

Common Sense Solutions to Help Address the Safety Issues and Challenges Facing Most Public School Districts.

Violence in Texas schools and in schools across the nation is a growing concern for parents, students, teachers, and administrators. No Texas community--large or small, urban or rural, prosperous or poor--is completely immune from the potential of violence.

Upon taking office, Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Rylander made education--and school safety and security--her priority. A mother, grandmother, former public school teacher, and former school board president, Comptroller Rylander urged the Texas Legislature to take steps to prevent violence and improve student safety on our school campuses.

"One of the most important goals of any government--perhaps the most important--is to ensure the safety and well-being of all of its citizens. It is particularly important to safeguard our most vulnerable citizens, our children."

"Students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach when they do not feel safe."
– Comptroller Carole Keeton Rylander

The 1999 Texas Legislature enacted Comptroller Rylander's recommendations contained in Senate Bill 1724 to require school districts to report to parents and the community the number, rate, and type of violent and criminal incidents occurring on each campus as part of each school district's annual performance report. The law, effective September 1, 1999, also encourages school districts to include violence prevention in annual campus improvement plans.

Moreover, Comptroller Rylander instructed her nationally recognized Texas School Performance Review (TSPR) team to share lessons learned, particularly the best practices of districts in protecting opportunities for every student to learn in a safe, secure environment. To that end, *Keeping Texas Children Safe in School* outlines exemplary programs collected in past reviews with school districts across Texas.

Toward Safe Places of Learning

By all accounts, gang and drug activities continue in Texas to escalate. According to a 1997 report by the Texas Attorney General's office, the number of identified gang members in the state's largest cities increased from 35,000 members in 1995 to 47,000 members in 1997. A survey by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) revealed an

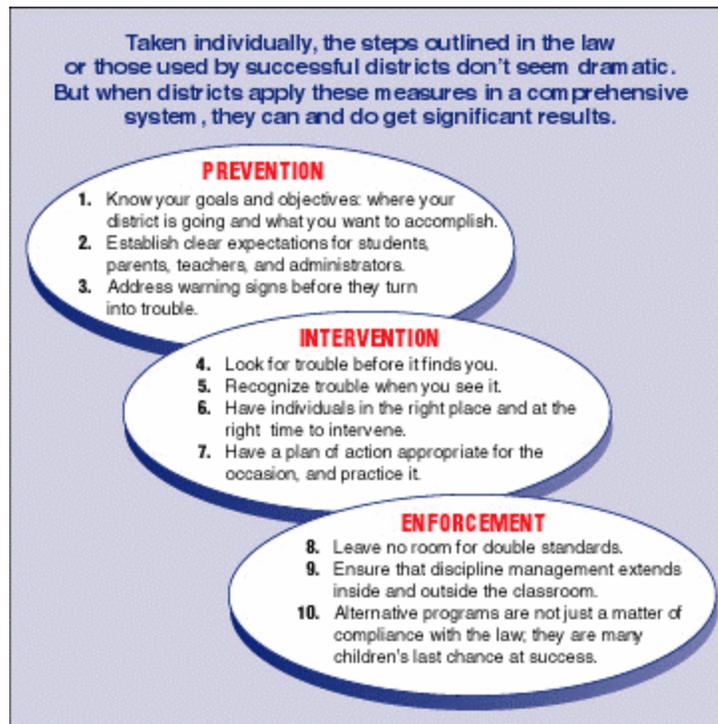
increase in illicit drug use, especially marijuana use, since 1992. By 1996, total annual drug arrests for juveniles aged 17 and under had more than doubled since 1985. More than 9 percent of all secondary students surveyed by TCADA reported they went to class drunk at least once during the previous school year.

One area of school safety concern--the presence of weapons--showed a slight improvement. While Texas Education Agency (TEA) statistics show that 8,012 weapons, including 576 firearms, were confiscated from Texas students in 1997, this number was 15 percent lower than the

1994 total. And, assaults against teachers also are down from 6,238 in the 1994-95 school year to 4,369 in 1997-98.

Despite improvements, however, the fact remains that violence and threats of violence remain a fact of everyday life in many of our schools. For example, there were 58,634

assaults against students in 1997 compared to 50,904 in 1994.



On a national level, the growing awareness that not all schools are safe places of learning contributed to the seventh goal of the U.S. Department of Education's National Education Goals: "All schools in America will be free of drugs and violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol, and offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning." Subsequently, Congress passed the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994 to support drug- and violence-prevention programs. Around the country, in addition, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents have banded together to sensitize one another to the potential for violence and develop approaches for heading off dangerous confrontations. In Texas, the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District in suburban Houston has emerged as a

national model for violence prevention, anger control, and mental health counseling in schools. The local school superintendent has made violence prevention his priority.

In addition, the 1995 Texas Legislature addressed school safety by revising safety and security provisions of the Texas Education Code. According to the revised statutes, each public school must adopt a student code of conduct setting the limits of permissible behavior. The law also states that students who engage in serious misconduct must be removed from the regular education setting and placed in alternative education programs; moreover, specific information concerning the arrest or criminal conduct of students now must be shared between law enforcement and local school districts.

The law is clear about a district's legal obligations, but TSPR has found differences in the day-to-day management of school safety and security programs can have a profound effect on success or failure.

Prevention, Intervention, and Enforcement: Understanding the Differences

An effective program of safety and security begins with a clear understanding of three key elements: prevention, intervention, and enforcement.

Prevention *is the foundation laid to deter crime and violence.*

Prevention might best be described as the planning phase of a school safety program. Prevention consists of the groundwork the district lays to prevent crime or violence from occurring in the first place. Just as an accounting office establishes internal controls that prevent an employee from writing himself a check, so must each district attempt to eliminate any expectation that criminal or violent behavior will go unpunished. An effective prevention program includes a clear vision of district goals and objectives; clear expectations for students, parents, faculty members, and administrators; and policies and procedures that address "warning signs" before they turn into harmful trouble.

Intervention -- *stepping in before it goes too far.*

Individuals will invariably find a way to bend or break any preventive system. Within a school, some students may consciously plot and scheme to break the rules, while others will simply forget them in a momentary lapse of judgment. Intervention describes an action step in the safety

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process--stepping in when crime or violence occurs and stopping it before it becomes a disaster. An effective intervention program requires teachers, administrators, and students to look for trouble before a conflagration erupts; recognize trouble when you see it; have the right people in the right place at the right time; have a plan of action appropriate for the occasion and practice it.

Enforcement -- what do you do in the aftermath?

A disruptive or violent deed is done--now what? Enforcement in our public schools includes enforcing school rules, administering punishment as applicable, and helping children who have disobeyed the rules learn how to alter their behavior. Effective enforcement leaves no room for double standards. Districts must understand that discipline management extends inside and outside the classroom, and that alternative programs are not there simply to comply with the law--they are many children's last chance at success.

PREVENTION

1 Know your goals and objectives: where your district is going and what you want to accomplish

Some Texas school districts operate their own police departments, while others employ security guards or off-duty police officers. Still others have a combination of security guards and certified police officers. Many quiet districts still don't have, or perceive the need for, security forces of any sort.

Clearly identify roles and responsibilities.

Some school districts hire guards or officers in response to escalating crime without a *clear design* in mind for what the district really needs or wants to accomplish.

For example, what are the community's and the district's expectations of personnel assigned to handle security on a campus? Teachers may think they should remove disruptive children from the classroom. An assistant principal in charge of discipline may feel that security guards should not be involved in discipline, but instead should protect the children from outsiders on the premises and assist with hall monitoring. Administrators may prefer that security officers patrol parking lots during the school day and deter vandalism after hours. And students may look to them for protection from other students.

In the Port Arthur ISD, TSPR found that police officers employed by the district had a totally different understanding of their role in the district from that of the parents or the administrators. No one was wrong -- but before any program can become successful, everyone needs to be working from the same page.

Nothing is wrong with any of these ideas; an effective safety and security program must begin by identifying such expectations. Next, however, comes the assignment of roles and responsibilities. What is the teacher's role in security situations? What is expected of the principal and assistant principal? When is a uniformed, certified police officer appropriate? When would a trained security guard be preferable? Should the security force carry weapons? Do they need a patrol vehicle? Who will respond to calls, and how will calls for assistance be communicated? What is the role of local law enforcement agencies on the campus or within the school district?

Prepare a comprehensive plan.

Some districts believe their student code of conduct, which outlines a variety of student offenses and resulting consequences, also provides an adequate guide to the duties and responsibilities of administrators and teachers in the disciplinary process. In fact, few of the codes of conduct examined by TSPR contain the kind of detail needed to establish an effective safety and security function or to clearly assign responsibilities related to the function. Furthermore, job descriptions for security officers, teachers, and administrators often are vague on issues of discipline. For example, a teacher's job description may say: "Maintains discipline in the classroom following state and local guidelines"--which is not really an adequate guide to such a complex and difficult topic.

A good security plan takes a "global" view of school safety. While some elements of school safety rest with the individual campuses, many others are issues for the district as a whole, such as designating hazardous bus routes for students who live in areas in which walking to school would be unsafe and coordinating district security programs with local law enforcement.

2 Establish clear expectations for students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

Psychologists have long said that children want to know their boundaries--that they desperately need fair and consistent guidance. Texas law requires each school district to prepare a student code of conduct to give students clear standards for their behavior.

The Student Code of Conduct must comply with the law, and it must be crystal clear.

Section 37.001 of the Texas Education Code instructs the district's school board, in consultation with the district's site-based decision-making committee, to adopt a student code of conduct. This code must be prominently displayed at each school campus. It must specify the circumstances in which a student may be removed from a classroom, campus, or alternative program; specify conditions authorizing or requiring a principal or other administrator to transfer a student to an alternative education program; and list steps for student suspension. A student can be removed to an alternative setting under this section of the law if, for example, he or she has committed a felony or is under the influence of, sells, gives, or delivers drugs, alcohol, or inhalants. Other sections discuss actions that may result in suspension and expulsion.

TSPR has found varying levels of compliance with this law. While some student codes of conduct are exemplary, others do not track the law or clearly define offenses and the resulting discipline. If any party involved in the student discipline process, including students, parents, faculty, or administrators, is unclear about what offenses lead to which action, the entire disciplinary process is undermined, and the chances of consistent application of the code are slim.

No matter how well-written, a code of conduct is only useful when it is used--and used consistently

One way to ensure that the rules are clear is to involve people from outside the district's central office in writing and editing the code of conduct. For example, some districts use a team of students and parents to draft a code that students can understand. Teachers, principals, and security personnel can provide insights about the practical application of the rules. Rules cannot be effective if the people charged with enforcing them don't understand them or simply can't comply with unrealistic expectations.

The Student Code of Conduct must be applied consistently.

The essence of prevention is voluntary compliance. A code of conduct may comply with the letter of the law, but it can accomplish little on its own. No matter how well-written, a code of conduct is only useful when it is used-- and used consistently. If the students on one campus are treated differently than those on another, or if the rules are bent for various groups of students while other groups are expected to toe the mark, critical boundaries are blurred and respect for the system is undermined.

Everyone must know the rules.

Rules concerning conduct are--or, at any rate, should be--a contract between students, parents, faculty, and administration. No one should be able to claim that he or she didn't know the rules. Contracts take many forms, but in this case verbal exchanges do not appear to be enough. The most successful programs require a signature from parents and students acknowledging the rules up front. In one school, TSPR observed laminated posters throughout the district, giving the "dos" and "don'ts" contained in the code of conduct. Few students on that campus could claim they didn't know the expectations--if they committed the offense, they did it willfully, knowing the consequences.

3 Address warning signs before they turn into trouble.

When you see specks of sawdust around your house and little bugs flying about, you know you have termites someplace, and you call the exterminators; you don't wait for the roof to fall in. And while it may be an uncomfortable conversation, you tell your neighbor to have his house checked, too. When a school district sees trouble brewing, its inclination should not be to handle the matter internally and keep it quiet. No teacher or administrator wants the local newspaper to publish a story about drugs or violence on their campuses, no matter how isolated the incident may be. Yet a policy of denial and secretiveness can be and usually is counterproductive.

Know what to look for; share information.

Signs of gang activity and drug abuse often are detectable by a trained eye. Instances of random violence and crime can be more difficult to detect, but there are warning signs there as well. Educating faculty and staff to recognize these warning signs is a valuable first step toward prevention and intervention. Section 21.451 of the Education Code requires district staff training in conflict resolution and discipline strategies.

Bringing employees from across the district or from other districts together to discuss mutual concerns is a useful way to stay alert to signs of trouble, and a good springboard to the search for solutions. Similarly, sharing information on gang and drug-related activity with local law enforcement agencies can help lay the foundation for cooperative prevention and intervention programs by:

- identifying areas in which gang activity is concentrated and any illicit drug activities in which gangs are engaged.
- identifying and documenting techniques used by gang members to recruit young children and sell them drugs.
- using this information to develop programs that heighten students' awareness of these techniques and the reasons why gangs want them to become involved with drugs.

Take action.

Some districts are educating their students on alternatives to violence. In Corpus Christi ISD, for example, students in grades 3 through 8 are taught dispute resolution skills. Other districts work with local and state agencies to provide additional counseling services. In Wimberley ISD, a small

district near Austin, a study completed five years ago indicated alcohol and drug use by community teenagers. In response, the district provides services such as individual and group counseling and crisis intervention to area junior- and senior-high students. Administrators and parents told TSPR that this process has benefited both students and parents in the district. Drug and gang awareness programs also produce good results; most districts reviewed by TSPR are using money from the Federal Safe and Drug Free School Act for such programs.

TSPR also has found that many secondary campuses are closed, meaning that students normally cannot leave the campuses for lunch or at any other time during the school day. This is a good deterrent to off-campus crime and mischief, and can prevent students from leaving campus to obtain drugs, weapons, or alcohol and bringing them back onto the campus. After school, security alarms and security patrols provide a good deterrent to vandalism.

Districts should never hesitate to call for help from the local community, churches, civic organizations, law enforcement agencies, and parent-teacher organizations. Lay your cards on the table and seek their help in devising plans that work. Beware of the temptation to blame the school district alone for the problem. Everyone in the community -- starting with parents -- must be involved before a school district will become a safe haven for children. In Corpus Christi, business owners have created a "safe zone" around schools where gang activity is high. Business owners, employees, and community members watch out for students and report problems to police immediately.

Beware of the temptation to blame the school district alone for the problem. Everyone in the community -- starting with parents -- must be involved before a school district will become a safe haven for children

Support from the board and staff, students, parents, and community members in the fight against drugs, weapons, and misbehavior is essential. The causes of these problems are community-wide and can be addressed effectively only through cohesive, coordinated community efforts. Some ideas for such efforts include:

- creating a directory of community organizations and available services and making it available to all teachers and school administrators.
- regularly meeting with key contacts in community organizations to discuss pertinent issues.
- seeking sponsorship from area businesses for anti-drug and anti-violence programs.

Another interesting concept is the use of teen courts, in which students hear the "cases" of fellow students. These proceedings give students on both sides of disputes a better opportunity to understand the ramifications of their actions.

INTERVENTION

4

Look for trouble before it finds you.

Possession of drugs or weapons on a school campus is a serious offense, but not as serious as the use of drugs or weapons on campus.

Detection takes many forms.

Some schools across the state and nation have installed metal detectors to prevent students from bringing weapons on campus. But not all detection methods are so drastic. Periodic, unannounced inspections of lockers can discourage students from bringing drugs or weapons to school. More than half of all districts responding to a survey conducted by the Texas Center for Education Research for the Texas Senate Interim Committee on Education use drug-sniffing dogs on campus. Spring ISD bought such a dog and saved more than \$15,000 annually over the price of a contract service.

Intervention Ideas

- unannounced locker inspections
- drug-sniffing dogs
- closed secondary campuses
- security alarms
- restricted access to campus
- fenced play-grounds

Restrict outsiders' access to students.

TSPR has found that it is very important to restrict access to students by outsiders. Nonstudents of any age should not be allowed to enter school grounds undetected. Drug sales, gang activity, and abductions by noncustodial parents and even by violent offenders can occur when unauthorized individuals are allowed on school property. Some districts use dress codes to keep gang-related attire out of schools; others issue student badges that must be worn at all times while on campus. Both methods allow campus administrators and security personnel to readily identify outsiders who may be mingling with students.

It is critical to keep all but the main entrance to schools locked after the beginning of the school day. Doors can be equipped to allow students to leave the facility in an emergency without being operable from the outside. A constantly monitored main entrance should be the only way for a parent or any other visitor to enter the school. Visitors should be required to sign in and wear badges. Teachers and staff members should be instructed to stop anyone wandering the halls or grounds without a badge--whether they think they know them or not--and ask them to return to the main office to sign in.

The design of some buildings, and the use of portable buildings on a campus, can make it impossible to monitor school traffic this closely. When possible, such campuses should be fenced. When this is not possible, walkways, exterior entrances to restrooms, and areas where a nonstudent could enter the premises should be monitored either electronically or in person.

In the Corpus Christi ISD, exterior bathrooms on one campus are used predominantly by children on the playground or in portable buildings. An unfenced playground and the presence of known sex offenders in the neighborhood led parents to demand surveillance cameras and structural changes to the facility that would allow for closer monitoring of these restrooms.

Establish an effective truancy program.

Another issue that contributes to crime and violence is truancy. An effective system to identify truant students and notify their parents can go a long way toward keeping children off the streets and away from dangerous and unlawful activities. Some Texas districts have set up programs in which the local constable or sheriff visits the truant child's home and issues citations for truancy. Aggressive programs of this type have boosted attendance rates and lowered community crime statistics.

During a pilot study done in 1996 by the Austin ISD, Travis County Constables made 4,200 home visits to families of truant children. The visits cost \$30,000, but generated \$114,000 for the schools when attendance increased by about 2 percent. The program got hundreds of truants back into classrooms and off the streets.

5

Recognize trouble when you see it.

Know who is in your neighborhood.

Lists of known sex offenders are available to all school districts and are regularly updated. Give parents access to this information. Tell teachers and staff who is out there and where they are. If you have pictures or descriptions of people in close proximity to the school, circulate the information.

Give students ways to deal with bad situations.

Talk openly and honestly about issues like drugs, violence, and crime in an age-appropriate setting. Provide students with ways to tell campus administrators about potentially dangerous situations while remaining anonymous. A number of districts reviewed by TSPR have a toll-free hotline allowing students to report hidden dangers, threats of violence, or gang activity. Again, teach students how to avoid conflict and resolve conflicts without violence.

Many school districts concentrate resources at the high school level only to find that the real trouble is brewing at their middle school



Many school districts now use "school resource officers," local police officers who work in schools not to provide security, but to teach students how to deal with conflicts, resolve problems, face peer pressures, and avoid criminal activity.

Identify students and families who need help.

Intervention also involves identifying students who are at risk of getting into trouble and taking action to help them before they do so. For example, Ysleta ISD's Legacy Program is an intervention program for middle school students whose brothers or sisters have been placed in alternative education program because of disciplinary problems. Other successful intervention programs bring parents and students together. For example, Houston ISD has a program called Crossroads, a nine-week voluntary intervention program for chemically dependent students that provides both students and their families with individual and group counseling.

6 Have individuals in the right place and at the right time to intervene.

Another critical element in the planning and design of any school safety and security program is a system that allocates security resources--guards, certified police officers, or other disciplinary officers--according to need. TSPR has observed that many school districts concentrate resources at the high school level only to find that the real trouble is brewing at their middle schools, and that virtually no resources are available for elementary schools. TSPR noted that middle schools in one district were experiencing more disorderly conduct than area high schools, yet no security or law enforcement personnel were assigned to those campuses. Where are incidents occurring? What kind of incidents are most prevalent on a campus and what is the best method of handling them? How many incidents can a security guard or officer respond to? Who will provide backup if one individual is otherwise engaged? At what point do you add another guard to the rotation? How many patrol guards do you need at night? Who will provide security for athletic events, and how many are needed? When is contracting more efficient than hiring in-house staff?

In the Beaumont ISD, infraction data from the discipline management system ranks campuses from least violent to most violent and becomes the basis for assigning security patrol officers and prioritizing district security needs.

The design for your safety and security system should answer these questions and many others by ensuring that staffing adjustments are clearly based on actual needs.

The Beaumont ISD had not taken a comprehensive look at the costs and benefits of operating its own police department. At TSPR's recommendation, the district adopted a staffing plan for security officers that included a balanced deployment of peace officers and security guards that is now providing equal or better quality security for the district at a savings of \$95,000 per year.

7

Have a plan of action appropriate for the occasion, and practice it.

Action Plans should be specific.

TSPR has found that districts must have a plan for handling crisis situations. For example, the Texarkana ISD maintains a comprehensive Crisis Procedure Manual on each campus that contains emergency phone numbers and procedures for responding to situations involving chemicals, explosions, tornadoes, bomb threats, nuclear warnings, and weather. This plan should address a multitude of concerns: When a child or teacher become seriously ill or injured, for instance, who calls for assistance? When bad weather occurs, a fire breaks out, or a bombing is threatened, what are the evacuation plans? How are the appropriate authorities notified when an emergency occurs? When a fight starts, who should step in to stop it? When a student reports that another student has drugs or a weapon, who investigates or attempts to confiscate the items? What is legal behavior for a teacher or security guard? What should be left to law enforcement officials? When are parents to be notified, and who notifies them? If a serious incident requires staff support from other campuses, how will this need be communicated? What communication devices are available to staff in the field? Who will provide coverage while staff responds to a call for assistance? When are local authorities called for assistance?

A good emergency plan should be well-rehearsed by staff and students

Rehearse the plan.

A good emergency plan should be well-rehearsed by staff and students and should address disasters such as tornadoes, fires, and floods as well as more common disruptions.

Fire drills and emergency evacuation procedures often are practiced in schools throughout Texas. But open discussions among teachers and administrators about such procedures are not as common. One school district reviewed by TSPR had a written procedure for dealing with a life-threatening situation, but when it actually occurred, no one was in a position to consult the manual as the emergency unfolded. They handled the situation as they saw fit at the time, only to find that they had not followed proper procedures, leaving the district at risk of lawsuit. Had they had an opportunity to talk through case studies and practice their responses, they would have been more likely to do the right thing in the heat of the moment.

ENFORCEMENT



Leave no room for double standards.

When a student commits a crime on school premises, the district faces a dilemma. Should the district turn the student over to the proper authorities for arrest and sentencing, or should they discipline him or her internally? Are certain crimes more deserving of arrest than others? When does misbehavior cross the line into crime?

The Student Code of Conduct must set the standard.

The Texas Education Code outlines specific offenses that must be reported to local law enforcement officials, but TSPR has found that this part of the law is applied inconsistently from district to district. Some districts reviewed by TSPR have zero-tolerance policies that state that any crime committed on school premises will be reported to the police. Others have a zero-tolerance rule about drug possession, dealing, or abuse. Still others have no written policy defining what offenses are worthy of arrest, but consult with law enforcement officials on a case-by-case basis. The lack of a written standard, however, leaves the district open to criticism from parents and the public and possible discrimination lawsuits. School districts must make hard decisions about the handling of criminal and non-criminal offenses and clearly define offenses and their responses. Apply the Code of Conduct consistently.

Once the standard is set, no exceptions should be made. In one district reviewed by TSPR, the son of a district staff member was caught smoking marijuana and placed in detention, while another student was expelled and subsequently placed in alternative education, as stipulated in the district's Student Code of Conduct. Dual standards such as these are unacceptable.

9 Ensure that discipline management extends inside and outside the classroom.

Teachers and staff must have appropriate training in discipline-management techniques.

Teachers need regular and ongoing discipline-management training; the Education Code requires training in discipline strategies. Teachers are on the front line of public education, and teacher surveys conducted in Texas and across the nation indicate that disciplinary challenges in the classroom are escalating. Teacher training is especially important as more special-needs children are being placed in regular education classrooms. Regular education teachers often are ill-equipped to manage such children. A high percentage of invalid referrals for special education testing or a disproportionate number of special education students referred to alternative education can signal a need for additional teacher training in discipline management.

Teachers cannot be expected to educate children when persistently disruptive students are allowed to remain in the classroom

Teachers need administrators' support when students persistently misbehave.

Teachers cannot be expected to educate children when persistently disruptive students are allowed to remain in the classroom. Although Chapter 37 of the Education Code is clear in this regard, teachers still find it difficult to remove some students from class. Good students suffer because of the antics of a few disruptive ones. Teachers need to know that there is a way to remove these students from the classroom. The Safe Schools Act requires all schools to make copies of the law available at every campus. Teachers should be trained in specific procedures required to invoke the provisions of the Safe Schools Act. And students need to know that they cannot harass or terrorize a teacher and get away with it. Despite the decline in reported incidents, too many teachers continue to report being verbally or physically abused by their students. This simply cannot and should not be tolerated.

10 **Alternative programs are not just a matter of compliance with the law; they are many children's last chance at success.**

The Education Code requires each school district to provide an alternative education program. Alternative education often is viewed as a punishment or as a mechanism for removing disruptive children from the classroom. But alternative education programs are not baby-sitting organizations for bad kids, and placement in alternative education should not be a "badge of honor" for gang members.

Learn what works and try to reproduce it.

Successful alternative programs are intellectually challenging; offer nontraditional educational methods that are self-paced and can be tailored to meet the needs of a wide variety of students; have strict discipline, including a dress code that bans the wearing of gang colors; and offer intense counseling for troubled youth. TSPR has observed several very successful alternative education programs, including the ones employed by Ysleta ISD in El Paso and San Angelo ISD. The key to the success of these programs appears to be carefully planned structure, a caring staff, and an expectation of success.

The key to the success of alternative education programs appears to be carefully planned structure, a caring staff, and an expectation of success

What are the alternatives?

Not all alternative programs are intended solely for students with disciplinary problems. Some are geared toward students who are not succeeding in a regular educational environment, have dropped out of school, are parents, or must work to support a family and cannot attend class during regular class times. It is important not to lump all of these students in one group. A student placed in an alternative setting for disciplinary reasons has needs that differ significantly from those of a teenage mother. Therefore, TSPR discourages the commingling of elementary students with secondary students. Students with specific educational needs also should not be commingled with those with disciplinary problems. Not all school districts provide alternative education programs themselves; some share programs with neighboring districts. TSPR knows of one school district in a county that provides alternative services for disciplinary placements, while another in the same county specializes in serving students that are behind in their grade levels.

In Houston ISD, the district has contracted for alternative education services and is pleased with the results.

CONCLUSION

In a time of public and parental concern and frustration over the amount of crime and violence in and around Texas schools, TSPR has found that districts must have a plan for keeping their children safe. An effective program of prevention, intervention, and enforcement begins by establishing *clear expectations* with students, parents, faculty, and administration; *addresses warning signs* before they escalate into trouble; and *helps children who have disobeyed the rules* learn how to become accepted and productive members of society.

If you would like more information on any aspect of the Texas School Performance Review, please call 1-800-531-5441, extension 5-3676 or contact us via e-mail at: <tspr@cpa.state.tx.us>.

See also *Note from the Comptroller on School Safety: Four-year Statewide Incident Statistics* (October 1999)