

## Tom Horne Reports

### P V Efforts To Assure Safety in light of Columbine Tragedy

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When the Columbine tragedy struck, many people had the natural reaction: "How safe are our schools?" Here are some of the things we have done in Paradise Valley to assure a safe environment for students:

1. Identifying and Treating Dangerous Students: Even before the Columbine tragedy, last fall, Paradise Valley conducted a training session for all school administrators in techniques used to identify potentially lethal personalities, Training was also provided in the appropriate referral and counseling of this kind of personality,

2. Zero Tolerance for Weapons at School: When students have been detected bringing lethal weapons to school, we have been consistent in implementation of expulsion proceedings. We have received some criticism for this approach, and have been accused of "over reacting" in some cases. But assuring a safe environment for students means being relentless and consistent in keeping guns out of our schools,

3. Prohibition of Gang Association or Gang Activity: We have also been relentless in applying discipline to prohibit students from associating themselves with gangs or gang-like activity.

4. Dress Code: Gang clothing, symbols, or paraphernalia are prohibited. Also prohibited is clothing which promotes drugs or alcohol. A student appearing at school with, for example, a shirt that advertises beer, is required to turn the shirt inside out, or go home and change the shirt.

5. Character Education: Character education is crucial. This applies not only toward potentially destructive students, but it applies toward those who, as at Columbine may mistreat marginal students and drive them to destructive behavior. One of the tragedies of Columbine was that, as unimaginable as it may seem, jocks and others were tormenting these students on a daily basis, everyone knew about it, and no one did anything about it.

In Paradise Valley, we have been on the cutting edge of emphasis on character education. Each school is required to implement, across the curriculum, a program to emphasize six core traits among students, These traits are: (a) personal responsibility, (b) citizenship, (c) respect, (d) integrity, (e) care for others, and (f) seeking peaceful resolutions to conflict. Each trait has between four and nine statements to describe areas that must be covered. For example, "care for others" would cover sharing, kindness, treat others as you want others to treat you, and empathy for people in difficult situations.

In addition to, and separate from the character education program, each high school and middle school is implementing a formal prejudice reduction program for its students.

6. Emergency Planning: In addition to the fire drills that everyone remembers as being part of school life, we now have "lockdown" so that we can respond to dangerous situations that may face students on the way home from school during emergencies.

This year, the district's planning staff will form a new committee composed of district experts in administration, psychology, security and social and health services, Additionally, the committee will have representation from district parents, from the Phoenix Police and Fire Departments, and the American Red Cross. The committee will survey every site in the district to ensure that each has a fundamentally sound response plan.

On the inside pages of this Observer you will find additional details on our efforts to assure safe schools for the students.

7. A Balanced Strategy: A successful strategy requires that we not neglect some approaches in emphasizing others, but that we press on all fronts simultaneously: strict discipline for those violating rules, sympathetic counseling for those needing help, and character education and prejudice reduction for everyone.