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Center For The Prevention Of School Violence

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# THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL STRATEGY SURVEY:

## THE CENTER'S SAFE SCHOOLS PYRAMID AND OTHER STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING SAFETY AND SECURITY

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The Center for the Prevention of School Violence approaches the problems of disorder, disruption, and violence in our schools with the understanding that these problems will not be solved without effort. Through the work it has done since its establishment in 1993, the Center has encountered schools employing many different strategies to ensure their safety and security. The goal of these strategies is to create environments in the schools which are free of fear and conducive to learning.

Because of its experiences, the Center developed the Safe Schools Pyramid as a model reflective of how schools are attempting to enhance their capacities to address the specific problems they are facing (see Figure 1). The Pyramid is characterized by a multiple-strategy, comprehensive approach. Such an approach has been found in several school violence prevention research studies to be more effective than narrower, single-strategy approaches.



**Figure 1**

The Pyramid has components which address what the Center describes as the three "P's" of school violence prevention: **place, people, and purpose**. Place, or the school setting itself, needs attention paid to it so that a secure environment exists. People, students, teachers, and staff, must be given consideration in efforts to ensure safety and security. And purpose, or the reason why schools exist - education, needs to be kept in mind so that efforts to ensure safety and security fit with the schools' educational missions.

The comprehensiveness of the Pyramid stems from its attempt to illustrate that all three "P's" must be taken into account when schools venture to enhance their capacities to ensure safety and security. Additionally, the Pyramid rests upon the community and, by doing so, illustrates that schools have their roots in their communities and are impacted by what happens, including violence, in those communities.

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## **The North Carolina High School Strategy Survey**

The Center conducted a telephone survey of all high schools in North Carolina during Spring, 1997, to determine which safety and security strategies are being used in these schools. The Pyramid strategies formed the framework for the survey questionnaire. The extent these strategies are being employed in the schools was measured. Estimates of the effectiveness of the strategies were obtained from school personnel as was information about strategies being employed in the schools other than those found in the Pyramid.

Three hundred and seven high schools, grades nine through twelve, formed the survey's population. A response rate of over seventy percent was achieved. Almost sixty-seven percent of the respondents were school principals; another twenty-nine percent were assistant principals.

Total enrollment for responding schools ranged from thirty-two students to over twenty-one hundred. Many of the schools, over sixty percent, have not experienced significant increases or decreases in total enrollment over the past three years. (Gender and race data were obtained about the schools and will be used in subsequent analyses.)

Responding schools have buildings which range in age from one-year old to seventy-eight years old. Almost fifty percent are one-story buildings. A quarter of the schools are comprised of only one building. Sixty-one percent have undergone some renovations, seventy percent of these occurring since 1990.

Ninety percent have six or fewer access points, and the vast majority, almost ninety-four percent, attempt to control access by requiring that visitors report to the office.

The six strategies which comprise the Center's Safe Schools Pyramid were focused upon in the survey which was conducted. Personnel from participating schools responded to questions about:

- **physical design and technology application;**
- **School Resource Officers (SROs);**
- **Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) chapters;**
- **conflict management and peer mediation programs;**
- **Law-related education; and**
- **Teen Court and Student Court.**

Although each of these strategies contributes to the three "P's" of school violence prevention, ordering the three "P's" offers an opportunity to organize understanding of the strategies. Those strategies which impact place will be described first with the idea being

that place or environment must first be secured and made safe. Those strategies which fundamentally involve people will be considered second in that the relationships between and among people in the school need to be considered. Finally, strategies involving purpose, education, will be addressed. The essential logic in this order is that with place secured first, attention can be turned to people and then the opportunity to fulfill the purpose.

## Physical Design and Technology Application

Ensuring safety and security through physical design and technology application involves assessing the school's physical environment, place in the Safe Schools Pyramid. The intention of such assessment is the establishment and maintenance of the safety and security of that environment. Inspection of the physical design of the school is the first crucial step in this strategy. From such an inspection, a prevention plan can be developed and enacted to address problems. Such a plan tends to focus on controlling access to school property as well as maintaining control on it. When appropriate, the plan may include some application of technology, such as use of metal detectors or surveillance cameras.

Almost seventy-four percent of schools participating in the survey have performed assessments of their physical layouts; over eighty-six percent of these were conducted in the last two years. Forty-one percent of the assessments were conducted by school administration with a majority of these being carried out by principals. School Resource Officers participated in twenty-four percent of the assessments. Eleven percent were conducted by school committees.

In addition to controlling access in the way already mentioned, eighty percent implement some kind of parking lot security, from using teachers as monitors to employing security guards for this purpose. Often, School Resource Officers also monitor parking lots as part of their duties.

In terms of maintaining control, various types of policies exist with hall monitoring, a traditional form of maintaining control, occurring at eighty-eight percent of the schools, and campus identification tags and book-bag policies, newer forms, in place at nineteen percent of the schools (See Figure 2).

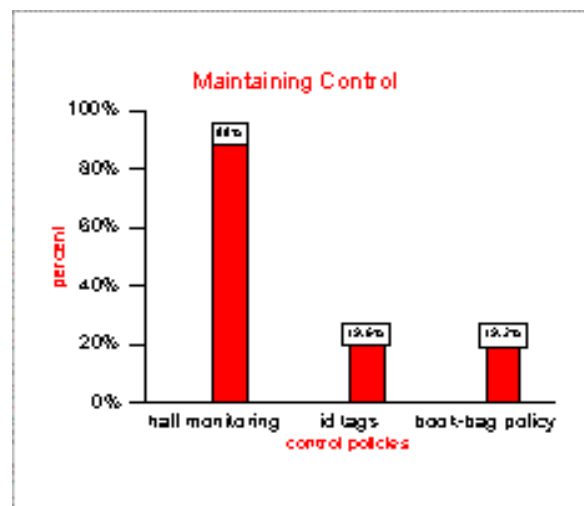


Figure 2

Sixty percent of the schools have metal detectors with sixty-four percent using one or two of them. Of the schools with metal detectors, ninety percent have portable ones. Sixteen percent have stationary ones; almost all of these are located at the entrances of football stadiums. The frequency of use varies with four percent using them daily and over a majority, sixty-two percent, using them randomly. Twelve percent have them but never use them (See Figure 3).

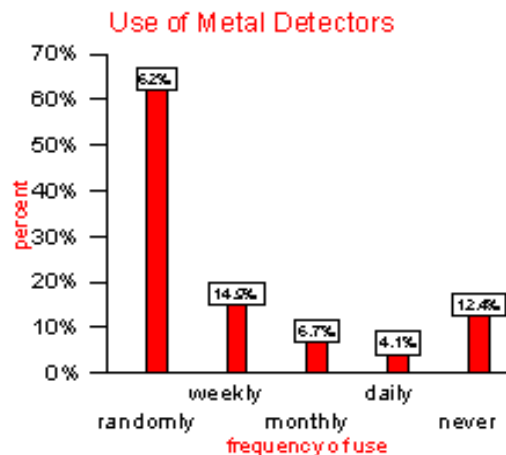


Figure 3

Most schools do not have surveillance cameras; only twenty-four percent use such cameras. Seventy-five percent of these schools use one or two cameras; one school has twenty-four cameras.

Other technologies applied to make schools safe and secure include two-way radios, identified by twenty-two percent of the schools, and alarm systems, identified by ten percent. (These numbers may be low given that the other technologies were not specifically asked about.) Two schools indicated that they have Breathalyzers.

Using a seven-point scale with "one" representing a perceived highest level of effectiveness and "seven" a perceived lowest level, the treatment of physical design and technology application was rated by respondents. Almost thirty-six percent of respondents rated physical design and technology a "one" or "two" indicating their perception that, for their schools, effectiveness is high with reference to this strategy. Only sixteen percent rated it "six" or "seven," reflecting low effectiveness (See Figure 4). (Further analysis of correlates with effectiveness, such as the presence of surveillance cameras, will occur in future analyses.)

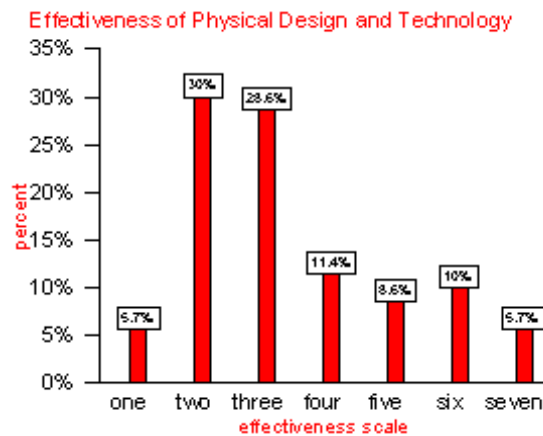


Figure 4

## School Resource Officers

School Resource Officers (SROs) represent a strategy that contributes to securing place, as evidenced by their involvement in assessments of physical layout. Additionally, they represent a strategy that focuses upon people and relationships.

SROs are law enforcement officers who are permanently assigned to cover a school or set of schools. They are trained to perform three roles: law enforcement officer, law-related counselor, and law-related education teacher. SROs act as resources for their schools. They serve as positive role models for students.

Seventy-nine percent of the high schools who responded to the survey have SROs. Although this may be an overestimate for the number of high schools which have SROs (other recent Center research determined that about two-thirds of the high schools in North Carolina have SROs), there is no doubt that more schools have SROs now than ever before. In fact, of the schools in the survey, over half indicated that an SRO was assigned to them for the first time in either 1995, 1996, or 1997. Seventy-three percent of these assignments are characterized by exclusivity which means that the SROs are responsible for covering only one school and are not shared with others. If sharing occurs, most often it is with middle schools.

The SROs are typically members of sheriff's departments with almost sixty-nine percent being sheriff's deputies; thirty-one percent are members of city police departments (See Figure 5).

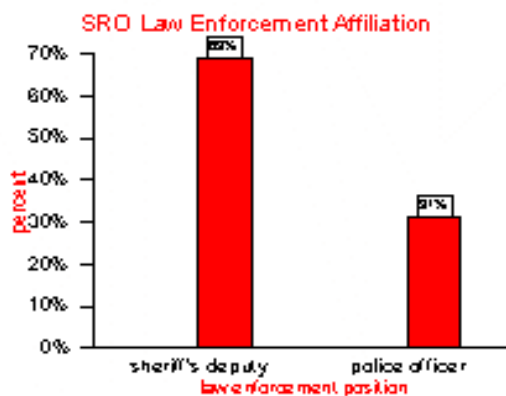


Figure 5

Almost sixty-two percent of the responding schools rated their SROs with a "one" on the seven-point effectiveness scale with almost twenty-six percent rating SROs a "two." The lowest rating received for SROs was a "five" put forth by one school (See Figure 6).

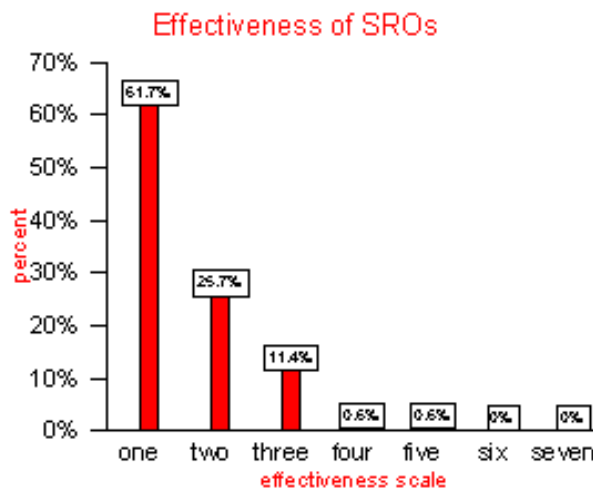


Figure 6

Questions about the SRO strategy generated many comments. Almost unanimously, these comments were positive. One principal

indicated that he at first did not like the program but thinks now that "it is essential." Another indicated that his school "can't live without it." A third said his SRO is "a needed resource" for his school. And a fourth said his SRO is one of his "strongest staff members."

## Students Against Violence Everywhere

Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) chapters are student-driven approaches and as such are reflective of the people aspect of the Safe Schools Pyramid. They are school clubs which are initiated, directed, and operated by students. The message they attempt to communicate to their schools and communities is one of nonviolence. Through school and community events, S.A.V.E. students promote nonviolent solutions to conflicts.

Although the first S.A.V.E. chapter was formed in 1989, the growth of S.A.V.E. chapters in North Carolina did not really accelerate until 1996. The Center estimates that now there are about two-hundred and twenty-five chapters in the state. Such chapters exist at all levels of school, but a majority of the chapters can be found in high schools.

Thirty-five percent of the high schools responding to the survey indicated that they have S.A.V.E. chapters. The number of students involved in chapters varied from ten in one school to four hundred and seventy five in another. The typical number of S.A.V.E. chapter activities per year was four. The types of activities varied from sponsoring "Peace Week" at a school to taking a trip to a local prison.

Respondents were asked to rate how active they observe their S.A.V.E. chapters to be. On a scale from "one" representing highly active to "seven" representing not active, thirty-four percent rated their chapters a "three" in terms of activity. Twelve percent were identified with a "one" and three percent were identified with a "seven" (See Figure 7).

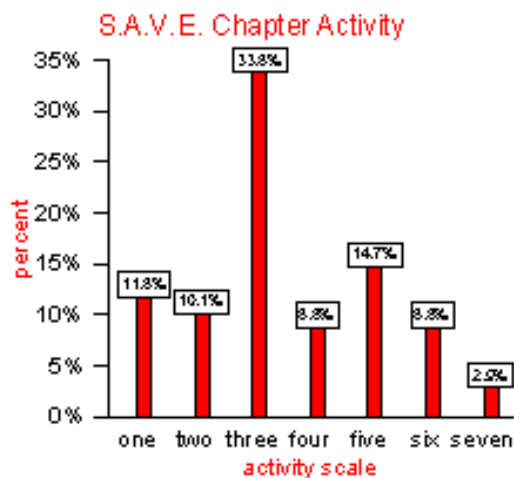


Figure 7

S.A.V.E. effectiveness was also rated on a seven-point scale. Thirty percent of the chapters were rated a "one" or "two" indicating high levels of effectiveness. Twelve percent received a "six" or "seven," reflecting low effectiveness (See Figure 8).

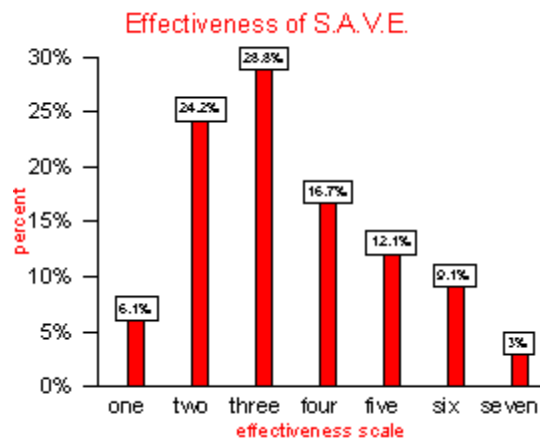


Figure 8

## Conflict Management and Peer Mediation

Conflict management and peer mediation are strategies which address how students handle conflict. Fundamentally, they emphasize how people relate to each other. Although they are combined into one strategy on the Safe Schools Pyramid, they are different enough in process to be asked about separately in the survey that was conducted.

Conflict management involves the teaching of conflict management skills to students by teachers. Teachers undergo specialized training in these skills and, either explicitly through curriculum or implicitly through behavior, expose their students to these skills in efforts to help their students better manage conflict.

Only eighteen percent of high schools who participated in the survey have conflict management programs. The typical length of program is three years with one identified as being in existence for ten years (See Figure 9).

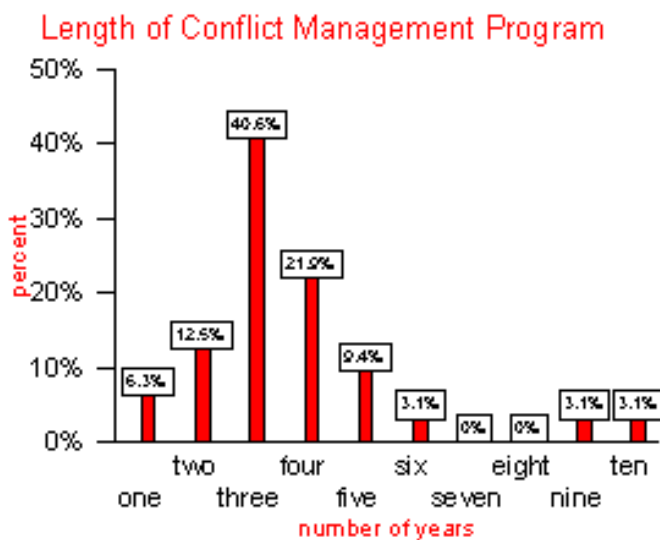


Figure 9

Thirty-six percent of the conflict management programs received a "one" or "two" in effectiveness or high scores. Only one program, three percent, received a "seven," the lowest rating for effectiveness (See Figure 10).



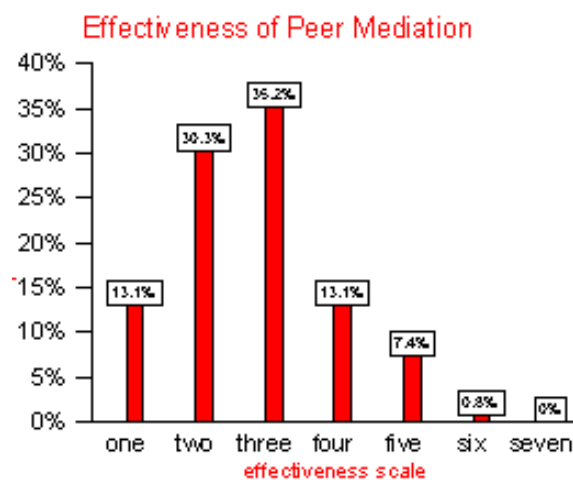
**Figure 10**

Many more schools indicated they have peer mediation programs with almost sixty percent of the responding schools indicating they have such programs. The length of program ranged from one year for fifteen percent to fifteen years for one school; most programs, forty-eight percent, were three or four years old.

The number of peer mediators in a school was typically estimated at twenty. These mediators are likely to be from any of the grades found in the high schools that were targeted, ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth. Mediation sessions occur both during class time and after school with the former the more typical occurrence.

A good indicator of the activity of such a program is information about how teachers support and use it. Almost seventy-four percent of teachers were described as "very supportive" of peer mediation with another twenty-three percent described as "somewhat supportive." For almost fifteen percent of the responding schools, all teachers were said to use peer mediation. In eighty-five percent, some of the teachers were said to use it.

Over forty-three percent of the responding schools with peer mediation rated it high in effectiveness with a "one" or "two." The lowest rating was a "six," offered by one school, on the seven-point effectiveness scale (See Figure 11).



**Figure 11**

## Law-Related Education

The goal of law-related education (LRE) is to teach students to be successful citizens. Included in the Safe Schools Pyramid as a component which addresses the purpose of school, education, LRE, as a strategy, teaches students about the importance of law and of being law-abiding citizens. Students are taught about rights and responsibilities.

LRE is undertaken in one of two ways: it is either incorporated into existing school curriculum or it is pursued as a separate one. The first approach is the more traditional way of teaching LRE. When incorporated into existing curriculum, LRE is typically found in history, government, or social studies classes at all grade levels. When pursued as a separate curriculum, LRE becomes a programmatic approach. These programs are often designed to encourage students to become participants in society by performing community service.

Just over fifty percent of the high schools which responded to the survey indicated that they have "a curriculum which is commonly described as law-related education." (Given that the content which comprises LRE is likely to be found in all high schools, respondents probably were answering whether they have LRE based upon whether the term "law-related education" is used in discussions of what is being taught at their particular schools.)

Except for one school, all of the schools which indicated that they have LRE said that it is incorporated into existing curriculum. This fits with what other research studies have determined about LRE; most often it is combined with other curriculum. Additionally, other research has found that better outcomes are associated with LRE when it is pursued as part of existing curriculum.

Twenty-nine percent of the schools with LRE rated it highly with a "one" or "two" in effectiveness. Eight percent rated it a "six" or "seven," indicating low effectiveness (See Figure 12).

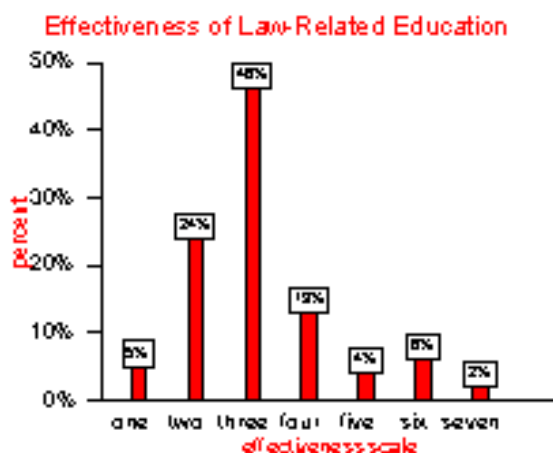


Figure 12

## Teen Court and Student Court

Teen Court and Student Court offer particular types of law-related education. With these strategies, students actively settle disputes through the application of judicial procedures.

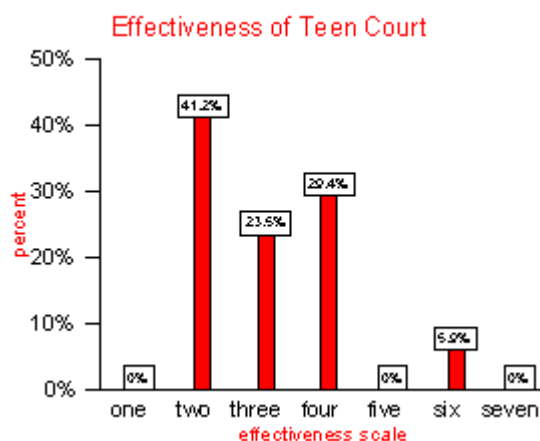
Teen Court is operated in cooperation with the court system. It takes place as an alternative to real judicial adjudication for offenses. In Teen Court, decisions focus upon appropriate punishment for criminal actions student defendants have admitted doing. In addition to admitting wrongdoing, students give prior consent to abiding by the decisions of the Teen Court. If they do not, the real judicial system awaits them. By participating in Teen Court, students avoid adjudication in the juvenile justice system but do not avoid the consequences for doing wrong.

Student Court takes place in a school setting but is based upon the procedures of the court system. It is incorporated into traditional school discipline procedures and is used when violations of school policies occur.

Students take on active roles in both Teen Court and Student Court. In addition to being defendants, they act as jurors, attorneys, judges, and other court personnel. Adults offer advice and supervise decisions that are handed down.

Both are relatively new approaches, and this newness is reflected in the findings of the survey. Only ten percent of the responding schools have access to Teen Court, and only two schools indicated that they have Student Court. Almost seventy-four percent of the schools with access to Teen Court indicated that it has been available for two years or less.

Despite its brief existence, Teen Court gets rated effective as a strategy by the few schools which have access to it. Forty-one percent rated it a "two" in effectiveness. The lowest rating, from one school, was a "six" on the seven-point effectiveness scale (See Figure 13).



**Figure 13**

Only one of the two schools with Student Court provided an effectiveness rating for Student Court, offering a rating of "four" on the seven-point effectiveness scale.

## Other Strategies

In addition to questions which focused upon the Center's Safe Schools Pyramid, responding schools were able to provide information about strategies other than Pyramid strategies. Thirty-nine percent of the schools named other strategies they see as part of their efforts to make themselves safe and secure.

The most-often mentioned strategy was use of a Crimestoppers approach. Second to that was application of discipline codes. Visibility of principal and other staff was also mentioned by several respondents as was getting parents involved in the school. Safe school planning, support personnel such as drug counselors, and character education were also identified.

## A Review of Effectiveness Ratings

Although schools were not asked to make comparative judgments of the Safe School Pyramid strategies, reviewing the ratings of effectiveness offered by participating schools gives some sense of how effective they are perceived to be relative to each other. One way to do this is to look at the most often occurring effectiveness rating, the modal rating, for the strategies.

Only one Pyramid strategy, SROs, received a modal rating of "one" representing highest effectiveness. Physical design and technology application received a "two." Teen Court, available to only ten percent of the schools, also received a "two." Conflict management, peer mediation, S.A.V.E., and law-related education received modal ratings of "three." The lowest modal rating, offered by only one school, was a "four" given to Student Court.

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## The Survey Results and the Three "P's"

The results of the high school strategy survey reveal that schools in North Carolina are attending in varying degrees to the three "P's" of the Center's Safe Schools Pyramid. Through efforts directed at physical design and the application of technology, almost all of the schools are addressing safety and security concerns which fall into the category of "**place**." Where available, School Resource Officers are often playing a role in this as well. These officers, along with conflict management, peer mediation, and Students Against Violence Everywhere, characterize efforts directed at the "**people**" aspects of safety and security. And, in lesser degrees, those strategies which have "**purpose**" or education at their core, law-related education, Teen Court, and Student Court, are being employed.

These findings confirm that there appears to be an inherent order in creating safe and secure schools. The safety and security of "**place**" or the physical environment is first established. The relationships of the "**people**" in that environment are then attended. And, finally, the reason the people are brought together in that environment, "**purpose**," is addressed.

The high schools which participated in the survey appear to be concentrating their efforts on "**place**" and "**people**" and appear to be satisfied with the "effectiveness" of their efforts. The connection of "**purpose**" to safety and security efforts is less obvious.

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## The Center's Plans

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence plans to conduct additional analyses of the high school strategy survey's results. Each strategy, as well as the strategies as they are employed in various combinations, will be closely examined. Factors such as size of school and location will be controlled for in these examinations. The "effectiveness" of the strategies will be focused upon by linking strategies to reports of school violence.

The results presented in this bulletin represent a critical step in the Center's efforts to further knowledge and understanding of what is taking place in high schools as they attempt to provide environments which are free of fear and conducive to learning. Such environments must exist if academic excellence is to be achieved. As this bulletin reveals, a great deal of effort is being put forth to provide such environments. The Center's work will aid in ensuring that these efforts are founded in enhanced knowledge and understanding. This will help establish what works to make schools places where teachers can teach and students can learn to the best of their abilities.

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