

Exceptional Children, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 335-347
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School Discipline at a Crossroads: From Zero Tolerance to Early Response

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ABSTRACT: *Dramatic incidents of school violence have thrust school discipline to the forefront of public consciousness. Despite a dramatic increase in the use of zero tolerance procedures and policies, there is little evidence demonstrating that these procedures have increased school safety or improved student behavior. Moreover, a punitive disciplinary climate may make any attempt to include more students with behavioral problems a cause for conflict between general and special educators. A preventive, early response disciplinary model increases the range of effective options for addressing violence and disruption across both general and special education. Ultimately, the effectiveness of any disciplinary system may be judged by the extent to which it teaches students to solve interpersonal and intrapersonal problems without resorting to disruption or violence.*

The shocking and tragic violence that has played out in our nation's schools in the last 2 years has elevated the status of school discipline from an issue of perennial concern to one of national urgency. No longer can small rural districts assume that violence is an inner-city issue and that they are immune from problems of school disruption or violence. No longer can we expect special educators working alone to solve all problems of emotional and behavioral disorders. Rather, it has become clear that the threat of school violence cuts across class, geographical location, and the presence or absence of a disability label.

Faced with disruptive and aggressive behavior, a typical response has been the punish-

ment and exclusion of students exhibiting challenging behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Well-defined disciplinary requirements and attention to school security have a place in schools in maintaining order and ensuring safety. Yet harsh and punitive disciplinary strategies have not proven sufficient to foster a school climate that can prevent the occurrence of school violence. Rather, a broader perspective, stressing early identification, comprehensive planning, prevention, and instruction in important social skills, is necessary if schools are to prevent the tragedies that happen too often in our schools. This article explores new perspectives in school discipline and violence prevention, and suggests effective strategies for dealing with disruptive and violent behavior in schools.

CURRENT PRACTICE IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

The key importance of school discipline in preventing school violence has been highlighted by data demonstrating the relationship between day-to-day school disciplinary disruptions and more serious violence. In the recent National Center for Educational Statistics report, *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97* (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998), a clear relationship emerged between low-level school disruption and serious school violence. Among schools reporting at least one serious discipline issue, 28% also reported at least one crime; in contrast, only 3% of schools with minor or no reported discipline problems reported the presence of crime. These less dramatic, but more frequent school and classroom disruptions, may also play a part in shaping perceptions about the safety of schools. In an examination of violence in rural school districts, Peterson, Beekley, Speaker, and Pietrzak (1996) reported that 52% of teachers and administrators in rural schools believed that violence was increasing at the middle/high school level. But the behaviors they perceived as escalating most dramatically were not the types of deadly violence that appear to concern us most—drugs, gang involvement, or weapons-carrying—but rather behaviors that indicate incivility, such as rumors, verbal intimidation and threats, pushing and shoving by students, and sexual harassment. Perhaps perceptions of school safety are shaped as much by serious violent episodes as by overall perceptions of school climate.

If there is a reliable relationship between the frequent less serious disruption and serious violent crime, efforts to improve the overall school disciplinary climate may well make an important contribution to the prevention of school violence. By implementing comprehensive programs that improve overall school climate and reduce minor disruption, schools may also be reducing the risk of more serious violent incidents that appear to be associated with higher levels of minor disruption. Such data support the argument that the problem of violence in our schools is related to a breakdown in civility. More importantly, they reaffirm the

value in studying school discipline and in particular preventive alternatives to current practice. Indeed, recent findings suggest that current school practice in discipline does not appear to be effective in addressing problems of disruption and violence in schools.

Gap Between Research and Practice

The gap between research and practice has been a continuing issue in the professional literature (Gersten, Vaughn, Deshler, & Schiller, 1997). That gap appears to be especially acute in the areas of school discipline and behavior, leaving schools with insufficient resources to cope with current serious problems of disruption and violence.

Research in the fields of applied behavior analysis (Horner & Carr, 1997), teacher effectiveness (Emmer, 1994; Rosenshine, 1986), and special education (C. Nelson & Rutherford, 1987; J. Nelson, 1996) has yielded effective strategies of individual programming, classroom management, and instruction to improve the behavioral climate for students with and without disabilities. Yet there is abundant evidence that such strategies are significantly underutilized in the public schools. The efficacy of positive consequences for managing student behavior, for example, has been widely demonstrated (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993; C. Nelson & Rutherford, 1987); the failure to balance positive and negative consequences may indeed yield a coercive cycle that increases the likelihood of disruptive behavior (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993). Yet negative consequences appear to outpace the use of positive reinforcers both in general education (Gable, Hendrickson, Young, Shores, & Stowitschek, 1983; Heller & White, 1975; Shores et al., 1993) and special education (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch, 1990). Some have suggested that the underutilization of effective behavioral strategies is due to school resistance (Axelrod, Moyer, & Berry, 1990), while others (Fantuzzo & Atkins, 1992) have placed the blame on ineffective models of research and dissemination. Regardless of the reason, what is apparent is that the most effective behavioral strategies are not well-implemented in school discipline in general education (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997).

This underuse of effective behavioral strategies may be due in part to inadequate teacher training. Effective behavior management and behavior support have been consistently rated as among the most important teaching skills by both general and special education teachers (Cannon, Idol, & West, 1992; Mandell & Strain, 1978). Yet at the same time, classroom teachers report feeling most underprepared in the area of classroom management (Barrett & Davis, 1995; Pilarski, 1994). Ill-equipped to handle the challenges of disruptive classroom behavior, inexperienced teachers may increasingly adopt an authoritarian approach to management and engage students in power struggles that serve only to escalate disruption (Emmer, 1994; Kearney, Plax, Sorenson, & Smith, 1988).

Ineffective School Disciplinary Practices

The past 10 years have seen a dramatic increase in the promulgation of zero tolerance school discipline policies. Relying primarily upon school exclusion (suspension and expulsion) and school security measures (e.g., metal detectors, video surveillance, locker searches), zero tolerance policy tends to punish both major and minor incidents severely in order to "send a message" that certain behaviors will not be tolerated (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Since the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act (1994), federal policy has adopted a zero tolerance approach for firearms, mandating a 1-year expulsion for their possession on school grounds. Some school districts have extended zero tolerance even farther to fighting (Petrillo, 1997), homework completion (McFeely, 1998), or even off-campus behavior (Seymour, 1999). Although suspensions and expulsions for apparently trivial reasons such as possession of cough drops or nail files have fueled controversy over zero tolerance (Skiba & Peterson), many districts continue to toughen their disciplinary policies ("Groups critical of no second chances," 1999).

Noguera (1995) has argued that stringent disciplinary policies are adopted less for their effectiveness than for their symbolic value, attempting to reassure administrators, parents, and teachers that strong actions are being taken in response to a perceived breakdown of school order. In an era of educational accountability,

however, it is reasonable to inquire about the effects and effectiveness of any educational policy. To what extent have zero tolerance and exclusionary discipline been effective in increasing school safety?

School Security Measures. In the aftermath of the Columbine High School tragedy, there have been increased calls for widespread application of school security technology. Yet it is important to note that, aside from district testimonials, there are few empirical evaluations of the efficacy of such approaches. Table 1 presents the results of an electronic literature search on the ERIC and Criminal Justice Abstract databases for published evaluations providing data on the effectiveness of school security measures (*metal detector, locker search, surveillance camera, and school uniforms*) from 1988 to 1999. As can be noted, the data on such measures are extremely sparse. There can be little doubt that more data is needed on the effectiveness of prevention for reducing school violence (Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998). Yet the bottom rows of Table 1 suggest that preventive approaches such as conflict resolution and improved classroom management come a good deal closer to acceptable standards of accountability for educational interventions than do the more politically popular school security measures.

The data that do exist fail to provide much support that school security measures are sufficient for deterring violence. The National Center for Education Statistics report, *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97* (Heaviside et al., 1998) documented that schools that rely heavily on zero tolerance policies continue to be less safe than schools that implement fewer components of zero tolerance. Using structural equation modeling to predict the incidence of school violence, Mayer and Leone (1999) found structural paths suggesting that overreliance on physical security procedures appears to be associated with an *increased* risk of school disorder. Moreover, qualitative research has suggested that misuse of school security measures such as locker or strip searches can create an emotional backlash in students (Hyman & Perone, 1998).

TABLE 1

Number of Published Investigations for Selected School Security and Preventive Measures Listed in ERIC and Criminal Justice Abstracts, 1988-1999

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Number of Published Articles Retrieved in Search^a</i>	<i>Number of Evaluations or Research Studies^b</i>
School Security Measures		
Locker Search	4	0
Metal Detector	28	2
School Uniforms	19	2
Surveillance Camera	4	0
Preventive Measures		
Conflict Resolution	132	35
Classroom Behavior Management	512	103

^aDocuments were retrieved via electronic search on the ERIC and Criminal Justice Abstracts databases, using any variation of the term (e.g., locker searches). Only studies that took place in the context of schools were retained.

^bDocuments that included the term study, research, or survey were retained, including either research studies or reviews of published literature. Investigations conducting survey research about the strategy were retained, but not research on a more general topic that mentioned the strategy in passing. No attempt was made to judge the quality of the research design.

In an era of school reform characterized by an intense focus on the accountability of academic instruction, the almost total lack of data on the effects of school security measures is at best surprising. In the wake of the Columbine shootings, school security measures have and doubtless will be more widely used in schools. Indeed, an emphasis on assessing building security appears to be an important component in a comprehensive plan for addressing violence and disruption (Dwyer, Osher, and Warger 1998). Yet as security technology is increasingly considered for school adoption, it would be very valuable to know whether the substantial outlays that will be required will in any way guarantee a reduction in school disruption or violence.

Unfair and Inconsistent Usage. One of the more widely replicated findings in the field of behavior management is the key importance of consistency in the administration of consequences (Deur & Parke, 1970; Wahler & Dumas, 1986). Yet research on the application of school discipline suggests that unfair and inconsistent application of disciplinary measures is common, and that school attributes make a strong contribution to predicting which students

are disciplined. In an ethnographic study, Brantlinger (1991) reported that disciplinary sanctions at the secondary level were perceived to be unfairly targeted at low-income students by *both* high- and low-income students. Districtwide studies of school discipline have typically found wide variation in the use of suspension and expulsion across schools (Kaeser, 1979; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986). In a multivariate study predicting the administration of school suspension, Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles (1982) reported that, while student behavior and attitude were correlated with suspension, school characteristics such as school governance, teacher attitude towards students, and race made a greater overall contribution toward predicting suspension.

Relationship to School Dropout. School suspension has been consistently found to be a moderate to strong predictor of school dropout. In the High School and Beyond study, over 30% of sophomores who dropped out of school had been suspended, a rate three times that of peers who stayed in school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Indeed, the relationship between suspension and dropout may not be acci-

dental. In ethnographic studies, school disciplinarians report that suspension is sometimes used as a tool for *pushout*, to encourage "troublemakers" or those perceived as unlikely to succeed in school to leave (Bowditch, 1993).

Research from the field of developmental psychopathology may help explain the relationship between suspension and school dropout. Throughout the elementary school years, students at risk for developing antisocial behavior exhibit disruptive behavior and experience social and academic deficits that increasingly alienate them from teachers and peers (Patterson, 1992). By middle school, these youngsters become less interested in school and begin to seek out other antisocial peers. At the same time, their families often fail to monitor their whereabouts, allowing more unsupervised time on the streets (Ramsey, Walker, Shinn, & O'Neill, 1989). For such a student, it seems unlikely that school suspension will successfully impact behavior. Rather, suspension may simply accelerate the course of delinquency by providing a troubled youth with little parental supervision a few extra days with deviant peers. Research in the field of juvenile delinquency suggests that the strength of the school social bond is an important predictor in explaining delinquency (Jenkins, 1997). From a developmental standpoint then, one must question the wisdom of school exclusionary strategies that are expressly intended to break that bond with troublesome students.

Disproportionate Use with Minorities. Analyzing Office of Civil Rights data, the Children's Defense Fund (1974) first reported rates of suspension for African-American students between two and three times higher than those for white students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Since that report, racial disproportionality in the use of school suspension has been a highly consistent finding (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Kaeser, 1979; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). African-American students are also exposed more frequently to more punitive disciplinary strategies, such as corporal punishment (Shaw & Braden, 1990), and are less often consequated with milder disciplinary alternatives

when referred for an infraction (McFadden et al.).

Race appears to make a contribution to disciplinary outcome independent of socioeconomic status or student behavior. Wu et al. (1982) reported that nonwhite students experienced higher rates of suspension than white students, even after controlling for socioeconomic status. Studies including measures of both disciplinary sanction and student behavior (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden et al., 1992) have reported that differences in the rate of misbehavior for White and African-American students are not sufficient to explain large discrepancies in rate of suspension and expulsion. Indeed, African-American students appear to be referred for disciplinary sanctions for less severe behavior (McFadden et al., 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1990). Bowditch (1993) argued that, whether or not ethnic disproportionality in discipline practice is conscious, the overrepresentation of African Americans and those of lower socioeconomic status in disciplinary sanctions contributes to racial stratification in school and society.

IDEA '97 AND THE NEED FOR A SYSTEMWIDE APPROACH

The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) contains a number of promising provisions that should address many of these concerns. Yet the current emphasis on punishment and exclusion in general education creates a situation in which special education initiative alone is insufficient and may well create new tensions between general and special educators. The following new provisions of IDEA '97 argue strongly that if there is to be hope for success in reforming school discipline practice, it will be necessary to undertake a systemwide approach that cuts across both general and special education.

IDEA '97 Disciplinary Requirements.

IDEA '97 contains a number of promising new components clarifying school disciplinary procedures for students with disabilities. New language concerning 45-day placements in interim alternative educational settings are intended to bridge the gap between special and general edu-

cation disciplinary procedures. Mandates that a functional assessment and individual behavior plan be completed prior to the 10th day of suspension can provide needed behavioral support for students at risk for long-term exclusion. Yet the positive behavior supports of IDEA '97 may find slow acceptance in a climate dominated by punishment. The technology of functional assessment, for example, enables school personnel to better understand the "communicative intent" of challenging behavior (Brady & Halle, 1997). In a zero-tolerance environment, however, teachers and administrators may be less interested in understanding communicative intent than in ridding schools and classrooms of troublesome students. As one principal put it to these authors after a workshop on functional assessment, "You don't get it. We don't want to understand these kids; we want to get them out."

Families and School Discipline.

IDEA '97 has as one of its major foci increasing parent participation and ownership in special education. Parent participation has been expanded; beyond the case conference, parents must be included in any meeting in which a decision on their child's educational progress is being made. Again, however, the good intentions of IDEA '97 may come into direct conflict with the perspective and practice of schools. School personnel often view families as the chief cause of school discipline problems; thus, when a child comes to the office repeatedly, it is not uncommon for school disciplinarians to seek to punish parents as well as children (Bowditch, 1993). If parents and families are to be effective in fulfilling a more active role in the education of students with disabilities, alternative disciplinary approaches that treat parents as partners rather than adversaries are critical.

Increased Emphasis on Inclusion.

One of the goals of IDEA '97 revisions is to make inclusion in the general education curriculum the default option for students with disabilities. Yet the inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral problems is fraught with difficulty (Lewis, Chard, & Scott, 1994; Muscott, Morgan, & Meadows, 1996). Under-

trained in effective management strategies, teachers and administrators are likely to respond to challenging behavior with school exclusion. It is not surprising then that students with disabilities, especially students with emotional and behavioral disorders, are overrepresented in the use of suspension and expulsion (Cooley, 1995; Rose, 1988). Without general reform of school discipline practice, increased instructional inclusion for students with emotional and behavioral problems may lead to increased *exclusion* when those students engage in disruptive behavior in general education settings.

In short, attempts by special educators to better meet the behavioral needs of students with disabilities in general education settings are likely to create *increased* conflict with general educators, whose primary goal may well be the removal of troublesome students from mainstream educational environments. In our experience, the IDEA '97 requirement for a continuing free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities who are expelled has created great frustration for many administrators who bridle at the limits it seems to place on their ability to discipline. It may well be this frustration that has led to attempts by legislators and special interest groups to amend or weaken the disciplinary provisions of IDEA '97.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

The stringent and punitive disciplinary climate that currently predominates in America's schools thus leads to two important difficulties. First, like most approaches to behavior change that rely solely on punishment, it has not been effective. Disorder and violence in America's schools do not appear to have been appreciably diminished, despite 4 years of national policy explicitly encouraging tougher responses. Second, for special educators, overreliance on suspension and expulsion represents an important barrier that transforms any attempt to better meet the behavioral and emotional needs of students with disabilities into a potential source of conflict with general education administrators and teachers. It is becoming increasingly apparent that providing effective behavioral supports for

students with disabilities requires that the school disciplinary climate be improved for all students.

If America's schools are to break the cycle of violence, educators and policymakers must begin to look beyond stiffer consequences to long-term planning designed to foster nonviolent school communities. Recently, a comprehensive model of prevention has begun to emerge as a guiding framework for addressing the complexity of emotional and behavioral problems in schools (APA, 1993; Dwyer et al., 1998; Walker et al., 1996). The approach is grounded in a primary prevention approach to mental health and behavior planning (Pianta, 1990), targeting three levels of intervention. That trilevel model is described in detail by other authors in this series (Dwyer, Osher, and Hoffman [this issue]; Sprague and Walker [this issue]).

Such models might be conceptualized as an early response rather than a zero tolerance approach to school violence. An early response model of school discipline assumes that there is no one simple solution that can address all problems of school disruption. Rather, developing safe and responsive schools requires comprehensive and long-term planning, an array of effective strategies, and a partnership of school, family, and community. A number of strategies have been shown to make a contribution to reducing school disruption and creating a more positive climate. Preliminary research suggests that a comprehensive combination of these components can be highly effective in reducing school disruption and violence (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999). Some combination of the following components is likely necessary in order to address the complex problems of violence prevention:

- *Conflict Resolution/Social Instruction.* The Clinton Administration's response to the violence in Littleton, Colorado, has stressed the importance of teaching students alternatives to violence in resolving their conflicts. Although there is as yet little evidence that primary prevention approaches are sufficient for students already exhibiting aggressive behavior (APA, 1993), social instructional approaches can help establish a nonviolent

school climate, by teaching students alternative methods for resolving conflict (Bodine, Crawford, & Schrupf, 1994). In the most comprehensive evaluation of conflict resolution to date, Johnson and Johnson (1996) reported that conflict resolution and peer mediation have demonstrated some success in reducing school suspension and in improving school climate.

- *Classroom Strategies for Disruptive Behavior.* Inadequate preparation for dealing with classroom disruption increases the chance that teacher reactions will contribute to the escalation of minor disruption. Appropriate strategies for handling misbehavior and teaching appropriate behavior can help prevent minor misbehavior from accelerating into a classroom or school crisis (Emmer, 1994; Gunter & Denny, 1996; Murdick & Petch-Hogan, 1996). Increasing the use of positive reinforcement by teachers appears to be capable of a strong effect in reducing school suspension and dropout rates (Meyer, Mitchell, Clementi, & Clement-Robertson, 1993).
- *Parent Involvement.* The national dialogue precipitated by the Littleton tragedy has placed a good deal of blame on parents, and the literature on antisocial behavior indeed reflects the critical importance of parental monitoring (Patterson, 1992). Too often, however, information about inadequate family resources or family instability is used to affix blame, creating an adversarial climate between home and school. Rather than simply blaming parents as the cause of discipline problems, effective disciplinary programs forge a partnership with parents and the community (Barclay & Boone, 1997; Morrison, Olivos, Dominguez, Gomez, & Lena, 1993).
- *Early Warning Signs and Screening.* In the rush to understand the motivations of school shooters, care must be taken to apply early warning signs to help, rather than segregate or profile, troubled students. Yet systematic early identification of students who may be at risk for serious disruption and violence may increase the chances of providing behavioral support before unmet social and behavioral needs escalate into violence (Dwyer et al.,

1998; Forness, Kavale, MacMillan, Asarnow, & Duncan, 1996; Quinn, Mathus, & Rutherford, 1995).

- *School- and Districtwide Data Systems.* One of the striking features of Littleton was the extent to which both school and law enforcement personnel were unaware of risk factors that were common knowledge among students. Improved data collection on discipline and office referrals is critical in evaluating school and district progress in handling both major and minor disciplinary issues (Morgan-D'Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996; Skiba et al., 1997; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996).
- *Crisis and Security Planning.* Beyond consideration of school security technology, effective plans for crisis intervention and security planning are essential in ensuring a coordinated approach to serious school incidents (Bender & McLaughlin, 1997; Myles & Simpson, 1994; Poland, 1994).
- *Schoolwide Discipline and Behavioral Planning.* Schoolwide discipline plans and behavior support teams build consistency and communication and have been shown to be a key element in effective responses to school disruption (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993; Gottfredson et al., 1993; Hawkins, Doueck, & Lishner, 1988).
- *Functional Assessment and Individual Behavior Plans.* Although a number of issues relevant to the functional assessment mandate of IDEA '97 remain to be resolved (Nichols, this issue; Smith, this issue), effective implementation of the positive behavioral supports required by IDEA '97 can help meet the needs of individuals with disabilities or more severe behavioral needs (Broussard & Northrup, 1995; Horner & Carr, 1997; Lewis & Sugai, 1996).

In summary, the early response model of discipline emphasizes a comprehensive program to build positive prosocial behavior, rather than merely punishing inappropriate behavior. Whether at the school or the individual level, effective intervention requires a wide spectrum of options that move significantly beyond a narrow focus on punishment and exclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

The field of special education has made remarkable progress in the past 15 years toward the academic integration of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. Yet the best instructional programs will be for naught if we cannot ensure our children's safety or teach them how to live and work together civilly.

The emerging literature on school discipline may simply reflect what the fields of applied behavior analysis and special education have stressed for 40 years: That punishment, especially punishment alone, cannot teach new behavior (The Council for Exceptional Children, 1991; Skinner, 1953). The literature on negative consequences (Axelrod & Apsche, 1983; MacMillan, Forness, & Trumbull, 1973; Wood & Braaten, 1983) has consistently demonstrated a host of serious side-effects in using punishment-based approaches, including escape and counter-aggression, habituation to progressively stiffer consequences, and reinforcement of the punishing agent. Further, unless accompanied by positive consequences or alternative goals, student reaction to harsh consequences is likely to be unpredictable, as likely to lead to escape or counter-aggression as to any meaningful alternative behavior. The appropriate application of consequences at opportune moments is certainly one tool for teaching students that actions have consequences in a lawful society; yet consequences alone have not been and are not likely to be sufficient.

It is interesting to note that the word *discipline* comes from the same Latin root as the word *disciple*: *discipere*, to teach or comprehend. Children are developmentally incomplete. They will always require socialization, instruction, and correction to shape fundamentally egocentric behavior into interpersonal skills that make our children capable of interacting successfully. The crux of school discipline turns on how instruction and correction are to be provided.

Indeed, the message of recent school shootings may well be that at least some of our nation's children, perhaps large segments of the school population, lack a fundamental understanding of how to solve intra- and interpersonal problems in social settings. The violence perpe-

trated by a handful of individuals in schools has been truly shocking. Yet the fact that the graphic threats of school shooters were often treated as jokes by peers suggests an equally shocking conclusion, that many of our youth have become to some extent inured to frightening levels of violence in resolving conflict. Ultimately, the fundamental challenge in developing effective models of school discipline will be to put together an array of options that can teach both general and special education students the skills they need to live together successfully.

The following articles present a variety of perspectives on school discipline and school violence, and suggest alternative strategies to punitive and exclusionary discipline. Dwyer, Osher, and Hoffman discuss the cross-agency collaboration that resulted in the Department of Education's *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*, and highlight important principles of prevention, early intervention, and school and community collaboration. The importance of early identification and intervention is highlighted by Sprague and Walker, who provide a databased framework for understanding risk and preventing violence. Townsend presents data on the extent and implications of African-American overrepresentation in exclusionary and punitive discipline and outlines approaches for addressing inequity in school discipline. Nichols provides a thought-provoking critique of the adequacy of current functional assessment models to capture the high-intensity, low-frequency behaviors that characterize school violence. Finally, in an analysis of judicial decisions since the promulgation of IDEA '97, Smith sheds light on the gap between current practice and the competencies mandated by the new special education regulations.

Despite a host of concerned opinion on the topic, there is as yet little empirical data on the causes of school violence or the factors that can successfully prevent violence in our schools. Yet school violence has become a matter of public health concern (Hamburg, 1998) that demands consideration by professionals, communities, and schools. If we are to teach both special and general education students how to live together safely and sanely, it is time to

begin a serious consideration of school disciplinary alternatives.

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Manuscript received May 1999; revision accepted September 1999.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Ms. Louise Pinkerton in the preparation of this manuscript and series.

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