

Standard 10: School Site Safety and Maintenance

*Reflective Essay*

This standard encompasses a variety of issues important to both the climate and physical safety of a school. A principal's role in the safety of a school is usually that of a chief officer. They may delegate certain tasks or jobs, but the ultimate responsibility is theirs. I will briefly discuss three issues related to school site safety and maintenance. The physical upkeep of a building is important for obvious reasons as well as those less often considered. Other issues such as supervision, student traffic flow in the building, and lighting can strongly impact both the perception of safety as well as influencing actual behavior. Finally, I will talk about the critical need for a well defined, practiced school crisis management plan.

Physical maintenance of a building is essential for meeting the demands of its daily use. When some part of the building is in disrepair, it causes a distraction to learning. Further, when aesthetic features of a building are neglected, it conveys the message that the place and the people are not important. Efforts like replacing light bulbs, regular cleaning, routine painting with warm colors can strongly influence the perception of staff and students about the attractiveness and safety of the school.

The research of Randy Sprik (2004) has long documented the impact of careful planning around adult supervision and logistic organization of student traffic flow. This relates to hallway travel, recess and playground structure, and before and after school supervision. Supervision must be active in that it requires more from an adult than being a warm body. Talking with students, knowing their names, and circulating and watching all contribute to the perception of and actual occurrence of safety in a school.

A final aspect of school site safety and maintenance that is of critical importance is the development and practice of a crisis management response plan. In their recent book *Safe and Healthy Schools*, Sprague and Walker (2004) discuss the importance of such a plan for schools today. These plans must include nuts and bolts for assigning roles during a crisis, logistic plans for where to keep students and staff safe, how to physically exit the building in the event that it is not safe, etc. Their work stresses, however, that school wide discipline and support systems should do much of the work of addressing student needs before crisis situations exist. Systemic approaches such as positive behavior supports, clear and consistent behavior policies, consistent discipline procedures, and regular communication between administration and teachers during discipline situations are powerful daily practices that help schools maintain safe learning environments.

*Related Artifacts*

The George Washington High School Improvement Plan clearly relates to this standard. It includes a well defined, measurable goal for safety. Our Collaborative School Committee (CSC) recognized the importance of continued focused efforts in this area. George Washington High School draws students from all socio-economic backgrounds as well as from diverse ethnic and cultural experiences. There are known gangs operating at the school. The combination of all of these factors contributes to a certain level of tension in the building. There are fights, substance use, and numerous other violations of the discipline code. During the course of the School Improvement course, our small group evaluated the discipline data from GW. We wrote a safety goal

for the school improvement plan that could be measured by decreased violations of the discipline code.

We were very specific regarding the types of resources and interventions needed to support this goal. As I referenced above, the work of Hill Walker highlights the importance of visible, active adult presence. Our plan recommends increased adult supervision during passing periods as well as during class time. The ongoing relationship that GW has with the Denver Police Department can support this goal as well. Finally, our group recognized the need for teachers to have ongoing and/or updated training regarding strategies for positive behavior support and classroom management.

*References*

Sprague, J.R., & Walker, H. (2004). *Safe and Healthy Schools*. New York: Guilford

Publications.

Sprick, R. (2004). *The Safe and Civil School Series*. Longmont: Sopris West.