

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

The 2007-2008 school year has not begun on a very good note in several districts in Ohio and across our nation. Surely, you are aware of some of the headline stories such as:

- The fourteen year-old shooter at Success Tech High School in downtown Cleveland.
- The third-grade, suburban Cincinnati student who had a loaded gun on the school bus.
- The teenager in Pennsylvania whose mother was helping him build an arsenal of weapons that were going to be allegedly used in some form of retaliation at his school.

Keep in mind that these are just the incidents of violence from this fall that we are aware of at this time. There could be others, and events of this nature can happen anywhere. These kinds of activities only serve to boost enrollments in private or parochial schools for those who have those opportunities. They also serve to tarnish what once was a stellar reputation enjoyed by most of our public school systems.

What else has contributed to the demise of many of our public school systems? One of a few of the contributors that come to my mind are the liberal interpretations of the Bill of Rights by too many people and organizations to mean that one is free to do whatever one wants to do. You can see examples of this almost any day regardless of the fact that every student has a copy of our District Student Handbook. In addition, every student signs off on a form that states that he/she has read the contents of the Student Handbook,

and understands it. The parent also signs this form. It doesn't say that you agree with it, only that you understand it. So, who is responsible?

Call me old-fashioned if you like, but I believe that one's clothing and behavior should reflect some form of self-discipline and responsibility. There is a time and a place for anything---I suppose, whether it is inappropriate clothing, behavior, or language. However, school grounds are not the place to see overexposed cleavage and mini-skirts on girls. Nor, is it the place for boys to wear pants that are specifically designed to hang off of their rear ends. Parents, do you know how this fashion called "sagging" got its start? Even if this isn't the message that your child is trying to convey, I do not believe that the school is the place to express this fashion statement. Actually, I am an advocate for school uniforms, as many public schools are now turning to. It solves this problem---period. Who is responsible?

Another problem is cell phones and text messaging. Even though there are rules in place regarding the use of electronic devices, the adults in the buildings don't really have eyes in the back of their heads. This rule is a difficult one to enforce. However, let's not be so naïve as to not realize the potential for cheating through text messaging during the school day. I often wonder how I ever grew up and made it in this world without all of the electronic devices, including calculators. Again, there is a time, place, and appropriate use of electronic devices at school. Who is responsible?

All of this “do what you want whenever you want” mentality is seemingly leading to chaos in the public schools, and in our country, in general. When the system, school or government, turns into chaos, positive accomplishments become fewer and farther between. Surviving in today’s world is about all of us working together, regardless of race or nationality. There are no islands upon which to camp. We need more of the attitude that it’s about “us” as a body of people, and that everything isn’t just about “me,” the individual. Who is responsible?

Television and Hollywood share some responsibility in all this decay of our behavioral and moral characteristics. How many movies or TV shows are available for children to watch that are either loaded with violence or full of sexual content---or both? Of course, all of this is done in the name of free speech with little or no regard for the effect that all of this Hollywood violence may be having on our young people. As parents, the best answer to this exposure to violence, drugs, and sex on TV and in the movies is to not allow your child to watch it. And, let’s not forget about all the problems in our world today that can be traced back to the internet. Who is responsible?

Finally, an article on this topic cannot be written without mentioning another contributing factor in all of this, and that is the decline and decay of the traditional family unit. This often has a devastating effect on children. Behavioral and academic concerns that have never appeared in the child prior to a family break-up can suddenly become apparent on a regular basis. Who is responsible?

What are our schools doing to address the area of safety?

- We have security cameras inside and outside of all of our buildings and on school buses.
- We have the Safe Schools Hotline where parents and students can report various incidents, including bullying and harassment.
- We have board policies against bullying or harassment of any kind.
- We have a full-time School Resource Office (SRO) in each attendance area.
- We practice and execute lockdown drills in all of our schools.
- We have purchased a portable metal detector to be used by our SRO staff in the district.
- All of our employees will soon have identification badges to wear when on duty.
- We keep as many exit doors locked at each building as we can. This is much easier to do at the high school buildings than at our present elementary buildings. This problem should be eliminated once our new elementary buildings are ready for occupancy.
- All visitors to our schools are required to report directly to the school office, and to sign-in upon visiting the school.
- We have various governance rules outlined in the Student Handbook that school staffs are expected to follow and enforce, including internet use and supervision while at school.
- Other measures are being considered by our district to “beef up” security even more.

- We have caring staff members, including our counselors who are there for students who need to talk to them.

Even with all of the above-mentioned safeguards, there is no way to ensure absolute safety if an individual or group is determined to wreak havoc in a school. All that we can do is our best to show our concern for student and staff safety and to continue to practice due diligence towards those efforts. But, we cannot do it alone. We need our parents and our communities to join us as one big team fighting against school violence. Together, we can solve most any issue. Safety is of the utmost importance. Academics are second. We need you with us working as one team to promote both of these goals. Thank you.

Charles P. Kimble

Superintendent