

SAFE SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER



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DoDEA News From the Field

We received a steady flow of responses to the [January 2003 Newsletter](#) article, which offered a free copy of the video *The Students vs. School Violence*, to the first ten respondents to request technical assistance. From Bahrain to Puerto Rico – administrators shared their ideas on Safe School Planning in response to the invitation to contact us. Some of the innovative Safe School ideas are summarized herein.

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Protect Your School From Youth Gang Migration

Given the DoDEA student mobility rate of approximately 33 percent, chances are good that DoDDS and DDESS schools will receive students from U.S. public schools who have been exposed to youth gangs. Separate studies conducted by the University of California and the Virginia State Crime Commission have documented that as individuals involved with youth gangs move to new locations, they sometimes begin distributing drugs for a youth gang in their new location.

Preventing the start of youth gangs requires that schools work with the Installation Commander and officials from



the local community to coordinate gang prevention efforts. Youth gang prevention programs include Gang Prevention Awareness Training to educate school staff, parents and students about the dangers of gangs in the community and the warning signs that individual students may be becoming involved with gangs.





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One administrator in Manama, Bahrain, described how the school staff-designed a "Silent Alert" alternative communication plan for use if the telephones are out of commission. The residential area is divided into separate zones and school personnel visit each teacher at home. Principal Sandra Daniels explained that Navy Security Personnel from the 5th Fleet assist the school in anticipating different crisis scenarios and approve all security plans.

Another administrator, Felicia Van Heertum, shared Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico's Plan for assisting a troubled student. Their plan includes an interview with the student, a consultation with the student's parent or guardian and, if the student poses an immediate threat, a referral to the military police.

At Fort Buchanan a student who makes threats about harming other people is referred to the principal. The principal and school psychologist meet with the student's sponsor to discuss the behavior that caused concern, and determine whether the student requires a mental health evaluation or other services. Members of the school's Crisis Management Team work with teachers to smooth the students' re-entry into classes and conduct a post-crisis follow-up.

And lastly, Principal Susan Ussery noted that the use of two-way radios enhanced the feeling of security at Bitburg Elementary School. In Bitburg, Germany, walkie-talkie radios enabled the nurse and school office to listen to reports from the recess monitors.

Send us your safe school planning tips: your successful counseling plan, communication techniques, or physical security measures. They might just be the solution another DoDEA principal is seeking.

Respond Calmly to Inhalant Abuse

Educators discovering signs that a student is abusing inhalants should avoid responding emotionally -- an angry or excited response could exacerbate health problems for the student. "Stay calm and avoid exciting the child, as this can trigger hallucinations, violent behavior, or heart failure," advises Alex Packer, Ph.D., president of Freedom from Chemical Dependency (FCD) Educational Services, a substance abuse prevention program used in U.S. State Department schools.

A cautious response to a student who is "high" on inhalants should not be confused with tolerance. Inhalants are extremely dangerous -- even one incident can cause permanent brain injury or death.

Although the 2002 Monitoring The Future Survey conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services indicated that inhalant abuse decreased from 17.1% to 15.2% among 8th-graders and from 15.2% to 13.5% among 10th-graders, inhalants are still the most heavily abused substance in U.S. middle schools. Since inhalants include common household chemicals they are also available to DoDDS-Pacific, DoDDS-Europe, and DDESS students. DoDEA

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administrators can counter inhalant abuse by publicizing school policies specifically prohibiting inhalant abuse and by providing students with information about the hazards and health risks resulting from inhalant abuse. Educate school staff, parents and students about the signs of possible inhalant abuse, including:

- 🍎 Chemical odor on the student's breath;
- 🍎 Sweating without an obvious cause;
- 🍎 Nonsensical speech;
- 🍎 Plastic bags or rags with a chemical odor;
- 🍎 Stains on the student's face, fingers or clothing (e.g., correction fluid, paint, adhesives);
- 🍎 Household solvents, cleaners, vegetable spray, aerosol cans, and/or adhesives in the student's belongings or trash; and if a
- 🍎 Student seems dazed or dizzy.

For more information, contact FCD Educational Services (617) 964-9300, www.fcd.org, or visit the National Institute for Drug Abuse Prevention (NIDA), at: www.nida.nih.gov/Newsroom/02/NR12-16.html.

Parent E-mails Smooth Communications During a Crisis



Include cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses in Incident Response Plans to ensure smooth communication with parents in the event of a crisis incident. Preparing a group list with parent e-mail addresses offers an alternative communication channel during a crisis.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross, people can usually send and receive e-mails during crisis incidents when the phone lines might be flooded with calls. E-mailing groups of parents simultaneously enables school administrators to provide parents with accurate information about an incident in order to control rumors or to announce a change in the parent-student rendezvous location.

Early in the school year, publicize procedures for re-uniting students and parents so parents will already know where to collect their children. For example, if your Incident Response Plan states that parents can come to a nearby recreational center or church to meet their children, then include that information in the Student Handbook. Explain that parents will need to produce identification and sign for their child, so the school can account for their students.

Some schools also use e-mail listserves to notify parents of snow days or cancellations in planned activities. DoDEA principals could establish a site on the school website to update parents regarding Incident Response Plans.

For more information, see: www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/unexpected.html or the FEMA Incident Response guide *Are You Ready*, at: www.fema.gov/areyouready.





Indoor Activities for Use During School Lockdowns

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) identified indoor activities for children coping with extended lockdown situations. NASPE Executive Director Judith Young expressed her concerns about the mental and emotional health of students in the Washington, D.C. area who endured several weeks of lockdown conditions during the sniper incidents last fall (see the November 2002 newsletter.) "Elementary age children should spend 60 minutes every day in a variety of moderate and more vigorous physical activity," Young said. Activities recommended by NASPE include:

Play Music: Use music for stepping, hopping or jumping in place.

Pretend Windmills: Encourage students to stand and put their arms over their heads, out to their sides, around their bodies, and then swing their arms by their sides.

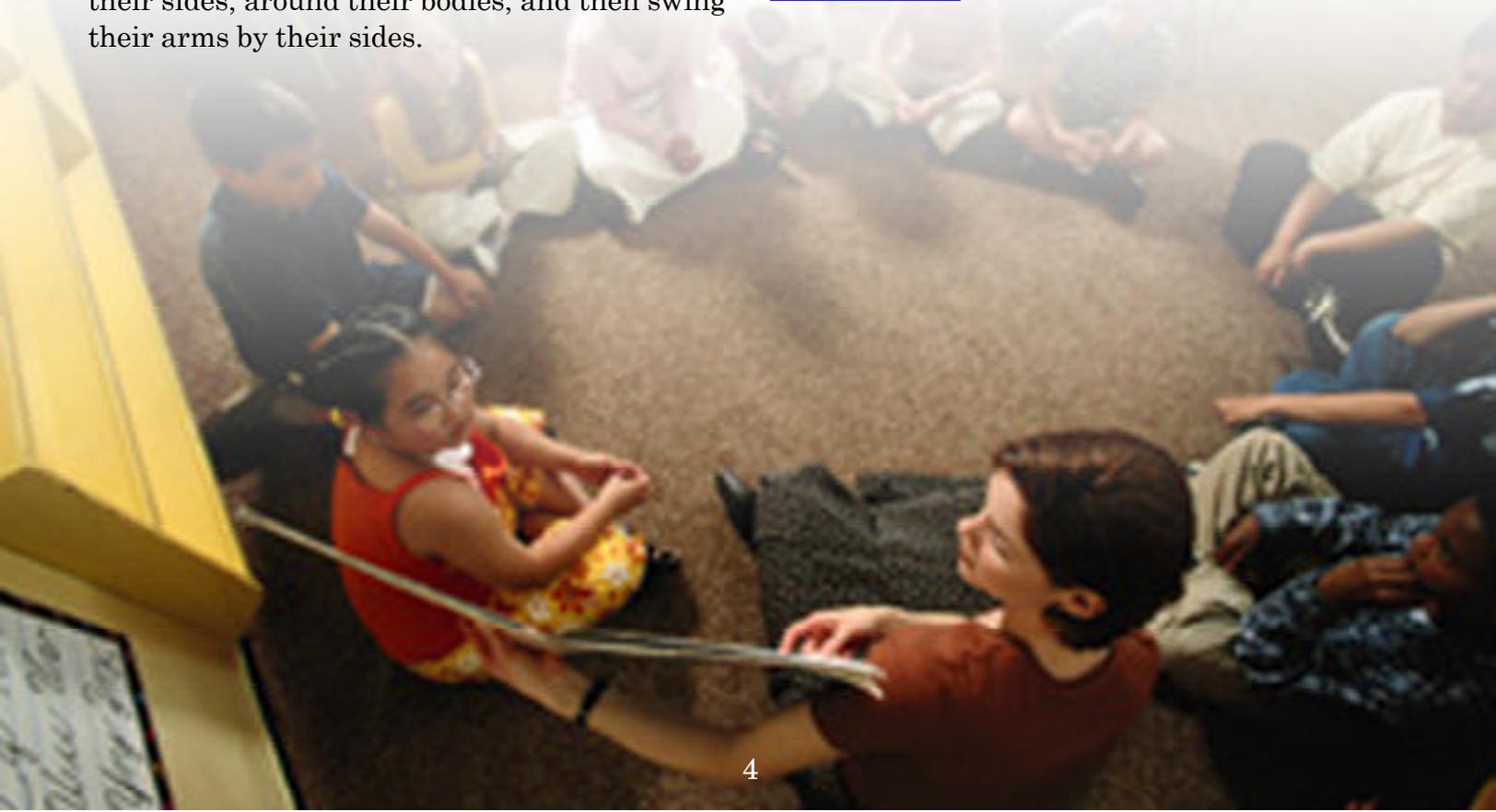
Dance: Have students invent dances or share the latest line dances. Social Studies teachers could invite students to perform folk dances or square dances relevant to their lessons.

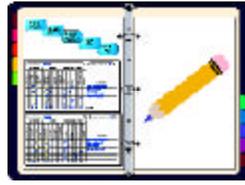
Inflate Balloons: Play "keep it up" with balloons. Begin with one balloon per child. Then group students and give each group one balloon.

Check Heart Rates: Measure heart rates following various locomotion exercises such as hopping, walking, and jumping.

Create a Classroom Gym: Plan exercise stations for strengthening and stretching different parts of students' bodies and have students progress through the stations.

Find additional ideas at: www.naesp.org/misc/naspetips.htm.





Safe School Planning

Practicing Lockdowns Makes Perfect

Simulating a scenario that requires a lockdown will give your staff the confidence they need to accomplish lockdown tasks efficiently and thus could save lives during a crisis incident. Accordingly, the DoDEA Internal Physical Security Guidelines (Regulation 4700.2, Enclosure 2, paragraph E2.2.1.3.11 - p.12) require both a tabletop exercise and a practical exercise annually: "Coordinate lockdown plans with local security officials and perform a joint tabletop exercise and then a practical exercise with staff and local security officials annually."

Remember that District Safety and Security Officers are available to help you plan a practical exercise. To select the most appropriate type of exercise for your school, examine the alternatives described below: orientation seminars, emergency drills, tabletop exercises, functional simulations and full-scale exercises.

Orientation Seminars familiarize school staff and community officials with the Incident Response Plan. Orientation can be accomplished with a briefing by the principal at a school staff meeting. The principal would explain the actions staff would take, the words used to signal the beginning and end of a lockdown, and procedures for accounting for students and releasing students to their parents.

Emergency Drills practice and perfect a single emergency response. In preparation for a Lockdown simulation, teachers could practice moving students out of the hall into classrooms, securing classroom doors, directing students away from the doors and windows, turning out the lights and putting a sign in the window indicating the classroom status, i.e. green if everyone is okay, and red if there is an injury. No sign on the door would indicate that no school staff member had yet secured that classroom.

Tabletop Exercises enable you to calmly discuss your plan with local security and emergency response officials such as the Provost Marshal's Office, or Chief of Security. As school, security and emergency rescue officials exchange information about how they would respond, they learn about each other's roles and identify areas that need further coordination. Include all key participants in a tabletop exercise and plan practical remedies to address any problems you may discover.

Functional Simulations mimic a real emergency under stressful conditions. Officials external to the school would participate to improve their coordination and response. A functional simulation of an incident requiring a lockdown enables local security officials to practice entering the school with contact and rescue teams, securing the perimeter, checking for hazards, and evacuating students when they determine the facility is safe.

Full Scale Exercises emphasize management coordination and usually require bringing security/emergency response vehicles and personnel to the school. Administrators can use full-scale exercises to thoroughly coordinate the school and installation response to an incident. DoDEA guidelines give principals the flexibility to include or exclude students from the exercise, as they deem appropriate. See the [November 2000 Newsletter](#) for the pros and cons of including students in the exercise.

Conducting a tabletop exercise of your school lockdown plan during March 2003 could enable you to prepare for a full-scale exercise when the weather is warmer. School lockdown exercises give staff and students the confidence and skills needed to perform lockdown procedures efficiently and to reduce risks to people and property.





NIH Reports Decrease in Student Drug Use

Responses to DoDEA customer satisfaction surveys have indicated that teachers in both DoDDS and DDESS were concerned about substance abuse because some drugs are easily available to DoDEA students. *The 2002 Monitoring the Future Survey* revealed decreases in student use of marijuana, some "club drugs," alcohol, and cigarettes. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) surveys 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders annually to compare changes in students' substance abuse and attitudes toward drug use. NIH Secretary Tommy Thompson said that the news of decreases in marijuana and ecstasy use were encouraging, and added that NIH will "Enlist the help of parents, teachers, and the community to keep our children healthy and drug free."

The *2002 Monitoring the Future Survey* reported decreases in marijuana use, but offered mixed results for some other drugs. Among 10th-graders, marijuana use during the past year decreased from 32.7 percent to 30.3 percent from 2001 to 2002. Use of LSD decreased dramatically among all students surveyed. However, the surveys indicated no change in steroid use and slight increases were reported in 10th-graders' use of crack cocaine and 12th-graders use of sedatives.

The survey reported limited progress in changing students' perception of the harm of using marijuana. Tenth graders reported increased levels of perceived risk and disapproval, but 12th-graders were much more accepting of marijuana use.

During the 1990s the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) concentrated drug abuse prevention and awareness efforts on middle school students

reasoning that students who refused drugs during middle school, would avoid drug use during high school and later in life. The ONDCP public awareness campaign appears to have had some affect. Marijuana use for 8th-graders in 2002 was 14.6 percent, a gradual but steady decrease from the 18.3 percent reported in 1996. For further information, visit the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), at: www.nida.nih.gov/Newsroom/02/NR12-16.html.



Promoting School Spirit Helps Prevent Gangs

DoDEA Administrators can counter youth gang recruitment efforts by strengthening their students' sense of identification with the school (i.e. school spirit). Increase student's sense of attachment to your school by:

- 🍎 Recognizing students' accomplishments;
- 🍎 Providing challenging academic curriculum; and
- 🍎 Offering exciting co-curricular activities.

Begin your gang resistance efforts by cooperating with local security officials and parent and community groups to identify gang "wanabees" and increase awareness of the early warning signs of youth gang recruitment efforts.

Early Warning Signs include:

- 🍎 Truancy
- 🍎 Declining academic grades
- 🍎 Changes of friends
- 🍎 Decrease in involvement in family activities
- 🍎 Use of a new nickname
- 🍎 Graffiti or tattoos

DoDDS and DDESS schools have only a limited problem with youth gangs according to a report from the National Education Goals Panel. *March Toward Excellence: School Success and Minority Student Achievement* states: "In the U.S. and in DoDEA schools overseas, efforts to recruit base kids to join youth gangs is a problem that occurs with varying degrees of success and frequency depending upon the local circumstances in the community. A significant gang problem arose some years ago in DoDDS schools in Germany, and continues to be an issue in some school districts in the Southeastern United States."

DoDEA administrators have several advantages over U.S. public schools in responding early and forcefully to burgeoning youth gang problems. *March Toward Excellence* identified three attributes of DoDEA schools that promote security: "a strong sense of community, small school size, and a focus upon personal accountability." Principals can emphasize the positive attributes of DoDEA schools to counter the allure of youth gang life: acceptance, excitement and wealth.

The sense of community on a military installation helps students identify with their school so they can resist seeking acceptance in youth gangs. Other aspects of DoDEA schools that principals can emphasize to strengthen students' connection to the school include:

- ★ **Personal Attention:** The modest-sized classes enable students to receive personalized attention and build a stronger bond with their teachers.
- ★ **Leadership Programs:** Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps classes establish close-knit groups where students can feel accepted.
- ★ **Mentoring Programs:** Adult mentors help students contrast the potential harm of involvement in criminal activity with the benefits of a gang-free lifestyle, such as academic achievement and job opportunities.

Additional information is available, at: www.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/pdf/DoDFinal921.pdf, or www.lunaweb.com/pargang.htm.





Gang Prevention and Resistance

Youth gangs in the United States have proliferated since the 1980s. A recent 11-city survey of middle school students found that 9% of respondents claimed to be currently affiliated with a gang and 17% said they had belonged to a gang at some time in their lives. Once thought to be exclusively the purview of ethnic minority students living in urban areas, gang membership now includes a sizeable proportion of middle-class Caucasian youth living in small cities and rural areas. In addition, females may now account for more than one-third of youth gang members.

Gang activity is an important consideration for violence prevention in schools because youth gangs are linked to serious crime problems in both elementary and secondary schools. Research indicates a strong correlation between gang presence and the presence of both guns and drugs in schools. Here we briefly explore reasons behind the allure of gang membership across the U.S., with special emphasis on the recent increase in female gang membership, and conclude with general considerations for schools for prevention of gang involvement.

Why do students join gangs?

Although there is no simple answer to the question of why students choose to involve themselves in gangs, research suggests a finite and comprehensible set of factors that relate to gang involvement. Researchers Decker and Van Winkle describe these factors as either pulls or pushes. Pulls include such attractions as status and prestige among peers, opportunities for excitement and, in many cases, financial enhancements deriving from drug sales and other gang-related activities. Pushes include social, cultural, and economic forces that propel youth toward gang involvement, either for its

protective features or as a means of gaining a sense of identity. Some researchers have commented on the fact that many youth are literally born into gangs as a result of the neighborhood in which they live or their parents earlier, and sometimes ongoing, affiliation with gangs.

Risk factors for youth gang membership can be categorized into individual, peer, school, family, and community domains. Although a substantial number of factors have been identified within each domain, large-scale longitudinal studies have helped to establish the following factors as most predictive of future adolescent gang involvement. At the individual level they include low self-esteem, prior delinquency, and a history of negative life events. The most important peer factor is prior association with delinquent peers. At school, low educational aspirations, poor academic performance, and lack of attachment to teachers are among the most important predictors. Within the family, lack of parental supervision, economic disadvantage, and family instability increase the probability of gang membership. Finally, communities lacking in social integration and in which drugs are readily available are most likely to have youth gang activity.

Female gang members

Up until very recently, the prevailing view among most experts was that females were merely auxiliary members of male gangs. Females were often cast as gang wannabes, sex objects, or tomboys who functioned primarily at the whim of male gang members. Recently, however, with the rise in the number of female gang members, there is a growing recognition that females often participate autonomously in gangs, and that the purpose and norms of female gang behavior may differ substantially from that of males.





Studies indicate that females join gangs by the age of 12 and 13 for a sense of friendship, solidarity, and self-affirmation. Joe and Chesney-Lind's study of Samoan and Filipino gang youths in Hawaii reports an average age of entrée of 12 for girls and 14 for boys. Based on a study conducted in Phoenix, Arizona, Portillos reports that most of the Chicana girls in his study joined between ages 12 and 13. It also appears that female gang membership may provide a refuge from emotional and sexual abuse incurred at home for many young women, or in the case of Chicana gang membership, as a means of escaping oppressive patriarchal conditions at home. As is true for male gang members, economic, cultural, and ethnic forces combine to push a substantial number of females toward gang involvement.

The rise in the number of female gang members presents a challenge for schools interested in preventing and reducing violence on campus. Surveys consistently indicate that, although the delinquency rates for female gang members are less than those for males, they are still substantially higher than that of non-gang females and even for non-gang males. More recently, Esbensen and Deschenes report that lack of school commitment and low expectations for success are associated with gang involvement for girls, and Thornberry describes negative attitudes toward school as a primary risk factor. Female gang membership is a significant social issue and one that should concern schools in their overall violence prevention efforts.

Prevention strategies

Reducing the likelihood of a child joining a gang requires a comprehensive effort on the part of schools, families, and communities. One primary prevention effort focused on reducing the social and emotional appeal of gang involvement is to

provide alternative recreational and leisure time activities exemplifying prosocial norms of behavior. An example of such an approach is The Boys & Girls Clubs of America program, Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (for more information see www.bgca.org/programs/specialized.asp). In addition to involving youth in meaningful alternative recreational activities, the program also focuses specifically on building communication skills, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities.

Another school-based program designed specifically to prevent gang involvement is the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program (www.atf.treas.gov/great/index.htm). This nine-week program designed for middle school students is taught by law enforcement officers and focuses on life skills that empower adolescents to resist peer pressure to join gangs. Specific skills include conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and understanding of the negative aspects of gang life. And the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention within the U.S. Department of Justice has published a Youth Gang Series available online (ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pub/gang.html).

Like all primary prevention approaches to the reduction of violence in schools, a focus on reducing gang involvement will require a conscientious effort to develop a school climate fostering self-respect and respect for the rights of others.

A special relationship with George Washington University makes it possible for DoDEA to present a series of articles by prevention program experts from the University of Hawaii.

