

Before addressing this issue one has to differentiate between protecting schools from danger that comes from the outside (as in Newtown) and danger emanating from within (as in Columbine.) While the former involves protective factors such as guards, doors, and protocols for responding to danger, it is the latter to which these comments are addressed.

A comprehensive, universal approach to school safety is needed. Along the lines of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) And RTI (Response to Intervention) , school safety should involve a three tier strategy. Starting with social skills groups for all students, the school based personnel would emphasize positive relations among classmates and between students and staff. Arising out of these groups as well as through teacher referral, would be the identification of students at risk for anti social behavior. These interventions would entail small, targeted groups focusing on anger management, bullying among other issues. At the third level there need to be intensive, individualized interventions for the most high risk students who are already exhibiting violent tendencies. In addition, school based personnel need to extend their outreach to parents as well as to community providers.

An additional core component is to provide a suggestion box whereby students could warn staff of another student's violent threats (toward self or others)--**anonymously**. This component has proven most valuable in reducing violent and or self injurious behavior. Another component is to administer an autobiography in which students often reveal problematic issues that could lead to violence. These programmatic suggestions arise out of twenty years of school social work experience in the Bronx, East Harlem, and two school districts in Connecticut --- both as a line school social worker and a program director.

School social workers are educated to have a broad view of behavior and the environmental factors that trigger antisocial behavior (as well as prosocial behavior). They are trained to look not only at the psychosocial factors of individual students but also at the social conditions that foster either prosocial behaviors or antisocial ones. While a variety of professionals can provide therapeutic services, it is school social workers who are in the best position to identify individual, social, and school factors leading to specific behaviors. Comprehensive assessment is the core social work skill and, hence, school social workers are optimally trained to oversee a universal program of school safety. I see a school social work presence as essential to the safety of every school building in our state.

Respectfully submitted,

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