive, integrated framework that connects the formal curriculum to both the relational, administrative and physical aspects of safety, while supporting student achievement. Having established the importance of a safe, effective school environment, this paper will now examine persistently dangerous schools and, with the use of both models, make recommendations to address the safety issues that plague them.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, each state is required to define "persistently dangerous" and develop its own criteria to identify unsafe schools. States had to certify that they met this provision to receive federal funds. The goal of the Act was to place pressure on schools and districts to institute reform, inform parents about the school's climate, and provide families with alternative choices. Granted, the mitigation/prevention, preparedness, and recovery best practices identified from the use of the two models will focus on persistently dangerous schools, however many of our nation's school do experience violent incidents ranging from shoving and punching, bullying and fights, to stabbing and shootings. According to Cornell, 2005,

Violence and threats of violence that do not result in homicide are all too common in our schools. According to a national survey of school principals (Miller, 2003), in 1999-2000 an estimated 1.5 million violent incidents occurred in public schools; more than 92 percent of secondary schools, 87 percent of middle schools, and 61 percent of elementary schools reported at least one incident. (p.17)

Therefore, because violent incidents in schools can and do occur, all of the nations' schools could benefit from a risk assessment analysis beginning with the essential questions facing persistently dangerous schools:

[object]

- What is an acceptable threshold for negative behavior?
- What should we do for students who are potentially dangerous?

Furthermore, all schools can also benefit from identified recommendations.

In view of the fact that Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is the city with the highest reported number of dangerous incidents, it serves as a catalyst for rich discussion about the context for violence in schools. Therefore, the passages that follow highlights and summarizes related safe schools policies in Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), places the threshold for dangerous behavior at felonious action that endanger others in the community. Thereby, A persistently dangerous schools is any public elementary, secondary, or charter school that during the previous year met any of the following criteria:

- School enrollment is 250 students or less and there are at least 5 dangerous incidents reported
- School enrollment is between 251-1000 students and the number of dangerous incidents reported is at least 2% of the school enrollment
- School enrollment is over 1000 students and there are at least 20 dangerous incidents reported

Dangerous incidents include:

- Possession of weapons, such as guns or knives, resulting in arrest
- Violent incidents such as homicide, kidnapping, robbery, sexual offenses and aggravated assaults, resulting in arrest (Student Services and Programs Home)

Incidents may occur on school grounds — regardless of the time or the day, or to students as they travel to and from school. In essence, when incidents become violent or potentially felonious, they are considered dangerous. Anecdotally, when disruptive behaviors become disorderly conduct, and students refuse to disperse resulting in multiple arrests, consequent to the multiple arrests, the school climate is also considered potentially dangerous.

For the last three years, Philadelphia has had the highest concentration of persistently dangerous schools in the nation. The state originally identified 27 Philadelphia schools in 2003. In 2007, that number dropped to 12. If this designation were the only indicator of school climate, attending or working in a Philadelphia school would be a very risky venture. However, those same schools also have malfunctioning membership and ecology. The assumption of strong membership is based on statements made at The Safe And Drug Free Schools And Communities, 2006 Advisory Committee Meeting. The statements reveal that:

“Last year, Pennsylvania, with several determinations of persistently dangerous school, had 12 students transfer because of the determination of persistently dangerous schools. In other words 12 [students] opted to go to another school because their school had been deemed persistently dangerous. Throughout the state 47 students transferred because they had been the victims of a violent crime.”

Thus, we see more Pennsylvanians transferring because of victimization rather than because of determination. One conclusion that can be drawn, from the transfer pattern identified above, could be that the attending families feel some sense of connectedness. Despite the persistently dangerous label, it is still their district school. Moreover, their originally assigned school is still preferable to an unknown alternative. Therefore, when offered a choice that allows them to opt out of the persistently dangerous school, most families choose not to exercise that choice. Their school remains their school by choice. Consequently, for Pennsylvanians there does not appear to be a causal link between school determination and transfer, rather the correlation is between incidence of victimization and a request to transfer. Further, as the rising victimization number indicates, for many students and their families, the core issue is eliminating the threat of danger at best, or surviving actual incidents at worst.

The popular solution to address the threat of danger present at most schools is to increase the security measures – more personnel, more devices and stricter policies and strategies. However, although such responses may be reasonable, they are too narrow in scope and equally important, in isolation such measures are ineffective. If schools only manipulate security measures, then, they have addressed only one of Taguiri’s elements - ecology. By only addressing ecology they have

gained momentary compliance. Unless the other elements are also tackled, the temporary, one-dimensional pressure provided by security resources will eventually become ineffective against the onslaught of increasingly unmet needs and escalating negative behaviors. However, the use of Taguiri's model provides schools with insight and a prolonged systemic strategy to combat negative or inappropriate behaviors most often rooted in inappropriate beliefs about violence, and fragmented communication and decision-making supports. Taguiri's first element for assisting schools to create and maintain an effective environment is to address the culture. The first step in changing the culture is to challenge students' beliefs about violence.

### **Culture and Persistently Dangerous Schools**

Most of the schools identified as persistently dangerous are high schools. Threatening and assaulting behaviors have a prescribed response. The behaviors that tend to get a significant number of students arrested are fights and weapons. Often times, the students who are arrested state that they no longer trust schools or the police. Additionally, they do not trust the adults representing those systems, to deal with them, or their situation, fairly. The lack of trust is reportedly connected to the unresponsiveness of many adults to their voice and to their concerns. Subsequently, these students often seek their own satisfaction, regardless of personal cost or consequence.

In examining the school's culture, it is evident that the school administration is starting from a position of distrust. They have the authority to act, but lack the mutual respect, trust, or requisite fairplay needed to establish and maintain an effective school climate. Students believe in their own abilities, or the abilities of their peers, or sometimes their parents, to solve the issues to their satisfaction, and bring final resolution to the conflict they face at school and in the community. Change will require student involvement from the inception and their on-going participation in the development of a culture that shows them they are valued, and respected. Use of direct instruction of pro-social skills would further their distrust and encourage further resistance. Additionally, most pro-social skills curricula are geared towards elementary and middle school students. There is a need for a high school initiative with creative collaboration from the various social service agencies, the criminal justice system, and recreation and sports industries. Partnerships among these entities could be prominent in any of the following three proposals:

- The development of a youth driven, social marketing campaign aimed at teens with the goal of advocating peaceful problem solving and career goal setting
- Service learning projects where content areas are linked to the real life issue of violence
- The development of a shared story. Students often feel they have a story to share but no one is listening and, further, their story is dramatically different from the stories of teachers and staff at school. Through various media projects, the stories of students' and others could be captured. The telling of the story could center on overcoming challenges of violence and dropout factories to obtain an equitable public education.

Each of the preceding cultural change proposals aims to engage teens in a meaningful dialog with each other, adults, and community agencies. Together, these teens and their school, through dialog, can establish common goals. In so doing, this approach exemplifies the use of Taguiri's cultural element to reestablish an effective school environment.

### **Administrative Structure and Persistently Dangerous Schools**

A collaborative approach, such as the projects proposed above, is also based on cooperation and partnership, and reflects the administrative style advocated in Taguiri's social system. Each project requires collaboration and partnership and empowers participants through shared leadership and learning. As demonstrated by previous examples, an effective administrative structure recognizes the voice and concerns of students who are at risk, institutionalizes transparent, streamlined decision making, and maneuvers formal and informal communication channels to effect meaningful, lasting changes.

### **Milieu or Membership and Persistently Dangerous Schools**

Taguiri's third element, milieu or membership has been partially addressed by default. Families seem to be connected to their schools. In general, when given a choice, students attending persistently dangerous schools have not opted to attend a different school. Their presence, however, does not necessarily indicate that they feel safe, visible, relaxed and or valued. These safety concerns are reflected in poor academic progress, high rates of absenteeism, and high truancy numbers. Granted, the level of disorder in the school is often a reflection of the social and

economic disruption within the community. However, similarly to bullying, the school can establish a culture of caring and accountability that, to some extent, mitigates the impact of negative behaviors.

### **Ecology and Persistently Dangerous Schools**

Finally, Taguiri's fourth element, the ecology of schools in Pennsylvania has been addressed by the Auditor General's school safety and security checklist. The checklist requires schools to have the following: a memorandum of understanding with its local law enforcement agency on reporting acts of violence on school property; a comprehensive safety plan; a visitation /identification process for students, staff and visitors; school security features including limited school access through single entry and egress points; designated safety personnel; an emergency communications system; and related training for staff, faculty and students. In short, it requires schools to incorporate NIMS/ICS into school plans and protocols thereby proactively addressing issues of physical safety.

Although schools must implement NIMS/ICS, without Taguiri's model, they remain particularly vulnerable to incidents stemming from relational tensions that increasingly result in violence. Vulnerability is even more of an issue for persistently dangerous schools where the culture, administrative structure, milieu, and/or the ecology are fragmented. However, when both models are applied, schools may be better prepared to protect lives, prevent injury, minimize property damage, and equally important, create a caring, effective learning environment by strengthening the safety network within school.

### **Recommendations**

Based on NIMS/ICS and Taguiri's model, the passages that follow highlights the recommendations of the authors. The recommendations aim to decrease fragmentation across the school environment, promote healthy schools, increase teacher effectiveness, and support safety and student achievement.

Our first recommendation focuses on the Recovery phase of NIMS/ICS and offers two suggestions. Quite often, recovery services are offered immediately after the event with minimum follow-up and little connection to prior incidents or violence related factors. To ensure that students are able to relax, focus, and learn, all service providers, whether schools or community based, should receive the same training. Shared preparation and expectations ensures that students are screened for violence-related factors and referred to the appropriate clinical and community resources. Additionally, because incidents will occur, schools must provide guidance for teachers within the academic curriculum. At minimum, schools should provide teachers with professional development on how to transition students back to the curriculum after varying intervals of disruption: short term of a week or less; intermediate disruptions lasting between one to four weeks; and extended disruptions, such as a pandemic, lasting for more than a month.

Our second recommendation is for schools to move from a fragmented approach to an integrated framework using Taguiri's model. Using the model, the first action step would be to address the culture starting with the beliefs of teachers and staff. In the face of tremendous economic, social, behavioral, and academic difficulties, it is challenging for many school staff to embrace the notion that despite obstacles they can make a lasting difference in the lives of their students. Belief in the power to make a positive difference through comprehensive prevention efforts, self-reflection and training, is the first step in adopting Taguiri's model of climate and an effective school environment.

Our third recommendation is the continued use of NIMS/ICS. NIMS/ICS, through the Safety Plan, establishes a framework for analyzing situations, resources, and response patterns. When used to address the problem of escalating violence, or other safety issues, schools have a common, workable framework for collaborating with a wide range of partners to address the problem comprehensively.

Our fourth recommendation would be to use NIMS/ICS to extend safety beyond school gates and into our students' homes. Development and articulation of partnership roles and responsibilities are integral to NIMS/ICS. Parent partnership must be encouraged to address behavior in two areas: 1) the reinforcement of social skills necessary for the classroom, home, workplace, and the community and 2) the monitoring of media activity and influence that undermine and denigrate pro-social skills.

In closing, when faced with danger, or the threat of danger, there is always the choice to fight back or flee. When the danger is a national epidemic, like youth violence and failing schools, then

fighting back effectively must include the development of a comprehensive, integrated, collaborative approach such as the one offered by NIMS/ICS and Taguiri's. Pennsylvania needs a broad, consistent, and powerful framework to produce meaningful dialogue and strategies that support safe, effective schools. This paper has proposed a marriage between two models to structure that effort. The thoughtful integration of these models give schools an aggressive and cohesive approach that connects daily classroom routines to local and national mandates. More importantly, it provides schools with a paradigm that informs and equips teachers and administrators with a proactive scaffold for developing integrated policies, strategies and protocols.

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<sup>1</sup> Nickel Mines refers to the Amish schoolhouse-shooting incident that occurred in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania on Monday, October 2, 2006. Five students died and five others were critically injured before the gunman shot himself.

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