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Educational Leaders and Family Engagement: School Violence Prevention

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School Violence: Definition, Facts, and Schools Today

School memories comprise of peer-to-peer relationships, **social-emotional development**, academic awards and achievements, and college and university acceptance letters. However, headlines have been filled with numerous mass school shootings and discussion of school violence prevention.

Gun violence is the leading cause of death for American students. One out of ten gun fatalities occur with youth and young adults and black students are four times more likely to experience gun-related deaths as opposed to their Caucasian peers. Every day, 12 students die from violent gun incidents; an additional 32 are survivors of gunshots and injuries (**Sandy Hook Promise, 2021**). Majority of mass school intruders implicated their threats of violence on social media posts and photos.

School violence encompasses various aggressive behaviors (i.e., nonverbal and verbal disrespect, emotional abuse, assault, physical attacks, and cyberbullying) occurring in educational settings.

Mass school shootings are a public health and human rights concern, impacting adolescents and young adults and early childhood learners. Eliminating gun violence is the work of all stakeholders: educational leaders, faculty and staff, related service providers, parents and families, students, and community engagement.

The Impact of Educational Leadership on School Violence Prevention

Educational leadership encompasses **school climate**, physical security, psychological welfare, safety analyses, and planning. As well as, educational leadership is highly influential in eradicating verbal, relational, and physical peer victimization for all children and adolescents, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and students with disabilities (Mayer, Nickerson, & Jimerson, 2021).

Educational leadership involves partnering with stakeholders and instituting implicit bias awareness training, **bullying prevention** programming, and equitable access for all students. By incorporating mental and behavioral health supports for emotional safety and counteracting the impact of bullying, educational leaders can strengthen school-wide initiatives for positive student development and academic achievement.

The Impact of Family Engagement on School Violence Prevention

Families are invaluable resources for knowledge, guidance, and expertise on school shooting prevention and violence prevention efforts. Not only are parents their child's first teacher, but they know their children. Through parents' know-best approaches to parenting techniques, these indispensable stakeholders can offer behavior modification techniques for challenging behaviors, replacement behaviors, and **behavior management plans**.

Families can provide additional insights on their family dynamics, interactions, and discipline strategies. Educational leaders, faculty and staff, and related service providers would benefit immensely from these details. Families are survivors of trial and error parenting techniques and experts in their own right. Most importantly, respectful relationships are a precipitating factor for successfully implementing school violence prevention policies and procedures.

School Violence Prevention Strategies

Central office administration and board of educational leaders are strongly urged to establish district-wide and school-wide discipline policies (Mayer, Nickerson, Jimerson, 2021).

Educational leaders are charged with:

- Creating a positive school environment and classroom environment
- Implementing a safe and supportive environment for academic achievement
- Adhering to anti-bias and equitable disciplinary practices, and reinforcing physical security

Every educational leader and stakeholder are accountable for building respectful, truthful, **empathetic**, and compassionate relationships within the school community.

Across America, the fight for anti-bullying alliances, **culturally responsive classrooms**, and mental health consultations is more critical now than ever before. Faced with insurmountable pressure, educational leaders are encouraged to join forces with students, parents and families, faculty and staff, local law enforcement, community activists, and related stakeholders to implement the following:

- Mental and behavioral health **counseling** referrals
- Peer mediation and conflict resolution skills
- Positive interpersonal relationship skills
- School safety incident data and school violence trends
- Incident-specific and individual-level interventions
- School-wide preparedness drills for intruder alerts
- Crisis response plans and threat and risk assessment protocols (National Association of School Psychologists, 2021).

Family Engagement: What to Say to Children

1. Educational leaders may coach parents and families on actively listening to their children, validating their emotions, embracing their questions, and allowing their reactions to guide the conversation on school violence.

2. For student-centered talking points, educational leaders, parents, and families may convey the following:

- Each of us plays a crucial role in school safety.
- Our role is to observe and report any distressing, startling, or alarming events.
- What would be a first step in safeguarding our school environments?
- How might local police officers, fire departments, and first responders join schools to prevent school violence?

3. All education stakeholders can diligently watch for any signs of student distress. This may encompass:

- Emotional distress
- **Anxiety** and **depression** symptoms
- Insomnia
- **Behavioral challenges**
- Academic underachievement
- A lack of motivation for learning
- Loss of interest in core content areas (i.e., English Language Arts, reading, math, science, and social studies) and support classes (i.e., **art**, library, **music**, and physical education)
- Limited drive for **classroom engagement**
- Substandard learning mentalities.

4. Mutually, educational leaders and parents can develop strategies to limit a learner's exposure to news outlets, internet, and social media posts of the tragic event. Recurrent exposure may contribute to depression, fear, nightmares, aggressive behaviors, bullying, and desensitization to violence.

5. Essentially, educational leaders, parents, and families can team up with young children and youth to enact specific policies for preventing and remediating threats of violence as well as developing partnerships with community mental health organizations and social services agencies for school-wide preparedness, assessments, implementation, and evaluation of intensive interventions.

Are you interested in making an impact through educational leadership? Check out our **available administration and leadership graduate degrees** and get started today!

References

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