

SAFETY AND SECURITY PLANNING IN SDA SCHOOLS

BY RON GARRISON

Students and staff at 20 secondary schools and two primary schools in Paris, France, recently experienced serious assaults, including the stabbing death of a student over a pair of stolen gloves. In Seoul, South Korea, more than 9,000 schoolyard bullies were arrested over a two-month period on a variety of charges from rape to drug abuse. In a Canadian poll, 93 percent of adult respondents said that violence against staff and students was a major concern. And in March 1996, at a Dunblane, Scotland, primary school, a lone gunman murdered 16 children and their teacher.

Clearly, violence at school is no longer a problem confined to the United States or to public schools. Violence can happen anywhere, at any time, so SDA school administrators, staff, and parents must take decisive action to ensure the safety and security of their school.

The school safety and security planning process requires cooperation, consistency, and positive relationships inside and outside of church and school. Violence at school, whatever its cause or effect, can be reduced when adults make adequate preparations. The process should combine safety and security

Picture
Removed

prevention and intervention in an ongoing and dynamic way, incorporating community and government resources into the planning. This process requires that Adventist educators be proactive rather than reactive in addressing all levels of risk management at their school.

But unfortunately, as Dale Johnson argued earlier in this journal, for both public and private schools, “there is a tendency to think that school violence can’t happen here.”¹

Our Best Response: A Safe School Process

Each Adventist school staff should collaboratively develop a safety and security process, using resources in the school, church, community, and government. As Marie and Frank Hill state, “Schools responsive to the needs of their community are less likely to experience violent behavior.”² However, school officials traditionally have found it difficult to plan as well for violence as for other disasters.

For example, today’s schools are more likely to have a violent event occur on campus than a fire. Yet in most countries, schools are required to purchase costly fire equipment, implement safety procedures, and rehearse fire drills but not to make any formal planning to prevent violent incidents from occur-

ring. Failure to implement comprehensive policies, procedures, and practices increases the potential for mismanagement of critical incidents and makes prevention of violence at best a haphazard and potentially a non-existent priority.

Both government and local communities can help schools with safety and security planning. France's education minister, Francois Bayrou, recently drafted legislation addressing a number of school safety concerns that will be integrated with existing local programs, including a ministry phone line to report school violence, school identification badges, and more campus supervisory personnel. As David Clark, an Ontario, Canada, school superintendent, recently suggested, "An issue as pervasive and complex as violence in schools needs plenty of support. . . you have to combine forces to be effective."³

Today, combining forces also requires that school staff learn to identify, respond to, and prevent violent critical incidents on campus by examining all of the contributing factors. For example, three elements combine to create the conditions for violent behavior: persons, relationships, and environment. However, individual actions are what usually prompt intervention, rather than the contributing factors of relationship and environment. Collecting as much information as possible in all three areas can be helpful in reducing the potential for violence.

To create a collaborative process that prevents or intervenes in criminal or violent activity on campus, educators should first obtain information on what types of crimes occur most often in their community, since the same problems probably exist in the school. For example, there may be a correlation between the number of sexual assaults in a local community and the amount of sexual harassment occurring on the school playground. Identifying issues and making connections at school are a vital part of developing school safety policies.

Violence can happen anywhere, at any time, so SDA school administrators, staff, and parents must take decisive action to ensure the safety and security of their school.

Picture
Removed

A campus escort service can be one component of a school safety and security program.

Developing an effective school safety and security process requires coordination of a number of diverse components, which can be grouped into the following categories:

- Leadership
- Law and policy
- Risk management
- Community collaboration
- School social systems (or school ecology)
- Learning alternatives, and
- Behavioral planning

Each of these components includes administrative, site, and community elements as a part of prevention and intervention.

The school safety and security process should, for example, include leadership training for school staff and parents, networking with church and outside agencies, crisis management expertise, and acquiring negotiation and public relations skills. "Law and policy" includes consistent application of school rules and of municipal or state regulations in areas like vandalism and trespassing. This section may also include issues such as student privacy rights, record sharing, use of force, and drug testing.

"Risk management" includes seven subsections, including *risk identification, analysis, elimination, reduction, assumption, transfer* (insurance), and *recovery*. "Community collaboration" means reviewing the numerous connections between the school and the community. Community utilization, parent participation, and youth agency involvement are typically addressed under this section of a school safety plan. "Social systems" or school ecology focuses on the human aspects of the physical and social environment, such as the school grounds and location, services provided to the school, outside influences, and learning conditions (temperature, noise, and other behavior-related issues).

"Learning alternatives" refer to those programs in and out of

school in which students regularly participate. This can mean church groups, alternative learning opportunities like music lessons, or local youth agency programs. Behavioral planning includes consistent enforcement of behavioral expectations by family, church, and community while students are in school.

Critical Components of Safety and Security Planning

In the United States, safety and security planning for educational institutions has existed since the 1890s. Its goals are to protect property, increase communication, and provide for student and staff safety. The old mortise lock used by school administrators in 19th-century America bears little resemblance to the safety and security technologies now being developed for use in the 21st century. However, many school security programs remain out of date, crisis driven, uncoordinated, and unilateral.

In an age of fear and violence, how can our teachers enjoy the levels of safety and security once enjoyed by their 19th-century colleagues? Perhaps one answer rests with community participation. Mark Brown and Kenneth Polk write that integrating various diverse elements of local communities in an active crime prevention strategy may serve to decrease the levels of fear.⁴

Unfortunately, many educators and administrators believe that crisis management is the only reason for developing a school safety plan. This reactive approach ignores the need to integrate educational services with safety and security planning for long-term results. Education professionals must not only plan for crises, but also ask the same fundamental questions as their colleagues do in the business and medical world about safety needs, procurement, management, policy, application, practice, and collaboration.

The value of collaboration, for instance, becomes apparent when one looks at models that other systems use to

The school safety and security planning process requires cooperation, consistency, and positive relationships inside and outside of church and school.

schools, where professional emergency personnel may be slow to respond. Critical incident triage systems use these standard classifications:

- Emergent: the victim requires immediate attention.
- Urgent: the victim needs care within a short period of time (usually one to two hours).
- Non-urgent: the victim can wait more than two hours for treatment.

Medical personnel and law enforcers can train teams of SDA school staff and parents to do triage-type management during an emergency.

An effective school safety process should also include critical incident team planning, listing who among school staff can be deployed during a critical inci-

Picture
Removed

Use of modern technology can help ensure that only authorized persons gain access to school dormitories and other buildings.

deal with emergencies. The triage system that medical people use to classify treatment of injury may prove useful in critical incident planning. Such a system is especially important in reducing the impact of violence at rural or inner-city

dent and how the school plans to recover from an emergency. However, school-based team members do not take the place of professional responders unless immediate assistance is unavailable.

To be truly comprehensive, the

school safety and security plan should address both prevention and intervention, not only in relation to violence but also accidental injury. A child can die as easily from touching a frayed, non-grounded electrical extension cord or from climbing on dangerous playground equipment as from an act of violence.

It is also important to develop plans for dealing with safety and security issues that occur off campus. For example, getting children to and from school safely requires a consistent effort by school staff, parents, and local agencies like law enforcement. Extending crosswalks, providing escorts, physically separating school buses from parent and staff automobiles, and coordinating traffic patrol and release times with other schools are some of the considerations that should be part of a school safety planning process.

Equally vital to the safety and security of a school are personnel issues that may lead to workplace violence. Systematic staff screening prior to hiring, availability of personal and family counseling programs, and easy access to the church community are a few of the steps leading to safer workplaces for staff and students.

Approaches that have proved useful for identifying, responding to, and preventing school violence include interactive systems that focus on persons, rela-

Picture
Removed

School safety and security requires collaboration between school and community.

tionships, and environments. Sustained involvement by key players in the areas of school improvement, conflict resolution, collaboration, and strategic planning will do more to ensure safe schools than intrusive methods like installing metal detectors.

Whether driven by laws, child advocacy, lawsuits, or public outcry—or preferably by Christian concern—schools today must effectively anticipate and prevent critical incidents related to safety and security by developing a comprehensive planning process that is based in the school, church, community, and technology.

When developing a school security program, educators must avoid inadvertently instilling unnecessary fear and mistrust in students and parents by implementing policies and procedures that are excessively oppressive, demeaning, or intrusive. The school security program must be built on consistent positive relationships between school staff, students, parents, and the community. Schools must create safety and security programs for the right reason: *to enhance the quality of relationships and instruction.* Safety and security planning

are not an end in themselves, but ways to enhance school attendance, achievement, and the mission of Adventist education. ✍

To obtain a list of resources and organizations relating to fear and intimidation prevention, and programs for at-risk students and juvenile offenders, send a self-addressed, stamped business envelope to the Editor, *Journal of Adventist Education*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

Ron Garrison is an Education, Justice, and Security Consultant who writes from Benicia, California. He can be contacted at (707) 746-5880 or e-mail at safeschool@aol.com.

REFERENCES

1. Dale Johnson, "Coping With the Unthinkable: Violence in SDA Schools," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 53:2 (December 1990/January 1991), p. 21.
2. Marie Sommers Hill and Frank W. Hill, *Creating Safe Schools: What Principals Can Do* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1994), p. 40.
3. David Clark, "School Violence in Canada," *Phi Delta Kappan* 75:8 (April 1994), p. 654.
4. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990), p. 14.

An effective violence prevention program

involves:

- Administrator, teacher, and support staff training
- Critical incident team formation and maintenance
- Anti-violence programs, policies, and procedures
- Communication systems
- Periodic security audits
- Methods for investigating and mitigating potential problems
- Evaluating and correcting unsafe conditions in the environment
- Enhancing collaborative relationships among all key players
- Planning for post-event response and counseling