

**Testimony of Anthony C. Stevenson
Incoming Principal of Radnor Middle School in the Radnor Township School District
(Wayne, PA)
Committee on Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education
“School Safety and NCLB”**

Chairman Kildee, Ranking Member Castle, Congressman Sestak and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, I am pleased to appear before you today to testify on “The Impact of School Safety and NCLB.”

Every since the tragedy at Columbine High School, school districts have been working to address the question of how to keep our children safe at schools. The recent shootings of Amish students thirty miles from here in Lancaster and even a recent incident in our school where a student brought a gun to school have impressed upon us that school safety is a constant priority.

Schools have the difficult task of ensuring that the school setting is safe on a daily basis. However, we also have to ensure that the school environment is not so overwhelming that true education cannot take place.

The physical plant of a school building is the first area of defense for school safety. Most schools that were built before Columbine were not designed with the adequate safety doors; cameras; escape routes; and other equipment that support school safety. As a result, schools were forced to redesign their building in a way that would improve the security of their building.

However, the physical plant of a school is only one component of creating safe schools. The true way to create a safe school is through the school climate. School climate can be understood as the frequency and quality of interactions among and between staff, students, parents, and the community throughout the entire school community. Research shows that schools with a positive and welcoming school climate increases the likelihood that students succeed academically and socially, and helps them disengage or avoid high risk behaviors like substance abuse and violence.

This type of climate can only be enhanced by having educators spend time designing prevention and intervention plans, well-organized crisis teams and maintaining clear lines of communication related to school safety among all appropriate stakeholders in the school community.

According to the National School Safety Center (1990), from a student’s perspective, school climate depends upon and is affected by the following:

- **Student involvement:** The degree to which students are involved in and enjoy classes and extracurricular activities at school.
- **Student relationships:** The level of comfort students feel in relating to one another and the ease with which they make new friends.
- **Teacher support:** The amount of help and care that teachers direct toward students.

- **Physical environment:** The extent to which the school building reflects the caring attitude of the school, the school buildings are clean, well cared for, supervised, and safe.
- **Conflict resolution:** Whether students are clear about the rules and feel that conflicts are resolved fairly and rules are consistently enforced.
- **Participation in decision-making:** The extent to which students, administrators, and teachers share in making decisions about school improvement.
- **Curriculum:** The extent to which students feel that what is taught in classes meets their needs.
- **Counseling services:** Whether students feel counselors are accessible and able to help with personal problems, job, and career information, and concerns about drugs, alcohol, and sex.
- **Recreation alternatives:** Whether students are satisfied with existing recreational activities and teachers' support of these activities.
- **Personal stress:** The amount of pressure students feel they are under and the resources they have to cope with it.

Here in the Radnor Township School District, we made all attempts to create a school climate that creates a balance of creating a safe setting while maintaining a strong academic and social atmosphere for our students. In Radnor, we have several programs that include but are not limited to:

- Each school has a **Crisis Management Team** that coordinates the plans for responding to violent or traumatic incidents on school grounds and various emergency drills.
- The District works in conjunction with the Radnor Education Foundation in the establishment of a **Drug and Alcohol Task Force** that meets monthly to discuss drug and alcohol issues that impact our school community. They provide various programs that address issues related to substance abuse.
- Radnor Township School District collaborates with the local law enforcement officials to create an environment that welcomes our local officials into schools and allows them to become part of our school culture.
- Each school has a **Student Assistance Program (SAP)** which identifies those students who are at risk and implement programs that can help meet their needs.
- **Various sports and extra curricular opportunities** for students to participate in.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, any school, whether suburban or urban, small or large, racially segregated or diverse, wealthy or poor, would benefit from an increase in additional appropriation funds to assist their schools with safety efforts. Additional funding would give schools the opportunity to provide an expanded version of intervention activities that can prevent and reduce violence in our schools. By supporting the current and proposed safe school programs, schools will have the opportunity to maintain a safe school setting without disrupting the educational environment that is imperative to meet the requirements of NCLB. This support will also provide schools with the opportunity to create a school culture that can provide a feeling of safety while providing the endless possibility of academic success for the students they serve.