



### Administrators Convene to Strengthen Connections

DoDEA’s administrators work at 194 schools in 12 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico, but unite as a team to collectively improve our schools. Professional support, whether advice, best practices, or simply lending an ear, is never more than an e-mail or phone call away. Strengthening relationships between geographically distant leaders was one of the key objectives of the June 2010 Worldwide Administrators’ Conference held in downtown Los Angeles, California. This “Making Connections” conference afforded administrators the opportunity to welcome new faces to the DoDEA family, re-establish connections with colleagues, and share insight and inspiration about educating the children of military personnel.



Interactions were not limited to scheduled events. Administrators found opportunities during extracurricular gatherings to enhance their social networks. Clusters would form as people discussed overarching issues and problem-solving strategies. Administrators starting new schools or transferring to different locations found a wealth of support. Several principals transitioning to new schools briefed their replacements on the school’s background.

During the culminating general session, Acting Director Marilee Fitzgerald received a standing ovation. Principals commented that they appreciated her taking the time to thank administrators for their service to DoDEA. Ms. Fitzgerald emphasized that the building-level administrators and faculty are performing a critical service by educating the children of military families and staying attuned to the needs of the whole child. She added that she was interested in learning about DoDEA’s ongoing efforts to keep students and staff safe and secure because she had helped start the DoDEA Safe Schools Program. Throughout the conference, administrators visited the Safe Schools information table to share success stories.

Administrators left with a renewed dedication to their mission. Despite varying time zones and distant geography, DoDEA administrators demonstrated their ability to come together to boost enthusiasm for learning and explore new ways to help students achieve. ■

### Inside This Issue

**News & Updates**

Administrators Convene to Strengthen Connections ..... 1  
 Back to School Security Tips..... 2  
 Voices from “The Wall” ..... 2

**Safe Schools Planning**

Establishing Expectations with Planned Communication..... 3

**Education Issues**

New Strategies for School Security ..... 4  
 Safety and Security Professionals Recommit to Excellence..... 4

**Cybersecurity**

Ethical Choices at Core of Cyber Protection..... 5

**Prevention Programs**

Preventing Youth Suicide ..... 6

## Back to School Security Tips

Reminding elementary school students of expected behavior and advisable school security practices can sharpen their observation skills and help prevent critical incidents. At the start of the school year, reciting the rhyme below can remind students of three valuable security lessons. Teachers can then take a few minutes to ask students why each line is important.

### Tips for Starting School Right

*Watch Where You're Walking!  
Careful When You're Talking.  
If You See Something Odd,  
Then Quick, Start Squawking!*

These valuable reminders refer to traffic safety, bullying prevention, and antiterrorism/security awareness. For example, students need to look for oncoming traffic while walking to school or exiting cars or buses in the morning. Teachers can ask young elementary school students why it is important to look both ways when crossing the street to reinforce the need to “Watch Where You’re Walking.”

“Careful When You’re Talking” captures the idea of practicing respect and consideration for others. Students need to remember that bullying is not tolerated and that including others in activities avoids ostracizing individuals. Students and staff can also use this as an Operations Security (OPSEC) reminder to be careful what they say online or in public to avoid endangering deployed service members.

Finally, the reminder to quickly “Start Squawking” gently reinforces the idea that students should tell an adult if they notice something out of the ordinary or see

anyone suspicious loitering near the school. It is also important to create an atmosphere where students feel safe telling an adult if a message they received or something they saw online made them feel uneasy.

The start of a new school year is filled with excitement and opportunity. Reminding elementary students of basic back-to-school safety and security tips reduces the chances that a security incident could detract from the rekindling of learning. ■

## Voices from “The Wall”

A powerful communication technique used at the Worldwide Administrators’ Conference was a “video wall” that consisted of brief video snippets from individuals throughout DoDEA. In the videos, teachers, counselors, and principals explained why they enjoyed working with military families. The comments below depict three teachers’ personal commitment to meeting the needs of DoDEA students.

*“We offer more than just academics. We offer support to the student while the parent is deployed, and more often than not, we offer support to the spouse of the deployed parent when they call to talk.”*

*“My husband is in the military and it made sense to stay within that family. I really identify with these students and the needs of the families. With one or more parents deployed, these kids have special needs that can only be addressed by people within the system.”*

*“I was really excited to be offered the opportunity to work with DoDEA schools. My dad is a retired captain in the Navy, so I grew up in the military. I’m a proud Army wife. I love this country, and I love the opportunity to teach every day with soldiers’ children.”* ■

### DoDEA Headquarters Personnel

Rose Chunik, Chief, Office of Safety and Security  
Adam Bergstrom, Program Manager, Antiterrorism  
Jennifer Jones, Program Manager, Physical Security  
Kim Perino, Program Manager, Emergency Preparedness

### CSC Safe Schools Newsletter Editorial Staff

Sarah Markel, Brian McKeon, Bert Garcia

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## Establishing Expectations with Planned Communication

During the Communications Workshop at the June 2010 Worldwide Administrators' Conference, principals learned practical ideas for enhancing school climate and improving parental involvement. Mr. Frank O'Gara, Ms. Elaine Kanellis, and Mr. Martin Fernandez from the DoDEA Communications Office discussed how a new school year offers an opportunity to set expectations for parents and students.



Ms. Kanellis began by suggesting administrators tailor specific messages to the different audiences they encounter, such as the school staff, students, parents/sponsors, and community. Administrators can then plan how to effectively disseminate messages using available communication channels. For example, if the school has a specific message for parents, reminders can be sent through several communication channels (i.e., parent newsletter, school Web site, and back-to-school night).

*Frank O'Gara, Chief, Communications Branch (standing), discusses communication strategies with principals (left to right) Charlie Council, Murray ES, Fort Bragg, NC; Danny Robinson, Baumholder MS, Kaiserslautern, Germany; and Jennifer Beckwith, Kaiserslautern HS, Kaiserslautern, Germany.*

The communication team noted that principals need to craft separate messages for each purpose. As the message becomes more specific, the size of the audience decreases. Audience categories range from general to specific based on the goal of the communication:

- ◆ Raising Awareness: General messages for everyone, including the entire school and community.
- ◆ Enhancing Understanding: Military community, military commanders.
- ◆ Fostering Internalization: Students, parents, school staff.
- ◆ Encouraging Action: Specific groups, parental support, community involvement.

Elaine Kanellis explained that useful messages must be concise, consistent, credible and tailored to the audience. Ms. Kanellis noted that effective messages focus attention, gain awareness, set expectations, and establish expertise. According to Ms. Kanellis, delivering the same message to everyone no longer works. She encouraged participants to communicate goals by asking the following questions:

- ◆ What do you want them to know about you?
- ◆ What do you want them to know about your school?
- ◆ What do you want recipients to take away?

For example, establishing clear ground rules regarding safety and security procedures at the start of the year ensures that everyone knows how to behave and what to expect in the event of a critical incident. Encouraging parents to read the discipline policy helps ensure they and their children understand both the students' rights and responsibilities and the high standards of behavior expected of DoDEA students.

For additional communication tips on crafting messages for the school community, contact your area public affairs officer or the DoDEA Communications Office at (703) 588-3260/3265. Share ideas about specific techniques that worked at [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■

## New Strategies for School Security

Which threat has a greater impact on learning: brief violence or sustained bullying? Researchers at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), a not-for-profit think tank, recently challenged school administrators to contemplate this logical conundrum when they released the study, *New Strategies for Keeping Schools Safe: Evidence-based Approaches to Prevent Youth Violence*. During a briefing for education policy makers, AERA researcher Anne Gregory, Ph.D., from Rutgers University, reviewed trends in highly publicized incidents of violence, such as school shootings, as well as reports on school bullying. Dr. Gregory concluded that students' concern over bullying distracts them from learning far more than the threat of serious crime such as terrorism or armed intruders.

Dr. Gregory presented statistics showing the prevalence of bullying and its impact on school climate. She reported that in 2007, 32 percent of secondary students in U.S. public schools reported being bullied. She acknowledged that bullying tends to affect younger students more than older students, noting that 43 percent of 6th grade students reported being bullied while only 23 percent of 12th grade students reported similar bullying behavior. Further, she acknowledged that only a portion of bullying consists of physical injuries in the form of bruises, cuts, or bloody noses. Dr. Gregory noted the increased awareness among educators of the psychological aspect to bullying.

The AERA report noted that the long-term psychological effects of bullying might prove more damaging than physical injury. According to AERA, "Peer conflict and peer rejection, victimization, and threats of violence produce psychosocial adjustment problems such as depression, anxiety, attention problems, and social withdrawal." The researchers concluded that these issues distract children from learning and erode students' motivation.

Dr. Gregory argued that bullying deserves a high priority in efforts to improve school security because it affects not just the victim, bully, and bystander, but also erodes school climate. According to Dr. Gregory, "The perception in the school that there is bullying, means it is tougher for all students to concentrate."

According to the AERA, using evidence-based prevention programs changes the school climate to reduce the prevalence of bullying. The report concluded that the key to effective programs was an emphasis on changing peer norms and bystander behaviors. For additional details visit AERA at [www.era.net](http://www.era.net). ■

## Safety and Security Professionals Recommit to Excellence

DoDEA Safety and Security Professionals gathered in Peachtree City, Georgia from June 28 through July 2 for the seventh annual Worldwide Office of Safety and Security Conference. Attendees welcomed new team members, synchronized approaches to security, and discussed strategies for responding to emerging needs.



*Left: Safety and Security professionals from across DoDEA attended the conference.*



*Right: Experts from Korea, Germany, and U.S. confer.*

## Ethical Choices at Core of Cyber Protection

Currently, four layers of protection are available for students on the Internet. Of these, the most critical layer consists of the choices the individual student makes. As John McClure, a professor of Information Security at the University of Virginia, explained, “All the security measures don’t matter if a student wants to get around the walls.”

Instilling an understanding of privacy and consideration is fundamental to security. A new guide from the Department of Justice, titled *Net Cetera: Chatting with Kids about Being Online*, offers tips on teaching students to exercise proper judgment while exploring the Internet.

The outermost layer of protection in a school consists of software and hardware measures designed to allow students to use the Internet for education while insulating them from obviously inappropriate sites or potentially harmful software. Firewalls are an example of technical measures available to protect users from malware and viruses that could infect a computer, while parental blocking applications make it difficult to access inappropriate Web sites.

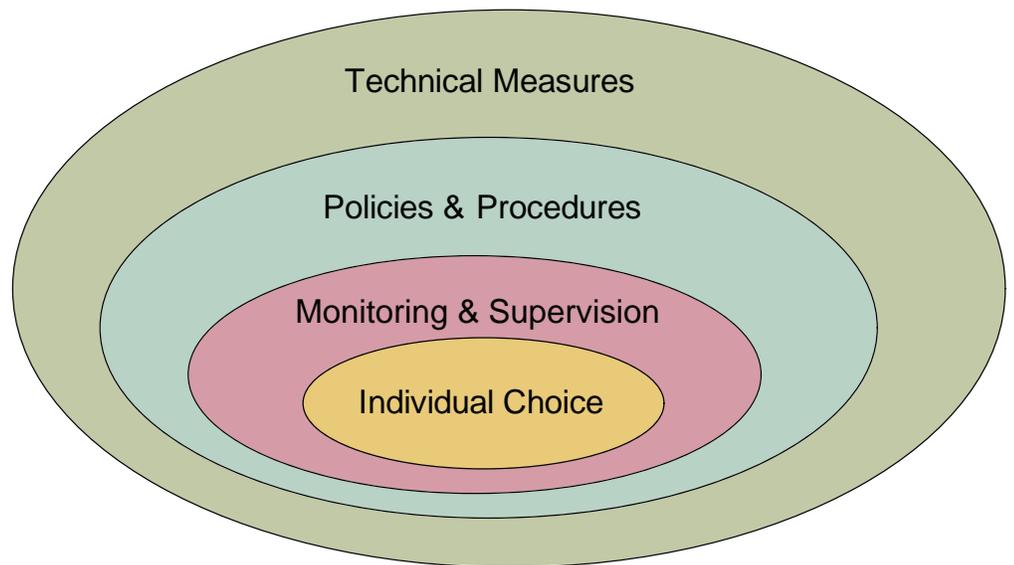
The second layer of protection consists of policies and procedures such as user agreements. Whether logging on to a private e-mail account at home or signing the agreement for an online account at school, students acknowledge their rights and responsibilities as digital citizens.

Monitoring and supervision of students while online provides a third layer of defense. Positioning computers in an easily supervised arrangement in the classroom, or in a family room at home, allows adults to remain aware of the content students are viewing. As the *Net Cetera* guide states, “Many ’tweens are adept at finding information online . . . but they still need adult guidance to help them understand which sources are trustworthy.”

The innermost layer of protection, however, depends on cultivating ethical judgment. According to the *Net Cetera* guide, teaching students that “behind the screen names, profiles, and avatars are real people with real feelings” can encourage students to approach their online communications the way they would if they were speaking with someone in person. Two guidelines students can always use to decide whether the content they are viewing is acceptable are:

- ◆ “Would I want Mom to see this?” and
- ◆ “How would I feel if everyone knew I was watching this?”

If it does not pass the “parent test” or would make them feel uncomfortable if it was widely known, then the Web site is probably unacceptable. Remind students that they can always turn off the computer if they cannot find any other way to exit a site. Most importantly, encourage them to talk to a trusted adult if they encounter content or messages that make them feel uncomfortable. To download a free copy of the Department of Justice guide, *Net Cetera*, visit [www.onguardonline.gov/topics/net-cetera.aspx](http://www.onguardonline.gov/topics/net-cetera.aspx). ■



## Preventing Youth Suicide

Increasing awareness of suicide warning signs might help students or school staff members prevent a suicide by encouraging an individual to seek help. Although the suicide rate among 10 to 19 year olds has decreased by more than 30 percent since the peak in 1994, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that suicide is still the third leading cause of death among high school students. Despite the grim statistics, there are three reasons for optimism: suicide is preventable, the risk factors and warning signs are known, and the appropriate response is straightforward.

### Risk Factors

Learning how to recognize suicidal ideation helps individuals consider intervention when they hear these risk factors mentioned. According to the Association of School Psychologists (NASP), suicide risk factors include mental illness such as depression, family stress/dysfunction, environmental influences such as the presence of guns in the home, and situational crises such as the traumatic death of a loved one, sexual abuse, or family violence.



### Warning Signs

Suicidal youth might not ask for help, but they often display observable warning signs. Since youth are more likely to turn to their friends rather than adults, it is important for everyone to be aware of the following warning signs:

- ✓ Direct statements or threats.
- ✓ Giving away prized possessions.
- ✓ Suicide notes and plans.
- ✓ Preoccupation with death.
- ✓ Prior suicidal behavior.
- ✓ Sudden changes in behavior, appearance, or thoughts.

### Response

The two most important things to remember if an individual confides suicidal thoughts are to refuse to keep the situation a secret, and tell a responsible adult. NASP recommends that individuals take the following actions when they learn that a student might be feeling suicidal:

- ◆ Remain calm.
- ◆ Avoid sounding judgmental.
- ◆ Ask the youth directly if he or she is thinking about suicide.
- ◆ Avoid leaving him or her alone.
- ◆ Listen.
- ◆ Remove means of self harm.
- ◆ Seek help.

Students should encourage the individual to talk with an adult such as a parent, teacher, or school psychologist. NASP notes that school psychologists are trained to intervene when a student is identified as potentially suicidal: “They conduct a risk assessment, warn/inform parents, and provide recommendations and referrals.”

The Office of the Secretary of Defense has distributed a copy of the Signs of Suicide (SOS) prevention program to DoDEA middle and high schools. An independent evaluation found that this program resulted in measurable decreases in suicide attempts and increases in referrals.

Increasing suicide awareness in the school community has additional benefits. NASP considers a closely knit community, and a feeling of connectedness among students and school staff, to be “resiliency factors” that decrease the chance of suicide. To learn more, visit NASP at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org) or the CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/youthsui.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/youthsui.htm). To learn more about the SOS program visit [www.mentalhealthscreening.org](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org). ■