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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

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Designing Safer Schools

As a new school year begins, safety ranks high on the list of issues occupying the minds of educators. School leaders everywhere are taking steps to try to reduce the risk of violence and other types of crime in the school setting.

As they look for appropriate solutions, many educators question the effectiveness of some of the school-security measures that are commonly proposed. They recognize the limitations of conventional security devices such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras. And many have doubts about the ethics and feasibility of efforts to identify youth who are prone to commit violence.

If these conventional school-security measures are not the answer, where might school leaders and board members look for more humane and enduring solutions? A new book from the Clearinghouse says the answer may be as simple as improving the management and use of physical spaces in schools.

The authors of *Safe School Design: A Handbook for Educational Leaders* point to an important but remarkably overlooked key to safe and secure schools: the design, use, and supervision of buildings and grounds. Quite often, the search for effective security solutions is simply a matter of improving the physical characteristics of the school setting.

When most of the nation's school facilities were designed, safety and security were not of paramount concern and school planners paid relatively less attention to this area. Now architects and planners have access to an important knowledge base of data and principles that explain how the social and physical environment influences safety and security. This knowledge, now widely used in design of buildings all over the world but rarely applied to schools, has been organized and formulated into a set of principles known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

> CPTED helps us to understand how the constructed physical environment affects human behavior, and thus it can be used to improve the management and use of physical spaces. It has been used extensively in the prevention and deterrence of criminal behavior in a range of community settings.

With careful attention to such aspects of the school environment as access

control, placement of the school office, visibility of entrances,density of hallway foot traffic, and appropriate lighting, administrators and facility planners can use CPTED principles to influence human behavior, and, in turn, security and safety.

Tod Schneider is a crime-prevention specialist for the Eugene, Oregon, police department; Hill Walker and Jeffrey Sprague jointly direct the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior at the University of Oregon. They explain how CPTED principles have been applied in the U.S. and abroad to prevent or deter criminal behavior.

Few educators are aware of the extent to which the design, use, and supervision of space in schools can affect safety and security. The authors' desire to expose school leaders to the extensive body of literature on CPTED prompted them to write this handbook.

They note that the physical ecology of the school is

> a powerful factor in contributing to its safety, security, and effectiveness. The design and use of school space has a huge but often unrecognized impact on the behavior of students as well as staff..... The use of lighting, color, and building-design features can all influence how individuals feel and act in the school setting.

Safe School Design is a self-contained handbook, complete with forms and checklists showing school staff how to conduct a thorough assessment of their school's security. Readers have permission to duplicate or adapt these forms as needed to gain the greatest benefit from the evaluation.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by briefly reviewing the current status of school safety and security. It highlights factors that make schools relatively safe or unsafe, identifies areas of vulnerability in schools, and describes how physical design and monitoring techniques can enhance safety.

Chapter 2 reviews several recent school shootings to illustrate CPTED's relevance to school safety and security. This chapter analyzes the physical locations in which specific school-based tragedies took place, the circumstances surrounding the shootings, and the motives that prompted the shooters.

From a CPTED perspective, the authors then describe CPTED measures that may have been applicable in each of these tragic situations.

Chapter 3 discusses three concepts central to CPTED: (1) *Natural surveillance*, the ability to see what's going on; (2) *Natural access control*, the ability to control entry and exit from an environment; and (3) *Territoriality*, the ability of legitimate users to control an area while discouraging illicit users. Ways in which these concepts can be used to help pinpoint, and then remedy, environmental design problems are outlined.

How to conduct first an initial assessment and then a thorough evaluation of a school's environmental design to determine whether it is safe is the focus of chapter 4, the heart of the book. Several forms and checklists that pertain to the assessment process are provided. The CPTED Site-Assessment Form is "used to record observations on characteristics of particular places, such as a single

classroom, a hallway, or a playground."

The book guides evaluators through the process, telling them what to look for on topics ranging from "abutting activities" and "alarm systems" to "windows" and "zones." Topics receiving special attention include lighting (the pros and cons of darkening campuses at night), parking lots, bike paths, fencing, access control in sprawling campuses, video cameras, metal detectors, and office design.

Using case studies of two elementary schools that were conducted by the handbook's senior author, chapter 5 offers a practical look at the process of performing a CPTED assessment, evaluating and interpreting the results, and applying the information to make the schools safer.

Chapter 6 illustrates how knowledge of CPTED principles can assist architects in designing safer schools.

Chapter 7 makes policy recommendations regarding future construction of schools and maintenance of existing structures and cites common errors in school safety planning.

Appendices contain the National School Safety Center's School Crime Assessment Tool, the Oregon School Safety Survey, and an extensive list of safety-related print and web resources.