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School Violence and No Child Left Behind:
Best Practices to Keep Kids Safe

By Lisa Snell

POLICY STUDY 330

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Executive Summary

Most schools in the United States are relatively safe. Data on school crime points to a general decline in school violence in public schools in the past decade. The National Center for Education Statistics *2004 Indicators of School Crime and Safety* provides the most recent data on school violence. This ongoing statistical survey has found that the crime victimization rate at school declined from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 24 such victimizations in 2002.

While the general data show a decline in school violence, this is not true for *every* school. Reason Foundation recognizes the general decline in school violence, but we are most concerned with policies for those schools that still have a high rate of crime and incentives to underreport crime. It is critical that parents have information about which schools are safe and which schools have crime on campus.

Most school violence is concentrated in a few schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 1999-2000 school year 2 percent of schools (1,600) accounted for approximately 50 percent of serious violent incidents and 7 percent of public schools (5,400) accounted for 75 percent of serious violent incidents.

In the 2003-2004 school year, only 52 of the nation's 92,000 public schools were labeled "persistently dangerous" under the No Child Left Behind Act, entitling students to move to a designated “safe” school. Based on the small number of schools that were labeled as dangerous, in September 2003 the Education Reform Subcommittee held a field hearing in Denver, Colorado to study how states are implementing No Child Left Behind’s persistently dangerous schools provision. The hearing suggested some states are significantly underreporting the number of unsafe schools to sidestep the law’s requirements. Testimony from a National Center for Education Statistics expert revealed that in 2001, 6 percent of students reported they had carried a weapon on school property, and the same percentage feared being attacked at school. A year earlier, in 2000, students were victims of about 700,000 nonfatal violent crimes while on school

property. However, only 0.0006 percent of the nation's schools have been designated as "unsafe" by their states.

If most violence is concentrated in a few schools, parents need to be aware of which schools are violent or safe in order to make the best decisions about where to enroll their children. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, students enrolled in a "persistently dangerous school" have the right to transfer to a safer school in the district. Yet, evidence suggests that schools have unreasonable definitions of "dangerous," underreport school crime, and do not provide parents with accurate information about school crime.

In a content analysis of 80 large school district Web sites including the member districts of The Great City Schools (which consists of most large urban school districts) and the 50 largest school districts as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, 75 percent of large school districts have no school crime data at district- or state-level Web sites. However, a few school districts provide parents with detailed information at the school level on the specific incidents of school violence that would allow parents to evaluate the type of crime happening in their child's school or potential school. Leading the way is Florida. Because of Florida's state violent incident reporting system, parents can find information on school violence at every school in the state. Some districts provide aggregate school violence incidents for the entire district in annual reports or other documents, but most of the data are dated. Some districts like Sacramento, California and Albuquerque, New Mexico provide somewhat dated crime statistics at the school level for selected years though not in a database format. Only New York, Los Angeles, Florida and Pennsylvania provide searchable databases or spreadsheets with multiple years of school crime data and detailed reports by type of crime. The Florida and Pennsylvania state systems also provide data on charter schools.

Parents need more information on school violence and legislators should require school districts to provide parents with more information about the safety of their schools and more choices for smaller and safer schools. But beyond the mere reporting of violence is the curbing of it. In determining how to lessen school violence, we compared the effectiveness of various approaches suggested or practiced by schools or those who study schools. We offer several recommendations for improving the safety of public schools and providing parents with accurate information about school crime:

1. Revise the state and federal law to loosen or eliminate restrictions on school choice. The act of choosing and the related imperative for schools to make themselves "choice-worthy" is the key to any serious anti-violence policy. Forced assignment to schools and the resulting mismatches and detachment beget boredom and violence and create schools that are unresponsive to parental demands for safer schools.

2. Encourage smaller schools, competition, and new school capacity. Strong evidence points to the correlation between school size and school violence. Private and charter schools cater to parents' demand for smaller schools. Legislation should require school districts to move away from school consolidation toward smaller schools.

3. Encourage legislators to provide school administrators with incentives to focus resources on a "broken windows" approach to preventing school violence. Cleaning up school facilities and getting tougher on smaller crimes help prevent more serious crimes.

4. Create uniform reporting standards. At the state level, and perhaps even the federal level, there should be consistent definitions for school violence incidents that make school crime data comparable across

individual schools so parents can make informed decisions about the safety of their schools. Pennsylvania and Florida demonstrate the usefulness of consistent crime data across all schools in one state.

5. Follow federal guidelines for defining "persistently dangerous" schools. The federal government should require states to use more accurate definitions for dangerous schools and include all types of violent incidents including rape and assault.

6. Use school violence outcomes—not processes—as a measure of dangerous schools. Schools should use the actual incidents of crime and not the processes, such as expulsion or criminal prosecution, to judge the violence in a specific school. Measures of detentions, expulsions, or school transfers are not measures of school violence.

7. Make crime statistics part of school report cards. Crime data should be required as part of a school's report card alongside academic data and teacher experience.

8. Report crime data in a timely fashion. Persistently dangerous schools should be labeled based on the previous school year's data and that data should be reported to parents in a timely fashion.

9. Include similar schools' rankings. Crime data reporting should include rankings of similar schools to help parents compare the violence level between schools.

10. Enforce the unsafe school choice option for student victims. Students who are the victims of school crime should immediately be allowed to transfer to a safer public school. If a safer public school is not available, the student should be provided with a school voucher to attend a private school.

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Part 1

Introduction

Violent crime is common at Locke High in Los Angeles. According to Los Angeles school police statistics in 2000-2001 at Locke there were 13 sex offenses, 43 robberies, 2 weapons possessions, 57 batteries, and 19 assaults with a deadly weapon. In 2001-2002, there was 1 sex offense, 10 robberies, 31 property crimes, 19 batteries, and 3 assaults with a deadly weapon.[1] Yet the school doesn't qualify as persistently dangerous under California's definition of a dangerous school.

Locke High School is not alone. [2] Forty-four states and the District of Columbia reported not a single unsafe school. The exceptions were Pennsylvania (28), Nevada (8), New Jersey (7), Texas (6), New York (2) and Oregon (1). Schools that are not on the list are not necessarily crime-free. Yet, there were nearly 1.5 million violent crimes in America's schools in 2002. In fact, the 2003-2004 school year was one of the deadliest in years, with 48 school-related violent deaths from August 2003 through June 2004. That's more than in the past two school years combined and more than in any year in the past decade.[3]

Despite the statistics and headlines, most schools in the United States are relatively safe and the risk of being killed at school is less than 1 in 1.7 million. In fact, the data on school crime point to a general decline in school violence in public schools in the United States. The National Center for Education Statistics *2004 Indicators of School Crime and Safety* provides the most recent data on school violence. This ongoing statistical survey has found that the crime victimization rate at school declined from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 24 such victimizations in 2002.[4]

The perception of dangerous schools is often overblown by media coverage of rare but horrific school shootings and other isolated incidents of extreme school violence. Yet, while the general data show a decline in school violence, this is not true for *every* school. We recognize the general decline in school violence, but are most concerned with policies for those schools that still have a high rate of crime. In those schools, school violence may actually be underreported. It is critical that parents have information about which schools are safe and which schools have crime on campus.

Most school violence is concentrated in a few schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics during the 1999-2000 school year 2 percent of schools (1,600) accounted for approximately 50 percent of serious violent incidents and 7 percent of public schools (5,400) accounted for 75 percent of serious violent incidents.[5] In the 2003-2004 school year, only 52 of the nation's 92,000 public schools were labeled "persistently dangerous" under the No Child Left Behind Act.[6] But those 52 schools are a far cry from the 1,600 schools that account for 50 percent of school crime and reflect a serious problem with underreporting of dangerous schools to parents.

Based on this discrepancy, in September 2003, Congress's Education Reform Subcommittee held a field hearing in Denver, Colorado to study how states are implementing No Child Left Behind's persistently dangerous schools provision. The hearing suggested some states are significantly underreporting the number of unsafe schools to sidestep the law's requirements. Testimony from a National Center for Education Statistics expert revealed that in 2001, 6 percent of students reported they had carried a weapon on school property, and the same percentage feared being attacked at school.[7] A year earlier, in 2000, students were victims of about 700,000 nonfatal violent crimes while on school property. However, only 0.0006 percent of the nation's schools have been designated as "unsafe" by their states.

If most violence is concentrated in a few schools, parents need to be aware of which schools are violent or safe in order to make the best decisions about where to enroll their children. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, students enrolled in a "persistently dangerous school" have the right to transfer to a safer school in the district. But each state has its own definition of dangerous. California says a "persistently dangerous" school must expel more than 1 percent of its students for any of nine types of crimes in each of three consecutive years.[8] Locke rarely expels violent students. Instead, they're given "opportunity transfers" to other public schools; the worst kids may be sent to continuation school or adult education. Or they keep right on attending Locke. Since almost nobody is officially expelled, the school isn't "officially" dangerous.

In 1998, Reason Foundation published *Violence Prevention: Strategies to Keep Schools Safe*, which reviewed the strategies used by public schools to keep students safe.[9] We divided school violence-prevention methods into three classes: measures related to school management (that is, related to discipline and punishment), measures related to environmental modification (for instance, video cameras, security guards, and uniforms), and educational and curriculum-based measures (for instance, conflict-resolution and gang-prevention programs). We found that all methods have their advantages and disadvantages.

Our research led us to the following conclusions:

Like the more mundane issues of pedagogy, textbooks, curriculum, and staffing and compensation policies, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to school violence. As William Modzeleski of the U.S. Department of Education put it, "There is no one program, no silver bullet, so that you can get one program up and say, Here it is, if you put this program in your school, you are going to resolve violence." If all schools were the same, in demographically similar neighborhoods, with similar crime rates in the surrounding community, with similar-quality teachers and similarly committed staffs, and similar budgetary constraints, then we could feel safe advocating a common policy for all schools. But schools are self-evidently not like that. The ideal violence-prevention policy will likely be different for each school.

For most anti-violence interventions, evidence of effectiveness is either sparse or mixed. Many programs have been imperfectly monitored or evaluated, so little data on results exist. Those programs that have been monitored work in some cases and not in other cases. There are so many variables that it is difficult to recognize success or failure in school violence-prevention programs. Therefore, the most reliable way of distinguishing between the real and the faddish is to subject individual schools, in their experimentation, to the discipline of competition. Schools choose their anti-violence programs; parents should be allowed to choose their children's schools.

Our general conclusion was to encourage innovation and experimentation in schools through decentralization and deregulation. Incentives matter, so effectively addressing school violence must include

some level of parental choice, and an emphasis on private, voluntary, contractual methods rather than compulsory ones.

In revisiting the school violence issue, we explain how school policymakers can more effectively provide parents with more information about violence in their schools and allow them to exit violent and dangerous schools. To that end, we examine the current data on school violence and school violence prevention strategies, the risk of school violence to children relative to other common childhood risks, school violence and the No Child Left Behind Act, and the status of school violence reporting to parents in major urban cities, and recommend best practices for reporting school violence to parents and reducing school violence more generally.

Part 2

The Scope of the Problem

A. School Crime Indicators

The data on school crime point to a general decline in school violence in public schools in the United States. In addition, the perception of dangerous schools is often overblown by media coverage of rare but horrific school shootings and other isolated incidents of extreme school violence. Yet, while the general data show a decline in school violence, this is not true for *every* school. This study recognizes the general decline in school violence, but is most concerned with policies for those schools that still have a high rate of crime. In those schools, school violence may actually be underreported. It is critical that parents have information about which schools are safe and which schools have crime on campus.

The National Center for Education Statistics' *2004 Indicators of School Crime and Safety* provides the most recent data on school violence. This ongoing statistical survey has found that the crime victimization rate at school declined from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 24 such victimizations in 2002.[10]

According to the U.S. Department of Justice in 2002, 15 percent of the 4,923,050 crimes that happened in the United States took place inside a school building or on school property. The only more common location for a crime to take place was at a victim's home, where 16.3 percent of all crime took place.[11]

According to a 2003 Center for Disease Control nationwide survey of more than 10,000 public and private high school students,[12] the percentage of students who said they had been in a fight in the preceding year dropped from 42.5 percent in 1991 to 33 percent in 2003.[13] Only a little more than 6 percent of students said they had carried a weapon onto school grounds in 2003, down from 11.8 percent in 1993. (see Table 1) But, one in 11 students surveyed in 2003 said they were threatened with or injured by a weapon on school property in the preceding year. That was up from about one in 14 students threatened or injured in 1993.

The number of U.S. teenagers skipping school for fear of getting hurt increased over the past decade, even though violence in schools declined. More than one out of every 20 high school students—5.4 percent—skipped at least one day of school because of safety concerns in 2003, according to the CDC survey. That is up from 4.4 percent in 1993. [14] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention attributed the increase in part to a rise in schoolyard threats and lingering fear from the Columbine High School massacre in 1999 and other school shootings in the 1990s.

Table 1: Percentage of High School Students Who Carried a Weapon, Were Threatened or Injured on School Property*

	Carried a Weapon on School Property						Threatened or Injured with a Weapon on School Property					
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	
Category	%	CI (±)	%	CI (±)	%	CI (±)	%	CI (±)	%	CI (±)	%	CI (±)
Race Ethnicity												
White	2.2	1.3	8.5	1.6	5.5	1.1	5.8	1.1	9.6	2.1	7.8	1.5
Black	5.5	2.2	8.4	2.5	6.9	1.9	7.5	1.5	14.3	2.6	10.9	1.6
Hispanic	4.2	1.4	7.7	2.0	6.0	1.1	6.9	2.8	11.9	3.0	9.4	2.4
Grade												
9	3.8	3.0	6.6	1.6	5.3	2.2	8.3	1.7	15.4	4.0	12.1	2.5
10	3.0	1.0	8.9	1.7	6.0	1.0	7.0	1.9	11.3	2.5	9.2	2.0
11	2.7	1.2	10.3	2.9	6.6	1.6	5.4	2.2	9.2	1.9	7.3	1.4
12	2.5	1.0	10.2	2.0	6.4	1.3	3.9	1.5	8.5	2.8	6.3	1.8
Total	3.1	1.0	8.9	1.5	6.1	1.1	6.5	1.2	11.6	1.9	9.2	1.5

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2003," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, May 21, 2004, Vol.53, No.ss-2, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students ages 12-18 were victims of about 659,000 violent crimes and 1.1 million crimes of theft at school in 2002.[15] Violent incidents include rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with or without a weapon, threat of physical attack with or without a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon. *Serious* violent incidents include rape, sexual battery other than rape, fighting with a weapon, threat of physical attack with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

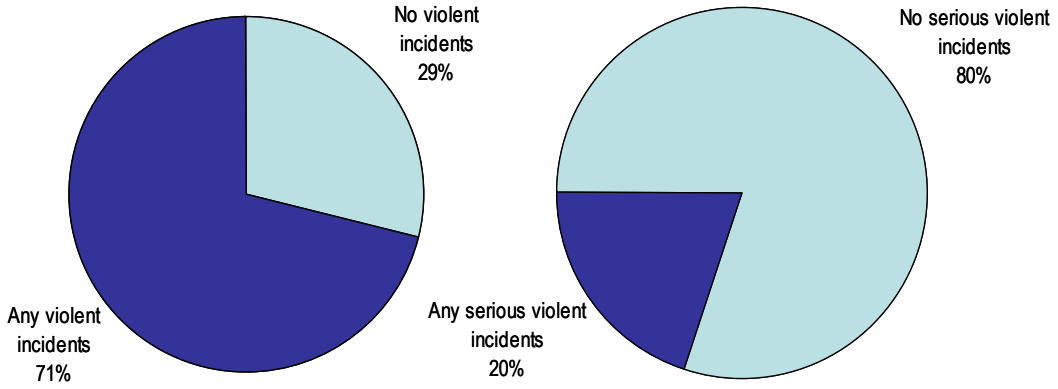
In 1999-2000, 71 percent of public elementary and secondary schools experienced at least one violent incident (see Figure 1). Thirty-six percent of public schools reported at least one violent incident to the police (see Figure 2). Of the 1.5 million incidents that occurred, around 257,000 (about 1 out of 6) were reported to the police. Twenty percent of public schools experienced at least one *serious* violent incident for a total of 61,000 serious violent incidents. Fifteen percent of public schools reported a serious violent incident to the police. This means that 25 percent of schools that had at least one serious violent incident made no report to the authorities.[16]

Figure 3 shows the percentage of public schools in the United States with specific types of crime. In 1999-2000 school principals reported that fighting without a weapon was the most likely type of crime in schools. For example, physical fights with a weapon were reported in only 5 percent of public schools.

Likewise, the prevalence of school violence can be compared in urban and rural schools. In *Sex, Drugs, and Delinquency in Urban and Suburban Public Schools*, the Manhattan Institute's Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster argue that urban and suburban students are about equally likely to engage in delinquent behaviors such as fighting and stealing.[17] However, data from the National Center for Education Statistics on crime incidents in public schools finds that when examining violent incidents by the location of public schools, city schools were more likely than urban fringe schools to experience or report to the police at least one violent

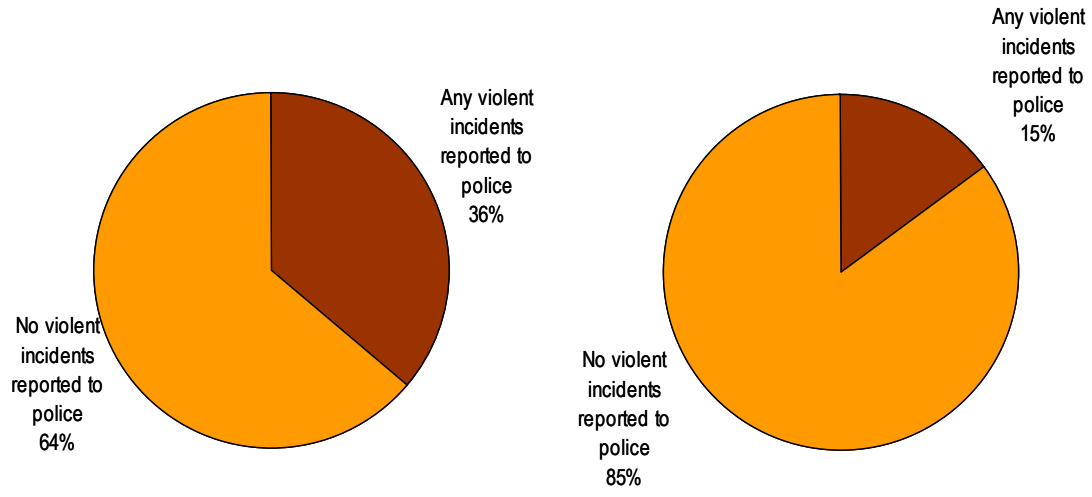
incident during the 1999–2000 school year.[18] Seventy-seven percent of urban schools had one or more violent incidents and 44 percent reported one or more incidents to the police, compared with 67 and 35 percent, respectively, of urban fringe schools.[19] Only 28 percent of rural schools report one or more violent incidents to the police.[20]

Figure 1: Percentage of Public Schools That Experienced Violent and Serious Violent Incidents: 1999 to 2000



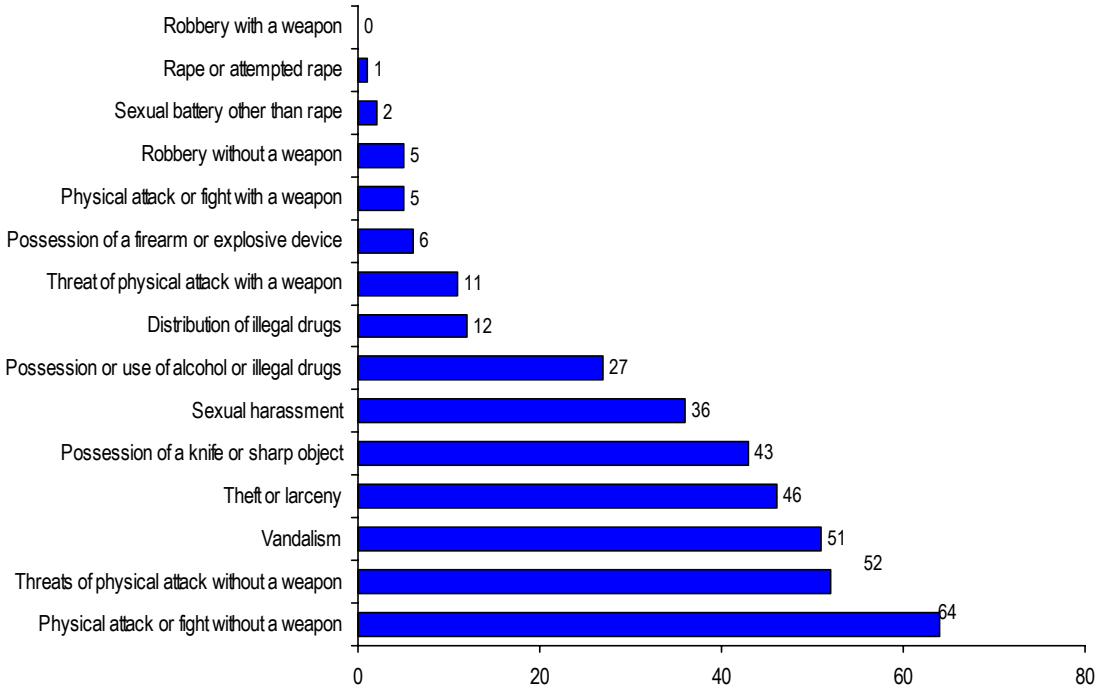
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000.

Figure 2: Percentage of Public Schools That Reported Violent and Serious Violent Incidents: 1999 to 2000



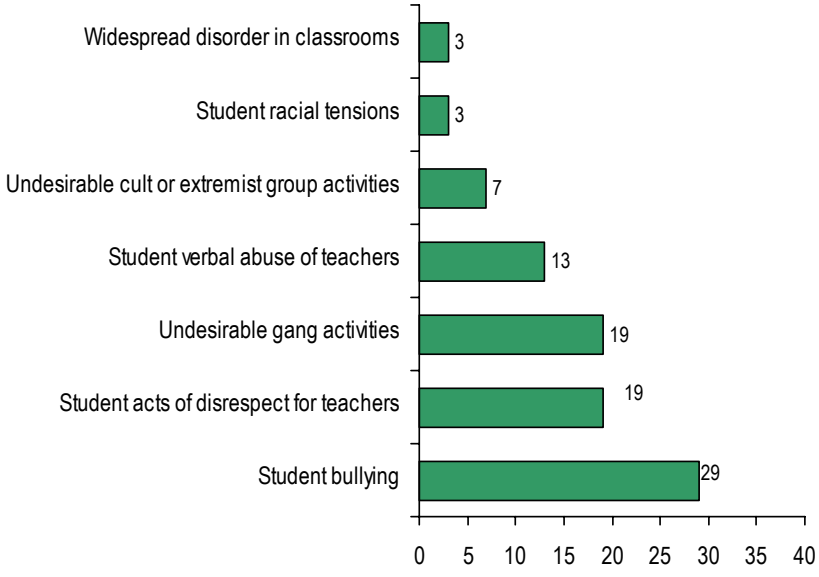
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000.

Figure 3: Percentage of Public Schools with Specific Crimes: 1999 to 2000



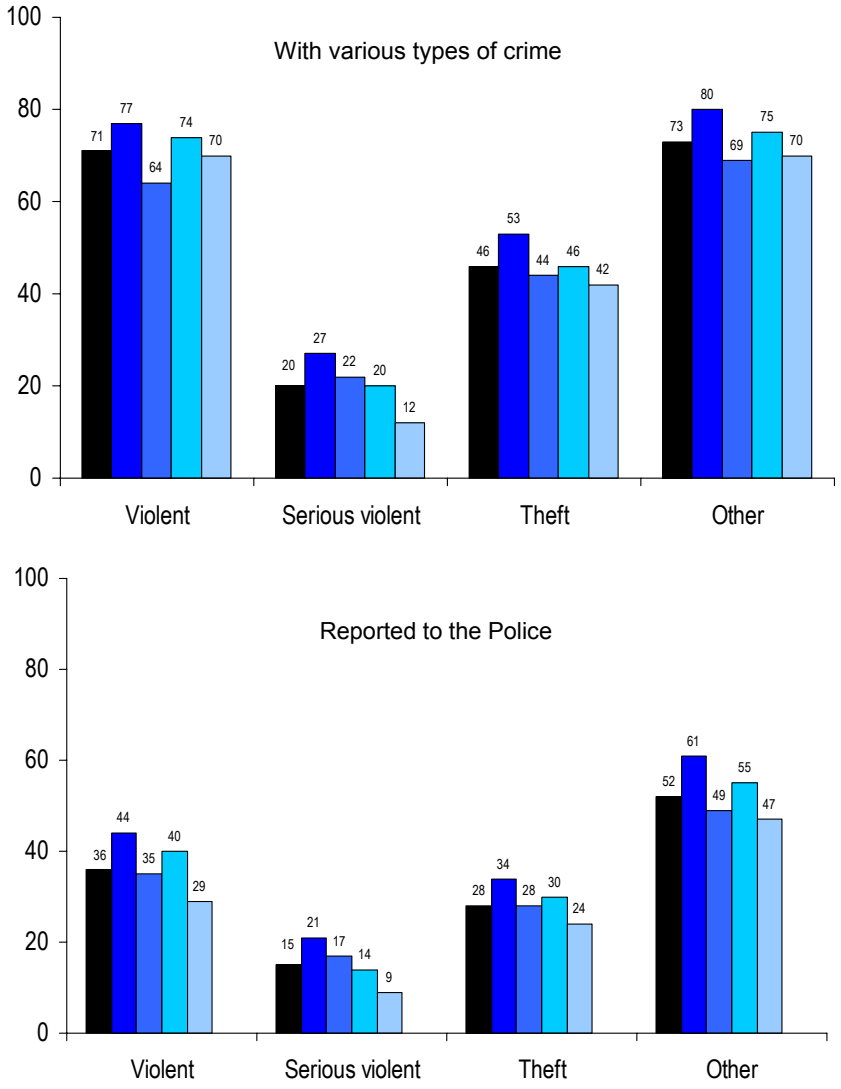
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000.

Figure 4: Percentage of Public Schools that Reported Selected Discipline Problems at School as Serious: 1999 to 2000



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000.

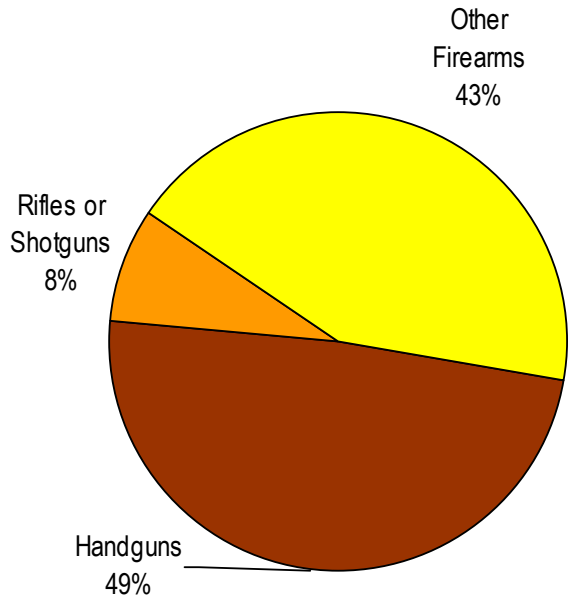
Figure 5: Percentage of Public Schools with Various Types of Crime and Percentage of Public Schools that Reported Various Types of Crime to the Police by Type of Crime and Urbanicity: 1999 to 2000



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2000.

But comparing the reporting of statistics among schools must take into account that schools make their own definitions of serious violent incidents. Fistfights happen, but many schools associate firearms with serious violent incidents. The federal government collects data on the number of firearms found in schools through the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994. Overall, 56 states and outlying areas reported under the GFSA for the 2000-2001 school year. The states reported that they expelled a total of 3,657 students from school for bringing a firearm to school (see Figure 6).[21]

Figure 6: Number and Percent of Students Expelled by Type of Firearm: 2000 to 2001



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

B. Risk of School Violence

Parents should understand that while violence does happen at schools, it is not usually the place where kids are most at risk and keep those risks in perspective. According to the School Violence Resource Center at the University of Arkansas, in each school year from July 1, 1992 to June 30, 2000, youth ages 5 to 19 were at least 70 times more likely to be murdered away from school than at school.[22] In the most recent school year for which data from all sources are available, from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000, there were 32 school-associated violent deaths.[23] Of these violent deaths, 24 were homicides and 8 were suicides. Sixteen of the homicides and six of the suicides were of school-aged youth (ages 5-19) at school. (Combined, this translates into less than one homicide or suicide of a school-aged youth at school per million students enrolled during the 1999-2000 school year. Away from school, during roughly the same time period, there were 2,124 homicides and 1,922 suicides of youth ages 5 to19. [24]

From July 1, 1992 to June 30, 2000, 390 school-associated violent deaths occurred on campuses of U.S. elementary or secondary schools.[25] Of these violent deaths, 234 were homicides and 43 were suicides of school-aged youth (ages 5 to19). Away from school during roughly the same period, 24,406 children ages 5 to 19 were victims of homicide and 16,735 children committed suicide.[26] In each school year, youth were at least 70 times more likely to be murdered away from school than at school.

Table 2: The probability that any school age child will die this year(1997) from*		
Any cause	1 in	3,000
A traffic accident	1 in	8,000
Homicide, away from school	1 in	21,000
Suicide, away from school	1 in	28,000
Cancers	1 in	33,000
Accidental drowning	1 in	73,000
Heart disease	1 in	79,000
A firearm accident	1 in	200,000
Pneumonia or influenza	1 in	250,000
Bronchitis, emphysema, or asthma	1 in	260,000
Cerebro-vascular disease	1 in	390,000
Accidental fall	1 in	390,000
HIV	1 in	420,000
An act of nature, including lightning	1 in	780,000
Diabetes	1 in	850,000
Meningitis	1 in	1,300,000
Any adverse effect of medical care	1 in	1,300,000
Homicide at school	1 in	1,700,000

* School age is here defined as 5 to 19 years of age.

Sources: These figures were calculated using 1997 values from the U. S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Dept. of Education, the U.S. Dept. of Justice, and the Centers for Disease Control Injury Mortality Reports.

Again, while the general risk of homicide at school may be low, it brings home the point that parents should know which schools might have an increased risk for a potential homicide or other serious violent offense happening in a small but significant percentage of public schools.

C. School Violence Prevention Strategies

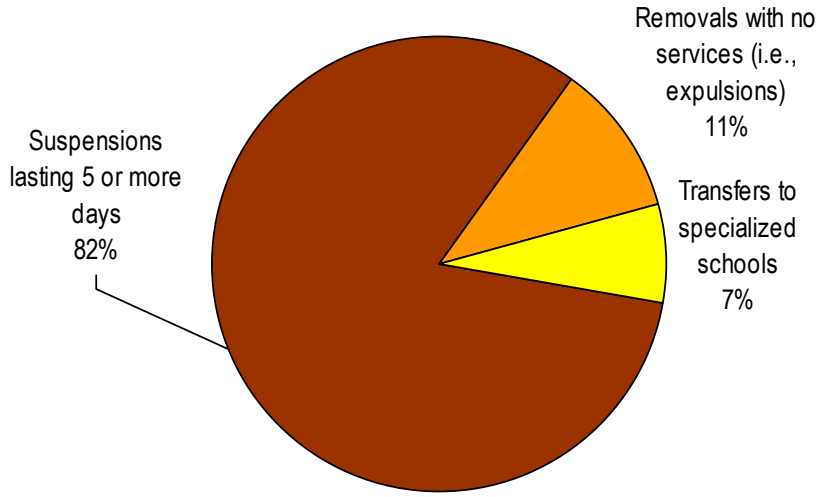
In our 1997 study *Violence Prevention: Strategies to Keep Schools Safe* we divided school violence prevention methods into three classes: measures related to school management (that is, related to discipline and punishment), measures related to environmental modification (for instance, video cameras, security guards, and uniforms), and educational and curriculum-based measures (for instance, conflict-resolution and gang-prevention programs). We found evaluation data of each class to be inconclusive, meaning we don't know a lot about which strategies are working.

Yet such strategies remain the core of school district efforts to reduce crimes and violence. Evidence shows that at least some of these strategies must be working because crime has generally fallen at most schools over the past decade. However, large schools that are likely to have more crime seem to use a wide variety of school violence prevention strategies ranging from school police to conflict management programs. These strategies are clearly not sufficient to reduce crime in the schools with the most crime. The larger point about

the use of these strategies is not that they do not work, but that, without proper benchmarking and data collection of school crime, schools will never know which strategies are actually working. Statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show which strategies schools report using to prevent school violence. The fact that the NCES collects this data shows how the public school system is focused on school violence prevention inputs (asking what processes do schools use to prevent violence?), rather than outcomes (how much was school crime reduced?).

Figure 7 examines school management strategies that involve discipline and punishment.

Figure 7: Percentage Distribution of Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools According to Type of Action: 1999 to 2000



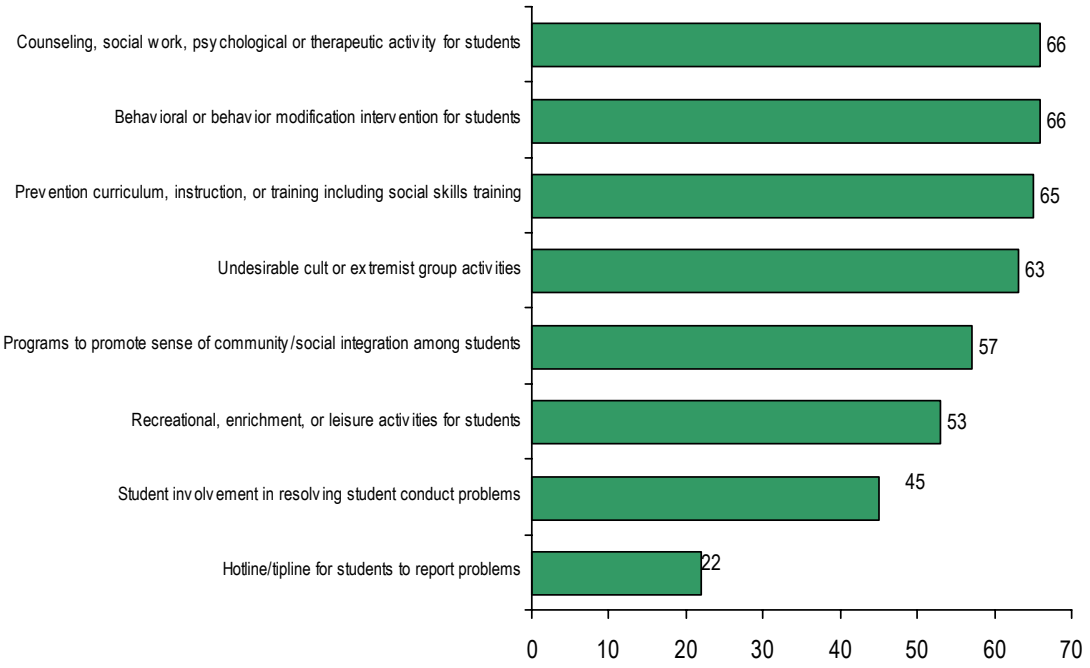
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

Disciplinary actions may be a necessary but insufficient strategy to stop school crime. These sanctions may punish the offender and even discourage other students from committing other crimes, but it does not give crime victims or potential victims the right to choose a safer school option in the first place or the right to exit a dangerous school. It is little comfort to know someone will be punished after they have damaged another student or teacher.

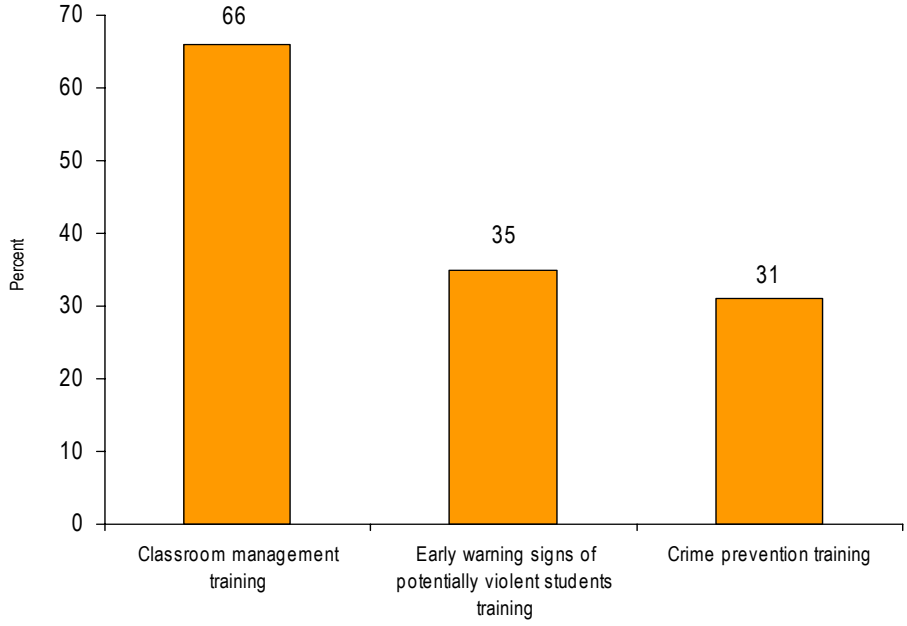
Figures 8 through 10 report the prevalence of educational and curriculum programs for students, teachers, and parents as a strategy to reduce violence.

Figure 8: Percentage of Public Schools with Specific Violence Prevention Program Components for Students: 1999 to 2000



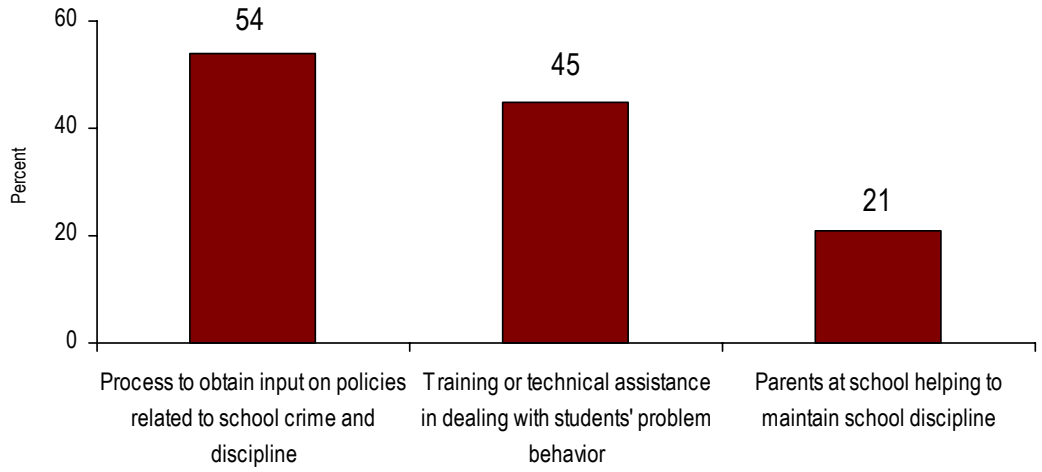
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

Figure 9: Percentage of Public Schools that Train Staff in Specific Violence Prevention Practices 1999 to 2000



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

Figure 10: Percentage of Public Schools with Selected Parent Involvement Programs: 1999 to 2000



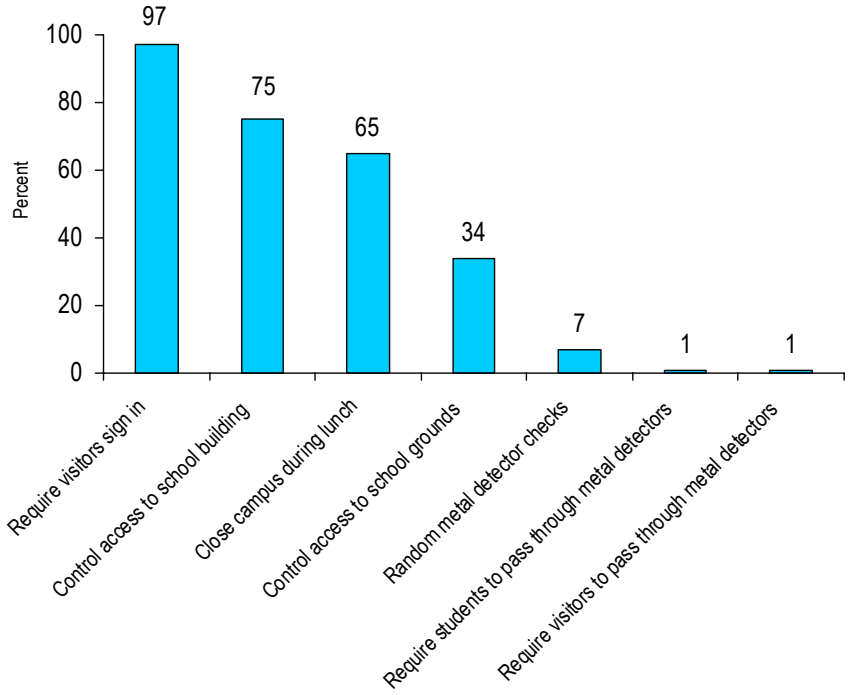
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

Training in school violence prevention for students and parents may work in some schools and give students and teachers a better understanding as to why school violence happens. However, these training sessions do little to provide schools or students with incentives to actually reduce crime. Without specific consequences to schools for high rates of violence, such as students exiting to safer schools, these training sessions may do little to stop school violence. Again, data collection on whether crime is falling or rising in specific schools is the only way to evaluate the effectiveness of educational school violence-prevention strategies.

Figures 11 and 12 report on the prevalence of environmental modifications such as metal detectors and school security cameras.

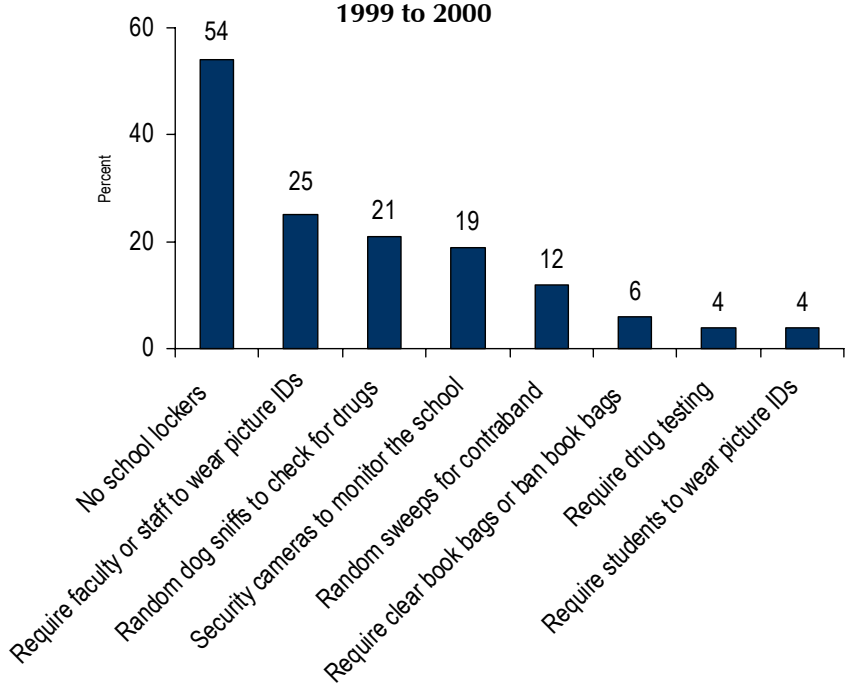
These environmental modification strategies seem to take an "after the fact" approach to school violence. Environmental modifications assume that school violence will happen and the only way to stop crime is to catch students committing crimes. While this approach probably prevents many crimes, it may not be as effective as targeting resources to create a school climate that makes it less likely that students will feel compelled to commit crimes in the first place. The next section discusses a more proactive approach to reducing school crime.

Figure 11: Percentage of Public Schools that Limit Access to Campus with Selected Practices: 1999 to 2000



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

Figure 12: Percentage of Public Schools that Monitor Campus with Selected Practices: 1999 to 2000



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 1999–2000.

Part 3

Promising Trends in Reducing School Violence

A. The Tipping Point Strategy

In Malcom Gladwell's *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* he tells the story of how crime dropped suddenly in New York in the mid 1990s. Gladwell argues that criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling's broken windows theory played a large role in reducing New York's crime epidemic.[27] The theory states that crime is the inevitable result of disorder. As Gladwell explains:

> *If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the buildings to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes.*[28]

The broken window is an epidemic theory of crime. According to Gladwell, the tipping point in the crime epidemic is something physical like graffiti: "the impetus to engage in a certain kind of behavior is not coming from a certain kind of person but from a feature of the environment." When applying this theory to schools one would expect that smaller reoccurring discipline problems and general disorder would lead to larger problems with crime and violence in schools.

What is surprising about the school violence literature and general strategies to prevent school violence is how little attention is paid to fixing the school environment and creating order. However, in our 1997 school violence study, we interviewed Catholic school principals in Los Angeles and one of the key ways they kept their schools safe was by not accepting disorder or minimal school discipline problems that might lead to larger problems. Anecdotal stories also point to the fact that charter schools like Edison schools and other "new" schools are successful because the school environment is so much cleaner and more orderly. In addition, because the children and their families usually choose these schools, this may also contribute to a less violent environment. In parent satisfaction surveys parents and students like the order and cleanliness of the facilities. Yet keeping facilities clean is not usually listed as a school violence-prevention strategy.

New York City provides a compelling example of the potential of the tipping point strategy. In an October *New York Times* feature, Susan Saulny describes New York's recent experiences with the "broken window" approach to combating school violence.[29]

It was just before 8 a.m. on a recent weekday when Rose Albanese-DePinto, the education official in charge of safety, stepped into one of the most dangerous schools in New York City, pen and paper in hand, her head full of questions.

Among them: Do the restrooms have toilet paper? Does the school tolerate graffiti? Are the windows kept clean?

"If you concentrate on the small things, you will send an unequivocal message that order is the order of the day," Ms. Albanese-DePinto said. "You can look at a school the same way you look at a neighborhood."

That is precisely what city education officials say they have been trying to do for much of the last year at 16 of the system's most troubled schools, blending such attention to detail with an influx of police officers, school safety agents and other disciplinary and support staff.

The Bloomberg administration adopted this approach in early 2004. It loosely imitates the successful style of combating neighborhood violence that was adopted by the police department under Chief Bill Bratton and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. As Saulny explains, "under that system, the police focus on smaller "quality of life" offenses as a way to reduce major crimes, crime patterns are tracked, and supervisors are held accountable for trends in their precincts."[30]

According to the New York Department of Education, preliminary results showed a 48 percent decrease in major crime, such as assault and grand larceny, at the city's 12 most dangerous schools from January through the end of the school year. In addition, a comparison of statistics for the first 15 days of school this year with the first 15 days last year showed a 40 percent overall decrease in major crime, school officials said.[31]

For example, Franklin K. Lane High School, with more than 3,500 students, is the most improved, with an 83 percent drop in major crime. Felony assaults, grand larceny and robberies are down. Susan Saulny describes the transformation that the high school has gone through in the last year:

And so Ms. Albanese-DePinto's team passed through Lane's triple-arched entrance for a full-day inspection with a 108-part checklist last month, surrounded by six education and police officials, the "school safety intervention team." Their goal was to figure out how much progress Franklin K. Lane had made in 14 major categories, including rule enforcement, instructional support and entry procedures.

The problems were easy to see last year: students gambling in the cafeteria, wearing head coverings with gang colors, running through the halls, kicking classroom doors, ignoring teachers and disciplinarians. Of the impact schools named last year, Franklin K. Lane reported the highest number of major crimes, including larceny, assault and aggravated harassment— roughly one every four school days. Three students were shot in an after-school dispute near the building at the beginning of last school year. The principal, Frank Barone, resigned in April, citing work-related stress.

But at the main doors recently, students waiting to pass through metal detectors were quiet and orderly. Three lines were moving at a good pace. "Please have your ID's out and empty your pockets," a tag team of teachers and safety agents reminded the students, over and over. "Hats off! Cellphones out!"

One of the safety team members, Deputy Inspector John K. Donohue of the Police Department, watched with satisfaction.

> *"What you're seeing is people actually engaging with students, telling them what the expectations are before they even get through the door," he said, noting that on his last visit in January, he saw no such thing. Students fumbling at the head of the line caused delays and rowdiness. "Our feeling is, if the students come in and are already frazzled and agitated by the scanning process, it's the beginning of a bad day."*[32]

In addition to investing school resources in school violence-prevention programs, an even more important aspect of keeping schools safe may be cleaning up the school itself and making sure that the "quality of life" issues in the school are not contributing to a violent atmosphere. In other words, if schools are clean, orderly, and tough on small crimes, this should in turn lead to less serious crime.

B. The Small School Movement

One significant school violence reduction strategy that has become extremely popular in the past few years is reducing school violence by reducing school size.

Within the economics of education literature, the traditional approach to school size has been to emphasize that efficiency gains can be enjoyed by larger schools from production economies of scale. However, there is an emerging body of literature that recognizes that other costs may rise with school size and come to counter marginal production benefits.

School size should not be confused with class size, which refers to the number of students per teacher in each classroom. There are small schools, which have large class sizes, and many large schools that have small class sizes. This paper will not address the class-size issue, but rather looks at the emerging trend toward smaller schools.

Economist Stephen Ferris at Carleton University analyzed evidence at the school level from the National Center for Education Statistics, Indicators of School Crime and Safety (2001) that shows that the percentage of schools reporting serious crime is more than three to five times higher in schools with more than one thousand students than in smaller schools with less than a thousand students (see Table 3 below).[33]

He writes,

> *It is true, for example, that students who attend city schools face a higher probability of experiencing serious violence than do students in schools in either towns or rural areas (16% compared to 5 and 8%) and city schools are typically larger. However, within each of these location categories, the same pattern of violence by school size is repeated. For example, the percentage of schools that report serious crimes is more than three times higher for large schools of 1000 or more compared to middle sized schools of 300-999 for both city and urban fringe schools. Similarly in smaller towns, the largest sized schools are five times more likely to report serious violence than their mid-sized alternatives.*[34]

> *According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), large schools report higher rates of serious violent crimes. Large schools had a ratio of 90 serious violent incidents per 100,000 public school students, compared with 38 per 100,000 in medium-sized schools.*[35]

Table 3: School Violence and School Size		
The percentage of public schools that reported one or more criminal incidents to police by seriousness of the incident		
School enrollment	Any incidents	Serious violent incidents
less than 300	37.8%	3.9%
300-999	59.6%	9.3%
1000 or more	89.1%	32.9%
The percentage of public schools that report 1 or more of 17 discipline issues as a serious problem in their school		
School enrollment	%	
less than 300	9.5%	
300-999	15.4%	
1000 or more	37.6%	

Source: NCES (2001: Tables 7.1, 16.1).

Ferris also examines evidence from private and public schools to weigh the relationship between school size and violence. He argues that if school size-related costs are undervalued in the public system, one should find that the private system produces private school sizes that are smaller on average than are public schools. In other words, private schools are meeting an unfilled demand for smaller schools. He finds that in 1998-99, average school enrollment in public elementary schools was 478 while average school enrollment in private elementary schools was 170. Similarly, average school enrollment in public secondary schools was 707 while average school enrollment in private secondary schools was 321. He argues that the school system that relies more on its students and their parents for support utilizes schools that are smaller in size than the school system that relies more on revenues from the public at large. This is consistent with the hypothesis that the public school system undervalues the costs associated with larger school size.

More specifically, Table 4 presents Ferris's data on the levels of violence experienced by students in the two school systems in both 1995 and 1999. He shows that not only do public schools report higher crime than private schools do, but the level of experienced violence is frequently more than twice as high in the public system as in the private school system.

However, the fact that Ferris found less violence in smaller schools could be partially attributed to the inherent characteristics of private school students and their parents. In other words, one would expect that these students would have life circumstances that would make them less likely to commit crimes or engage in violent behavior. This is not always the case. In Reason Foundation's 1997 school violence study, Catholic school principals reported low levels of violence and safer school climates within their schools even in dangerous neighborhoods and with similar low-income student populations. Similarly, private schools and charter schools that have targeted urban low-income children seem to also maintain safe climates.[36] A plausible alternative explanation is that these schools are more likely to enforce a "broken windows" approach to school violence and stop school disruptions before they turn into serious school violence. For example, the Catholic principals in the Reason study reported that they contacted a student's parents immediately, even for minor behavioral problems, and the students knew that the school would immediately contact their parents. In addition, private schools usually make the cleanliness and general appearance of the school a high priority whether they are serving low- or high-income students.

Ferris also attempts to address the inherent characteristics of private school students that may account for less violence in private schools. He notes that if students attracted to the private system were inherently less

violent than the students who remain in the public system, then it would be the students rather than the school size that produced the relationship between smaller private schools and lower rates of violence.

Ferris presents additional evidence that it is the school size rather than the student that accounts for the fall in school violence experienced within the private school system. He argues that when private school students are on their way to and from school, the level of fear of violence they experience is similar to that experienced by public school students.

He explains his findings:

> *Only in 1999 is there more than a 10 percent difference between the two sets of numbers. On the other hand, when the same students are in school, the level of fear from violence falls dramatically for private school students while actually rising for students going to public schools. In relative terms, private school students have about a third of the level of fear of violence than have public school students. Because the fear of violence changes in opposite directions for students attending different school systems, one can have greater confidence that at least some of this differential is attributable to public-private school differences. That is, there is evidence that the reduction in fear of violence is coming from organization within the school system rather than from student differences. This is consistent with the hypothesis that school size itself has a negative effect on the level and fear of violence experienced within the school.*[37]

Despite Ferris's conclusion that some of the difference is attributed to the size of the private school, there may be many alternative explanations besides school size for lower school violence. Private schools usually have direct control over decisions at the school level, many private schools may already practice the broken windows theory of school violence and be significantly less tolerant of small discipline problems that could lead to larger problems, and the fact that students chose the school may all play a role in the difference between perceptions of school violence in private and public schools.

Table 4: Percentage of Students Aged 12 Through 18 Who Reported Criminal Victimization at School, By School Type and Year

	1995	1999
Violent (a)		
Public School	3.1	2.5
Private School	1.7	0.3
Serious Violent (a)		
Public School	0.7	0.6
Private School	0.1	0
Bullied at School During the Last Six Months (b)		
Public School	5.3	
Private School	2.8	
Street Gangs Present at School (c)		
Public School	30.7	18.6
Private School	6.9	4.4

Source: NCES (2001: Tables [3.1.sup.a], [6.1.sup.b], [15.1.sup.c]).

Table 5: Percentage of Students Aged 12 Through 18 Who Report Fearing Attack at or on the Way to School, By School Type and Year			
	1989	1995	1999
Feared Attack or Harm at School			
Public School	5.9	9.1	5.7
Private School	1.7	3.3	1.7
Feared Attack or Harm on the Way to or From School			
Public School	4.5	6.7	4.0
Private School	4.3	5.0	2.8

Source: NCES (2001: Table 2.1).

Similarly in a 2002 study of inner-city males and self-reported incidents of violent behavior, Ferris and his colleague Ambrose Jeung found that even after controlling for other violent influences such as poverty or delinquent friends, school size remains a significant determinant of school violence. They found that students attending schools with more than 2000 students were 22 percent more likely to engage in serious violence.[38]

In light of the relationship between large schools and school violence, the small schools movement may hold promise for school violence reduction. However, there are other plausible explanations for why larger schools have more crime besides just the raw number of students. For example, one alternative explanation may be found in the broken windows theory that was mentioned in the previous section. Large schools may have more disorder and small crimes that lead to larger crimes. For example, the most prominent example of success with the broken windows theory of preventing crime was New York City. Controlling smaller crimes rather than changing the population size helped control crime in the large city. Similarly, private schools and many charter schools typically have *no* administrative structure above the school level. All the power and decision-making is way down at the school level rather than upstream in the school district. So the question then becomes: is it the smaller schools that make them less violent (and perform better) or it the fact that decision-making is much more decentralized in the smaller schools? There may be attributes of the smaller school that make implementing a tipping point strategy to stopping school violence easier. In other words, less bureaucracy and more direct control by a principal of a small public or private school may explain the difference in school violence rather than just the raw number of students.

In addition, in some cases where smaller schools are present there may be more competition between schools with fewer students in mandatory-assigned schools based on their residential addresses. Students who are in self-selected schools may by the nature of making a choice to attend be less violent and contribute to a more positive school climate. In addition, there is a "get-what-you pay-for" phenomenon working in the private schools because parents have specific expectations in exchange for tuition. While parents may indirectly pay some of the cost of public schools, this consumer effect is severely diluted by the perception that public schools are free and the public schools suffer from a "tragedy of the commons" effect—with no specific accountability for high levels of school crime.[39] More research needs to be done to move beyond the correlation between small schools and less violence to determine the other characteristics of these schools that may help reduce violence.

Schools that are strategically designed to have no more than 400 students represent the small schools movement. These schools are in place or starting up in at least 41 states. Some urban districts like Sacramento and Los Angeles have converted or are planning to convert all large high schools to small high

schools. The schools are either created new or are created by subdividing large high schools and having several schools share one building.

According to a recent CNN story, in the past decade, the Gates Foundation has invested $745 million in grant money into promoting small schools. In addition, the federal government is operating a $142 million grant program for subdividing larger high schools.[40]

A growing body of evidence suggests that reducing school size will improve student outcomes. Data collected by researchers at the Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois suggest that small school size not only improves student performance on grades and test scores, but lowers drop-out rates, reduces violence and drug abuse. These outcomes improve with reduction in school size, researchers agree, regardless of other restructuring and reform measures taken.[41]

If research shows that school violence is reduced in smaller schools, regardless of other reform measures, then initiatives that offer alternatives to large district-run schools should be implemented, including charter schools, voucher programs, and tax credit programs that lead to the growth of small school capacity. In addition, specific research needs to be done to highlight the best practices in the small schools movement and evaluate performance outcomes such as the rate of school crime in smaller schools. As with any large-scale reform, the implementation of small schools is critical and it involves more than simply dividing students into groups of 400.

Part 5

No Child Left Behind and School Violence

The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires students in violent or dangerous schools to be given the option to transfer to safer schools. Yet we find that school districts across the nation have manipulated safety criteria to their advantage, resulting in nearly every public school being labeled as safe—irrespective of the actual dangers to children at the school.

The Unsafe School Choice Option (USCO) (section 9532 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) requires that each state receiving funds under the ESEA establishes and implements a statewide policy requiring that students attending a persistently dangerous public elementary or secondary school, or students who become victims of a violent criminal offense while in or on the grounds of a public school that they attend, be allowed to attend a safe public school.[42]

In the 2003-2004 school year only about 50 of the nation's 92,000 public schools were labeled "persistently dangerous" under the No Child Left Behind Act.[43] Based on the small number of schools that were labeled as dangerous, in September 2003, the Education Reform Subcommittee held a field hearing in Denver, Colorado to study how states are implementing No Child Left Behind's persistently dangerous schools provision. The hearing suggested some states are significantly underreporting the number of unsafe schools to sidestep the law's requirements. Testimony from a National Center for Education Statistics expert revealed that in 2001, 6 percent of students reported they had carried a weapon on school property, and the same percentage feared being attacked at school.[44] A year earlier, in 2000, students were victims of about 700,000 nonfatal violent crimes while on school property. However, only 0.0006 percent of the nation's schools have been designated as "unsafe" by their states.

Similarly, in a 2003 survey of school-based police officers with 728 respondents, representing each of the 50 United States, over 87 percent of these police officers reported that the numbers of crimes that occur on school campuses nationwide are underreported to police. In addition, over 61 percent of survey respondents believe that school administrators faced with their schools possibly being labeled as "persistently dangerous" will underreport school crime.[45]

Most of the problem with the underreporting of dangerous schools comes from the state definitions of "persistently dangerous." The NCLB federal law allows each state to use its own definition of persistently

dangerous. The majority of states have set such a high threshold of violence that it is unlikely that *any* schools will be labeled as dangerous.

In response to states refusing to identify dangerous schools, the U.S. Department of Education issued new non-regulatory guidelines for the unsafe school choice component of NCLB. [46] In the new guidance the Education Department encouraged states to use a shorter time period to evaluate a dangerous school and to evaluate all incidents of school violence. Currently, the majority of state definitions requires schools to be dangerous for three years before being labeled as "persistently dangerous" and often only include gun violations as part of the definition. More specifically the guidelines state:

> *Often-identified measures of danger include number of weapons seized, number of assaults reported by students, and number of homicides. We strongly encourage SEAs (state education associations) to work with local law enforcement officials, including school resource officers, to identify other sources of data and information that can be used to accurately assess whether a school is persistently dangerous. Many current State definitions utilize suspension and expulsion data, which measure disciplinary responses to an incident. We urge SEAs to use data that relate to incidents (numbers of offenses) even when an offender is not apprehended and subsequently disciplined.*

Clearly, these new guidelines are designed to encourage states to take an honest look at school violence in their schools. Yet, despite the new guidelines the 2004 school year seems to be following the trend of few states truthfully labeling dangerous schools. For example, in 2004 not a single school in New York State is "persistently dangerous," according to the State Education Department.[47] California has also found no dangerous schools in 2004.

Newspapers around the nation are filled with horror stories of school violence that was not considered in a state's definition of dangerous schools. In Georgia, which had no dangerous schools in 2004, an investigation by the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution* found thousands of crimes that were not being considered by the state as it compiled its list of dangerous schools.[48] Marietta City Schools did not report an alleged rape, despite the fact that security cameras captured what school officials believed to be a 17-year-old male forcing a 16-year-old girl into the boys' restroom for sex. In Cherokee County, a pair of aggravated batteries that left one student with a broken jaw and another with facial fractures were not reported to the state because administrators did not list the infractions under aggravated batteries.

Similarly New York City has received negative press for failing to label schools as dangerous. New York defines a school as "persistently dangerous" if the number of incidents of weapons possession or use equals or exceeds 3 percent of the school's enrollment for two consecutive years, officials said. Officials said the finding was based on a decline in incidents involving weapons, but they said they did not include factors like assault, sexual assault and other violent incidents, citing significant inconsistencies in the data reported by schools.

According to the *Daily News*, these incidents were among those not counted as dangerous by the Education Department:

> *Three male students at Intermediate School 172 in Harlem forced a girl into a closet and sexually assaulted her in March.*

A student at Manhattan's Washington Irving High School shoved a Snapple machine down a flight of stairs in December.

A student at Queens' Beach Channel High School in December smashed his ex-girlfriend's head through a trophy case.[49]

Most state definitions of dangerous schools continue to go against recent recommendations on dangerous schools established by the U.S. Department of Education. In a September 2004 report the Education Commission of the States (ECS) cataloged the 50 state definitions for persistently dangerous schools.[50] The ECS analysis found that the majority of states still use three years as the time period that a school must be dangerous before being labeled and fewer than 10 states have adopted the federal recommendation for considering crimes over a one-year period.[51] In addition, many states continue to use a narrow definition of incidents that considers gun violations as the main criteria for a dangerous school.[52] For example, in California a school is only dangerous if for three consecutive years it has a federal or state gun-free schools violation or a violent criminal offense has been committed by a student or a non-student on school property *and* has one expulsion for every 100 enrolled students for a serious violent offense.

Some states have thresholds of school violence ensuring that no schools will ever be labeled. For example, in Colorado for a school over 1200 students, it must have more than 225 violent incidents for 1200 students for two consecutive years. In other words, a violent high school in Colorado would have to have a violent incident *every* school day for two years.[53]

Regardless of official lists of persistently dangerous schools, some school leaders have maintained their own list of dangerous schools and given these schools extra resources and attention. For example, Philadelphia Public School CEO Paul Vallas told the *Philadelphia Daily News* that despite the state's list, he has his own list of 50 disruptive schools that will get extra behavioral health staffers and security measures. “The state has its list, and I have my list. My list is larger than the state's,” Vallas said.[54] Similarly, in New York City the Bloomberg administration has targeted several dangerous schools with extra resources that have not been labeled as “persistently dangerous” by the state.

School districts have also had problems with data collection. Washington D.C. has become the poster child for how *not* to collect school violence data.

In September 2004 the *Washington Post* reported that the District's school system does not keep adequate records on crimes and other serious incidents that occur on school grounds, according to an audit by D.C.’s inspector general.[55] An audit by the inspector general’s office concluded that the schools lack a comprehensive system to record and track incidents from the time they occur to the completion of investigations by police and school security officers. In addition, the reporting of serious incidents is hampered by school security policies that are inconsistent or unclear. The auditors found that “there is no central repository, automated or manual" within the school system to keep track of the final outcome of incidents.[56]

In addition to problems with data collection, school violence reporting also suffers from schools being labeled based on old data. There is a huge lag in data reporting. For example, in Reason’s analysis of school district reporting of crime data, the school districts that made any information available at all often reported data that were from two to five years old.

School violence crime data in New York City provides a good example of why good data collection is critical. The most dangerous high schools identified by the New York Police Department in 2004, based on the actual number of violent incidents that occurred in the schools, were not the same schools that the education department had identified as dangerous schools in need of extra resources.[57] In other words, the New York Department of Education had been providing extra resources and police officers for schools that were dangerous but were not the *most* dangerous schools according to the actual data.

Pennsylvania has created a statewide school violence incident reporting system that should solve both the timeliness issue and the inconsistent data reporting by school districts within a state. According to a May 2004 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, a partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the state's 501 school districts has resulted in a much-improved online system for tracking violent incidents in Pennsylvania schools. "This system will not only allow the Commonwealth to meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act but will give parents a precise picture of their child's school environment," said Secretary Phillips. "We are taking advantage of the best that high-tech collaboration can provide. The online reporting system gives school district administrators explicit definitions of what incidents should or should not be included in the annual report." Florida also has a statewide data reporting system that is easily accessible to parents and is the only state where crime data is presented alongside academic data to give parents a clearer picture of a school's performance and environment.

State legislators should follow Florida and Pennsylvania's example and create standard statewide reporting systems that are automated and take advantage of on-line technology. Legislators should also make crime statistics available as a standard feature of school report cards.

Part 6

How Schools Report Crime to Parents

A. Reason's School District Web Site Content Analysis

We performed a content analysis of 80 large school district Web sites, including the member districts of The Great City Schools (which is a membership organization representing the largest urban school districts) and the 50 largest school districts as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics. (See Appendix for a complete list of schools).[58] The analysis included a search of each Web site for school violence and crime data as it was reported to parents. We used a long list of possible search techniques for every variation on school crime, safety, incident reporting etc., to try to exhaust all possibilities for how data might be presented on school district Web sites. We put ourselves in the position of the average parent trying to find specific school violence data.

The analysis revealed that most school districts provide parents with little or no information about school crime in district schools. Seventy-five percent of large school districts have no school crime data at district- or state-level Web sites. However, a few school districts provide parents with detailed information at the school level on the specific incidents of school violence that would allow parents to evaluate the type of crime happening in their child's school or potential school. In addition, because of Florida's state violent incident reporting system, parents can find information on school violence at every school in Florida. Some districts provided aggregate school violence incidents for the entire district in annual reports or other documents. However, most of these data were dated. Some districts like Sacramento and Albuquerque, New Mexico provided crime statistics at the school level for selected years though not in a database format. These data were also somewhat dated. Only New York, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Florida and Pennsylvania provide searchable databases or spreadsheets with multiple years of school crime data and detailed reports by type of crime. The Florida and Pennsylvania state systems also provide data on charter schools.

School districts with detailed crime data at the school level.

- Albuquerque
- New York City
- Los Angeles
- Sacramento
- All Florida Districts (through state Web site)
- All Pennsylvania Districts (through state Web site)

General observations from the school district analysis include:

1. No school district makes it easy to find crime statistics. Even where comprehensive information is available, a parent would have to be very motivated to find the information. School-level crime reports are never linked to parent information pages.
2. School districts do not yet include school crime data in annual reports or school-level report cards. Only Florida includes crime statistics as part of overall school reports searchable through a state database.
3. Schools with police departments are more likely to report specific crime statistics.
4. Local newspapers are a more reliable source of school crime data than schools.

Tables 6 and 7 reflect the school database reporting systems in New York City and the state of Florida and show the type of information that is provided to parents. In the New York database parents are given three categories of crimes by their severity and an average number of crimes for similar schools. The Florida database in Table 7 provides parents with the specific types of crime but does not offer comparison data to show how it relates to similar schools. However, Florida's database offers more detailed information about the type of crimes and a picture of school crime over several years. Similarly, the Sacramento school crime spreadsheet (Table 8) offers parents a snapshot of school crime over time and the specific types of crime.

Table 6: Number of Crimes and Incidents at Prospect Heights HS (Brooklyn, NY) Consolidated Location

	Major Crimes	Other Crimes	Non-criminal Incidents
Prospect Heights HS	9	9	17
Average for Similar-size Schools	1.6	5.6	13.8

Notes: Address: 883 Classon Avenue, Brooklyn, NY

The total 2003-2004 enrollment in this consolidated location is 1317 students

Table 7: Florida School Indicators Report: School Level Data: Incidents of Crime and Violence

School Name	Violent Acts Against Persons	Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs	Property	Fighting and Harassment	Weapons Possession	Nonviolent Incidents & Disorderly Conduct	Total
Felix Varela Senior High School 2002-2003	16	15	32	38	3	11	115
Coral Gables Senior High School 2002-2003	7	16	70	87	2	7	189

Table 8: School Crime as Reported in Fern Bacon Elementary School, Sacramento

	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
Against Person(s)	3	5	0	2	12
Against Property	1	2	3	1	3
Involving Drugs	1	1	1	1	0
Involving Weapons	1	0	0	0	1
Involving Alcohol	0	0	0	0	0
Terrorist/Bomb Threats	1	0	0	1	0

The best approach to reporting school crime to parents would combine these three reports for a report that shows crime over time, specific incidents by specific crime, and includes a similar school ranking to demonstrate how dangerous each school is compared to other schools in the district.

Best practices for school violence incident reporting

1. Report incidents at school level
2. Report incidents by specific crime categories
3. Include similar schools' ranking to show how much out of norm or geographic ranking
4. Indicate whether school self reports or uses police data or both
5. Develop standardized reporting system across districts

B. The Higher Education Model

Since 1992, all colleges have been required by federal law to compile annual statistics about crime on their campuses and to make them available to their students and staff members, normally through the schools' admissions offices. By October 1st of each year, a school that is Title IV-eligible is required to publish and distribute an annual campus security report to all current students and employees. In addition to the required annual campus security report, schools are required to provide timely warning of the occurrences of crimes that are reported to campus security authorities and local police agencies. The timely warning information is to be provided in an appropriate manner so as to prevent similar crimes from occurring and to protect the personal safety of students and employees.

The **OPE Campus Security Statistics Website**, compiled by the Office of Postsecondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education, is a direct link to reported criminal offenses for over 6000 colleges and universities in the United States. It was authorized by Congress with the 1998 amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) to help potential college students and their parents research criminal offenses on college campuses.

In addition, each year *The Chronicle of Higher Education* asks all colleges with enrollments of more than 5,000 for copies of their security reports. In the "Facts and Figures" section of the Higher Ed site, you can search the most recent survey by state.

For example, I was able to check two local state colleges close to my home in California. I found out that California State University Fullerton had 20 car thefts versus 59 car thefts at California State University Long Beach. More significantly, Long Beach had five forcible sex offenses in 2003 while Fullerton had zero. As a parent or student this is meaningful information about the level of safety at each college campus. It tells the potential student much more information than just the total number of violent incidents. Perhaps because colleges enjoy greater competition for students, and cannot enroll students based on mandatory attendance zones, they are willing to provide potential customers with more information about school crime.

A central difference between crime data in colleges and public schools is that college students are adults and can report crimes themselves. Public school students are minors who depend on school personnel to do it and schools may have strong incentives to underreport crime, to prevent being labeled as dangerous or to prevent students from leaving a school.

Figure 16: Criminal Offenses at Cal State Fullerton (OPE ID: 00113700)			
Criminal Offenses - On-campus	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**
On Campus			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	0	2	0
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	3	5	0
e. Robbery	1	1	2
f. Aggravated assault	6	3	2
g. Burglary	10	25	10
h. Motor vehicle theft	41	26	20
i. Arson	0	0	0
On-campus Residence Halls			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	0	1	0
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	0	0	0
e. Robbery	0	0	0
f. Aggravated assault	0	0	0
g. Burglary	1	1	3
h. Motor vehicle theft	0	0	0
i. Arson	0	0	0
Public Property			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	0	0	0
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	0	0	0
e. Robbery	2	0	0
f. Aggravated assault	0	0	0
g. Burglary	11	0	0
h. Motor vehicle theft	13	0	0
i. Arson	0	0	0
Reported by Local and State Police			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter		0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter		0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible		1	0
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)		2	0
e. Robbery		2	1
f. Aggravated assault		5	4
g. Burglary		2	4
h. Motor vehicle theft		16	11
i. Arson		1	1

Figure 18: Criminal Offenses at Cal State Long Beach (OPE ID: 00113900)			
Criminal Offenses - On-campus	2001	2002	2003
On Campus			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	3	0	5
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	0	0	0
e. Robbery	1	0	1
f. Aggravated assault	3	3	3
g. Burglary	73	46	16
h. Motor vehicle theft	54	48	59
i. Arson	1	0	1
On-campus Residence Halls			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	3	0	4
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	0	0	0
e. Robbery	1	0	0
f. Aggravated assault	0	0	0
g. Burglary	16	4	5
h. Motor vehicle theft	2	0	13
i. Arson	1	0	1
Noncampus			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	0	0	0
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	0	0	0
e. Robbery	0	0	0
f. Aggravated assault	0	2	1
g. Burglary	2	7	5
h. Motor vehicle theft	1	0	1
i. Arson	0	0	0
Public Property			
a. Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
b. Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0
c. Sex offenses - Forcible	0	0	1
d. Sex offenses - Non-forcible(Include only incest and statutory rape)	0	0	0
e. Robbery	0	0	15
f. Aggravated assault	0	0	30
g. Burglary	0	0	49
h. Motor vehicle theft	0	3	47
i. Arson	0	0	0

The crime data reported by the institutions has not been subjected to independent verification by ED. Therefore, the Department cannot vouch for the accuracy of the data reported here.

Since schools already must report violent incidents under the Gun Free Schools Act and the No Child Left Behind Act, a next logical step would be to work toward uniform incident reporting by type of crime that could be kept in a database for all public schools. An independent school reporting system such as Greatschools.net or the Broad Foundation's Schoolresults.org could also include school violence data with school report cards.

Part 7

Recommendations

Parents want their children to be safe at school. While schools have often used external measures to counteract school violence, school policymakers don't always have the correct incentives to ensure that their schools are safe. The threat of reduced school enrollment and the right of students to exit an unsafe school is a powerful incentive to get schools to reduce crime. However, schools need transparency about the level of school crime so parents can help drive school-level change. School administrators have every incentive to underreport school crime. *Legislators* should require school districts to provide parents with more information about the safety of their schools and more choices for smaller and safer schools.

1. Revise the state and federal law to loosen or eliminate restrictions on school choice. The act of choosing and the related imperative for schools to make themselves choice-worthy is the key to any serious anti-violence policy. Forced assignment to schools and the resulting mismatches and detachment beget boredom and violence. Parents care about keeping their kids safe. If they can compare school safety along with other performance data, and if school competition is legal, that competition will apply pressure on schools to control violence. Since there is no one-size-fits-all approach that controls school violence, competition and the right of parents to exit violent schools is the best incentive to help all schools to reduce school violence.

2. Encourage smaller schools, competition, and new school capacity. Strong evidence points to the correlation between school size and school violence. Private and charter schools cater to parents' demand for smaller schools. Federal and state legislators should enforce provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act that require accurate reporting of dangerous schools. Legislation should require school districts to move away from school consolidation toward smaller schools. In the past decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided $745 million in grant money to promote small schools and increase the impact. One example is $51.2 million to New York City's public schools to fund 67 small, theme-based high schools, each of which will limit enrollment to a maximum of 500 students.

A little over two months ago, Chicago announced that about 60 of its worst schools will close. One hundred smaller schools with new staff and new programs will replace them. The district plans to operate one-third of them, and evenly split the other two-thirds between chartered, mostly secondary schools, and schools managed by independent contractors. [59]

3. Focus resources on a "broken windows" approach to preventing school violence. Cleaning up school facilities and getting tougher on smaller crimes may prevent more serious crimes. Controlling crime before it is serious enough for metal detectors, locker searches, and video cameras is really the most effective management strategy for school violence. Schools need incentives to create consequences for bad behavior

before it escalates to the point where students know they can get away with serious violent behavior. School-level management needs to invest more resources, time, and effort into running the school with sufficient observations and proactive responses to curtail serious crime. As in the New York City schools, keeping the school clean and targeting smaller school offenses is the first step to reducing school violence. This may also entail renegotiating labor contracts that have allowed basic maintenance and school clean up to be a low priority or neglected altogether.

4. Create uniform reporting standards. Parents and local and state school officials need to understand their own violence problem relative to other schools and other school priorities. This will help them determine which school violence prevention strategies are working and whether or not progress is being made. At the state level, and perhaps even the federal level, states should have consistent definitions for school violence incidents that make school crime data comparable across individual schools so parents can make informed decisions about the safety of their schools. Pennsylvania and Florida demonstrate the usefulness of consistent crime data across all schools in one state.

5. Follow federal guidelines for defining "persistently dangerous" schools. The federal government should require **s**tates to use more accurate definitions for dangerous schools and include all types of violent incidents including rape and assault. Schools need solid definitions uniformly applied. Schools need to understand why some crimes are reported to the police and some are not. Schools need more transparency about the decisions they make in regards to crime reporting in order to evaluate when those decisions need to change. If No Child Left Behind is going to base a demand for change on meeting a set criteria for dangerous schools, then the criteria needs to be explicit, and those criteria have to be strongly enforced.

6. Use school violence outcomes—not processes—as a measure of dangerous schools. Schools should use the actual incidents of crime and not the processes, such as expulsion or criminal prosecution, to judge the violence in a specific school. Measures of detentions, expulsions, or school transfers are not measures of school violence.

7. Make crime statistics part of school report cards. Crime data should be required as part of a school's report card alongside academic data and teacher experience**.** The best approach to reporting school crime would combine best practices from the few districts that report comprehensive crime statistics and include reports of crime over time, specific incidents by specific crime, and a similar school ranking to demonstrate how dangerous each school is compared to other schools in the district.

8. Report crime data in a timely fashion. Persistently dangerous schools should be labeled based on the previous school year's data and that data should be reported to parents in a timely fashion.

9. Include similar schools' rankings. Crime data reporting should include rankings of similar schools to help parents compare the violence level between schools. Without benchmarks, parents and school decision-makers have no context for judging data. If schools officials know how much crime is at their school, but not whether that is high or low compared to similar schools, they don't know very much.

10. Enforce the unsafe school choice option for student victims. Students who are the victims of school crime should immediately be allowed to transfer to a safer public school. If a safer public school is not available, the student should be provided with a school voucher to go to a private school.[60] The provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act that require schools to make academic progress on standardized tests, have resulted in some schools being closed or reconstituted and some schools being competitively bid to be run by

outside operators such as charter groups, nonprofits, or for-profit school operators. Yet, the NCLB has failed to adequately identify which schools are dangerous. And because safety seems to be a prerequisite for raising test scores, it seems crucial that the same competitive provisions such as closing schools, allowing local voucher or tax credit programs to give students the right of exit, or competitively bidding dangerous schools would be critical to reducing violence and ultimately improving student achievement. For this to happen, the No Child Left Behind Act must become more than just lip service to safer schools. The provisions that cover dangerous schools must be revised to be more binding and uniformly enforced.

Appendix

School District List

These are the specific school district Web sites which were examined for their reporting of crime data.

1.	Albuquerque Public Schools	http://ww2.aps.edu/
2.	Anchorage School District	http://www.asd.k12.ak.us
3.	Anne Arundal	http://www.aacps.org
4.	Atlanta Public Schools	http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us
5.	Austin Independent School District	http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu
6.	Baltimore City Public Schools	http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/
7.	Baltimore County	http://www.bcps.org
8.	Birmingham City Schools	http://www.bhm.k12.al.us
9.	Boston Public Schools	http://www.boston.k12.ma.us
10.	Broward County Public Schools	http://browardschools.com
11.	Buffalo City School District	http://www.buffaloschools.org
12.	Caddo Parish School District	http://www.caddo.org
13.	Charleston County Public Schools	http://www.ccsdschools.com/index.cfm
14.	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	http://www.cms.k12.nc.us
15.	Chicago Public Schools	http://www.cps.k12.il.us
16.	Christina School District	http://www.christina.k12.de.us/
17.	Cincinnati Public Schools	http://www.cps-k12.org

18.	Clark County School District	http://www.ccsd.net
19.	Cleveland Municipal School District	http://www.cmsdnet.net/
20.	Cobb County	http://www.cobb.k12.ga.us/
21.	Columbus Public Schools	http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us
22.	Dallas Independent School District	http://www.dallasisd.org/
23.	Dayton Public Schools	http://www.dps.k12.oh.us
24.	De Kalb	http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/
25.	Denver Public Schools	http://www.denver.k12.co.us
26.	Des Moines Indep. Community School District	http://www.dmps.k12.ia.us
27.	Detroit Public Schools	http://www.detpub.k12.mi.us
28.	District of Columbia Public Schools	http://www.k12.dc.us./dcps/home.html
29.	Duval County Public Schools	http://www.educationcentral.org
30.	Fairfax County	http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/
31.	Fort Worth Independent School District	http://www.fortworthisd.org/index.html
32.	Fresno Unified School District	http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us
33.	Guilford County Schools	http://www.guilford.k12.nc.us/
34.	Gwinnet	http://www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/
35.	Hawaii Department of Education	http://doe.k12.hi.us
36.	Hillsborough County School District	http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us
37.	Houston Independent School District	http://www.houstonisd.org
38.	Indianapolis Public Schools	http://www.ips.k12.in.us
39.	Jackson Public School District	http://www.jackson.k12.ms.us
40.	Jefferson County Public Schools	http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us
41.	Jefferson County 1	http://jeffcoweb.jeffco.k12.co.us

42.	Jordan	http://www.jordan.k12.mn.us/
43.	Long Beach Unified School District	http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us
44.	Los Angeles Unified School District	http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us
45.	Montgomery County	http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/
46.	Memphis City Public Schools	http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us
47.	Mesa	
48.	Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools	http://www.nashville-schools.davidson.k12.tn.us
49.	Miami-Dade County Public Schools	http://www.dadeschools.net
50.	Milwaukee Public Schools	http://www.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/pages/MPS
51.	Minneapolis Public Schools	http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us
52.	New Orleans Public Schools	http://nops.k12.la.us
53.	New York City Department of Education	http://www.nycenet.edu
54.	Newark Public Schools	http://www.nps.k12.nj.us
55.	Norfolk Public Schools	http://www.nps.k12.va.us/
56.	Oakland Unified School District	http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us
57.	Oklahoma City Public Schools	http://www.okcps.org
58.	Omaha Public Schools	http://www.ops.org
59.	Orange County Public Schools	http://www.ocps.k12.fl.us
60.	Palm Beach County Public Schools	http://www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us
61.	Philadelphia Public Schools	http://www.philsch.k12.pa.us
62.	Pinellas	http://www.pinellas.k12.fl.us/
63.	Pittsburgh Public Schools	http://www.pps.pgh.pa.us/
64.	Polk County	http://www.pcsb.k12.fl.us/
65.	Portland Public Schools	http://www.pps.k12.or.us

66.	Prince George	http://www.pgcps.pg.k12.md.us/
67.	Providence Public Schools	http://www.providenceschools.org/
68.	Richmond Public Schools	http://richmond.k12.va.us
69.	Rochester City School District	http://www.rcsdk12.org
70.	Sacramento City Unified School District	http://www.scusd.edu
71.	Salt Lake City School District	http://www.slc.k12.ut.us/
72.	San Diego Unified School District	http://www.sdcs.k12.ca.us
73.	San Francisco Unified School District	http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us
74.	Seattle Public Schools	http://www.seattleschools.org/area/main/index.dxml
75.	St. Louis Public Schools	http://www.slps.org/
76.	St. Paul Public Schools	http://www.spps.org
77.	Toledo Public Schools	http://www.tps.org
78.	Tucson Unified School District	http://www.tusd.k12.az.us/
79.	Virginia Beach	http://www.vbschools.com/
80.	Wake County	http://www.wcpss.net

About the Author

Lisa Snell is director of the Education Program at Reason Foundation where she oversees Reason Foundation's research on social services and education issues. Her most recent policy studies include *Special Education Accountability: Structural Reform to Help Charter Schools Make the Grade* and *Child Advocacy Centers: One-Stop on the Road to Performance-based Child Protection.*

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In his "Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin argues that free access to common resources brings ruin to all. Here is how it works. Imagine an unregulated public pasture where everyone is permitted to graze their animals. To preserve this commons, all participants must agree not to overgraze it. In other words, all must adopt an ethic of restraint. If even one of the common's users insists on adding more animals than it can support, the public pasture ultimately is destroyed.

The nation's public schools are similar to Hardin's public commons in the sense that all have access to this resource. And school assets, such as time or space in the curriculum, are the equivalent of the forage in Hardin's pasture. So when individuals fail to constrain themselves and "overgraze"

our schools by placing excessive particularistic demands on them, they are doomed to the same fate as the overgrazed public pasture is. No, it won't erode away because its roots have been destroyed. But, by attempting to become all things to all people, it will become incapable of focused, purposeful activity.

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57 Joe Williams, "10 Schools on NYPD's Danger List," *Daily News* (New York), February 28, 2004.

58 I examined 60 members of the Great City Schools and the largest 50 school districts for a total of 80 school districts when overlap was considered. For a complete list of school see Appendix.

59 David Kirkpatrick, "Smaller Schools. At Last." *School Report 692*, U.S. Freedom Foundation, November 4, 2004.

60 In a related article, I detail how schools routinely deny school violence victims their right to transfer to better schools. See Lisa Snell, "No Way Out," *Reason*, October 2004.









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