Research on School Security
The Impact of Security Measures on Students

The National Association of School Psychologists cautions against over-emphasizing extreme physical security measures or universally increasing armed security in schools as such strategies may undermine the learning environment while not necessarily safeguarding students.[1] When considering school-wide efforts to promote safety, NASP recommends addressing the continuum of needs and services that lead to improved safety, well-being, and learning for children and youth, instead of the historical practice of primarily increasing school building safety measures, such as armed security guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras.[2] The decision to utilize armed security should be made based on the needs of individual schools and communities. NASP believes that armed security in schools should be provided only by school resource officers, police officers specially trained to work in schools. Research on the impact of such security measures on students supports these recommendations.

Trends in the Use of Security Measures in Schools
- Sixty-eight percent of students ages 12–18 reported in 2009 the presence of security guards or police officers in their schools; 70% reported the use of security cameras; and 11% reported the use of metal detectors.[3]

- In the 2009–10 school year, 61% of public schools reported that they used one or more security cameras to monitor their students (up from 19% in 1999-2000). By grade level, the rates were 84% of high schools, 73% of middle schools, and 51% of primary schools.[4]

- Stringent security measures are increasingly being used in U.S. public schools,[5] even in schools where there are no discernible threats to safety.[6] Schools are also employing strict discipline policies to keep students in line and maintain safety.[7]

Impact of Security Measures on Violence
- There is no clear evidence that the use of metal detectors, security cameras, or guards in schools is effective in preventing school violence, [8,9,10,11] and little is known about the potential for unintended consequences that may accompany their adoption.[12]

- There has not been sufficient research to determine if the presence of metal detectors in schools reduces the risk of violent behavior among students.[13]

- Some researchers have expressed concern about the widespread use of guards, cameras, and other security technologies, given that so little is known about their effectiveness.[14,15]

- Research has found security strategies, such as the use of security guards and metal detectors, to be consistently ineffective in protecting students[16] and to be associated with more incidents of school crime and disruption[17] and higher levels of disorder in schools.[18]

- Evidence from a school–police partnership implemented in New York City reveals that students in these schools continue to experience higher than average problems linked directly to future criminality, compared to students in other New York City schools not involved in the partnership.[19]

- Surveillance cameras in schools may have the effect of simply moving misbehavior to places in schools or outside of schools that lack surveillance. Even more troubling, it's possible that cameras may function as enticement to large-scale violence, such as in the case of the Virginia Tech shooter who mailed video images of himself to news outlets.[20]

- Research suggests that the presence of security guards and metal detectors in schools may actually increase levels of violence in schools by strengthening the influence of youth "street" culture with its emphasis on self-protection.[21]

Impact on Students' Perceptions of Safety

- The widespread public impression that schools are unsafe—fueled by rare, but highly visible school shootings—is contradicted by empirical evidence.[22,23] In fact, schools are not only safe, but are arguably safer today than they were a decade ago.[24]

- Research comparing the levels of fear among 12- to 18-year-old students before and after the Columbine tragedy found that, contrary to expectations, students were only slightly more fearful after Columbine.[25] In fact, evidence suggests that students believe their schools to be safe places and that their schools' security strategies are unnecessary.[26]

- Analysis of media reports of the Columbine shooting suggests that perceptions of that tragedy were merged with terrorism as part of a broad framework of fear and national security,[27] stimulating increased use of stringent security measures in U.S. schools.[28,29]

- Studies have shown that the presence of security guards and metal detectors in schools negatively impacts students' perceptions of safety and even increases fear among some students.[30,31]

- Many types of school security correspond with a significantly greater likelihood that students will be worried about crime—while none reduce feelings of worry.[32]

- The use of metal detectors is negatively correlated with students' sense of safety at school, even when taking into account the level of violence at the schools.[33]

Impact on the School Climate

- Studies suggest that restrictive school security measures have the potential to harm school learning environments.[34,35]

- The adoption of rigid and intrusive security measures in schools diminishes the rights of students and increases the likelihood that trivial forms of student misconduct that used to be handled informally by schools will result in arrest and referral to the courts.[36,37]

- Along with the increasing use of security measures,[38] schools are employing strict discipline policies to keep students in line and maintain safety, which undoubtedly negatively influences the social climate of schools.[39]

- According to the courts, surveillance cameras provide students with a reasonable expectation of safety and if they are attacked in full view of a camera and no one comes to their aid, schools could be successfully sued.[40]

- Research suggests that the presence of school resource officers does not change students' views of the police or of offending,[41] and their presence has engendered concern that schools are criminalizing student behavior by moving problematic students into the juvenile justice system rather than disciplining them at school.[42]

- Analysis of the use of surveillance cameras in schools suggests that they may work to corrode the educational environment by, among other things, implicitly labeling students as untrustworthy (cameras magnify this impact since their sole purpose is to record misbehaviors and deter through intimidation).[43]

For more information on policies to improve school safety, see *NASP Recommendations for Comprehensive School Safety Policies* at http://www.nasponline.org/communications/press-release/NASP_School_Safety_Recommendations_January%202013.pdf.

Endnotes

[1] National Association of School Psychologists. (2013, January 9). *NASP cautions against increasing armed security to improve school safety* (Press Release). Bethesda, MD: Author. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/communications/press-release/NASP_Statement_on_Increasing_Armed_Security.pdf

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