



“Targeted violence is any incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to [his] violent attack.”

*Exceptional Case Study Project,
U.S. Secret Service*

Preventing School Violence: Plans Make it Possible

Despite the fact that schools remain one of the safest places for our children, recent tragic school events, such as the shootings at Virginia Tech, Platte Canyon High School, and the Amish schoolhouse have raised the level of anxiety about the safety of our students at school. And because of incidents like these, approximately 6 percent of students report being afraid of an attack at school (*Indicators of School Crime and Safety*: 2006).

These tragic events beg the question: “What can be done to prevent violent attacks from occurring in our schools?” The *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*, presented by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in 2004, discusses the implications of this question, particularly with regard to student-on-student violence (the most common type of school violence).

The initiative examined 37 incidents of school shootings and attacks that occurred between 1974 and 2000 with particular focus on the attackers’ planning behaviors and communications. The final report indicates that schools are better prepared by using a formal threat assessment process to appraise behavior, rather than relying simply on stated threats or specific student traits that warrant concern. As part of the threat assessment process, the appropriate authorities gather information, evaluate facts, and make a determination whether an identified student poses a threat of violence. From there, the appropriate level of intervention must be made. Detailed information about the development and institutionalization of a formal threat assessment process is available in the Secret Service’s *Threat Assessment in Schools Guide* available online at http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf.

Conducting threat assessments is important in addressing school violence but is only one component in an overall strategy to create safe schools. A more comprehensive approach involves the establishment of a school climate that offers students safety, respect, and emotional support. This type of environment can help

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Targeted School Violence Key Findings

Attackers make plans.

Attackers talk about their plans.

Attackers often do not make direct threats.

There is no stereotype or profile.

Warning signs are common.

Attackers may have difficulty coping with loss or failure.

Bullying can be a factor.

Attackers have easy access to guns.

Attackers are encouraged by others.

School staff are most often the first responders.

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diminish the possibility of targeted violence in schools. Environments where students, teachers, and administrators pay attention to students' social and emotional needs, as well as their academic needs, will have fewer situations that require formal threat assessments and interventions.

School administrators, teachers, and staff members have the power to positively affect the school climate. For example, educators may take the following steps to promote a healthy and safe school climate:

- Assess the school's emotional climate using surveys or other tools that ask about behaviors and attitudes related to safety.
- Emphasize the importance of listening in schools. Encourage students to find an adult at the school who will listen and help with problems when necessary.
- Prevent or intervene in cases of bullying by paying attention to warning signs and enforcing a consistent, fair policy that addresses bullying behaviors. Consider using a formal, age-appropriate prevention program.
- Involve all members of the school community in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect. Encourage open communication between the staff, parents, and community members to foster strong relationships and cooperation.

Prevention of school violence entails comprehensive and ongoing efforts, and an effective initiative includes both a formal threat assessment process as well as the development of a positive school climate. Although the task is neither quick nor easy, schools and communities do have the power to create safer school environments that minimize the risk of violent events.

Complete findings from the *Safe School Initiative* are available online at http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf. 

School Safety Centers

In response to youth and school violence, many states have established school safety centers devoted to serving the education community by promoting safety and violence prevention through research, legislation, and policy development. These safety centers were created to provide resources to educators in their home states. Here we are highlighting four as reliable models for any state considering establishing its own school safety center.

Center for the Prevention of School Violence

North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency
<http://www.cpsv.org>

Established in 1993 by the governor of North Carolina, this center is the primary resource for addressing school violence in the state. The center:

- Provides information and technical assistance to any and all stakeholders involved in safe schools and youth development.
- Operates as a think tank for school violence prevention and policy development.
- Maintains an expansive resource library.
- Conducts workshops and trainings on issues related to school safety such as program development, research, and evaluation.

Virginia Center for School Safety

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services
<http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss>

Established in 2000, the center works to provide Virginia's students with a safe and secure learning environment. It does this by encouraging partnerships, introducing legislative initiatives, offering training programs, conducting data collection, and evaluating programs. The center:

- Provides training for public school personnel in the effective identification of students who may be at risk for violent behavior and in need of special services or assistance.
- Collects, analyzes, and disseminates Virginia school safety data.
- Provides training for and certification of school resource officers.

Kentucky Center for School Safety

Eastern Kentucky University
<http://www.kysafeschools.org>

Established by legislation in 1998, the center serves as a central point for data analysis, research, dissemination, and technical assistance for safe schools in Kentucky. The center:

- Provides a clearinghouse of information and materials on violence prevention.
- Analyzes school safety and discipline data as reported by local districts.
- Evaluates existing school safety programs.
- Provides an annual report to the governor, Kentucky Board of Education, and the Interim Joint Committee on Education on the status of school safety in the state.
- Advises the Kentucky Board of Education on administrative policies and regulations.

Missouri Center for Safe Schools

University of Missouri–Kansas City
<http://education.umkc.edu/safe-school>

Established in 1995 with a grant from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the center offers resources and facilitates networking between schools across Missouri as they develop effective measures to combat violence and other safety issues. The center:

- Conducts building and district safety reviews including security, staff screening, and compliance with the *Missouri Safe Schools Act*.
- Provides staff development on safety issues including sexual harassment.
- Provides examples of school emergency management plans and direct assistance to schools that request help.

INTERVIEW:

OSDFS Official Discusses Study that Tracks School Deaths

Bill Modzeleski serves as associate assistant deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. The Challenge interviewed Modzeleski recently to discuss school-associated violent deaths. The department works with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to collect data on each school-associated death.

Q: Why have ED and the CDC been collaborating on the school-associated violent death study?

A: In the early 1990s we had noticed an increase in school violence and were particularly troubled by the growing number of large-scale school shootings. The press picked up on the disturbing trend of young people coming into their schools to shoot classmates, teachers, or administrators. Congress took notice as well. Authorized as part of the *Improving America's Schools Act*, the *Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act* established funds to help schools address factors that contribute to school-associated violence.

We needed to quantify the numbers of school-associated violent deaths, and at that time no federal agency was collecting these data. Because youth violence affects the public health and justice systems as well as the education system, it makes sense for ED to work collaboratively with the CDC and DOJ to monitor these events in a consistent and meaningful way.

Q: What data is collected, how is it collected, and how is it used?

The study collects detailed information about the victims and perpetrators, the schools where events occurred, and the circumstances surrounding the events. The CDC has a team of researchers who gather the data using a variety of media and Internet databases, vast contacts with state and local agencies, as well as police and school officials. Every identified case is researched first to determine if the incident occurred under the parameters set by the study. We look at homicides, suicides, cases of legal intervention (meaning a vic-

tim who is killed by a police officer in the line of duty), and unintentional firearms deaths. To be considered school-associated, we include cases that occurred on the campus of an elementary or secondary school, on the way to or from school, or during an official school-sponsored event (including traveling to or from such an event). Victims include students and staff.

We use these data in several ways. First we are reporting them so that everyone has an idea of how many school-related deaths occur each year. Also we are finding patterns and commonalities in the events that may help schools prevent such deaths from happening. To help in this prevention, the data are used in developing interventions and shaping policies at the federal, state, and local levels.

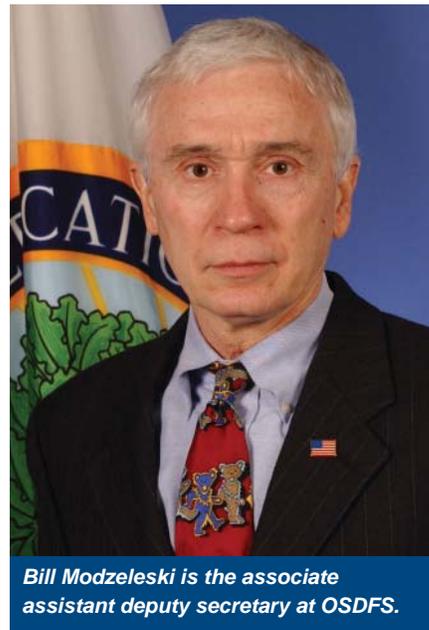
Q: Don't the FBI or local police agencies collect information on school shootings?

The FBI collects and reports national crime statistics but does not track school-specific incidents within those numbers. While some communities are able to get local crime data from their police departments, there are no centralized databases or national reporting mechanisms to track all school-related violent deaths.

Q: What do the data show?

We see two trend lines. From 1992–99 we see an even trend with approximately 34 school-associated deaths per year. After a decline to 13 deaths during the 1999–2000 school year, the numbers have been going up again. It is important to be cognizant that one multiple homicide will increase the numbers, so we want to be careful when looking at these numbers.

These data show that schools need to be prepared for the possibility of violent deaths because they can occur anywhere, but these events are still extremely rare occurrences. Other types of school victimization and criminal activity are much more common and require constant attention. The U.S. has 53 million students attending elementary and secondary schools,



Bill Modzeleski is the associate assistant deputy secretary at OSDFS.

and a tiny fraction of them fall victim to such tragedy. Furthermore, we see that less than one percent of homicides with victims ages 5 to 18 are school associated.

Q: Where can readers go for more information on these school-associated violent deaths?

Look to the ED or CDC Web sites (<http://www.ed.gov> and <http://www.cdc.gov>) for links to the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* to find the annual statistics.

Two articles have been published that describe findings from this study, *School-Associated Violent Deaths in the United States, 1992 to 1994* and *School-Associated Violent Deaths in the United States, 1994–1999*, both in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Another set of articles on the more recent data is in development. 

Additional studies on school shootings include the *Safe School Initiative*, an analysis of 37 school shootings (41 shooters) conducted by ED and the U.S. Secret Service. The 2002 findings are available at <http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac.shtml>.

The FBI analysis of 18 school shootings is published in 1999's *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*, available online at <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/school/school2.pdf>.

White House Conference Encourages Participants to Take Threats Seriously

In fall 2006, national experts on school safety, politicians, law enforcement agents, school faculty, and community members met in Washington, D.C., to highlight best practices for making schools safe, share lessons learned from prior incidents of school violence, and engender new ideas for creating the safest environments possible. President and Mrs. Bush delivered impassioned remarks about society's obligation to prevent violence in our nation's schools as well as to aid in recovery from school tragedy. Joining the president and first lady, then Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Education Secretary Margaret Spellings convened the meeting and served as moderators.

During the discussions, panelists stressed the critical importance of effective intelligence and information sharing. Most students who plan a violent event talk about it to others, and it is crucial that mechanisms are in place for allowing this divulged information to make its way to authority figures who can stop the event from occurring (as well as provide help to the troubled youth planning the event). Likewise, research shows that in many violent school events, different people in the attacker's life (e.g., teachers, friends, parents, school staff, employers, law enforcement, social service providers) had different small clues that a problem existed; therefore, the sharing of information, data, and intelligence across organizations and systems in the community (with confidentiality of utmost importance) also plays a critical role in prevention of school violence.

Establish Authority for the Threat Assessment Process

For a school to establish a formal team and process to collect data and act upon potential threats, it is critical to follow federal and local laws and regulations governing information sharing. Threat assessment teams should consult with

According to the model established by the Secret Service in *Threat Assessment in Schools Guide*, six principles underlie the process of threat assessment:

- Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable, and oftentimes discernable, process of thinking and behavior.
- Targeted violence stems from an interaction among the person, the situation, the setting, and the target.
- An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.
- Effective threat assessment is based on facts, rather than characteristics or "traits."
- An "integrated systems approach" should guide threat assessment investigations.
- The central question of a threat assessment is whether a student *poses* a threat, not whether the student has *made* a threat. (pp. 30–33)

their school district's legal counsel when developing policies and procedures to access and share information about a student. Because information sharing is vital to violence prevention, it is important to navigate the laws and establish connections with law enforcement, mental health, and social services. Many states have developed policy guides on this matter specifically to help schools comply with federal and state law. In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention published *Guidelines for Juvenile Information Sharing* in October 2006 to highlight best practices in collaboration, confidentiality, and technology.

Clearly define the expectations and duties for the threat assessment team. Determine the threshold to trigger an inquiry or investigation and who is responsible for

each aspect of gathering data. Formalize the steps that the team will follow from beginning to end.

Create a Threat Assessment Team

Establishing a formal threat assessment team can be accomplished according to many different methods. The Secret Service suggests the team be comprised of a law enforcement investigator (such as a school resource officer), a school administrator, a mental health professional, and other professionals within the school such as teachers, coaches, counselors, and nurses. During an active assessment, teams may consider bringing in an additional person who knows the subject well (this could be someone within the school or from the community like a probation officer, clergy member, or social service worker).

It is important to bring together a team that will be analytical, fair, and trustworthy. This team will be responsible for treating sensitive information with confidentiality while pursuing relevant facts and appropriate intervention. Also, these team members must be cognizant of the manner in which they approach people, such as friends and family or other service professionals, during an inquiry. Team members may need the cooperation of teachers, employers, counselors, parents, or friends of a student who is under investigation—it is imperative to treat the situation with respect and concern for the student's welfare as well as that of the school's. 

Information and resources from the school safety conference are available online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education/schoolsafety>.

The Secret Service guide to threat assessment is available online at http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf.

The OJJDP guidelines can be found online at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/215786.pdf>.

Lessons Learned Will Help Schools Contend with Crisis

When a school has put its crisis plan into action, that process later becomes a learning event for those involved as well as for other school districts. The U.S. Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center has published four documents in a series of lessons learned that spotlight critical actions, decisions, and events from actual crisis situations. Below is a synopsis of Vol. 1, Issue 2 titled *A Coordinated Response To Multiple Deaths in a School Community Helps the Healing Begin*.

School Responds After Deadly Car Crash

After a weekend traffic accident claimed the lives of seven of its students, one school shared its experiences about initiating its crisis response procedures. The school's crisis team acted quickly and successfully completed a number of tasks to support students, teachers, and staff during the initial shock of the tragedy. The team's actions include:

- Maintaining the regular schedule and each afternoon removing the tokens of remembrance that accumulated at the students' lockers.
- Establishing a short-term counseling center for students.
- Offering teachers and staff resources such as classroom discussion points, daily updates on funeral services, and food and flowers in the faculty break-room.
- Offering information to parents through a letter sent home with students the first day back at school and a support meeting held later in the week.
- Offering support to the families of the deceased, including special considerations for picking up their children's belongings.
- Helping with additional administrative responsibilities that arose after the incident.
- Establishing an efficient media-relations plan to answer media requests while

shielding students from being asked to comment.

- Acquiring support for the caregivers including the administration, faculty, staff, and crisis team members.
- Planning a moment of silence to commemorate the first anniversary of the event.

Crisis Response Team Learns Valuable Lessons

The school crisis response team highlighted here responded in an outstanding manner during the aftermath of losing many students at once. However, the experience brought to light the importance of having a detailed, school-based plan in place. This team identified a number of procedures and considerations that should be established before a tragic event occurs. Some of the suggestions include:

- Develop a crisis handbook.
- Conduct training for the crisis team.

- Create memoranda of understanding to coordinate resources (such as managing donations).
- Document needs, tasks completed, and responses as they occur.
- Establish processes for communicating with families, teachers, and the media.
- Organize support for school personnel, perhaps arranging for other schools to help with duties or provide amenities such as refreshments.
- Conduct mandatory debriefings with caregivers to prevent emotional burn-out.
- Establish a policy for school-sponsored memorial activities.

To read the full account of this crisis event and the others in the series called *Lessons Learned*, visit the REMS Web site at <http://www.rems.ed.gov> and click on the *Publications* link. 

School Tip Lines Offer Safety Net

Because most school violence is committed by fellow students, and because usually someone is aware of the concerning behavior, implementing a safety tip line is an additional layer of prevention. Many students know about threatening behavior but are often afraid to come forward with information for fear of retaliation or breaking the code of silence that exists in many schools.

Tip lines are meant to provide an anonymous outlet for any caller who wants to share information that may help prevent a violent incident. They are typically answered by law enforcement communications centers so they are available 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Callers are asked for various information about the suspected incident but never asked to identify themselves, and these lines do not use caller ID. Tips are forwarded to the proper authorities depending on the nature of the threat. Assigning a code number to each caller allows tip administrators a way to signal a need for more information if necessary—depending on the setup, some tip lines post code numbers on a Web site to indicate the caller needs to call back to answer more questions.

Covering a district, a region, or an entire state is possible. Making sure that anonymity is guaranteed (including making sure that records cannot be subpoenaed) is a major factor in getting callers to speak up. Colorado has an initiative, recently signed into law, that includes a statewide tip line known as *safe2tell*. The tip line, protected by nonprofit status guaranteeing anonymity for callers, has fielded thousands of calls since its debut in 2002. Anyone in the state can call the tip line and be assured that viable tips are investigated.

News from OSDFS

Webcast Focuses on School Safety

Shortly after the White House Conference on School Safety, the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) hosted a webcast focused on school safety and emergency planning. The hourlong discussion is archived and available for viewing online. Joining Deborah Price and William Modzeleski were presenters Edward Clarke (formerly with Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland), Willie Freeman (Newark Public Schools), and Pegi McEvoy (Seattle Public Schools) who each spoke of the practices they implemented as safety and security administrators at various school districts.

Emergency management, whether in response to school violence or a natural disaster, requires careful preparation that begins with collaboration. School administrators are able to generate more comprehensive and effective plans by working with representatives from public health, mental health, law enforcement, public safety, emergency management, and the local government. Discussion from the webcast focuses on taking an all hazards approach (one that addresses all types of emergency or crisis) and one that considers the four phases of emergency management. Some of the suggestions generated during this discussion include the following:

Prevention and Mitigation

- Use the environment to help prevent crime or crisis as best you can. Consider controlled access, lighting, blind spots, and keeping facilities clean and well maintained.
- Conduct facilities and school climate assessments.
- Make repairs to damaged structures on campus.
- Consider implementing anti-bullying and other wellness programs to promote a safe social environment.
- Update the school communications plans and procedures.

Preparedness

- Develop community partnerships so school administrators know the people they will work with during a crisis situation.
- Conduct drills (meetings, tabletops, full-scale exercises).
- Engage parents during the planning process. Let them know what to expect during an emergency, where their children can be picked up, and where to find information.
- Develop alternate communications procedures in case the primary system is not working.
- Establish policy for locating teachers and staff in the case of events that occur after-hours.
- Establish off-site storage for important data.

Response

- Have both district-level and school-level plans accessible.
- Assess the situation and choose appropriate action quickly.
- Notify public safety, emergency responders, and the school crisis response team at appropriate times.

- Be prepared to evacuate or lock down the school if necessary.
- Expect to be surprised.
- Allow for flexibility as the situation develops.
- Keep emergency “go-kits” stocked with supplies, student rosters, and parent contact information.
- Conduct an after-action debriefing to discuss what happened, responses, and what improvements could be made.

Recovery

- Restore educational operations as appropriate considering physical or structural damage; business and fiscal operations; and psychological and emotional needs.
- Establish family liaisons to share information.
- Reach out to first responders.
- Recognize that recovery takes time and people heal at their own pace.
- Use an established plan for securing and managing donations.

Think of the emergency management plan as a living document. Update it, share it, and practice it.

To view the webcast and download the accompanying PowerPoint presentation, visit <http://www.connectlive.com/events/edschoolsafety>.

REMS Publishes Helpful Hints

OSDFS and the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center created a series of publications for school districts to improve the emergency management practices within their school communities. This series, called *Helpful Hints*, provides key emergency preparedness topics to REMS grantees and non-grantee schools. Each brief document will focus on an issue of interest to school emergency managers. There are currently six publications in this series, with topics such as updating emergency response plans, conducting exercises to test plans, and creating emergency “go-kits.”

To find the *Helpful Hints* series, visit <http://www.rems.ed.gov> and click on the *Publications* link. 



Research Findings

Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2006

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2006

Violence and weapons continue to pose problems in schools according to the most recent data on school crime and safety. Key findings indicate:

- From July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005, there were 28 school-associated violent deaths (including seven suicides) among youths ages 5 to 18.
- The percentage of public schools experiencing one or more violent incidents (including fights) increased between the 1999–2000 and 2003–04 school years, from 71 to 81 percent.
- In 2003–04 middle schools experienced 53 violent crimes per 1,000 students, versus 28 violent crimes per 1,000 students in both primary schools and high schools.

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007003.pdf>

Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools—Findings from the School Survey on Crime and Safety: 2003–04

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, December 2006

Key findings from the survey include:

- High schools (44 percent) were more likely to report that students were distributing illegal drugs at school than were middle schools (27 percent) or primary schools (1 percent).
- Middle schools (42 percent) were more likely than high schools (21 percent) and primary schools (24 percent) to report that student bullying occurs at least once a week at school.
- More schools drill students on an existing written plan for natural disasters (84 percent) than they drill students on an existing written plan for school shootings (47 percent).

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007302rev.pdf>

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 2006

In the United States, 71 percent of all deaths among persons aged 10–24 years resulted from four causes: motor-vehicle crashes, other unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide.

When surveyed, many high school students reported that they had engaged in behaviors that increase the likelihood of death by one of these four causes during the 30 days preceding the survey:

- Drove a car or other vehicle after drinking alcohol: 9.9 percent.
- Carried a weapon: 18.5 percent.
- Drank alcohol: 43.3 percent.
- Used marijuana: 20.2 percent

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5505.pdf>

Resources

OSDFS Emergency Planning Web Site

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2007

This Web site provides resources that schools can use for all aspects of emergency and crisis planning. It includes guides, archived webcasts, grants information, and announcements for trainings.

Visit the site at <http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan>.

OJP Safer Schools Web Site

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2007

This Web site offers links to suggested prevention programs, publications, resource centers, and research, all focused on promoting safety among youths.

Visit the site at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/topics/saferschools.htm>.

Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates

U.S. Secret Service; U.S. Department of Education, 2002

This guide is the companion to the final report of the Safe School Initiative conducted in 2002. It sets forth the threat assessment process for identifying, assessing, and managing students who may pose a threat of targeted violence in schools. The guide describes how to develop a threat assessment team, steps to take

when a threat or other relevant information comes to light, when to involve law enforcement, information sharing, and safe school climates.

Free online at http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf.

Masters of Disaster

American Red Cross, 1999–2006

The Masters of Disaster curriculum contains ready-to-go lesson plans, activities, and demonstrations on disaster-related topics that teachers can incorporate within core subject areas. Lessons strengthen students' core academic skills in science, math, social studies, and language arts while educating them about hazards that cause injury, death, and damage.

Download materials for free at <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/masters> or order kits from your local Red Cross chapter.

Facing Fear: Helping Young People Deal with Terrorism and Other Tragic Events

American Red Cross, 2001

A supplement to the Masters of Disaster, lesson plans and activities are geared to help children deal with concerns, fear, anger, and other feelings in the aftermath of a tragic event.

Download materials for free at <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/masters/facingfear> or order from your local Red Cross chapter.



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Questions and Comments

With childhood obesity being such a disturbing (and, unfortunately, valid) concern, I'm thankful to work for a school that places a great deal of emphasis on health and physical fitness. I realize that schools often cut back on P.E. classes and recess in an effort to boost test scores, but I'd be interested to learn if there's a correlation between childhood obesity and academic performance.

— Michelle M., Arkansas

The short answer is yes, obesity and academic performance are connected. The relationship is complex though, and researchers are increasingly looking at the connection between nutrition and lifestyle and their impact on academic performance.

Studies find that fit children who eat regular, nutritious meals experience greater academic success and have fewer

behavioral and health problems that can interfere with learning.

As students get older, the psychological impact of being overweight (or underweight) also has bearing on their academic performance. When teens are teased about their weight, it can be difficult for them to concentrate and feel good about school. Some studies find that obese children miss more school than their average-weight schoolmates and this clearly has an impact on their academic performance. Additional studies find that more obese children think of themselves as poor students compared to students of average weight.

Your school may be interested in additional funding for physical fitness programs. ED sponsors the Carol M. White Physical Education Program to administer grants for schools to meet physical education standards. Visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/whitephysed/index.html> for

more information about these grants.

Encouraging healthy eating habits and supporting physical activity on a daily basis are important factors for every student. We're happy to hear your school is active in promoting health as a big part of the learning environment.

•••

I enjoyed reading the recent article on protective factors (Vol. 14, No.2). Working on skills that can help kids make better choices and feel connected to school is important to me and in my classroom. Thanks for a timely topic.

— Liz S., Texas

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Send questions, comments, or suggestions to *The Challenge* via e-mail at informationcni@thechallenge.org.