EDUCATORS
AT RISK

What Steps Should You Be Taking to Prevent Violence Against Educators and Staff

A recent study by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that one-third of surveyed teachers reported experiencing at least one incident of verbal and/or threatening violence from students during COVID and over 40% of school administrators reported verbal or threatening violence from parents during COVID.

These statistics are staggering and most likely contributing to the current high turnover rate of educators and school personnel. The APA study reports almost half of the teachers surveyed – 49% -- reported they want or plan to quit or transfer jobs due to "concerns about school climate and school safety."

It's clear a comprehensive solution is required to protect educators and staff, but what does that look like? Regardless of the program you decide to implement, there are three top priorities required to develop a workplace violence prevention program:

▶ Training

▶ Reporting and Analysis

▶ Communication and Culture

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TRAINING

The entire education community needs to do their part to prevent violence in schools, and training is an essential empowerment tool. All staff must receive high-quality training to learn how to identify risk factors, practice de-escalation techniques, and protect themselves and exit when necessary.

The responsibility for developing workplace violence prevention programs often rests with the security team. As a result, some organizations choose a training program for the entire education community that's more appropriate only for the security team.

A number of educators in the APA survey reported feelings of high stress in part to limited input in school policies and procedures. For a training program to be successful, it has to feel relevant to the people being trained. What's relevant to the security team is different from what's relevant to teachers. That's why all staff members should be involved in choosing, creating, reviewing, and updating workplace violence prevention training for their organizations.

The only people who truly understand what educators encounter every day are the educators, and it's essential they're included when you evaluate whether a program will meet organization needs.

Once chosen, implementing a relevant training program means tailoring the program even further to the employees being trained. Ideally, trainers should include a security professional, educator, and school administrator. The particular needs of each department should also be addressed -- a teacher might need a different kind of level or training than an administrator.

All new employees should receive training before their first day, and if your training is appropriately targeted, employees that move from one department to another should also receive new training for the new department. All employees should repeat training yearly.

REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Complete, efficient, and consistent reporting is the number one solution that enables all other workplace violence interventions to succeed.

You can't know where your organization needs extra support or which intervention will be most effective if you don't know exactly what's happening, where it's happening, when it's happening, and why it's happening. It's also difficult to justify additional spending for security needs when you don't have robust data to back up your requests.

When you know exactly where and what the problems are, you can begin to develop an informed strategy for solving them.

What Are Some Helpful Metrics to Track?

▶ **Rate of violent incidents** – Knowing the rate of incidents helps you identify areas that might need more resources or an updated violence prevention plan.

▶ **Severity of Incidents** – When you have to prioritize, begin with units that have both a high rate and high severity of incidents.

▶ **Time and Day of Occurrence** – You might find you need more security presence on Friday afternoons or that the most violent incidents happen in the school yard outside. Changing your operating protocols during those events to help prevent increased violence.

▶ **Incident Details** – You may notice patterns in patient behavior that help you develop more effective prevention techniques.

▶ **Response Details** – Tracking response details helps you discover what's working and what's not, so you can use the data to optimize training and processes.

▶ **Mishaps** – Did something "almost" go wrong? Recording mishaps helps you learn what caused the situation to "almost" go wrong and what you did to prevent a bigger problem.

The only way to improve your workplace violence prevention strategies is to keep meticulous records of what's happening, what you're doing about it, and how it's working. It's important to continually review the data from your reports to learn what's working well and consider where improvements need to be made.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Reporting is the one intervention that enables all others to succeed, but without the right culture and communication strategies around workplace violence, you won't get the data you need.

Reporting should be encouraged, supported, and required.

Establish a clear definition of what workplace violence is and what offenses are reportable and make reporting a requirement. The more complete your reporting is, the better picture you'll get of where your problems lie and what you can do to solve them.

You don't have to limit your reporting to what's required by OSHA. Establish a clear definition of what workplace violence is, including all forms of harassment and bullying. Make sure all employees know exactly what offenses are reportable, and make reporting a requirement, not an option. The more complete your reporting is, the better picture you'll get of where your problems lie and what tailored solutions you can develop to solve them.

Creating a culture of reporting requires an organizational mindset change, and while that starts with educators, staff, and administrators, student engagement is also essential.

The importance of encouraging a community-based approach to campus safety cannot be understated, but it can be challenging to get students and staff to report suspicious behavior or incidents if they fear it may lead to retaliation or being ostracized. When developing a workplace violence prevention plan, it's essential to consider a solution that makes reporting safe, easy, and anonymous.

Consider what kind of cultural or administrative shifts need to happen to address them.

Acceptance

Communicate frequently to your community that violence is not a part of the job. It's a problem you're committed to addressing.

Empathy

Make it clear that the purpose of reporting is not to discipline or stigmatize students or their parents who are acting out. Even offenses that may be minor, understandable, or out of a student's control because of cognitive impairment must be reported, since understanding why and how all violent incidents occur is the best way for your organization to develop strategies that can prevent them.

Inefficacy

Follow up on all reports of violent incidents. Inform the victim of what your organization is doing to address the particular problem that was reported or to help prevent the type of problem from happening in the future.

Inconvenience

Use a robust records management system (RMS) with customizable fields and mobile capabilities that make reporting fast and easy — anywhere where there's a computer or mobile device. A good software solution will not only streamline reporting processes, but it will also include easy and customizable report-generation capabilities that help your organization analyze and respond to the state of workplace violence on a regular basis.

Fear

Make it clear that there will never be any retribution for reporting. Everyone from the school board on down should be involved in communicating that your organization supports a culture of reporting so that you can all work together to ensure a safe environment for all employees.

Finally, communication is key. The messages above must be communicated regularly — during daily huddles, in newsletters, on signs throughout facilities, and in training.

WHAT NEXT?

It's clear that drastic steps need to be taken to help protect school personnel, create a safer environment, and reduce turnover rates. When developing your school's violence prevention programs, it's essential to include:

▶ Comprehensive training programs developed in collaboration with educators and school personnel

▶ Complete, consistent incident reporting that allows security personnel to track trends and gain actionable insights

▶ A culture of communication that makes it clear reporting is encouraged, supported, and required

▶ Preplanning and incident management software that allows users to mobilize quickly in fast-moving situations

▶ Tools that empower staff, students, and community members with anonymous reporting capabilities that help improve safety and security

▶ Easy-to-access documented safety procedures and mass notifications

▶ Support for student and educator mental health and well-being

The right software solution can help support these needs. Omnigo's streamlined solutions enable you to approach campus safety, security, and fast-moving situations proactively and intelligently, protecting staff, students, and your campus. Check out our comprehensive suite of education security solutions or contact us to learn more.

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