School Violence Prevention Strategies

School violence prevention is a significant concern for administrators, educators, students, and the community at large. While school security initiatives such a School Resource Officers (SROs), metal detection and surveillance may be utilized in some schools, "studies examining the relationship between metal detectors and school safety, found reports of fewer weapons being carried to school; however, neither found that the presence of metal detectors reduced the number of reported threats, physical fights, or student victimization in school" (DePaoli, J., & McCombs, J. (2023).

Childhood adversity also contributes to community and school violence. Experts from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) utilize Prevention Resources for Action. These strategies aim to address individual behaviors that are catalysts for healthy relationships with family, school, community, while providing protective factors for violence. They are intended to work together and to be used in combination in a multi-level, multi-sector effort to prevent violence.

Administrators in the educational environment play a crucial role in preventing violence, ensuring safety, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion which can be highly effective in preventing violence in schools. Listed below are specific strategies for school violence prevention tailored for school administrators:

Create a Safe and Supportive Environment

- **Promote Positive School Culture that Prevents Bullying**: Foster an environment of respect, kindness, and inclusion that supports positive relationship between school staff and students. Establishing a safe and supportive learning environment can improve school climate and enhance academic outcomes for students. Anti-Bullying and cyberbullying programs can prevent violence and instill a culture of inclusivity, respect but also establish clear, well-communicated rules regarding violence, bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment. The department has created this video that provides information on bullying prevention practices. It is vital that the school remains consistent when implementing these programs to guarantee overall success. Ensure that students, staff, and parents are educated about these procedures and understand these policies.

- **Create a School Climate Committee**: Involve teachers, students, and parents in developing strategies to improve school climate, address safety concerns, and resolve conflicts peacefully. School climate committees should aim to create school connectedness. The Centers for Disease Control reveals that students who feel connected to their school are less likely to experience substance use, poor mental health, and violence. The school climate survey is a valuable tool to evaluate and receive data from parents, students and educators on both district and school climate.

Preventative Education and Training

- **Educate Students on Conflict Resolution**: School administrators must promote healthy, nonviolent strategies that de-escalate and manage disruptive behaviors that could lead to potential acts of violence. Teach students Social and Personal Competencies that provide conflict resolution and emotional regulation techniques. Help them understand how to manage disputes without

resorting to violence. Train students in mediation techniques to help resolve conflicts among their peers in non-violent ways. School-based mental health support can provide an array of options to increase positive childhood experiences and conflict resolution skills that are needed for future success in a global society.

- **Provide Professional Development for Staff**: Offer ongoing De-escalation Training for teachers and staff on how to detect signs of bullying or aggression, de-escalate potentially violent situations, and implement crisis intervention strategies. The department has also developed a Conflict Resolution Guidance Document that contains best practices and strategies that can assist LEAs in implementing a conflict resolution program.

- **Involve Parents and Community**: Partner with parents and local organizations to provide workshops and resources on bullying prevention, mental health awareness, and conflict resolution. Parent Bullying Information guides provide parents with information about types of bullying as well as signs and strategies to prevent bullying. The department also provides information on bullying and harassment for parents and students.

Early Identification and Intervention

- **Offer Counseling and Mental Health Services**: Provide accessible counseling services for students struggling with anger, depression, anxiety, or any other issues that could lead to violent behaviors. Consider hiring counselors, social workers, and psychologists. Click this link for Mental Health Best Practices.

- **Monitoring Early Behaviors and Threat Assessment Protocols**: Developing systems for identifying students who may be at risk of engaging in violent behavior, such as behavior changes, academic performance, or social isolation is imperative. Early detection is instrumental in *preventing* school violence. Schools can enhance school safety by using a behavior threat assessment model to assist in the evaluation of potential risks and determine appropriate interventions for students who exhibit violent tendencies or express threats.

Communication, Reporting Systems and Security

- **Encourage Reporting**: Create anonymous reporting systems (e.g., hotlines or online reporting tools) where students, staff, and parents can report concerns about violence, bullying, or threats of harm. Schools can also use the free Safe TN app for anonymous reporting.

- **Foster Open Lines of Communication**: Regularly communicate with students, parents, and staff about the importance of reporting safety concerns and the steps taken by the school in response to reports. Open lines of communication give students and parents a "voice" to express concerns. The Tennessee School Climate Survey measures student, teachers, and parents' perceptions of the school's climate, providing valuable feedback for improvement.

- **Collaborate with Law Enforcement**: Build strong relationships with local police or school resource officers. Ensure they participate in safety planning and can respond swiftly to incidents when

necessary. Establishing relationships with local law enforcement through School Resource Officer (SRO) programs, supported by *memorandums of understanding* define roles and intentions for successful violence prevention initiatives. While locked doors are always the responsibility of everyone in the school, school resource officers can also be instrumental in maintaining physical security and implementing facility best practices, ensuring that external doors always stay locked throughout the school day. Law enforcement should also play a key role in emergency planning within the school/district.

Develop Crisis Response Plans with Emergency Strategies

- **Have Clear Protocols**: Develop, practice, and regularly update school-wide crisis response plans that involve the school safety team. Strategies should include emergency drills for active shooter situations, natural disasters, and other potential emergencies. Emergency Drills should always be appropriately documented.

- **Train Staff and Students**: Ensure that all staff are trained on school safety strategies and procedures, including how to recognize potential threats and how to respond during a violent incident. Train staff and conduct safety drills with students, so they know what to do in the event of an emergency. Classroom Emergency Flip Charts can provide a quick reference for teachers during emotionally charged emergencies.

- **Establish Emergency Response Teams**: Create response teams with designated roles for staff members. School Emergency Response Teams and crisis teams should include local law enforcement. Post-vention Crisis Recovery Teams should include community mental health agencies and school mental health liaisons for the school district. These teams should coordinate actions during an emergency, ensuring effective safety, emotional recovery, and communication.

- **Armed Assailant Drills**: According to Michele Gay, Sandy Hook mother and Executive Director of Safe and Sound Schools, "School communities have successfully conducted drills for fire, weather, and earthquake for decades, preparing students and staff for safety in a variety of crisis scenarios. Yet many have struggled with active assailant drills, causing avoidance, confusion, anxiety—and in some cases physical and psychological harm." This guidance aims to provide a trauma-informed approach to teaching and training students and staff for the complex threat of violence in the school setting.

Addressing External Factors

- **Combat Bullying as an ACE**: Implement programs specifically targeting bullying prevention that are designed to build empathy, restorative skills, and trauma informed communities that teach students to build resilience and resolve conflicts peacefully.

- **Promote Inclusivity**: It is key to creating a culture where everyone feels respected, valued, and empowered to contribute. Promote inclusion through student-led clubs, events, and activities.

- **Provide Alternative Spaces**: For students who struggle with aggression or emotional regulation, offer alternative spaces where they can calm down and discuss their emotions with trained staff

members. Creating safe spaces requires a classroom environment that promotes culturally responsive teaching and trauma informed practices.

Conclusion

School administrators can be proactive in preventing school violence through the implementation of various strategies designed to foster student leadership and engagement. School violence prevention requires an initiative-taking, comprehensive approach that involves administrators, staff, students, and the broader community. By fostering a safe and supportive school climate, providing early intervention, and having clear communication and response systems in place, school leaders can significantly reduce the risk of violence and create an environment where students can learn and thrive.

Fostering student engagement and giving students an opportunity to be more connected through team building, extracurricular activities, and clubs, designed to empower student leadership skills will instill a sense of belonging. Additionally, involving students in school safety initiatives and councils or safety committees can play a pivotal role in creating awareness and preventing acts of violence. School administrators should consistently evaluate school violence prevention strategies by:

- **Regularly Reviewing Policies**: Continuously assess and update safety and wellness policies to ensure they are effective in addressing the evolving landscape of school violence and bullying.

- **Seek Feedback**: Regularly gather feedback from students, staff, and parents about the school's climate, violence prevention strategies, and any concerns they may have. This information can guide future decisions and improvements. Use data from incident reports, school climate surveys, to monitor evaluate improvement and provide feedback about school violence prevention strategies as needed.