



# INFORMATION CAPSULE

## Research Services

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### SAFE AND SECURE SCHOOLS

The Department of Research Services distributed a series of surveys to Miami-Dade County Public Schools' district staff in order to identify the educational issues they would rate as most important. Survey respondents ranked "school safety and violence prevention" as one of the most important educational issues and indicated they would like to receive additional information. Therefore, this Information Capsule addresses this priority topic.

All students deserve a safe and secure school environment. Supportive school communities ensure that students feel known, accepted, safe, and useful. Research has shown that feelings of security encourage student learning and that students who attend safe schools are less likely to engage in inappropriate behavior.

The ERS Focus On . . . series has outlined the following set of strategies for building safe and supportive school communities:

1. **Strengthen the student-school bond.** Programs that successfully personalize schools fulfill students' desires to be known and valued as an individual, accepted, safe, and useful to others.
  - School staff ensure that every student feels known and valued by at least one adult in the school.
  - School staff establish a climate that is emotionally safe and accepting.
  - Students feel that their school is a safe place where they won't be harmed or bullied, either physically or emotionally.
  - Students are allowed to contribute to the school community by offering unique perspectives and abilities and by helping their peers succeed.
2. **Develop a proactive, schoolwide approach to discipline.** Students must see a pattern of consistency in the school's disciplinary program and feel that all adults have similar expectations of them. Effective schoolwide discipline initiatives incorporate the following key components:
  - Emphasis is placed on the prevention of disruptive behavior.
  - At-risk behavior is identified and responded to immediately.
  - Highly intensive interventions are held with students who exhibit chronic behavior problems.
  - Information about student behavior is collected and used to guide ongoing improvement.
3. **Help students deal with conflict and anger.** Teaching students the skills needed to deal with conflict and anger constructively will improve the climate and increase the safety of schools.
  - Conflict management and violence prevention strategies should be integrated into the school culture and not presented as isolated or crisis-oriented "after the fact" programs.
  - All students should participate in conflict management and violence prevention programs, not just students selected on the basis of certain criteria, such as "at-risk" or "too aggressive."

- Conflict management and violence prevention programs are strengthened when lessons are taught by teachers and administrators who understand the factors that contribute to student frustration and anger and who can help students deal more effectively with their emotions. Students must be exposed to alternate, nonviolent approaches to resolving conflict.
- The school's principal sets the tone for a non-violent school climate by modeling peaceful behavior, encouraging student-teacher interaction, and acting as a supportive leader who listens to students' and staff's concerns.

4. **Maintain a safe and secure environment.**

The school's physical environment conveys a message to students, staff, parents, and community members. A safe physical environment promotes a sense of security and comfort. Students who feel safe in their surroundings often display a more positive attitude toward learning and behave accordingly. Schools can enhance physical safety by taking measures that include:

- Supervising access to the building and grounds;
- Having adults visibly present throughout the building;
- Staggering lunch periods and dismissal times; and
- Adjusting schedules to minimize time in hallways or in unsupervised, potentially dangerous locations.

Every school building should have a crisis plan that covers the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency (such as evacuation, severe weather, or death or suicide). Annual staff training should be conducted to provide a complete review of the crisis plan's procedures.

In conclusion, strategies designed to keep schools safe include strengthening the student-school bond, adopting a proactive schoolwide approach to discipline, helping students deal with conflict and anger, and maintaining a safe and secure environment. An emotionally and physically safe environment will support students' academic, emotional, and social growth.

Web Sites on Safe and Secure Schools

**[eric.uoregon.edu/trends\\_issues/safety/](http://eric.uoregon.edu/trends_issues/safety/)**

The Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management offers a discussion of trends and issues and provides links to Educational Resources Information Center publications.

**[ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf](http://ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf)**

The U.S. Department of Education provides guidelines and ideas on how to develop emergency response and crisis management plans.

**[ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/index.html](http://ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/index.html)**

The U.S. Department of Education provides educators and schools administrators with information to include in emergency preparedness plans.

**[nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004004.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004004.pdf)**

The U.S. Department of Education's Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2003 report provides data on school crime from the perspective of students, teachers, and principals.

**[mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/schoolviolence/](http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/schoolviolence/)**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Mental Health Services provides information and resources on school violence prevention and related issues to help educators, parents, and community leaders develop initiatives to reduce school violence.

**[edfacilities.org/rl/disaster.cfm](http://edfacilities.org/rl/disaster.cfm)**

The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities' Disaster Preparedness for Schools web site provides books, articles, and links on how schools can develop emergency preparedness plans and withstand disasters.