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**ISPV**  
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY  
AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

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**Violence in Northern Ohio Public Schools**

*A Summary of Results*

As an unfortunate part of the daily lives of many children, violence shapes where they walk, where they go and who their friends are (Epp & Watkinson, 1997). Although the United States recently witnessed a steady decline in the juvenile violent crime rate, concern about child and juvenile violence is still significant (Daane, 2003). A report published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2001) shows that the rate of overall violent crime decreased significantly between 1994 and 2001. However, given that juveniles are still twice as likely as adults to be victims or witnesses of serious violent crime, juvenile crime and victimization remain very serious problems (OJJDP Report, 2001). Persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, for example, experience the highest rates of both deadly and nonfatal firearm related injury (Gotsch et al., 2001). In recent years, the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property has not changed significantly while students in urban and suburban locales were equally vulnerable to serious violent crime at school (OJJDP Report, 2001). The Violence and Crime at School-Principal Report (2001) found that in 1996-1997, 10% of all public schools reported to police at least one violent crime.

Law enforcement efforts are increasingly moving toward proactive approaches to dealing with delinquency and violence, rather than relying solely on traditional reactive methods. The data presented here come from one such proactive initiative – Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) for the Northern District of Ohio. Project Safe Neighborhoods is the current administration’s primary domestic crime initiative which aims to reduce gun violence in American communities using a variety of innovative approaches. The United States Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio heads the PSN initiative for the region. The Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence at Kent State University was selected as research partner to assist with program evaluation and technical assistance.

As part of the PSN effort in Northern Ohio, data were collected to identify the prevalence of school related violence and strategies that have been employed to counter youth violence. The primary purpose of the project was to provide a baseline understanding of the school based delinquency and violence interventions taking place in Northern Ohio public schools. In addition, this report examines factors that lead to higher levels of school violence. By establishing a clearer under-

**METHODS**

*The data used in this paper come from the School Crime and Safety survey administered in connection with the evaluation of the United States Department of Justice Project Safe Neighborhoods in the Northern District of Ohio. The District covers the northern 40 counties of the state including the major cities of Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Toledo, and Youngstown. The survey instrument was adapted, with permission, from the National Center for Education Statistics 2004 School Survey on Crime and Safety. The purpose of the survey is to identify the prevalence and type of school related violence-prevention strategies being used in schools.*

*The survey measures school practices and programs, parent and community involvement, teacher training, limitations on crime prevention, frequency of crime and violence, number of incidents, disciplinary problems and actions, school characteristics, and truancy. A letter was sent to school district superintendents from the U.S. Attorney’s office explaining the survey and requesting their assistance in conducting the survey. A total of 825 surveys were mailed in the fall of 2004 to all public junior and senior high school principals in the Northern district of Ohio. A unique number was assigned to each respondent to ensure confidentiality and track response rate. A reminder postcard was sent approximately one month later to principals who had not responded and a final mailing including a complete survey approximately one month later. A total of 439 surveys were returned for a response rate of 53.2%.*

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**Table 1**

<b>All Incidents</b>	<b>Number of schools reporting</b>	<b>Percent of schools with one or more incidents</b>	<b>Total number of Incidents</b>
Violent incidents	383	86	7,339
Serious violent incidents	369	21	314

**Table 2**

<b>Violent Incident</b>	<b>Number of schools reporting</b>	<b>Percent of schools with one or more incidents</b>	<b>Total number of incidents</b>
Rape or attempted rape	425	2	9
Sexual battery other than rape	424	3	15
Physical attack or fight with a weapon	414	6	78
Physical attack or fight without a weapon	415	80	4825
Threat of attack with a weapon	405	11	170
Threat of attack without a weapon	405	69	3934
Robbery with a weapon	422	1	6
Robbery without a weapon	402	9	128

standing of school and student characteristics that are related to school violence, effective prevention and intervention programs can be developed and implemented.

*Incidents of Violence in Northern Ohio Public Schools*

The first part of this report addresses the level of violence reported by administrators of Northern Ohio schools and associated factors. Throughout this report we refer to “violent” and “serious violent” incidents. The primary difference between the two definitions involves the use of a weapon as an indicator of a more serious assault or threat of assault offenses. The definitions of these terms are as follows:

*Violent incidents include:* rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with or without a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

*Serious violent incidents include:* rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with a weapon, threat of physical attack with a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon.

In the 2003-2004 school year, approximately 7,339 violent incidents occurred in the Northern District of Ohio

public schools that reported (86 percent of schools) (table 1). In comparison 314 serious violent incidents occurred in the Northern District of Ohio schools during the 2003-2004 school year (20 percent of schools).

Of the violent incidents reported, physical attack or fight without a weapon accounted for the highest percentage of reports. Approximately 80 percent of schools reported at least one incident of physical attack or fight without a weapon (table 2). Threat of attack without a weapon was reported by the second highest percentage of schools. Approximately 69 percent of schools reported at least one incident of a threat or attack without a weapon during the 2003-2004 school year. Threat of attack with a weapon (11 percent) was the next most frequently reported type of violent incident reported (table 2).

**School Characteristics**

*Larger schools experience more violence.* Figure 1 suggests that violent incidents were more prevalent as the enrollment size increases for the schools. For example, 75 percent of schools with less than 300 students had at least one violent incident, while 90 percent of schools with 1,000 or more students experienced a violent inci-

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dent. Likewise the relationship between enrollment and serious violent incidents yielded the same general relationship.

*Crime in the community is associated with in-school violence.* Figure 2 illustrates the results of the analysis, depicting that violent incidents were more prevalent, 100 percent, where the neighborhoods were considered high crime level, and lower, 86 percent, in the neighborhoods with low crime levels.

**Characteristics of Student Population**

*High academic performance is associated with low levels of school violence.* Figure 3 illustrates that 81 percent of schools that reported 0 to 5 percent of students scored below 15 percent on standardized tests had violent incidents, while 88 percent of schools reporting that 15 percent of students scored below the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile had at least one violent incident.

*Gender distribution of student body is associated with violence.* Violent incidents are most prevalent when there is an approximately equal percentage of males and females in the student population (figure 4).

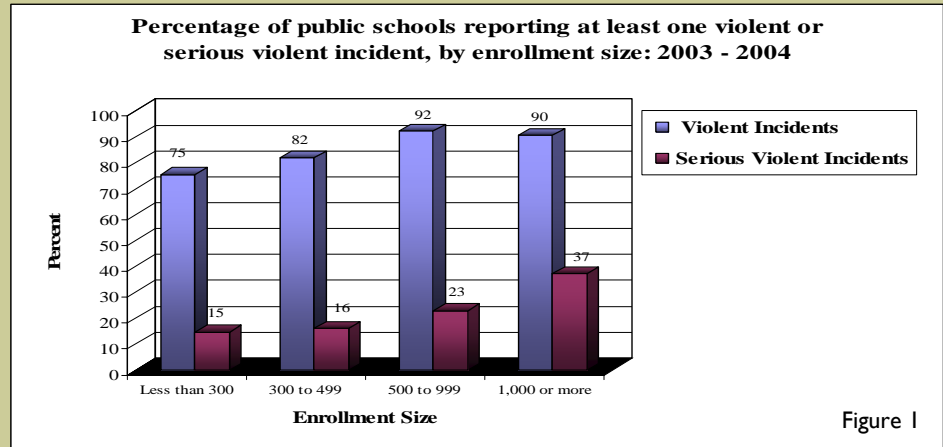


Figure 1

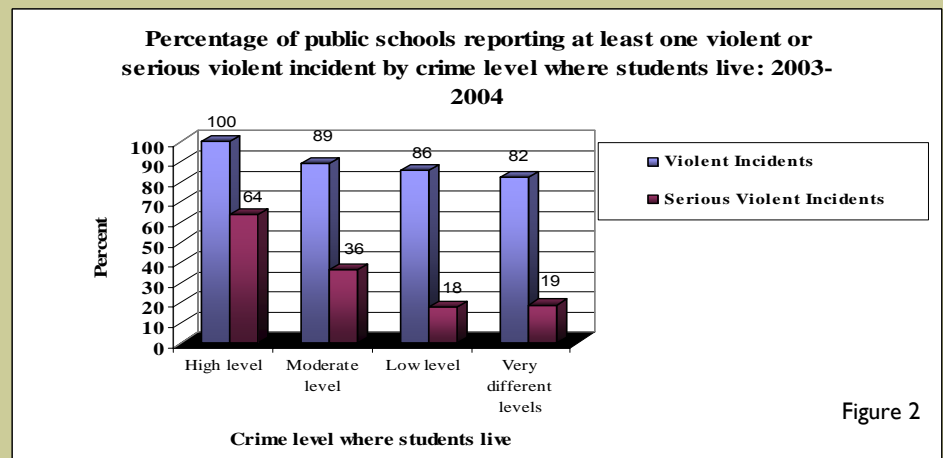


Figure 2

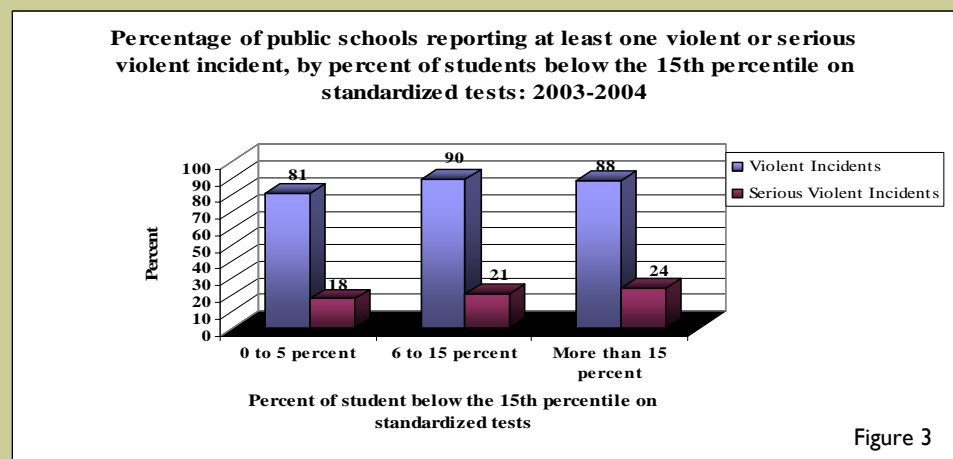


Figure 3

Violence in Northern Ohio Public Schools

**School Characteristics**

*Lower student to teacher ratios are associated with less school violence. In the 2003-2004 school year, schools with low student-to-teacher ratio were less likely to experience a violent incident than schools with a high student-to-teacher ratio. Specifically, 79 percent of schools with a student-to-teacher ratio less than 12:1 reported a violent incident compared to 91 percent of schools with a student-to-teacher ratio of more than 16:1 (figure 5).*

*Student mobility is associated with increased school violence. An association was found between transfers as a percentage of enrollment and violence. In general, as the number of transfers as a percentage of enrollment increased, so did the likelihood of experiencing violent incidents at school (figure 6).*

**Prevention Activities**

*Safety Strategies in Northern Ohio Schools*

Results from the survey are first broken down into five tables (i.e., tables 3 - 7) which examine the types of prevention activities engaged in by the sample of schools. The interventions are categorized as follows: (1) Physical security measures; (2) Emergency response plans; (3) Behavioral interventions; (4) Commu-

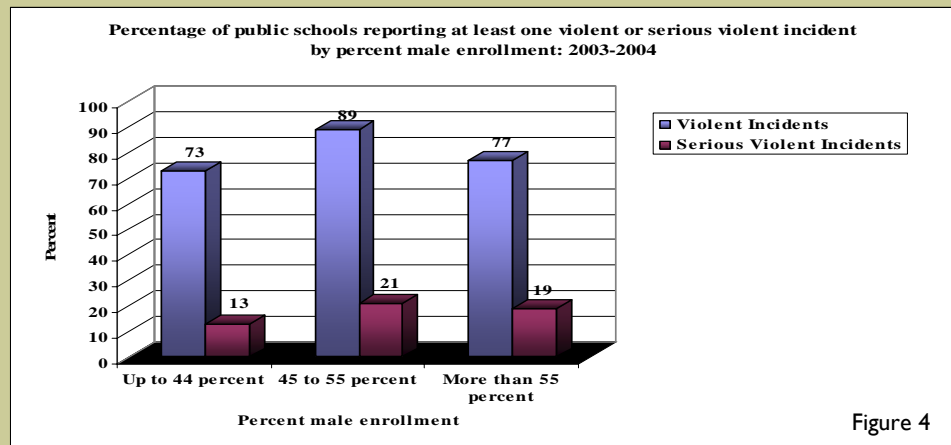


Figure 4

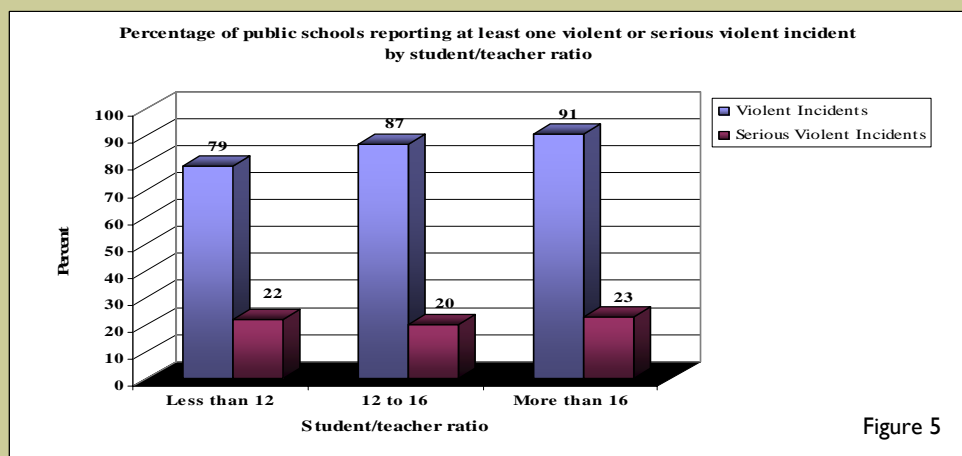


Figure 5

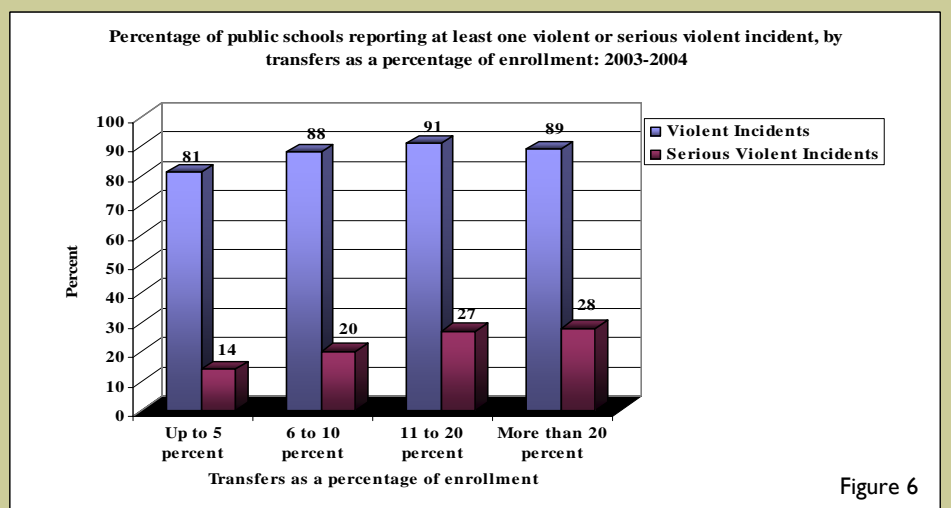


Figure 6

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nity involvement; and (5) Law enforcement programs. The first column of each table describes the percentage of sampled schools that responded affirmatively to each measure/program.

Table 3 explores the physical security measures taken at the respondents' schools and should be referenced for complete results. Several of the more interesting findings are presented here. Requiring visitors to sign in at the school office was almost universally practiced (98.2%), and stands out as the most common measure taken. The second and third most common physical security measures were controlling access to the buildings during school hours (83.9%) and closing the campus for most students during lunch (82%). Although a spate of school shootings during the 1990s raised public awareness of weapons making their way into schools, the use of metal detectors is still rare amongst the sample of schools studied. Less than one percent of schools required students or visitors to pass through metal detectors upon entering the facility, and less than six percent (5.7%) reported performing random metal detector checks on students.

Given that the sample consisted of only public schools, it is not surprising that few schools (4.8%) required student uniforms, but nearly seven out of ten (68.5%) re-

**Table 3**  
*Percentage of Schools that Report the Following Physical Security Measures are Taken in Their School*

Measure	Percent of Schools
Requiring visitors to sign or check in at school office	98.2%
Control access to buildings during school hours	83.9%
Control access to grounds during school hours	25.3%
Require students to pass through metal detectors	0.5%
Require visitors to pass through metal detectors	0.2%
Perform random metal detector checks on students	5.7%
Close the campus for most students during lunch	82.0%
Use random dog searches for narcotics	57.2%
Perform other random sweeps for contraband	20.6%
Require student uniforms	4.8%
Enforcing strict dress code	68.5%
Require clear book bags or ban book bags on campus	16.6%
Require students to wear ID badges	6.4%
Use one or more security cameras	55.4%
Provide telephones in most classrooms	56.8%
Provide two-way radios to any staff members	56.9%

**Table 4**  
*Percentage of Schools that Report Undertaking the Following Emergency Response*

Measure	Percent of Schools
Have a written plan for shootings	81.9%
Drilled students on the plan for shootings	27.7%
Have written plan for natural disasters	97.9%
Drilled students in the plan for natural disasters	81.9%
Have written plan for hostages	80.7%
Drilled students in the plan for hostages	28.5%
Have written plan for bomb threats or incidents	94.5%
Drilled students in the plan for bomb threats or incidents	38.0%
Have written plan for WMD threat or incident	73.1%
Drilled students in the plan for WMD threat or incident	22.6%

Table 5  
*Percentage of Schools that Report Using the Following Behavioral Interventions in Their School*

Measures	Percent of Schools
Prevention curriculum, instruction, and/or training for students	73.4%
Behavioral modification intervention for students	79.7%
Counseling, social work, psychological or therapeutic activity for students	87.3%
Individual mentoring, tutoring, and or coaching of students	86.9%
Recreation, enrichment, or leisure activities for students	76.8%
Student involvement in conflict resolution process	49.0%
Programs to promote a sense of community/social integration among students	72.2%
Hotline/tip-line for students to report problems	74.9%

Table 6  
*Percentage of Schools that Report the Following Community Groups as Being Active in Their Schools*

Measures	Percent of Schools
Parent Groups	59.0%
Social service agencies	75.6%
Juvenile justice agencies	72.7%
Law enforcement agencies	91.5%
Mental health agencies	58.9%
Civic organizations/service clubs	40.6%
Private corporations/local businesses	21.7%
Religious organizations	32.9%

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ported enforcing a strict dress code. Some schools (16.6%) either required clear book bags or prohibited book bags on campus to prevent their being used to conceal weapons or drugs.

In the wake of Columbine and other school shootings, it is particularly interesting to examine the emergency response plans in place in schools for acts of violence and natural disasters. Nearly all schools report that they have plans in place for natural disasters (97.9%) and bomb threats (94.5%). A large majority of schools now have plans in place for shootings (81.9%), but less than a third of schools drill students on the plans for shooting incidents (27.7%). Given that this survey was conducted post 9-11, it is not surprising that nearly three quarters (73.1%) of the reporting schools had a written plan in place for weapons of mass destruction incidents or threats.

In order to assess the extent to which schools used behavioral interventions in a preventative or responsive way to address delinquency and violence, eight questions were asked and are presented in Table 5. A great majority of the schools used all but one of the behavioral interventions listed. The one exception is “student involvement in conflict resolution” to which only 49% of schools reported using this intervention technique.

Table 6 explores the extent to which community groups and agencies have an active presence in each of the schools. As

Table 7  
Percentage of Schools that Report Using Sworn Law Enforcement Officers, Security Guards, or Security Personnel in the Following Manner

Measures	Percent of Schools
Used on a regular basis	46.6%
Used at any time during school hours	91.0%
Used while students were arriving or leaving	87.9%
Wore a uniform or other identifiable clothing	89.6%
Routinely armed with a firearm	84.4%
Participated in security enforcement and patrol	84.0%
Participated in maintaining school discipline and safety	83.5%
Participate in identifying problems and proactively seeking solutions	81.0%
Participate in training teachers and staff in school safety and crime prevention	48.8%
Participate in mentoring students	70.8%
Teach a law-related education course or train students	48.1%

revealed in column 1, law enforcement is active in 91.5% of the reporting schools. This partly reflects the broad appeal of DARE, and similar programs, being taught in most schools. Social service agencies (75.6%), juvenile justice agencies (72.7%), and parent groups (59%) comprise the next three most frequently reported groups that are active in the respondents’ schools.

The final table (Table 7), examines the law enforcement/security levels/security guards (hereafter LE personnel) and activities that are reported within the schools. Nearly half (46.6%) of all reporting schools used LE personnel on a regular basis, and nearly all (91%) used these personnel at some time during school hours. A substantial amount of LE activity is dedicated to training/mentoring rather than responding to incidents. Specifically, LE personnel reportedly trained teachers and staff in school safety and crime prevention (48.8%), participated in mentoring students (70.8%), and taught a LE education course or trained students (48.1%).

As stated, the purpose of this report has been to establish a baseline understanding of the school violence and current responses to this problem in Northern Ohio schools. In the following pages you will find recommendations and resources for administrators and others to consider in their plans for improving school safety.

## Recommendations for Effective Violence Prevention in Schools

- Identify your needs and gaps before you choose a program or plan an approach.
- Make your plan developmentally appropriate. Different programs are meant for youth in different grades and who have varying capacities. No program works the same for everybody.
- Do something to increase the positive, don't just try to reduce the negative.
- A significant number of long-term outcomes are related to school attendance. The longer a child stays in school, the better off over the long-term he or she does.
- Implement evidence-based programs (programs that have a scientific base showing they result in significant behavior change or improvements in school climate).
- The best program will not work if it is not implemented as intended, with fidelity and well trained staff. Remember, staff turn over every year, so booster trainings and follow-ups increase the chances that intervention effects will be sustained over time.
- Seek to improve school climate, which will also result in improved student behavior.
- Take bullying and threats seriously.
- Good intelligence leads to effective preventive interventions.
- Practice your crisis plans.
- Communicate and collaborate with law enforcement in your violence prevention plan.
- Communicate and collaborate with mental health professionals in your violence prevention plan.
- Talk to parents and students about what's happening in your school.
- Make violence prevention part of your overall school strategy for learning, achievement, and well-being.

### Online Resources

1. Education Resource Information Center

<http://www.eric.ed.gov>

"ERIC provides free access to more than 1.2 million bibliographic records of journal articles and other education-related materials and, if available, includes links to full text. ERIC is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (IES)."

2. Office of Safe and Drug-free Schools

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/resources.html#online>

This site is part of the U.S. Department of Education providing resources and reports such as, online publications and internet links related to school safety information.

3. Center for Safe Communities and Schools

<http://www.txssc.txstate.edu/txssc.htm>

This site is provided by Texas State University- San Marcos and includes resources such as safety tips and school drills lesson plans.

4. Center for the Prevention of School Violence

<http://www.ncdjjdp.org/cpsv/>

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence website allows visitors to navigate different locations, like the library or the locker rooms, on a school floor plan and view resources and tips on school safety.

5. Keep Schools Safe: The School Safety and Security Resource

<http://www.keepschoolssafe.org/>

This site contains resources for parents, schools and teachers while also providing a Safety and Security Directory with links to sites dealing with school violence.

6. Safety Zone: NW Regional Educational Laboratory

<http://www.safetyzone.org/>

"The Safety Zone is a clearinghouse for information and material related to school safety. We are a project of the [Comprehensive Center, Region X](#) of the [Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory](#)."

7. Safe Schools Manual

<http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/images/ssmanual.pdf>

This is a direct link to a pdf file manual which is "a resource on making communities and families safe for children."

8. Increasing School Safety Through Juvenile Accountability Programs

[http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/jaibg\\_2000\\_12\\_1/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/jaibg_2000_12_1/contents.html)

"The Bulletin describes key elements of effective school-based accountability programs, delineates the steps essential to successful program implementation, and provides examples of promising programs and best practices."

9. Safe Schools/ Healthy Students

<http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/initiative/resources.aspx>

"Browse more than 50 Federal documents and Web sites covering important issues around youth and school violence prevention. Find out more about violence prevention programs, organizations and agencies supporting prevention, and the reports released by the Federal Government."

10. Early Warning Timely Response (U.S. Dept. Of Ed)

<http://cecp.air.org/guide/guide.pdf>

This is a forty page guide to safe schools that is supported by the U.S. Department of Education.

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A Summary prepared for  
Project Safe Neighborhoods  
The Northern District of Ohio

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**Mission of ISPV**

The Institute for the Study and Prevention of Violence promotes interdisciplinary research on the causes and prevention of violence, engages in the design, implementation and evaluation of community-based programs for violence prevention and, using a multidisciplinary approach, trains teachers, law enforcement personnel and other professionals on principles and practices related to violence prevention. The Institute helps bridge the gap between science and practice to effectively inform public policy related to violence prevention.

