



**Highlights of Remarks by Patrick F. Bassett to the
Secretary's Advisory Council on Safe and Drug-Free Schools
Tuesday, January 16, 2006**

- **The Panel:** NAIS, representing over 1300 independent college-preparatory schools and 500,000 students, is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Secretary's Advisory Council, since the topic of school safety is so critical for the well-being of all children in the U.S.

- **School Safety:** Independent schools in particular and private schools in general have been spared from "the danger within": acts of violence by students or adults known to us. Why is this the case?
 - One of the reasons private schools tend to have less crime on campus is that they have selective admission and hiring policies: i.e., the students and the faculty fit the ethos of the school, whether college-prep, gifted, or LD-oriented. Private school students want to attend the school they are in and know that misbehavior could result in dismissal. The more there is a fit and match between students and schools and the less of "one container for all sizes," the greater the sense of "belonging," a key ingredient to school and student success, not to mention safety.
 - A second factor is that most independent school students are involved in multiple after-school activities which keep them occupied in salutary not dubious and unsupervised endeavors in the hours before their parents return home from work.
 - A third factor may be the systems that private schools have developed for dealing with or preventing crises. Many independent schools, for instance, have crisis plans that address security, and most conduct security audits and drills to ensure that their campuses are safe, a practice that should be standard for all schools.
 - Finally: private schools tend to be small, intimate, family-like places, not large and impersonal bureaucracies: the former generate a sense of obligation and responsibility; the latter a sense of alienation and anger.
 - The high touch/high tech future: High tech *and* high touch will surely be the future of academics and other programming, including safety programming in good schools: All schools, public and private, need unobtrusive, non-invasive means to secure a safer future: teachers (not armed security) trained and staffing single points of entry; neural networks

and smart cards tracking kids and visitors, cameras screening the building and classrooms, and the like.

- **NOAA Radio Issue:** The private school world endorses the “America is Safer When Our Schools are Safer” pilot program that would distribute NOAA radios to public schools in selected high-risk cities. We believe this initiative is an appropriate one for government to undertake. But the distribution plan alarms us for several reasons:
 - Radios were only given to public schools
 - Private schools were bypassed for the second wave of distribution
 - The regulations of this initiative state that all schools will receive a NOAA radio, and yet these regulations are not being followed.
 - When it comes to the health and safety of our nation’s children, all students should be treated equally by the federal government.
 - By excluding private schools and students the Department of Homeland Security is creating “holes” in a “safety net” designed to protect all students.
 - When natural disasters make no distinction between public and private school students, and neither should the government, since all children should be protected, and all schools should be prepared to listen to the warnings and act accordingly.
 - We would hope this panel would urge that NOAA radios from the America is Safer When Our Schools are Safer initiative be delivered to all schools, including independent and other private schools.

- **Stafford/FEMA/Hurricane Relief**
 - Prior to 2006, independent and private schools were ineligible to receive reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for damaged facilities, since they were not considered to be providers of “critical services,” and therefore had first apply for a loan from the Small Business Administration (SBA), rather than a grant from FEMA in the event of a disaster. (Only if the loan was denied or the damage was greater than the loan amount could a private school apply directly to FEMA for assistance.) This process burdened private schools with more expensive insurance policies and increased financial exposure.
 - In 2006 legislation was passed and signed into law amending the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, which now restores federal aid for the repair, restoration, and replacement of private nonprofit educational facilities that are damaged or destroyed by a major disaster. The private school universe thanks you for your quick and effective response to our concerns regarding the implementation of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act’s Restart School Program, which provided Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students and Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations Program.
 - NAIS and other private schools educated literally tens of thousands of displaced Katrina students—almost all with no charge of tuition. When

the eleemosynary instincts of the private school community are matched with the financial relief government can provide under emergency circumstances, we can stand together strongly to meet the needs of children.

- **Drug-free Schools:** While the focus of today's panel is on disaster and crisis planning and policy, I would also say a word about the larger threat to children's health and safety: i.e., the absence of drug-free schools and communities. Students are vastly higher at risk from the use of tobacco products, alcohol, and other drugs than they are from violence or natural disasters. The private school world is not immune from this menace, of course. We are, however, experimenting in ways all can be helpful in the future to all schools: i.e., there is a public purpose of private education, and being the laboratory of "what works" is one such important contribution. I would cite the "social norming" experimentation going on in some schools and colleges as the most promising approach I've seen in a long-time: i.e., documenting the extent of use and abuse, and sharing what is inevitably "news" to students: Not *everyone*, in fact not even the majority in most cases, is immersed in "sex, drugs, and alcohol." When real data is collected and shared, it becomes the norm NOT to use and abuse drugs.

NAIS

The National Association of Independent Schools, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) based in Washington, DC, is a membership organization and the national voice of independent K-12 education. NAIS represents nearly 1,300 U.S. independent schools, including day, boarding, and day/boarding schools; elementary and secondary schools; boys', girls', and coeducational schools. NAIS offers a variety of products and services to member schools and associations, including professional development, publications, national statistics, and benchmarking.

Independent Schools

Independent schools are defined by their independent governance and financing. As nonprofit entities, they are governed by boards of trustees composed of alumni/ae, parents, educators, and community members. Financially, NAIS schools are primarily supported through tuition payments, charitable contributions, and endowment income. They are accountable to state and regional accrediting associations, boards of trustees, and to the parents who choose to send their children to independent schools. For a complete list of NAIS member schools, please visit <http://www.nais.org/>.