



September 2009

FACT SHEET

School Safety

“IS MY SCHOOL SAFE?”

When parents send their children to school, they want to be assured that they are in a safe place to learn. The Board of Regents at the New York State Education Department recognizes this concern and Chancellor Tisch has stated: "There is no issue more important to the Regents than ensuring the safety of the children in our schools" (Tisch, 2009). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have also acknowledged this, stating “parents, teachers and administrators expect schools to be safe havens of learning” (CDC, 2008).

As institutions within a larger environmental context, schools are affected by what happens outside their walls. Schools can be safe learning environments by taking actions within the building, such as:

- Promoting supportive relationships between adults and youth,
- Encouraging a positive school climate,
- Enhancing connections between the school and community, and
- Strengthening relationships with parents and guardians.

Key questions arise for all who are part of the school community:

1. How do I know my school is safe?

When trying to determine if your school is safe, it is important to look at sources of data to help define the nature of the problem. Specifically, analyze **school-related** data on Violent and Disruptive Incidents (VADIR) and other student conduct data to provide information on pockets of concern that require attention and program strengths that could be replicated. Consider **community-related** data, such as those on injury, violent death and criminal activity to get a full picture of levels of violence in your school community. Consider supporting this effort by:

- Attending board of education meetings to hear and understand how safety fits with educational planning for your district. This is also an opportunity for you to provide input to those elected to represent you in making decisions about your district.
- Getting involved in your school. Volunteer to serve on your district safety team and building level emergency response team, and/or shared decision making team to have input in the planning process.

- Talking with all members of the school community – teachers, students, parents/guardians, administrators, other staff and members of the community – to gain a broad perspective on your community’s safety.

2. What can I do to ensure we have a safer school environment?

The New York State Education Department recommends steps that can be taken to help in this area. For example:

- Collaboratively develop, review annually and equitably enforce a Code of Conduct
- Collaboratively develop, and review annually, district safety plans and building emergency response plans, and practice with drills, tabletops and functional exercises
- Personalize the school environment
- Implement programs and activities that have a proven record of achieving positive results
- Actively engage and involve students, parents/guardians, and community members in addressing issues; provide easily available contact information
- Ensure that students, teachers, parents/guardians, administrators and other school staff are aware of the warning signs of violence and the need to communicate to others
- Use data to drive your decision-making process

3. How do I find the information I need to do this?

As stated recently by the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, parents want to know first if their children are safe when they go to school, and then if they are learning (OSDFS 2009 National Conference, Washington, DC). Here are some resources in New York to help you in your work to create safer school environments, and to ensure that optimal learning can happen:

New York State Center for School Safety

<http://nyscenterforschoolsafety.org>

New York State Education Department

www.emsc.nysed.gov/ssae/

New York State School Boards Association

www.nyssba.org

New York State United Teachers

www.nysut.org

New York State Office of Domestic Violence

www.opdv.state.ny.us

New York State PTA

www.nyspta.org

New York State Student Support Services Center

www.nyssscenter.org

School Administrators Association of New York State

www.saanys.org

United States Department of Education

www.ed.gov

Regional Student Support Services Centers

www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/NetworkCoordinators.html

New York State Council of School Superintendents

www.nyscross.org

Your District's website

Let's join together to ensure that New York provides safe learning environments for our children and for those who work with them. It is only in safe and secure learning places that children can meet the goals established by the Board of Regents:

1. Every child will get a good start.
2. Every child will read by the second grade.
3. Every student will complete middle level education ready for high school.
4. Every student will graduate from high school ready for work, higher education and citizenship.
5. People who begin higher education will complete their programs.
6. People of all ages who seek more knowledge and skill will have the fullest opportunity to continue their education.

Tisch, Merryl, New York State Board of Regents, New York State Education Department, Press Release August 2009

Center for Disease Control, *Understanding School Violence*, [cited 2008]. Available from URL: www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/.../SchoolViolence_FactSheet-a.pdf

New York State Board of Regents, New York State Education Department, Regents 2008 Board Report.
