The Columbine Response

Since 1999, the state of Colorado has made significant progress addressing concerns outlined by the Columbine Review Commission in its report to the Governor. Some of these strategies and legislative efforts include:

**Sharing Information** – Colorado law now requires school districts to develop written agreements with local law enforcement officials, the juvenile justice system, and social services departments for the purpose of keeping each school environment safe. Section 22-32-109.1(3), C.R.S. (2002).

**Breaking the Code of Silence** – Since students are concerned about reporting threats of violence for fear of repercussion, **safe2tell**, a safe school hotline has been implemented through funding from The Colorado Trust. Student anonymity is guaranteed so critical information can be shared about potential violent threats and other situations that compromise the safety and well-being of persons in the school.

**Establishing Safe Communities~Safe Schools** – The Colorado Trust has provided funding to help any Colorado school develop the 5 steps to a safe school: create a safe school planning team; conduct a safety assessment; develop an interagency social support team; implement proven effective programs based on need, and develop a crisis management plan.

**Assessing Threats** – As part of the Safe Communities~Safe Schools initiative, an interagency social support team is convened as the most appropriate means of assessing and preventing targeted violence.

**Developing Safe School Plans** – Colorado law now requires that each district adopt a safe school plan that includes a written conduct and discipline code, annual reporting regarding the school environment, a crisis management policy, and a safety and security policy. Section 22-32-109.1(1),(2)(b), C.R.S. (2002).

**Developing Bullying Prevention Policies** – Since bullying is such a pervasive problem in America’s schools, legislation was enacted that requires each school district to have a written policy concerning bullying prevention and education as a part of its conduct and discipline code. Section 22-32-109.1(2)(a)(X), C.R.S. (2002).

Ongoing technical assistance is available for all of these strategies from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado-Boulder at 303.492.1032.

Are Schools Safer Now?

In the past five years, the state of Colorado has developed a better understanding of the elements of a safe school, and has legislated policy to address some of the conditions that underlie school violence. Even though youth violence is less lethal today than it was in the 1990s, the percentage of adolescents involved in violent behavior remains alarmingly high according to *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* (2001). So the question remains: Are Colorado schools now a place where teachers can teach and students can learn without fear for their safety?

In Colorado, some violent trends have decreased slightly, but illicit drug use, dating violence, and suicides have increased. Furthermore during 2002, 46 percent of young people reported being hit, shoved, kicked or tripped at least once in the past month, according to *The Ask the Children Series* from The Colorado Trust. However, schools involved in the Safe Communities~Safe Schools (SCSS) Initiative report strengths in many areas when matched with comparison groups (2003), such as:

- A significantly higher percentage of SCSS school students agreed that they feel safe at school.
- A significantly higher percentage of SCSS school students said that their teacher really cares about them.
- A significantly lower percentage of SCSS school students said that many students get picked on in a mean way by other students.

Developing safe school plans based on need, and involving the entire community remains critical if we are to reduce or prevent serious youth violence.

COMING THIS FALL…
Did you know?

According to the FBI’s Preliminary Annual Uniform Crime Report, violent crime overall decreased in 2003 but homicides increased for the third consecutive year. The findings report varying rates of increase—with the smallest US cities having the largest increase in homicide. Cities with fewer than 10,000 residents saw an increase of 15.7 percent, while cities in the range of 10,000—24,999 residents saw a rise of 10.8 percent. The largest cities, with over 1 million in population, saw a very slight increase of 0.2 percent.

Join Together Online (www.jointogether.org)

Corresponding with these findings is a reported increase in the number of violent deaths in or around schools for the 2003-04 school year. In April, the number of school-related violent deaths around the country was reported to be 43. National School Safety and Security Services, based in Cleveland, tracked school-related deaths from all around the country and found a number higher than the previous two years combined.

Columbine: A recurring nightmare? The Denver Post