

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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RELEASE: August 18, 1999

Governor Attends Safe Schools Seminar; Stresses Need to Prevent Youth Violence and Open Lines of Communication

Gov. Christie Whitman today spoke at a safe schools training seminar, telling educators and administrators that everyone has a role in preventing tragedy and that communication is the strongest weapon there is when trying to keep teens from behaving violently.

"As you know, we must become better at identifying and reaching troubled youths before violence occurs," the Governor told assembled participants. "We need to detect potential problems as soon as possible and make children, teachers and parents aware of the help that is available. And we have to do our best to create a positive, violence-free atmosphere."

"Everyone has a role to play in preventing youth violence," Gov. Whitman stressed. "In New Jersey, where we invest so much in the education of our young people, we must also care enough to create an environment that gives all our children every opportunity to succeed."

"One of my foremost priorities is ensuring that all of our children are safe and secure in their school buildings," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "While I believe that schools are among the safest places for our children, the department is doing all it can do to make sure the effective programs are in place to prevent incidents of violence. Today's conference is one example of department activities aimed at providing districts with the information they need to ensure the safety of our children."

The Governor applauded attendees for taking the initiative to attend the seminar and for their commitment to preventing school violence and creating a positive environment in New Jersey's schools.

The training seminar is a series of six one-day seminars being offered to school administrators, school crisis management staff and substance awareness coordinators by the Department of Education (DOE) and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). The seminar is being co-hosted by the Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health and Hospitals and the Lucent Foundation.

The series is being hosted by UMDNJ as part of its contract with DOE for the Sudden Violent Loss and Mediation Services Project, a state funded program providing prevention, intervention and education in areas of violence and conflict resolution.

The series is part of DOE's response to numerous requests for assistance and guidance by school officials in light of recent tragedies around the country. The seminar addresses topics including the identification of school and community resources available to educators, the application of the workforce violence model in school settings and strategies for dealing with safe school issues.

In addition to the seminar, DOE established a grant program that provides aid for violence prevention and crisis management programs and the Safe Schools Initiative implemented by Gov. Whitman.

Gov. Whitman's Safe Schools Initiative includes the Zero Tolerance for Guns Act which requires that any student carrying a weapon in school is immediately removed. It also requires the development of county-wide alternative programs that provide a way to keep disruptive or violent students in school, but away from the students they were disturbing.

New Jersey has also designed the Intervention and Referral Services Project to help schools be more effective at reaching troubled kids. In addition, the Violence Institute at the University of Medicine and Dentistry has created a Tip Sheet to help teachers and parents know what patterns of behavior should send warning signals and what to do with students who may be at risk for violent behavior.

Keeping Kids Safe Governor Christie Whitman's Initiatives to Reduce Youth Violence

Intervention and Referral Services Project

This initiative, developed by the Department of Education was designed to help schools develop more effective intervention programs. Every New Jersey school is already required to provide intervention services; this program will help ensure that these services meet the needs of students.

Gun Locks

Governor Whitman has placed \$175,000 in the state budget to help new gun owners pay for gun locks to eliminate children's access to weapons. The Governor has also proposed legislation to require that every gun sold in New Jersey either have smart gun technology or a gun lock.

Tip Sheets for Recognizing Violence

Prepared by the Violence Institute, the tip sheet tells teachers, parents, and other students what patterns can signal potentially violent tendencies and what actions should be taken when a student exhibits them.

School Search Manual

Regarded by the National School Boards Association as one of the best resources available to help school officials keep guns and dangerous weapons out of schools.

Safe Schools Initiative

This program helps prevent violence, disruption, and drug and alcohol abuse in schools. It includes the Zero Tolerance for Guns Act, which the Governor signed to require the immediate removal of students who bring weapons to school, and the development of countywide alternative education programs as a way to keep disruptive or violent students in school but away from other students whose education was being disturbed.

Uniform Emergency and Trauma Protocol

A Uniform Emergency and Trauma Protocol is being developed for the young victims of violence. By reaching out to young victims or witnesses of violence, further violent behavior can be discouraged.

Crisis Intervention Units

The Crisis Intervention Units in each of the 21 county Family Courts will be expanded to include jurisdiction over children who are identified as being at risk for behaving violently, under a proposal offered by Gov. Whitman.

Commission to Deter Criminal Activity

Governor Whitman reactivated this Commission under the direction of the Attorney General, which is developing a peer-based violence prevention program. The Attorney General is also encouraging school officials to work with law enforcement agencies to ensure

that our schools are safe places for our children to learn.

School Based Youth Services

These programs operate in 30 New Jersey school districts and are run by the Department of Human Services. The School Based Youth Services Program has a proactive approach that attempts to reach kids before it is too late. The program provides comprehensive services directly at the school sites. One aspect of the program is a new approach that involves kids building a "fight-free" school. Called SAVVY for "Students Against Violence and Victimization of Youth," it has resulted in a 93% reduction in the number of fights in one participating school. (Essex Vo-Tech in Newark)

Children's Mental Health System of Care

The Department of Human Services is developing a Children's Mental Health System of Care initiative, a major reform of our state's system for dealing with children with serious emotional disturbance. This initiative will help us to manage our current mental health and child welfare services more effectively and to expand the range of services available for children and families. It will close gaps in the current system and give families real options when they need them most.

Center for Youth Policy and Programs

This initiative will provide resources for agencies and organizations that foster personal responsibility among youth. The Center will establish a statewide youth advisory commission, with representatives from such organizations as the New

Jersey Youth Corps and the Work Incentive Board youth councils. It will also develop a youth leadership training institute, a mentor program, and a best-practices component that will spotlight successful youth programs.

