

Education: Cornerstone of A Civilized Society

by Dr. Steve Edwards, National Crime Prevention Council

Safety and security in America's schools continues to capture media attention. During the week of February 2nd, there were three tragic events on school grounds. In Washington, D.C., a seventeen-year-old star football player was gunned down in the hallway of his high school just outside the cafeteria. The following day, a Florida middle school student was stabbed in the bathroom prior to the start of school and left there to bleed to death. In the same Florida middle school the following day, a ten-year-old girl was raped at the school by two of her male classmates.

Incidents such as these reinforce the need for greater attention to safety and security training and education for those who are responsible for our children while they are at school and/or on school grounds. Research has demonstrated that the combination of educating all stakeholders in the value of security hardware along with addressing safety as a climate issue has the greatest opportunity for creating more secure learning environments in our schools. It is clear from the incidents of early February that education is critical to this equation. After the school shooting in Washington and the two events in Florida, parents, during highly emotional meetings, were look-

ing for the quick fix. The call for more metal detectors, increased security and additional cameras was at the forefront of parent and community concerns.

The value of increased technology is only one piece, however. We need to continue to educate all stakeholders on the need for increased training for school administrators, faculty and staff, parents, students and the community at-large. There are 16,000 school districts in America that provide public education to over 80 million school-age children. No district, school or community wants to be the next to fall prey to a tragic event on school grounds. To reduce the likelihood of these tragedies, we need to make use of all resources available to comprehensively educate an entire society on the need for taking safety and security to the next level.

One resource that provides a comprehensive at looking at both the safety and security of schools is the *Be Safe & Sound* program. The *Be Safe & Sound* program assists schools and communities by engaging school administrators, parents, policymakers and the greater community in conversation and in designing a

plan of action. The *Be Safe & Sound* toolkit addresses three important questions:

- Where are you now?
- Where do you want to be?
- How do we get there?

The first question is answered by completing a school safety audit and school climate survey. The toolkit addresses the second question by providing valuable information to help stakeholders take the information gathered and identify current gaps. The toolkit also assists stakeholders in designing an action plan to achieve intended goals, thus addressing the third question.

The *Be Safe & Sound* toolkit and associated materials is one resource that schools should take advantage of to increase school safety and security in their communities. The *Be Safe & Sound* program is an initiative of the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) and its corporate partners, the Allstate Foundation, ASSA ABLOY, and Security Industry Association (SIA). Currently, *Be Safe and Sound* has outreach to over 40 states. To bring the *Se Safe and Sound* program to your school or community, contact Steve Edwards or Meghan Sharp at the National Crime Prevention Council at 202-466-6272, or visit our website at www.ncpc.org. ❖