



*Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference*  
**PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE**



# *School Safety in the Western Cape*

## *Challenges, Successes, And Barriers to Implementation*

**A RESEARCH PAPER**

**By**

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**December 2007**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

School violence is a problem of mounting concern in South Africa. Violence occurs in schools around the world, but in South Africa the situation is particularly acute: gang violence, weapons in school, sexual violence, assault, theft, robbery and vandalism are, to varying degrees, part of the daily reality for learners and educators. A study of youth victimization conducted by Cape Town's Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention in 2006, for example, found that 41.1% of youth interviewed had been victims of some form of crime in the year preceding the study, and that schools were the places in which youth were most likely to become victims of theft, assault, and sexual assault.<sup>1</sup>

In light of these pressing challenges the South African government, NGOs and educators have allotted resources for school safety and embarked upon innovative initiatives through which to address problems of violence in schools. Employing many of the internationally accepted approaches for improving school safety, these stakeholders have had some success in transforming schools into positive social spaces where students can learn and thrive. However, the benefit of these efforts has not reached all schools, or been able to address all safety issues within individual schools. *The questions that one must then ask are: what are the innovations that some schools have implemented that have helped them create a more secure learning environment? And given the availability of ostensibly positive resources for school safety in South Africa, what are the barriers that are limiting the effectiveness of current safety efforts?*

School safety is a complex social phenomenon, and broad, general answers to these questions ignore the particularities of the challenges that exist in specific contexts. Accordingly, this research project set out to explore these questions by engaging with educators and administrators from five schools located in two geographical areas in the Western Cape. These schools offer services to students and families in similar socio-economic contexts, and all of the schools experience similar forms of violence. In order to create a context for the case-studies, this paper will begin with a literature review of the violence that exists in South African schools, followed by an overview of the governmental and non-governmental programs available for addressing the problem. The subsequent section of the paper will highlight the outcomes of interviews with administrators and educators from the five participating schools, all of whom were asked about their schools' successes in addressing school violence, and the barriers that they feel limit their ability to further improve their safety situations. It is hoped that this study will offer a more detailed picture of the specific factors that aid and limit efforts to improve school safety in the context of these five schools, and that it can thus offer insight to educators in similar situations, and guidance to officials working to improve school safety policies.

## 2. VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

As discussed above, this paper will begin with an overview of the school safety challenges that learners and educators in South Africa currently face. This summary will demonstrate the urgency of the school

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Burton, "Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Submission made to the South African Human Rights Commission by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention", 3-4. For more complete information on CJCP's Youth Victimization Study, see "How Rich the Rewards: Results of the 2005 National Youth Victimization Study," <http://www.cjcp.org.za/Final.RichReward.pdf>.

safety issue, and offer readers a framework for understanding what interventions are needed in South Africa.

Learners and educators in schools all across South Africa are threatened by violence. This violence takes different forms and exists at different levels of intensity in different places, but no school communities are immune to the problem – according to Faeza Khan and Patrick Burton of the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP), for example, there is no statistical difference between the levels of violence experienced in affluent and impoverished schools in South Africa. The authors note that there is some difference in the levels and types of violence experienced by urban and rural schools, and there are differences between provinces, but they assert that school violence cannot be correlated with socio-economic status; and that violence occurs in certain schools where no one would expect it.<sup>2</sup> Although not all schools experience the same types or levels of violence, there are themes that run through the literature which point to at least seven specific manifestations of violent behavior that broadly affect schools in the country. These include, but are not limited to: 1) Theft and vandalism; 2) Lack of respect for, and threats against, teachers; 3) Bullying of students; 4) Physical assaults; 5) Weapons in school; 6) Gender violence and sexual assault; and 7) Gangs. These are not discrete themes – the concepts overlap and interact in their manifestations and impacts. Nonetheless, each theme is important in that it highlights different aspects of the problems that face South African schools. The following section will offer a brief discussion of each type of violence, its social context, and its impacts.

## **2.1 Theft of Personal Property, Theft of School Property & Vandalism**

Theft and vandalism are problems that affect individuals in schools, as well as the school environment itself in South Africa. According to the Youth Victimization Survey conducted by Cape Town's Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in 2006, theft of personal property is the most often-reported crime by youth in South Africa, and schools are the sites where the majority of these crimes occur.<sup>3</sup> This may involve theft perpetrated by other learners on school property, but may also involve theft perpetrated by outsiders against students on their way to, and from the school premises.

Theft of personal property was a significant problem in four of the five schools interviewed for this research. This involved theft from fellow students, and as one principal stated, "General disrespect for other students' property," but more commonly involved outsiders robbing students and teachers en route to and from school. In at least three of the schools, this threat had resulted in school policies directing students to enter the gated school property as soon as they arrived at the school, and to wait within the gates before being picked up at the end of the day. Teachers and administrators felt the need for constant vigilance on behalf of the students, and encouraged students to be highly vigilant as well: students were told to travel in groups, and in some cases were forbidden to bring jewellery, cell-phones or other items of value to school. In at least one school, students were responding to this threat by bringing weapons, especially knives, with them to school.

<sup>2</sup> Faeza Khan and Patrick Burton, *Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP)* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Burton, "Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Submission made to the South African Human Rights Commission by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention," 3-4.

In considering the impact of this problem, it is apparent that theft increases insecurity and disorder in schools. Yet in addition to this, theft also may have behavioural consequences for victims: in their survey, the CJCP found that although the majority of victims did not access support or counseling services after experiencing theft, 70.6% of young people did experience changes in their behaviour after being victimized.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a teacher in one of the schools involved in this study said she felt that student victims of robbery at her school had a significant need for counseling support, but that such support was not readily available.

The fact that students and teachers are being so consistently threatened and victimized by robbery in South Africa is a troubling trend. However, the problem of robbery at schools does not lie solely at the individual level. School property itself is also widely targeted for theft and vandalism, often by gangs or members of surrounding communities who see schools as a resource that can be exploited. This problem is reaching critical levels in some areas. As reported in the *Cape Argus* in August, 2007:

“Since the start of the school year, several primary and high schools in the [Western Cape] area have either been burgled or vandalised at weekends and during school holidays, principals say. The incidents have caused damage estimated at thousands of rands, and schools say they cannot keep up with the high repair costs. Some schools have had to replace all their toilets, pipes and classroom doors. Others have had to buy new desks and intercom systems, repair ceilings, re-paint classrooms, fix fences and replace stationery. Some schools have even had to replace their year's allocation of toilet paper after it was stolen.”<sup>5</sup>

Theft and vandalism of school property, especially after school hours, was a significant problem in three out of the five schools involved in this research. One school had regularly been without a telephone service in the preceding months because vandals had consistently stolen and re-stolen their telephone wires, and one school, on the day of their interview, was without water because their pipes had been stolen the night before. All of the schools involved in this research had fences surrounding their property, but in some cases this measure was inadequate to prevent vandalism: at one school, vandals had broken holes in the fence and cut the razor wire covering it in order to jump over onto school property. At one school, staff had been directly threatened with violence by individuals wishing to enter the property after school hours.

This type of violence and disregard for school property places severe financial burdens on schools – many of which do not have adequate financial resources to effectively serve their student population. The problem also contributes to high levels of frustration and demoralization on the part of teachers and school administrators.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Leanne Leoschut and Patrick Burton, “How Rich the Rewards? Results of the 2005 National Youth Victimization Study,” *Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention* (Monograph Series No. 1, Cape Town, May 2006), 52.

<sup>5</sup> Candes Keating, “School burgled for fourth time this year,” *Cape Argus*, August 7, 2007, 8 (as cited on iol website, [http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?from=rss\\_South%20Africa&set\\_id=1&click\\_id=13&art\\_id=vn20070807114715318C555562](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?from=rss_South%20Africa&set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20070807114715318C555562)).

<sup>6</sup> Candes Keating, “School burgled for fourth time this year,” *Cape Argus*, August 7, 2007, 8 (as cited on iol website, [http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?from=rss\\_South%20Africa&set\\_id=1&click\\_id=13&art\\_id=vn20070807114715318C555562](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?from=rss_South%20Africa&set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=vn20070807114715318C555562)).

## 2.2 Lack of Respect For, and Threats Against, Teachers

Although “lack of respect” might seem like a vague concept that is minimally relevant to the issue of serious violence in schools, this problem destabilizes many South African school environments and contributes to high levels of stress on the part of South African teachers. In their Submission to the Human Rights Commission’s Public Hearings on School Violence, the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) maintained that students in South African schools widely demonstrate a blatant disregard for their teachers. The presenter discussed the fact that students will regularly swear at their teachers<sup>7</sup> and engage in “shouting, backchatting, laughing in [the teacher’s] face, abuse of alcohol and dagga at sports meetings, etc.”<sup>8</sup> According to NAPTOSA, this type of verbal abuse has been linked to low teacher morale, stress, and absenteeism.<sup>9</sup> The submission made by the South African Teachers’ Union to the South African Human Rights Commission echoed these concerns about verbal abuse in schools, and its impact on teachers; the presenter maintained that abuse from both students and parents resulted in emotional and psychological trauma for teachers, and had led some educators to resign.<sup>10</sup>

Verbal abuse in schools is a concern in and of itself, yet in many cases in South Africa, verbal abuse can turn violent, involving threats to the physical safety of learners and educators. According to Joan van Niekerk, the National Co-ordinator of Childline South Africa, teachers across the country feel threatened in classroom situations.<sup>11</sup> In answering questions posed by NAPTOSA, teachers explained that “lessons are no longer disciplined – some [students] even carry weapons.” Teachers also maintained that discipline is “next to nil because most teachers fear the big boys dominating the learner population.”<sup>12</sup> The fear that results from this kind of intimidation from the student population is not unfounded – there have been numerous reported cases in South Africa where students have physically assaulted and even killed their teachers.<sup>13</sup> This reality often leaves the affected teachers feeling insecure and unable to effectively manage their classroom environments.

There are a wide range of factors that have been hypothesized to contribute to this culture of disrespect in schools, including lack of parental support for schools, and a lack of discipline at home.<sup>14</sup> Yet according to teachers, a key factor that exacerbates this behaviour is the unbalanced promotion of human rights in schools. Students are aware of their rights, but seldom seem to recognize the

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<sup>7</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Richard Hayward, “Educator Morale in South Africa in 2002: Report on Findings,” *National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)*, (<http://www.naptosa.org.za/documents.php>, December 2002: accessed 9 October, 2007), 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Mr. Raux, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the President of the South African Teachers Union (SAOU)* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Joan van Niekerk, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Coordinator for Childline, South Africa* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Richard Hayward, “Educator Morale in South Africa in 2002: Report on Findings,” *National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Edwin Naidu, “Spate of attacks as schools turn into war zones,” *Sunday Tribune* (23 September, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Richard Hayward, “Educator Morale in South Africa in 2002: Report on Findings,” *National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)*, 48; Paul Colditz as cited in Edwin Naidu, “Rapes and knifings in the blackboard jungle reach crisis point,” *The Sunday Independent*, 23 September, 2007).

corresponding responsibility they have to respect the rights of teachers and fellow students. Again, in answering questions posed by NAPTOA, teachers asserted that “learners have more rights than educators – learners intimidate educators,” and “learners misbehave intentionally under the cloak of ‘rights.’”<sup>15</sup>

Lack of respect for teachers was not a serious consideration in any of the schools that participated in this research. Nearly all teachers said that classroom discipline was a problem, but the majority attributed this to over-large classes, lack of teacher training, and a lack of discipline in students' homes. In all of the schools that participated in this research, relationships between teachers and students seemed to be respectful and open, and teachers said that disruption in their classes was usually not malicious. It is interesting to question why the schools involved in this study might not struggle with the same problems of disrespect and threats as do other schools in the country.

### 2.3 Bullying: The Verbal and Physical Victimization of Students

Disrespect and violence directed at educators in schools is a significant problem, but it is important to recognize that students are also the victims of verbal and physical abuse in schools – often at the hands of classmates and schoolmates, but sometimes of outsiders. Internationally, bullying is understood as:

“Exposure to the negative actions of one or more persons repeatedly and over time. It encompasses a spectrum of aggressive actions, both physical and verbal. It can be direct (hitting, kicking, threatening, extortion) or indirect (spreading rumors, social exclusion).”<sup>16</sup>

In regard to the verbal bullying that students experience in South African schools, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention found that:

“Insults and other forms of verbal abuse... proved to be rampant at South African schools. Nearly a third (32.8%) of the youth in this study reported that they had been teased, insulted or otherwise scared at school. More males (34.3%) than females (31.3%) had been insulted at school. Verbal victimisations were most common among young people in the 12--14 year age grouping (37.8%), as well as among black (33.6%) and coloured (33.3%) youth. The perpetrators in these incidents were primarily classmates (54.1%), other learners attending the same school as the participants (36.7%), and children from other schools 4.3%.”<sup>17</sup>

The study found that nearly half of the respondents had been victimized by verbal abuse once, but more than one third experienced this kind of harassment two to five times, and many “had been the victims of threats or physical harm six or more times.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dr. Richard Hayward, “Educator Morale in South Africa in 2002: Report on Findings,” *National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)*, 48.

<sup>16</sup> D. Wolke, S. Woods, L. Bloomfield, & L. Karstadt, “The association between direct and relational bullying and behaviour problems among primary school children,” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (Vol. 41, 2000: 989–1002) as cited in Holan Liang, Alan J. Flisher and Carl J. Lombard, “Bullying, violence, and risk behavior in South African school students,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* (Vol. 31, 2007: 161-171), 162.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Burton, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Submission made to the South African Human Rights Commission by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



As highlighted above, bullying involves both aggressive verbal and physical actions. Physical bullying is also a problem in South African schools. In a study conducted in Cape Town and Durban, researchers found that 36.3% of students were involved in bullying, either as bullies or victims, or both. The behaviour studied in the research included physical fighting and weapon-carrying, as well as theft and vandalism.<sup>19</sup>

The ramifications of this kind of behaviour for bullies and their victims are far-reaching. According to J. David Smith, J. Bradley Cousins, and Rebecca Stewart, victims of bullying experience anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, “suicidal ideation” and social withdrawal. Other research indicates that bullies are also a high-risk group for psychological and behavioural problems. In addition to causing physical and emotional trauma to their victims, these individuals experience elevated levels of depression and suicidal ideation, engage more often in substance abuse and weapon-carrying, and are at risk for delinquency and violent behaviour in the future.<sup>20</sup>

Bullying, specifically, was only an issue of concern in one of the schools that participated in this study. However, all of the teachers and administrators interviewed maintained that students in their schools generally had poor conflict resolution skills, which increased the likelihood that conflict between learners would escalate, needlessly, when it occurred.

In light of the statistics regarding the frequency of bullying in South Africa and the information on the negative implications that bullying has for students, one would hope that South African schools would have established policies on how to address the problem. According to Joan van Niekerk of Childline, however, this is not the case; in her submission to the South African Human Rights Commission Public Hearings on school-based violence, Ms. Van Niekerk maintained that very few schools actually have policies on bullying.<sup>21</sup> In its submission to the same hearings, the Free State Education Department also maintained that when schools do address bullying, they often focus their attention largely on the victims, and not on the bullies themselves.<sup>22</sup> This approach does not address the complexity of the bullying phenomenon, and is unlikely to be comprehensive enough to be effective.<sup>23</sup>

## 2.4 Physical Assault

Bullying constitutes part of the problem of physical assault in South African schools, but unfortunately the intensity and scope of this problem extends beyond the regular parameters of what might normally be involved in bullying behaviour. Reports of violence in South African schools are widespread, and leave no group unaffected: teachers commit assault against students, students commit assault against teachers, students commit assault against other students, and outsiders enter school property and assault

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<sup>19</sup> Holan Liang, Alan J. Flisher and Carl J. Lombard, “Bullying, violence, and risk behavior in South African school students,” 169.

<sup>20</sup> J. David Smith, J. Bradley Cousins, and Rebecca Stewart, “Antibullying Interventions in Schools: Ingredients of Effective Programs,” 741; Holan Liang, Alan J. Flisher and Carl J. Lombard, “Bullying, violence, and risk behavior in South African school students,” 162-163.

<sup>21</sup> Joan van Niekerk, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Coordinator for Childline, South Africa* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the Free State Education Department* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> J. David Smith, J. Bradley Cousins, and Rebecca Stewart, “Anti-bullying Interventions in Schools: Ingredients of Effective Programs,” 742-743.

staff and students. The following section will offer a brief overview and illustration of each of these types of assault in order to further clarify the phenomenon of school violence.

#### 2.4.1 *Teacher-Instigated Assault: Corporal Punishment*

In 1997, corporal punishment was declared illegal in South Africa through the Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act.<sup>24</sup> In 2000, then Minister of Education Kader Asmal maintained that by so outlawing physical punishment, as well as psychological and emotional abuse, South Africa was taking effective steps toward achieving a “democratic, human rights culture” where “contraventions of the basic rights to dignity and security” were disallowed.<sup>25</sup> This Act took an important legislative step towards improving the safety of students in South Africa schools, but unfortunately, in practice compliance with this law has been slow and sporadic. For example, in February 2007, the *Sunday Tribune* reported the following:

“An Umbumbulu teacher is in hot water after caning pupils for not wearing their school ties. A teacher at Phindela Higher Primary, in Golokodo district, gave 13 pupils five lashes each on their backsides with a cane two weeks ago. One Grade 6 pupil, Siyabonga Mzulwini, 13, was given an extra five lashes for the alleged verbal abuse of another pupil.”<sup>26</sup>

The mother of one of the victims in the above story told reporters that “[Her son] was green on his backside, with several marks showing where he was caned.” Another grade 5 student at the school disclosed that “things are very strict at the school. Teachers say they hit us because we don’t listen.”<sup>27</sup> Reports of this kind are alarming, and unfortunately are not isolated occurrences. According to the CJCP Youth Victimization Study:

“More than half (51.4%) the participants reported being caned or spanked at school for their transgressions. The physical punishment of learners was prevalent in all the provinces... Black youth (57.3%) and participants between the ages of 12–14 years (64.6%) were most likely to report being spanked at school. In addition, participants residing in rural communities were significantly more likely to report that corporal punishment was effected as a means of discipline at their schools (62.5%).”<sup>28</sup>

Those who continue to impose corporal punishment in schools justify it as a response to unmanageable students. Some teachers maintain that discipline in schools is out of control, and that the only way to create a functioning educational environment is to use the rod. As stated by one teacher:

“Ever since corporal punishment was taken away in schools, there is less discipline, and this is the cause for the problems being experienced by educators. We spend more time on discipline and admin work instead of pure teaching. We are so overworked and stressed but we still do our best. People who have problems with educators should consider swapping [sic] roles for a day at one of our Cape Flats schools, then we can talk again.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Republic of South Africa, “Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act, 1997,” *Government Gazette* (Vol. 387, No. 18256, Cape Town, 5 September, 1997) <http://www.info.gov.za/gazette/acts/1997/a33-97.pdf> (accessed 12 October, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Kader Asmal, “Remarks by Professor Kader Asmal, MP, Minister of Education, at a Press Conference to Launch Booklet on Alternatives to Corporal Punishment,” (Cape Town, 5 October 2000), <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2000/0010061010a1004.htm> (accessed 12 October, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Chris Makhaye, “Mother takes on local teacher over child caning,” *Sunday Tribune*, 25 February, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Leanne Leoschut and Patrick Burton, “How Rich the Rewards? Results of the 2005 National Youth Victimization Study,” *Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention* (Monograph Series No. 1, Cape Town, May 2006), 72.

<sup>29</sup> As cited in Dave Chambers, “Children,” *Cape Argus*, 24 November, 2006.

Other teachers may be interested in non-violent methods of creating classroom discipline, but are unsure of how to create such an environment – especially when they have only been taught to enforce discipline through physical punishment. Shifting to a new form of classroom management is a challenging task, especially in an already disordered context, such as is found in many South African schools. According to Dr. Gilbert Masitsa, teachers often feel “helpless in the classroom” and cannot see any “adequate alternative” to corporal punishment.<sup>30</sup> This problem is also compounded by the fact that some parents still advocate corporal punishment as an appropriate means of disciplining their children<sup>31</sup> – with parental support for corporal punishment and a lack of knowledge of viable alternatives, many teachers still resort to this illegal practice.

The question of corporal punishment in schools is a sensitive issue, yet all of the participants in this study discussed the challenges around corporal punishment openly. All of the participant schools had policies against corporal punishment, and none of the principals condoned the use of physical punishment towards learners. In spite of the uniformity of policy, however, different schools were experiencing different challenges in regard to the question of corporal punishment: several principals had heard of isolated incidents of corporal punishment taking place in their schools, and several were struggling to support their teachers in the transition to a positive approach to classroom discipline. Some teachers said they had not traditionally used corporal punishment in their schools, but as different kinds of learners had entered the school environment in recent years, the need for stricter discipline (of any description) had increased.

An important addendum to this discussion is the issue of whether corporal punishment is actually an effective practice. Despite belief that if you “spare the rod you spoil the child”, there is a great deal of literature that points to the negative impacts that corporal punishment has on children: corporal punishment has been linked with increased levels of aggression and depression, and an increased likelihood that victims will act violently as adults. In addition, physical punishment has been shown to be less effective than other methods of discipline, particularly in its ability to create long-term behaviour change in children.<sup>32</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Student-Instigated Assault

A great deal of the concern surrounding violence in South African schools is focused on the phenomenon of student-instigated violence. Although teachers are also perpetrators of violence, students have been known to engage in severe acts of aggression against their teachers and fellow students. As reported in the *Sunday Independent* in September 2007

“Violent attacks involving schoolchildren are a countrywide occurrence. Education authorities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape find they are having to deal with an increasing number of such incidents...”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Gilbert Masitsa as cited in Aeysha Kassiem, “Smaller classes to address lack of discipline in schools,” *Cape Times*, 4 April, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Joan van Niekerk, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Coordinator for Childline, South Africa* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Carol Bower, Executive Director, Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN), “Corporal Punishment,” *Cape Times Opinion Piece*, 22 April, 2003 ([www.rapcan.org.za](http://www.rapcan.org.za)).

<sup>33</sup> Edwin Naidu, “Rapes and knifings in the blackboard jungle reach crisis point,” *Sunday Independent* (23 September, 2007).

Examples of these violent attacks are shocking but not uncommon:

“On Thursday, a grade 11 KwaZulu-Natal pupil was stabbed to death after becoming involved in an argument during morning prayers at his school. A pupil was arrested and is due to appear in court this week charged with the death of Sithembiso Mazibuko, of Mafu High School in Oliviershoek.”

“On Tuesday, a boy at Ferndale High School in Randburg, almost lost an eye after being hit with a broken bottle by a female pupil.”

Nokulunga Ndala, a KwaZulu-Natal teacher, was stabbed to death by a pupil she had accused of attempting to cheat during a geography test in March. The alleged killer had wanted a relationship with Ndala while she was a student teacher at another school, but Ndala told him that he was too young for her. Mazwi Armstrong Mkhwanazi pleaded guilty this month to killing Ndala, a Thornwood Secondary School teacher, and is now awaiting sentencing. He told the court that he had stabbed Ndala twice in the shoulder and throat in a rage because she had humiliated him in front of his classmates. Ndala bled to death in a school corridor.”<sup>34</sup>

According to National Education Department Director-General Duncan Hindle, the department is concerned about the violence, but does not think the situation is out of control. The Sunday Tribune cites Hindle as saying, “The situation is not out of hand considering we have 28,000 schools... We have a grip on what is happening and the department has taken steps [to address the problem].”<sup>35</sup> Yet in spite these reassuring words, it is important to recognize that the kind of violence that students are perpetrating in schools goes far beyond the level of what is reasonable or acceptable. This kind of violence signals a concerning development in education, and requires immediate and effective intervention.

The majority of the schools involved in this study did not have out-of-control problems with student-instigated violence. As previously discussed, teachers maintained that students lacked effective conflict resolution skills and would therefore engage in physical violence over mundane issues that would not seem to warrant physical aggression. In one school, however, a schoolyard conflict had escalated to the point where one student fatally stabbed another, outside of the school property, after school hours.

#### 2.4.3 *Outsider-Instigated Assault*

One final category of assault that takes place in relation to schools involves outsiders either entering the school grounds and physically attacking learners and teachers, or waiting for students traveling to and from school, and attacking them off school property. This type of violence is not discussed as often in the literature, but also contributes to insecurity in the school environment. In their submission to the Human Rights Commission Hearings on School Violence, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) asserted that above all, the students they interviewed were concerned about

<sup>34</sup> Edwin Naidu, “Rapes and knifings in the blackboard jungle reach crisis point,” *Sunday Independent* (23 September, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Edwin Naidu, “Spate of attacks as schools turn into war zones,;

the fact that outsiders often have easy access to school premises.<sup>36</sup> Cases of estranged spouses and other community-members coming onto school property to perpetrate violence against staff and students have appeared in the South African news, and as discussed above, it is widely noted that students are vulnerable to being attacked on their way to and home from school.<sup>37</sup>

Of all forms of assault, outsider-instigated violence was by far the issue of greatest concern for the schools involved in this study. A significant problem was indeed the robbery perpetrated against students traveling to and from school that was addressed earlier in this paper – a challenge that severely limited the freedom of movement for the students involved. One school had experienced significant problems with outsiders harassing their students over the school fence, either verbally or by throwing stones or other objects over the wall. One school had installed their fence and electric gate after an irate parent entered the school property and attempted to assault a learner. Two of the schools involved in this study had only female learners, and the interview participants felt this factor put their students at particular risk; both schools had instituted policies to keep their learners inside the school gates in order to guard against robbery, harassment by male outsiders, and victimization by taxi drivers who would wait for the female learners outside the school grounds.

## 2.5 Weapons in School

The problem of physical violence in schools is exacerbated by the number of weapons brought onto school property by students. These weapons are not limited to traditional items such as guns or knives – students in South Africa have been known to turn benign objects such as bottles or pencils into weapons when they experience conflict with other individuals.<sup>38</sup> Yet students are also bringing serious weapons such as guns onto school property, which is an issue of great concern. According to the National Public Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), when students come to school armed, mundane conflicts have a greater likelihood of escalating and becoming highly violent or even deadly.<sup>39</sup> The causes of this problem are multifaceted, but two of the main explanations that appear in the literature are that students bring weapons to school to protect themselves, or that they bring weapons because they find them at home and bring them to show off or to gain attention from their peers.<sup>40</sup> In regard to students bringing weapons to school for protection, the reasons are fairly obvious: students face a significant risk of being attacked and robbed on their way to and from school, and are

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<sup>36</sup> Dorothy Khosa, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2001), 33; *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by Soul City* (28 September, 2006); Patrick Burton, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Submission made to the South African Human Rights Commission by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention*, 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Khosa, *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation* (28 September, 2006);

<sup>39</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)* (28 September, 2006)

<sup>40</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)* (28 September, 2006); Ronnie Casella and Mark Potterton, “Guns in schools: A closer look at accidental shootings,” *South African Psychiatry Review* (Vol.9(4)2006: 216-219)

also at risk of being victimized in school. Because the police and the schools cannot guarantee that the students will be safe, young people choose to find means of protecting themselves.<sup>41</sup>

The other common explanation for why students bring weapons to school is, as noted above, related to curiosity and the availability of weapons at home. Mark Potterton and Ronnie Casella maintain that young people will bring guns they have found at home to school to show their friends. The authors assert that this is often a way for students to gain popularity or attention, but cite numerous examples of how these young people have ended up inadvertently wounding or killing their classmates. Some of these examples include shooting bystanders when examining a gun with friends, or accidentally shooting classmates while pointing the gun at someone else. One might wonder why other students would not report a fellow student who has a gun; the authors maintain that students are not always willing to report their peers because they do not believe that having a weapon is a serious issue, or because they don't want to be seen as "snitches".<sup>42</sup>

Students carrying weapons was an issue in at least two of the schools that participated in this study. One principal had confiscated sharp objects, knives and even machetes from students in his school, and noted that although the issue was not out of control, it was something that required vigilance on his part. Another principal maintained that students bringing weapons to school was one of the most significant issues he and his teachers faced. They had no consistent means of identifying which students were carrying weapons, and depended largely on reports from other students to find out who was in possession of knives or other dangerous objects. A teacher from this school affirmed that students bring the weapons to protect themselves from muggings en route to and from school, maintaining that this behaviour was not about protection or revenge within the school. This is encouraging, although the teacher felt this was still a cause for serious concern in light of students' lack of conflict resolution skills and propensity to become aggressive in the face of conflict.

## 2.6 Gender Violence/Sexual Assault

Physical assault is not the only form of assault that affects South African schools. Sadly, one of the most pervasive and traumatizing forms of violence that takes place in the South African school system is sexual violence. The majority of the literature on sexual violence holds that females are the primary victims, although it is apparent that young males also fall victim to this kind of assault, and are victimized at a far greater rate than many may realize. The following sections will explore the issue in further detail.

### 2.6.1 Who is affected?

Sexual violence victimizes South African youth irrespective of race, age, gender or socio-economic status.

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<sup>41</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NPTOSA)* (28 September, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> *Ronnie Casella and Mark Potterton, "Guns in schools: A closer look at accidental shootings," South African Psychiatry Review (Vol.9(4) 2006: 216-219)*

In their comprehensive report on sexual violence in South African schools, Human Rights Watch noted that:

“Sexual assault occurs in prestigious, predominantly white schools, in impoverished, predominantly black township schools, in schools for the learning disabled, and even in primary schools.”<sup>43</sup>

The report notes that poverty can make youth more vulnerable to being victimized by sexual violence, but highlights the fact that affluence offers no systematic protection from this kind of victimization.<sup>44</sup>

Many may assume that females are the only victims of sexual violence in schools. Indeed, females are frequently victimized in this manner, yet sexual violence has become a problem for children regardless of gender. Professor Corene de Wet from the Free State University conducted research on the issue in schools in the Free State, and found that in fact boys there were being sexually harassed more frequently than girls.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.6.2 Forms and Frequency of Violence

The spectrum of sexual violence against youth is broad. Boys and girls as young as pre-school age have been sodomized and raped with foreign objects – often-times with the violence taking place repeatedly at the hands of groups of peers.<sup>46</sup> Sexual violence can become common-place for girls especially as they get older, with female youth enduring sexual comments in hallways and classrooms, being propositioned and fondled against their will, and becoming the victims of sexual assault, rape and gang rape on school property.<sup>47</sup> Sadly, the responses to this behaviour in schools often further victimize youth, as many school administrators either do not intervene, or intervene ineffectively when pressured to act.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps partially due to the fact that administrators allow this violence to continue by not disciplining perpetrators, youth are often ostracized by their peers after they have fallen victim to, or have reported one of these violent crimes.<sup>49</sup>

These examples of violence are cause for concern on their own, but are even more concerning when viewed in light of the frequency with which they occur. According to Soul City, an NGO dedicated to health promotion and social change, rape, sexual assault and gender-based violence account for one third of all reported cases of violence in schools.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the Centre for Justice and Crime

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<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 36.

<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 36.

<sup>45</sup> As cited in Nashira Davids and Buyekezwa Makwabe, “Our children are raping each other,” *Times* (7 November, 2007), <http://www.thetimes.co.za/News/Article.aspx?id=616379>.

<sup>46</sup> Nashira Davids and Buyekezwa Makwabe, “Our children are raping each other,” *Times* (7 November, 2007), <http://www.thetimes.co.za/News/Article.aspx?id=616379>.

<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 36.

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools.” The report highlights how administrators often do not act to stop sexual harassment, as they either do not see the behaviour as serious, or they blame the female victims. If administrators do act, it is often done privately without engaging the police, and involves a payment to the victim’s family. Perpetrators of serious offenses such as rape are often left within the school setting, with the victim.

<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools.”

<sup>50</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by Soul City* (28 September, 2006).

Prevention has found that young people are more likely to be sexually assaulted in schools than anywhere else.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.6.3 Who are the Perpetrators?

The perpetrators of these sexual offenses are as varied as their actions, but primarily include teachers, school staff and fellow students. Teachers, for example, have been known to attempt “dating relationships” with their young pupils, thus abusing their positions of power and trust. Girls who refuse to engage in dating relationships with their teachers are still at risk, however, as teachers also lure girls into rooms alone to sexually assault or rape them. Teachers also threaten corporal punishment or loss of grades if girls do not acquiesce to their sexual advances.<sup>52</sup>

Although the risk posed by teachers to students is substantial, youth in South African schools are even more likely to be victimized by their peers. Young males have been known to be sodomized and sexually harassed by their male peers, especially in group bullying situations. Males are also sexually assaulted by fellow female students in the forms of unwanted kissing, sexual grabbing or pinching, as well as rape.<sup>53</sup>

Boys will also sexually harass female students, through teasing, taunting, fondling, grabbing, and subjecting female students to sexually degrading comments, as well as through sexual assault and rape. Boys in South African schools are most likely to commit these serious forms of assault when they are in groups – as such, gang rape or “jack rolling” is a common form of violence experienced by female South African students.<sup>54</sup>

When violence does occur one-on-one between male and female youth, it is often in the form of relationship violence. Violence within South African youth relationships has been known to include coercion, intimidation, battery, rape, and murder.<sup>55</sup>

None of the schools involved in this research named ‘sexual violence’ as a significant issue they struggled with within the school. A teacher at one school maintained that students brought values from home that potentially led them to treat female learners in a negative manner, but the teacher did not elaborate on this issue. A principal from another school discussed the issue of sexual violence in the context of the home, maintaining that some of her students had been the victims of rape and violence at the hands of family-members.

### 2.6.4 Implications

Obviously, the implications of this problem are severe. Impacts on learners include the physical risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but also include depression, guilt, fear, isolation and other psychological damage, deterioration in school performance and increased rates of school-

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Burton, “Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Submission made to the South African Human Rights Commission by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention,” (September, 2006), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 37.

<sup>53</sup> Nashira Davids and Buyekezwa Makwabe, “Our children are raping each other,” *Times* (7 November, 2007), <http://www.thetimes.co.za/News/Article.aspx?id=616379>.

<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 49.

<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 54-55.



leaving.<sup>56</sup> As the ramifications are so severe it is easy to focus solely on the victims of these crimes, yet when considering the implications of sexual violence it is also important to consider the perpetrators; constructions of masculinity for young men in South African society, for example are often tied to beliefs about domination, control and violence. Many young men are not given guidance on how to create healthy identities that do not involve the sexual and other domination of women.<sup>57</sup> In addition, it seems that youth in South Africa have come to equate sex with power – as illustrated in the various instances of bullying that involve sexual assault and degradation.<sup>58</sup> This, too, is a problem that has concerning implications for school violence in South Africa.

## 2.7 Gangs

Gang violence is a significant problem in South Africa, in the Western Cape in particular. Researchers estimate that, “Between 40 per cent and 60 per cent of serious violent crime in the Western Cape is directly attributable to gang activity.”<sup>59</sup> This is a pervasive problem that impacts families and communities, but which also spills over into school environments, exacerbating the problems schools already have with weapons, drugs, insecurity and disorder. Human Rights Watch sketches the following picture of the problem:

“Gangs operate with impunity in some school environments, making schools places where drugs, thugs and weapons can move as freely through the gates as pupils. Turf wars between gang members do not just spill onto school grounds; rather, schools become territorial prizes because gangs need a controlled area from which to sell drugs and recruit members. Some schools are so destabilized by gangs that courses are not conducted according to any regular schedule. Teachers report that they sometime fear their own gang-affiliated pupils who carry weapons and smoke *dagga*. Intimidation by gangs can undermine all attempts at creating a culture of learning and teaching.”<sup>60</sup>

The impact that this type of violence has on teachers and learners is extensive. Students who are exposed to the trauma of threats, drive-by shootings and violent death can suffer psychological harm, including apathy and helplessness, depression and stress. Teachers are also affected, as they are not only exposed to this insecurity, but are responsible for offering support and counseling for traumatized youth. These pressures can result in post-traumatic stress disorder for teachers trying to work in gang-violent areas.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 61.

<sup>57</sup> Inge Petersen, Arvin Bhana and Mary McKay, “Sexual violence and youth in South Africa: The need for community-based prevention interventions,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* (Vol. 26, No. 11, November, 2005: 1233-1248), 1237-1243.

<sup>58</sup> Nashira Davids and Buyekezwa Makwabe, “Our children are raping each other,” *Times* (7 November, 2007), <http://www.thetimes.co.za/News/Article.aspx?id=616379>.

<sup>59</sup> Batya Reckson and Lily Becker, “Exploration of the narrative accounts of South African teachers working in a gang-violent community in the Western Cape,” *International Journal of Social Welfare* (Vol. 14, 2005: 107-115), 107.

<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools,” 34.

<sup>61</sup> Batya Reckson and Lily Becker, “Exploration of the narrative accounts of South African teachers working in a gang-violent community in the Western Cape,”

Two of the five schools in this study had problems related to gang activity, although only one listed this as a significant security problem. For one school, the gangs were simply small, informal groups of local youth who engaged in theft and vandalism on and around the school property. For the other school, however, the presence of a formal gang operating drug houses and engaging in other activity in the area was a significant threat to school security. The principal at this school maintained that the security measures they had implemented – including installing fences, gates and an intercom system – were a direct result of the gang presence in their neighbourhood.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF INTERVENTIONS & EVALUATION

In light of the great concern over safety issues in South African schools, government officials, NGOs and educators have mobilized resources and implemented many innovative strategies aimed at improving school safety. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these resources in their entirety; however, in order to gain some perspective on what supports are available, the following section will provide an overview of strategies employed by the Department of Education's Safe Schools Project, as well as a brief overview of some of the school safety programming available through the NGO sector in the province. As this research took place in the Western Cape, the information highlighted here will reflect the strategies of the Western Cape Safe Schools Project, and will focus on the NGOs that were present in the case study schools. This sample, however small, will offer a point of reference for comparing South African policies and programs with internationally accepted best-practices for school safety.

#### 3.1 The Safe Schools Project: Western Cape Department of Education

##### 3.1.1 Mission and Three-Pronged Strategy

The Western Cape Safe Schools Project employs multiple approaches and operates various programs aimed at improving safety in Western Cape schools. While a detailed treatment of every aspect of their work is not possible within the confines of this paper, it is possible to describe the general mission and strategies that the Safe Schools Project currently utilizes. Safe Schools' mission, as described in the document, "Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions" is as follows:

"Safe Schools strives to create centres of excellence with strong community links, quality learning and teaching, and effective management and governance, and in so doing, combat the root causes of crime and violence."<sup>62</sup>

This is a holistic, broad approach to school safety, which Safe Schools pursues through a "three-pronged strategy." This strategy includes: 1) Environmental Programs; 2) Behavioural Change Programs; and 3) Systems Programs that impact both in-school management and community-school relations.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Western Cape Education Department, "Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions," (Western Cape Education Department, 2003), 5.

<sup>63</sup> Western Cape Education Department, "Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions," 5.

Safe Schools' Environmental Programs are the types of interventions that are perhaps the most visible to outsiders, as these programs involve modifying the school building to address immediate threats to the security of educators and learners. This includes installing fences and barbed wire around the school property, installing intercom systems and electric gates in order to limit access to the school, and installing alarm systems connected to armed-response services.

Safe Schools' Behavioural Change Programs extend the concept of school safety to include not only structural, but human elements as well. These interventions involve skills-training for learners and educators, as well as community-members, in order to improve relationships and conflict management skills within the school. To this end, Safe Schools provides programs such as "conflict management, trauma counseling, peer counseling and human rights education" to target schools.

Finally, Safe Schools' System Programs involve "leadership and management training, organizational development, community relations and effective governance." Essentially, these programs aim to strengthen the organizational capacity of a school by offering training and guidance on strategic planning, and by facilitating connections with Community-Based Organizations and NGOs that can help improve security in the school and surrounding community.<sup>64</sup>

### *3.1.2 Targeting Schools for Intervention*

In looking at these broad, general strategies, the question that follows is how actual programs are practically targeted and implemented in Western Cape Schools. There are several ways in which this is done: according to Nariman Khan, the Director of the Western Cape Safe Schools Project, schools in the province are ranked along a continuum that ranges from "low-risk" to "extremely high-risk." A high-risk school is defined as "a school located geographically in a gang-infested area where gang involvement, violence, vandalism and crimes occur." An extremely high-risk school is defined as "a school located geographically in a gang-infested area where there is a regular occurrence of gunfire." The Safe Schools Office identifies the schools that fall into these two categories, and targets fifty of these per year for full "three-pronged" interventions. Safe Schools initiates these interventions every year, but works with each high risk school for two years; as such, Safe Schools runs intervention programs with approximately one hundred schools every year.<sup>65</sup>

Working with these hundred schools is a significant task, but as was evident in the interviews conducted for this research, Safe Schools also works on a more ad hoc basis with schools that are not in the high and extremely high-risk categories. None of the schools that participated in this research necessarily received the full complement of Safe Schools' programming efforts, as they were not classified in the high-risk categories, but the schools did receive funding for varying types and combinations of Environmental, Behavioural and Systems interventions.

### *3.1.3 General Supports*

Safe Schools has several other strategies that are aimed at supporting schools' safety efforts. One significant support is the Safe Schools Call Centre. This resource centre currently employs five individuals who are on call for learners, educators, and parents, members of School Governing Bodies,

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<sup>64</sup> Western Cape Education Department, "Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions," 5.

<sup>65</sup> Personal interview with Nariman Khan, Director of the Western Cape Safe Schools Project: September 26, 2007; Western Cape Education Department, "Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions," (Western Cape Education Department, 2003), 2-3.

and community members who have concerns about safety. Individuals can call in order to access emergency services, to report incidents of crime, abuse, violence and/or vandalism, and can also request referrals to other support services, including NGOs or trauma counselors. The Call Centre follows up on requests for help, and also keeps data in order to help Safe Schools track WCED school safety trends and changes.<sup>66</sup>

Another form of intervention, provided by the Department of Community Safety in the Western Cape, involves the deployment of “Bambanani Against Crime” volunteers. These individuals are members of either a neighbourhood watch, a community policing forum or a school governing body, and are offered a stipend to work on school premises monitoring access points and keeping watch for dangerous objects or activities. These volunteers provide another supervisory presence in the school, and are also trained in conflict resolution and mediation skills so they can intervene in conflict situations if necessary.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to these resources, Safe Schools also creates numerous written safety support documents that are distributed to schools across the province. These documents, including publications such as “Cooking Up Community,” “Signposts for Safe Schools,” a “Drug Abuse Policy Framework,” all offer guidelines and best practices to schools so that they understand how to address various safety concerns properly.

Finally, Safe Schools has sought to capitalize on the expertise and capacity of community and non-governmental organizations, by entering into school safety community partnerships. For example, in order to address both behaviours and beliefs that contribute to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, eighteen non-profit organizations have partnered with the Western Cape Education Department to run a program called Generation of Leaders Discovered (GoLD) in Western Cape Schools. This program brings facilitators into schools in order to work with youth on positive behaviour skills, peer education training, and leadership development.<sup>68</sup> In addition to partnering on in-school programming for safety, the Department of Education has also collaborated with various organizations to create the previously-mentioned support documents for school safety. For example, in 2006 the Department worked with the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention and the Open Society Foundation for South Africa to create “Hlayiseka Early Warning System: Be Aware – Take Action,” – a national guideline document on how to monitor school safety. The Department also set up a partnership with the South African Police Service to create the document “Signposts for Safe Schools” – a crime prevention resource for South African educators and administrators.

## **3.2 The NGO Community**

### *3.2.1 Peer Counseling and Life Skills*

This type of capacity-building was being offered to several schools in this study by the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB, or simply the “Salesians”) – a congregation of Catholic priests and brothers that

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<sup>66</sup> Personal interview with Nariman Khan, Director of the Western Cape Safe Schools Project: September 26, 2007. The Call Centre number is: 0800 45 46 47, and can be accessed from any landline.

<sup>67</sup> *Public Hearings on School-based Violence – Oral submission made to the Human Rights Commission by the Department of Community Safety (Western Cape Province)*, (28 September, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Personal interview with the principal from one of the schools that participated in this research: Tuesday, October 30, 2007.

offers social support services to various communities in Southern Africa.<sup>69</sup> The Salesians provide life skills training to two of the schools in this study, covering the areas of self-esteem, vision and goal-setting, HIV/AIDS and STIs, gender and violence, and diversity. In addition to this, the Salesians also offer peer educator training in which students “are trained to recognize youth in need of additional help and refer them for assistance and to advocate for resources and services for themselves and their peers.”<sup>70</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Counseling Courses for Educators*

Social upheaval and violence in schools puts tremendous strain on the psycho-social well-being of students and educators. As a result of this, it is necessary for educators to be equipped with skills that allow them to respond to members of their school community in a supportive, caring manner. Educators in one school in this study had partaken in counseling training, provided by the Catholic Schools Office, which helped equip them for this important role.

### 3.2.3 *Counseling Support for Victims of Crime*

Given both the intensity of violence in South African schools and the need for teachers to be able to *teach* their students effectively (and not be unduly relied upon for counseling support), it is important that alternative resources for counseling and responding to trauma are available to schools. Two of the schools in this study had access to Catholic Welfare and Development, an organization that provided either weekly social worker support to the schools, or provided these services on an as-needed basis.

### 3.2.4 *Well-Managed Classroom Training for Teachers*

One of the significant challenges facing South African educators is the question of how to effectively manage classroom behaviour. Given large class sizes and the banning of corporal punishment in schools, teachers need to find methods of behaviour management that allow them both to teach effectively and to promote positive behaviour in learners. The staff from one of the schools involved in this study had completed a “Well-Managed Classroom” training course, offered by Girls and Boys Town of South Africa. This two-day training seminar equipped the teachers with skills to help them manage challenging behaviour in a proactive and positive way, while the principal received special training in a rehabilitative approach to discipline.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.2.5 *Extra-Mural Education*

A final category of support offered by NGOs operating in the five schools in this study revolves around the promotion of extra-mural education. Extra-mural education seeks to enrich a student’s learning experience by offering them opportunities for sport, music, and other forms of skills-building. By engaging in extra-mural activities, students are able to direct their energies towards constructive ends instead of engaging in negative behaviour such as participating in gangs, vandalism, or other crime. And finally, in some cases, extra-mural education attempts to make schools into centres for community living, learning, and interaction, as opposed to simply being isolated buildings of which no one in the community has ownership. This is directly related to the issue of school safety; according to Naledi Pandor, the current Minister of Education:

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.salesians.org.za/Index.html>.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.salesians.org.za/lifechoices.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Information on this program can be accessed on the Girls and Boys Town website, at: <http://www.gbtown.org.za/courses.htm#schools>.

“The limited use of school spaces has led to extremely instrumentalist notions of schools. We see them as spaces we occupy for a brief time for specified purposes only. We have no real ties to them. This is why we conduct ourselves in a negative fashion in schools, it is the reason we allow theft of school property, the reason why learners and teachers cannot feel confidently safe and protected. Using schools as community hubs for learning beyond the curriculum makes them our spaces and thus enhances the potential for caring about them.”<sup>72</sup>

There were multiple extra-mural initiatives being implemented in the five participant schools, including programs focusing on dance, soccer, softball, and general physical education. Not all of these initiatives had the lofty goal of making the school into a hub for community, but each at least offered positive engagement opportunities and skills-building for underserved youth.

### 3.3 Fit with Best Practices

The above list of NGO and governmental interventions demonstrates the wide range of school safety supports available to Western Cape Schools. As there are so many resources available, one might wonder if the persistence of violence in South African schools could be attributed to not having the *right kinds* of interventions available. In comparing the Department of Education and NGOs’ approaches to school safety with international best practices, however, one finds that South Africa is following many of the recommended strategies for effectively addressing school violence. In 1999, the International Association of Chiefs of Police released a comprehensive document outlining many of the strategies and steps required to significantly improve school safety. The following section will highlight the parallels between internationally-accepted standards for improving school safety, and the South African approaches discussed in this paper.

#### 3.3.1 Multiple Strategies

The Police Chiefs’ document begins with the statement: “Violence prevention programs work best when they incorporate multiple strategies and address the full range of possible acts of violence within schools.”<sup>73</sup> As evidenced by the examples above, the South African strategy for addressing school violence unquestionably incorporates multiple approaches – it is not just a one-track strategy that focuses simply on building fences and installing gates, but is rather a strategy that includes environmental, behavioural and system/community interventions.

#### 3.3.2 Environmental Initiatives: Safety Audit and Infrastructure for Security

One of the issues that the Police Chiefs document highlights is the need for schools to conduct a safety audit in order to determine what security needs exist in their environment.<sup>74</sup> The South African Department of Education fully supports schools in conducting such audits, and provides resources such as the Hlayiseka Early Warning System, and the “Nine-Point Safe Schools Planning Process”<sup>75</sup> in order to guide schools in their efforts.

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<sup>72</sup> South African Government Information, “Address by the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, MP, at the Extra-Mural Education Project’s (EMEP) ‘Beyond the School Wall’ teachers’ graduation, Sid G Rule Primary School, Grassy Park, Cape Town (<http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2007/07042511151002.htm>).

<sup>73</sup> Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), “Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence,” (November, 1999), 1.

<sup>74</sup> Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), “Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence,” 4.

<sup>75</sup> Western Cape Education Department, “Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions,” 20-26.

Part of this preventative approach, as advocated by the Police Chiefs, includes evaluating whether there is a need to physically alter the school environment to increase security. Many of the Police Chiefs' recommendations revolve around the need to regulate access to the school property – through policies on reporting to the Main Office, through hiring personnel to monitor entrances and exits, etc.<sup>76</sup> In the Western Cape, many schools have implemented such security measures, and have reinforced their efforts to regulate access to school property by installing fences, electric gates, and security cameras. Further to this, the Police Chiefs recommend setting up an anonymous hotline that individuals can call in order to report vandalism, harassment, abuse, or any other form of crime.<sup>77</sup> Safe Schools has implemented exactly this kind of initiative by establishing and advertising the Safe Schools Call Centre.

### *3.3.3 Behavioural Initiatives: Classroom Management, Conflict Resolution, and Diversity Training*

Behavioural interventions are a cornerstone of both the Department of Education and NGOs' strategies for improving school safety. As discussed above, Safe Schools and various NGOs provide support for teachers and administrators to learn effective classroom management techniques, and offer conflict resolution and diversity training for staff and students. This is entirely in line with the recommendations found in the Police Chiefs' manual: the document outlines, for example, the importance of having clearly defined rules for a school, which are enforced with clear and consistent consequences; discusses the need for a "Peaceable Classroom" or "Peaceable Schools" approach to behaviour management; and suggests both conflict resolution education and diversity training for teachers and students, as important avenues for preventing violence.<sup>78</sup>

## **3.4 Systems Initiatives: Organizational Capacity Building and Community Connections**

Finally, international standards regarding organizational capacity-building and fostering community connections link well with many of the approaches taken by Safe Schools and the South African NGO sector. The Police Chiefs advocate for a co-ordinated approach to school safety that involves teachers, administrators, parents, law enforcement, and community actors. They highlight the need for violence prevention through organizational planning and collective buy-in, and discuss the need for emergency-preparedness, record-keeping, and recurring evaluation. All of these organizational capacity-building approaches are part of the South African Safe Schools Project's three-pronged approach to school safety.<sup>79</sup>

The Police Chiefs also recommend that schools engage with the community as much as possible to gain support for violence prevention efforts, and that schools foster extra-mural education opportunities to limit the likelihood that students will become engaged in negative behaviour during their

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<sup>76</sup> Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence," 4-6.

<sup>77</sup> Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence," 6.

<sup>78</sup> Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence," 8-14. Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence," 12.

<sup>79</sup> Western Cape Education Department, "Managing Safety and Security within WCED Institutions," 5.

unsupervised hours.<sup>80</sup> As discussed above, community engagement and extra-mural education opportunities form a key aspect of Safe Schools and the NGOs' approach to improving school safety.

The above section demonstrates the way in which South African safe schools policies are broad, comprehensive, and consistent with many of the internationally accepted strategies for effectively addressing school violence. Given the availability of these positive resources, one must then ask why schools are still experiencing the high levels of violence that were discussed at the beginning of this paper. Outsiders can offer conjecture as to what factors might contribute to this disparity, but it is likely that the clearest answers to these questions will come from the teachers and administrators who are addressing school violence on a daily basis. Schools have diverse circumstances and similarly diverse needs when it comes to promoting school safety, and as such, it is probably less useful to examine these issues across a wide range of circumstances. As such, the final sections of this paper will examine the safety experiences of five schools in the Cape Town area, all of which exist in fairly similar social circumstances, and all of which are experiencing similar types of violence. Interviews with staff in these schools sought to find answers to the following questions: 1) What safety innovations has your school implemented that have been helpful, given your context and security needs; and 2) What are the barriers you see as limiting your school's ability to further improve its safety situation? The concluding section of this paper will offer recommendations based on these answers, highlighting how safe school resources and efforts might be better directed in the future.

#### **4. THE CASE STUDY SCHOOLS: DEMOGRAPHICS**

Before embarking on a discussion of interview outcomes, it is important to briefly outline the demographics and circumstances of the schools that participated in this study.

Two of the schools involved in this study were Catholic institutions with only female students, while the remaining three were entirely public institutions that served both male and female learners. Two were primary schools, and three were high schools. Enrolment varied from 260 to 620 learners, although four out of the five schools had more than 450 learners in total. Class sizes varied from as few as 24 students to as many as 70 in one or two instances; classes with 40 or more students were the norm. To accommodate these learners, the number of teachers ranged from 13 to 19, with student-teacher ratios ranging from 17-1 to 36-1. It is important to note that in several of the schools there were few support staff, and those in administrative positions played a dual role as teacher and, for example, principal.

The racial breakdown in the various schools was mixed; for example, one school had a majority of Xhosa-speaking students, with a complement of coloured students and a small minority of white learners, while another had a 75-80% majority of coloured students, and a smaller population of black learners. At two of the schools, the majority of the students came from the surrounding area, but at the remaining three schools students largely commuted in from townships on the Cape Flats.

In all of the schools, the majority of students came from working class families, where levels of unemployment and poverty were high. Social problems in the communities the students came from

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<sup>80</sup> Private Sector Liaison Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence," 10-11.



included substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence, and an increase in numbers of child-headed households. Many students came from single-parent households, some were growing up in foster care, and some were living in shacks and informal dwellings. Low or non-existent parental involvement in school life was a problem for the majority of the schools involved in this research. The four public schools charged school fees ranging from R450-R600 per year, although payment of school fees was a significant problem for all schools.

In general, all of the schools had created a clean, orderly and structured environment. Every school had a fence and a security gate, and several had volunteers who monitored access to the school property. Some schools had to be more vigilant about monitoring their gates, as community-members would regularly loiter outside the property, but at other schools access to the property did not seem to need such tight control.

As illustrated in the first section of this paper, the safety challenges facing the schools involved in this study were fairly representative of the challenges facing the larger South African community. Students and teachers faced the threat of robbery and assault on their way to and from school, and several schools indicated that students had started to bring weapons with them onto school property. Bullying and the lack of effective conflict resolution skills in students were identified as problems, although the level of aggression and violence demonstrated by students varied from school to school. Vandalism and theft of school property were problems at four out of the five schools, and gang violence was a concern for two of the schools that participated in the study. Interviewees from two of the schools felt ill-equipped to deal with safety issues and were frustrated that safety concerns demanded a significant amount of their attention; participants from one school felt safe inside, but not outside the school walls; and, in general, all participants felt they needed to be vigilant regarding safety and security.

Finally, in regard to the schools' connection with the Department of Education's Safe Schools Project, one school had a non-existent relationship (an independent Catholic school), while the others had various degrees and forms of interaction with the Department. Safe Schools had provided infrastructure improvements for four of the five schools, and had helped at various locations with bullying intervention programs, peer counseling training, diversity training and strategic planning. Two schools seemed to engage with Safe Schools on an as-needed basis, while the other two schools seemed to receive support on the initiative of Safe Schools itself.

## **5. THE RESULTS: OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As discussed above, the schools in this study had much in common regarding both their social context and experiences with school safety: the schools existed in similar geographical areas, had similar student populations, and all experienced low to moderate levels of violence. These similarities allow us to draw some tentative conclusions regarding potentially positive innovations that can help mitigate violence in schools in this context, as well as barriers that currently stand in the way of improving the level of school safety. The following conclusions are drawn from both explicit statements by research participants, and the researcher's observations regarding similarities between the participant schools.

## **5.1 Resources and Innovations for School Safety**

### *5.1.1 Physical Security: Gates, Fences and Other Safety Infrastructure*

The first resource that seemed to benefit all of the schools in this study was the presence of physical security infrastructure; fences, monitored electric gates, and security cameras all allowed the schools an increased measure of control over who had access to their property. Participants at all of the schools maintained that by controlling access to the school grounds, they were better able to defend themselves against theft and vandalism, as well as assault or harassment of their learners during school hours. Even if learners experienced insecurity in the surrounding community, these physical security measures allowed staff to create a secure and structured environment inside the school property.

### *5.1.2 School Code of Conduct*

The majority of the schools involved in this study had established a code of conduct for learner behaviour. In several schools this involved printing the school rules, along with the corresponding consequences for rule infractions, in a student handbook, as well as having the rules publicly displayed in rooms such as the principal's office. This offered both teachers and students clarity as to what was considered acceptable behaviour within the school, and allowed teachers to be consistent in their response to negative behaviour. Many of the schools made classroom discussions of the code of conduct part of the beginning of their academic year, and offered opportunities for student input into the code. Levels of student acceptance of the code of conduct varied between the schools – some students viewed it as a list of things they were not allowed to do, whereas other students saw the code as a reflection of school and personal values. The school in which students were seen to have internalized the code and made it part of their personal value system, had explicitly engaged students on the issue of collective values. Teachers in this school felt strongly that their reinforcement of school values – through classroom education, discussion and school assemblies – had made a significant impact on learner compliance with the code of conduct, and student willingness to alter negative behaviour.

### *5.1.3 Caring or Counseling Approach to Discipline*

A third resource or innovation that teachers felt was useful in improving safety, was the use of a caring or counseling approach to school discipline. Staff at one school, for example, had instituted disciplinary procedures based on principles of behaviour modification, largely because they had previously seen students come into the school wanting to “make their own rules,” and consequently staff felt they needed to have structures in place to help clarify boundaries and expectations for behaviour. The belief-system that underlined this approach was that all behaviour happens for a reason, and that students are good and capable of positive change. Staff at the school created a file for each learner, which highlighted both their positive and negative behaviour. This file was updated by classroom teachers and the staff-member in charge of discipline for the school, and was used to track trends in student behaviour. Positive behaviour was reinforced and applauded, while negative behaviour was met with clear and structured interventions. Responsibility for addressing different types of negative behaviour (including tardiness, non-completion of homework, non-compliance with the dress code, disruptive behaviour, as well as more serious infractions) was given to different individuals, ranging from student leaders, classroom teachers, a behaviour committee, and the school governing body. Teachers at this school maintained that after instituting this approach, both they and members of the school governing body saw a marked improvement in learner behaviour.

The principal at another school involved in this study discussed the “counseling approach” to school discipline that they had implemented in his school. He had received training in this approach through Girls and Boys Town in Cape Town, and believed that it had played a valuable role in encouraging positive behaviour in the learners at his school. The approach is based on the perspective that it is necessary to have clear guidelines as to what behaviour is acceptable, what is not, and what consequences accompany certain actions. This counseling approach also holds that learners are capable of positive change, if given enough support from the adults around them. As such, the principal maintained that he spent a significant amount of time working with students who demonstrated challenging behaviour; they would discuss the behaviour, talk about why it was not acceptable, and discuss what the student would do in the future if placed in a similar situation. The principal said that this was a time-intensive approach – the “long road” – but that he felt that it was worthwhile for helping students learn positive behaviour and decision-making skills for the future, and that it helped foster positive relationships between staff and students.

#### *5.1.4 Consistent Contact with Parents and Guardians*

A fourth source of innovation for improving school safety, according to the participants in this study, was persistently pursuing contact with parents and maximizing the role that dedicated parents can play in the school environment. Most of the schools in this study had either very limited or non-existent parental involvement in their school; some parents did not know how to participate in their child’s school experience, while others felt uncomfortable about it, or simply did not want to. Yet it was apparent in several schools that parental involvement could play a significant role in improving learner behaviour and supporting the often under-resourced, over-worked school staff. In one school, for example, learners were “bunking” or leaving school during school hours at alarming levels. In response, the principal suspended all of the offending students, and sent a letter home to each of them saying that they would only be allowed to return after their parents had come to a meeting at the school. When the parents arrived at the school, the principal took them on a tour of the school grounds, showing them the places from which the students were leaving the school property. The principal engaged the parents in the school environment and alerted them to disciplinary issues involving their children, and maintained that after this intervention, bunking ceased to be a problem.

The principal at this school also worked diligently to maintain contact with his parent population by distributing regular school update newsletters, and by telephoning parents consistently when discipline issues involving their children arose. This diligent approach to encouraging parental involvement was common practice in several of the participant schools. Various participants maintained that this kind of outreach did require a great deal of effort, but most also believed that it played a significant role in improving levels of discipline and school safety.

A principal at a second school also discussed the important role that parents played in improving the school environment. He maintained that few parents felt comfortable in the school, and that this contributed to their lack of involvement. To address this problem, he arranged non-academic opportunities for parents to contribute to the school: he organized painting and school maintenance gatherings on weekends, where families could come for a braai and spend the afternoon working on the property. This principal believed that this gave parents a non-threatening avenue through which to participate in the school environment, and made them more likely to stay engaged in school life. This school did in fact have an extremely active core group of parents and community volunteers that contributed daily to the functioning of the school: according to the principal, there were between ten

and fifty volunteers at the school every day, working on administration, finances, classroom supervision, and literacy support. The principal worked with the volunteers, training them to provide teacher support in and outside of the classroom. The principal maintained that this core group represented no more than 10% of his parent population, but that they played an integral role in improving the functioning of the school.

One additional intervention employed by the staff at this school involved very direct parental involvement in discipline issues. When learners acted inappropriately at the school, parents were contacted and required to spend time volunteering in their child's classroom. This is an innovative extension of the idea of parental engagement in school discipline, and the principal at this school believed that it played a positive role in impacting learner behaviour.

#### *5.1.5 Using Safe Schools Resources Preventatively and Proactively*

A fifth source of school safety support for the participants in this study involved using Safe Schools resources preventatively and proactively. The Call Centre, for example, was seen as a positive resource by many of the participating schools, and had been used successfully in emergency situations.

One principal maintained that although her school did not receive structured interventions from Safe Schools, she had submitted several proposals to the Department for safety funding, and had as a result been able to access resources quickly and consistently.

A third school had made effective use of the Bambanani security volunteers provided by Safe Schools, by actively engaging them in training on how to approach students, and by making them part of on-going security discussions in the school. Not all schools had this kind of positive experience with the Bambanani volunteers – some felt that the volunteers sat idly and did not do the work they were engaged to do. However, at the school where the volunteers were seen as part of school's approach for safety, where they were trained by the principal, and where they were involved in discussions on the security situation, the experience was much better; the principal felt that they actually played a significant role in improving school safety. In this way, it is evident that a proactive approach to working with resources for school safety can be highly beneficial to the school involved.

#### *5.1.6 Access to Social Work Resources*

Not all of the schools that participated in this study had access to social work resources. However those that did seemed to feel that it made a significant impact on their ability to effectively address the social issues faced by many of their students. Given the extent of violence and threats that students in the schools faced – including threats at home, in the wider community, and in the school – there was a great need in the schools that teachers and administrators did not feel they could adequately attend to. In addition, teachers and administrators were over-worked and felt overwhelmed by the need to play the roles of counselor and social worker, in addition to their role as teachers. The two schools that had access to social workers – either for one day per week, or on an as-needed basis – felt that this burden was eased, and that their students' needs were being more effectively addressed.

#### *5.1.7 Strategically Using Outside Resources*

A sixth method of improving school safety was the strategic use of outside resources. This recommendation is quite situation-specific and requires creativity on the part of individual schools, but it can play an important role in improving security. One school, for example, was highly concerned by

the fact that its students were being robbed and victimized on the way to and from school – particularly at the bus stops near the school. The principal contacted Golden Arrow Bus Services, and requested that the company modify its route so that students could be dropped off and picked up immediately outside the school premises. According to the principal, this has made a significant contribution to the security of his students, did not cost the school anything, and did not require a great deal of effort on his part.

#### *5.1.8 Team-Building and Staff Support*

A final resource that was useful for all of the schools involved in this study was the active promotion of team-building for staff. In a highly stressful environment, such as a school in which safety issues are a concern, teachers and administrators benefit from support from, and collaboration with, their colleagues. Most of the participant schools maintained that their staff had a common vision for how to address school violence, and that colleagues worked together to implement safety and discipline initiatives. Staff in at least one school started every day with a check-in meeting and prayers which, according to some, was a valuable way to strengthen connections between the staff-members. All of the research participants stated that this kind of collaborative environment was an important source of support that helped them work effectively under sometimes stressful circumstances.

## **5.2 Barriers to Improving School Safety**

### *5.2.1 The Outside Community*

The major security challenges facing three of the five schools that participated in this study came directly from the surrounding community. Students experienced harassment, robbery and assault from individuals living in the area surrounding their schools, and schools themselves were targeted by community members for theft and vandalism. Most of the schools experiencing these types of challenges took great pains to increase their structural security measures, which, as discussed above, was seen to be an important measure for improving school security. Yet the fact remains that in these places, the security of the school depended on whether or not the physical infrastructure was adequate for keeping outsiders out; if outsiders found ways to circumvent the security measures, they would. In one school, for example, vandals had broken holes in the school fence, and had started cutting the razor wire in order to climb over the fence to enter school property.

It is important to note that few of the schools involved in this study had significant ties to the surrounding community; students either commuted in to attend the school (did not live in the area), or school-community connections simply did not exist and weren't consciously nurtured. None of the schools had the experience of trying to improve their security by attempting to build connections with the surrounding community. It is unclear as to whether this would make a significant difference in improving the security situation of the school, but this would be an interesting area for future research.

### *5.2.2 Over-work and Lack of Human Resources*

A challenge experienced at all of the schools in this study was that of over-work and lack of human resources. According to one principal, the Department of Education will fund one teacher for every 39 students in a school. This is a challenging ratio to begin with, and presents considerable challenges for schools that cannot raise sufficient funds through their School Governing Body to hire extra staff. Yet what is even more concerning, is the fact that there is no additional allotment of funding from the Department to pay for administrative positions in the school. As such, the principals in the public

schools in this study were also considered full time teachers, and needed to find ways to balance their time between classroom duties and administrative duties. This lack of personnel puts existing teachers under a significant amount of stress, requiring a small number of individuals to fill multiple roles, including those of disciplinarian, administrator, counselor, social worker, and teacher.

Related to this challenge, is the fact that over-worked school staff are seldom able to find the time to engage in long-term planning regarding safety. One principal who participated in this study, for example, maintained that in his school they had not had time for a safety audit, for fire drills, and definitely not for long-term planning regarding their school safety strategy. This was something he thought was important, but given the demands on his and his staff's time, they had not managed to complete such a procedure in the last several years. In total, only one school out of the five that participated in this research had taken the time to conduct an evaluation of their safety initiatives. Literature on best practices for school safety, however, maintains that planning, continuous record-keeping and evaluation are critical for improving school safety.<sup>81</sup> It is apparent, therefore, that the human resource challenges in Western Cape schools significantly undermine schools' abilities to prepare for and successfully monitor safety strategies.

### *5.2.3 Lack of Appreciation and Respect for Teachers*

An issue that is perhaps not directly related to improving school safety but which may indirectly influence the effectiveness of teaching staff, involves the question of respect for teachers. Participants at one school emphatically maintained that teaching staff felt underappreciated by the Department of Education, and that this lack of acknowledgement or support led to a decrease in teacher morale. This comment was offered as an explicit answer to the question, "What barriers do you see as limiting the effectiveness of your school safety initiatives?" As such, one might conclude that a perceived lack of respect from the employer can result in a decrease in teacher morale, and a corresponding reduction in teachers' commitment to work on challenging issues such as school safety.

### *5.2.4 Lack of Conflict Resolution Skills in Youth*

A common answer to the question, "What barriers do you see as limiting the effectiveness of your school safety efforts" was, "A lack of conflict resolution skills in the students." Teachers in four of the five schools reported that learner responses to conflict tended to be violent and aggressive, and that minor issues would often escalate into physical altercations. This tendency towards violence in the face of conflict is obviously not ideal for students, but also places a significant burden on staff who must be diligent in monitoring student behaviour. Teachers generally believed that students were not exposed to nonviolent conflict resolution skills at home, and therefore were unable to navigate conflict in constructive ways within the school setting. Teachers repeatedly stated that any positive gains they made in this regard within the school were often lost because the positive skills were not reinforced in students' home environment.

Interestingly, two participants hypothesized that students' violent responses to conflict might also be related to problems with language. They explained that many of their students come from households where English is not the first language spoken, but that students are expected to use English when they are in the school. Students may have limited levels of proficiency in English and may not be able to fully express themselves in words. When faced with conflict, the participants surmised, these students

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<sup>81</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Guide for Prevention and Responding to School Violence."

are more likely to resort to physical violence out of frustration and a lack of ability to express themselves otherwise.

#### *5.2.5 Inadequate Attention to the Community Roots of Violence*

Participants at several of the schools felt that schools are largely held responsible for youth violence in the country, and that this is unfair given the role that family and community play in fostering violent attitudes, values and behaviours in youth. The participants in this study felt they were doing the best that they could to address the violence that manifested in their schools, and that they were being unjustly blamed for complex social problems that they could never hope to, and should never be expected to, resolve on their own. The participants felt strongly that schools could be positive spaces for social and educational growth for students, and that they had great capacity to contribute positively to social regeneration in South Africa. However, participants felt that the goal of creating truly safe schools could not be achieved without giving attention and responsibility to families and communities as well.

#### *5.2.6 Short-Term Interventions: Inadequate for Meaningful Change*

Many of the schools that participated in this research had received training or some form of behavioural or organizational support from the Safe Schools Project. Most of the schools felt that this training had been positive – anti-bullying programs, peer counseling programs, diversity training for students, and facilitation for strategic planning were all well-received by the various schools. However, participants also felt that many of the interventions were too short-lived to help bring about long-term organizational or behavioural change. For example, the strategic planning support that one school received was seen as useful, but there was no follow-up with the facilitator and no support to track progress, and as such the school did not follow through with the recommended changes. Safe Schools also provided diversity training for this school, which involved a weekend retreat where students were challenged to engage with one another and examine stereotypes. Students and teachers saw this as an exciting opportunity, but because the training took place for only one weekend, the principal felt that the gains were quickly lost: students simply returned to their largely segregated social groups when they returned to school. The principal of this school maintained that the large amount of funding invested in this intervention could have been used more effectively if the training had involved more students, and had been introduced into the school for a longer period of time.

#### *5.2.7 Rights and Not Responsibilities*

Several of the interview participants discussed problems in their schools that related to the fact that students recognized their own human rights, but failed to acknowledge their corresponding responsibilities to other people. This echoed the concerns of other teachers cited earlier in this paper, who said that students would flaunt their teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in their classrooms by saying such things as, "I know my rights" and "You can't touch me." The human rights discourse in South Africa is important for fostering respect and appropriate behaviour, especially in light of the country's history of apartheid. Yet according to the interview participants, this explicit recognition of students' own rights, without an accompanying respect and consideration for the rights of teachers and fellow students, can make it very difficult for teachers to create an ordered classroom environment that is conducive to learning and collaboration.

#### *5.2.8 Ad Hoc Connections with NGOs*

Most of the schools that participated in this study had some kind of connection with NGOs that supported their school safety efforts; NGOs provided conflict resolution training, leadership training, diversity training, positive classroom management training, and various extra-mural opportunities for students. These connections were always seen as positive and helpful for the school – NGOs offered expertise in various specific areas, and usually became a regular presence in the school for a sustained period of time. Yet it was also evident from the interviews that most schools made connections with NGOs in a random, ad hoc way. Oftentimes, the NGOs approached the school themselves, asking if they could run their programs in the school. Alternately, teachers or principals would hear of a program or know someone with a connection to an organization, and would initiate the contact from the school side. Most principals and teachers interviewed for this study maintained that the regular, sustained presence of NGOs made a positive impact on school culture and the school's safety efforts. In this regard, it is concerning that these valuable resources seemed to be accessed in an unstructured, unsupported manner.

#### *5.2.9 Ad Hoc Connection with Safe Schools*

Although many of the schools involved in this research felt that Safe Schools provided positive resources for their school safety efforts, some individuals felt that the connection their school had with Safe Schools was too reactionary and distant. This could well be because none of the schools involved in the study were deemed “high-risk” or “extremely high-risk” schools, and as such did not command the full attention of the Safe Schools office. Nonetheless, some participants felt that they would appreciate a more consistent, co-ordinated, and pro-actives relationship with the Safe Schools program.

#### *5.2.10 Lack of Capacity to Effectively Utilize Safe Schools' Written Resources*

A final barrier that was noted in many of the interviews dealt with the written resources distributed by Safe Schools. Most teachers thought that the various resources – the manuals, guidelines and support documents – contained valuable information, but maintained that they did not have time to read all of the documents, master the content, and effectively implement the policies. One principal opened his cupboard to illustrate the number of written resources he had received from the Department of Education, and asked, “When do I have time to read all of these?” He also illustrated the way in which over-worked teachers were unlikely to use the resources effectively: he asked if after teaching forty or fifty students all day, after fighting to maintain discipline in the classroom, and after marking papers and preparing for future lessons, anyone would have the energy to read a manual on the Department's sexual harassment policy or guidelines for positive discipline. Again, most participants felt that the information contained in the Department's support documents was valuable and good; they simply did not feel they had time to make adequate use of it.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The perspectives outlined above demonstrate that there are a great many positive developments taking place in the realm of school safety in South Africa. At the same time, however, there are areas where challenges still exist, and where resources for school safety could perhaps be redirected so as to better contribute to safety in schools. Many recommendations could be made in response to these insights, and a rigorous treatment of these is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the final section of this paper will attempt to highlight seven recommendations that might be of direct interest to those involved in shaping provincial Safe Schools' policy and funding priorities.



### *5.3.1 Provide funding for increased human resources in schools*

Given the strain on teachers who must accommodate large numbers of learners and fill multiple roles within the school, it would be beneficial to create opportunities for schools to access funding for supplementary human resources. If this funding could be used to employ a social worker or counselor in the school for even one day per week, for example, it would reduce the social strain on teachers and administrators, and would allow them to attend to their teaching and administrative duties more effectively.

### *5.3.2 Provide funding for safety interventions involving parents and communities*

School violence is a complex issue. Its roots are varied and deep, and as such, addressing it effectively requires not only interventions within the school, but also interventions that engage the families and communities in which children develop. Many teachers in this study maintained that they did not want to be held responsible for all of society's problems, and that they felt that the good work they did was undone when their students went back into their home environments. It might well be beyond Safe Schools' mandate to initiate programming within these large social contexts, but in light of the role families and communities can play in either undermining or contributing to school safety, providing funding or programming to positively engage these actors would contribute to the effectiveness of other safe schools initiatives.

### *5.3.3 Shift to a strategy of long-term interventions*

The various schools involved in this study maintained that the long-term school safety interventions provided by NGOs were often the most effective interventions they had access to. Schools also maintained that the resources provided by Safe Schools – including conflict resolution training, diversity training and strategic planning support – were generally good, although their often short duration undermined their ability to effect long-term change in the school. Accordingly, it would be beneficial for Safe Schools to perhaps redirect its resources to offer long-term interventions itself (including follow-up and evaluation support), or to partner more readily with the NGO sector, which already has the capacity to maintain a long-term presence in schools and the expertise to facilitate effective interventions.

### *5.3.4 Target conflict resolution training to areas of concern: Responsibilities and Language*

Over the course of the various interviews, the research participants highlighted several issues that seemed to detract from students' abilities to deal effectively with conflict situations: specifically, a lack of awareness of the responsibilities that accompany their human rights, and a potential lack of language skills, which impacted students' abilities to address conflict constructively. Given these areas of concern at present, it would be valuable for Safe Schools and the NGO community to target and adapt their conflict resolution trainings for students so that they are responsive to these specific needs. Yet there are probably also other areas of concern that will continue to impact students' abilities to effectively address the conflict they encounter, which will change in the coming years. It is therefore important for both Safe Schools and the NGO sector to engage regularly with teachers and school staff to see what specific issues are currently affecting school safety, and to adapt conflict resolution training accordingly.

### *5.3.5 Facilitate connections between NGOs and schools*

In light of valuable role that NGOs played in most of the schools in this study, along with the generally ad hoc way in which the schools made connections with the NGO sector, it would be valuable for Safe

Schools to compile a comprehensive list of NGOs in South Africa that provide programs dedicated to school safety. This would streamline the process of matching schools with NGOs having the necessary expertise, and would take some of the onus for providing safety support, off of Safe Schools.

#### *5.3.6 Provide preventative group training for schools with similar safety concerns*

One participant in this study felt that it would be a great benefit to his school if they were able to engage on safety issues in a preventative or pro-active way, instead of simply reacting to problems after they occurred. He seemed to feel that his school was ill-equipped to address the safety issues that arose for it, and that he would like to take time to really consider issues and plan for them in a structured way. He also thought that Safe Schools must have a kind of “map,” outlining what was happening in the different schools across the province, and that they should be able to facilitate or arrange such trainings. His suggestion was for Safe Schools to facilitate preventative school safety trainings with teachers from schools experiencing similar issues, so that teachers could share experiences, ideas, and best practices for improving school safety.

#### *5.3.7 Redirect funding for written safety resources towards practical support*

As discussed above, the written safety resources produced and distributed by the Department of Education were generally well-received by the teachers that participated in this study. However, most of the participants also maintained that they did not have the time, energy or expertise to read, master and implement the information presented in the various support documents. Accordingly, it might be beneficial if some of the financial resources that Safe Schools uses for creating and distributing their written resources could be redirected towards practical support for schools – perhaps in conjunction with the collective preventative training for teachers as discussed in recommendation six. This could include discussions of the support material, practical training on how to implement various initiatives, responding to questions and concerns, and working sessions with schools to come up with implementation plans. This would offer structured support for teachers to effectively *use* the support documents, and could therefore contribute to improving school safety.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

School safety is indeed a complex and challenging issue in South Africa. Multiple forms of violence present different challenges for schools in different contexts, and have negative impacts on the learners and educators who must try to function and learn in insecure school environments. There are many resources available to address these daunting challenges – some from the government and some from the NGO community – and these resources are often good in their theory and approach to improving school safety. However, in light of the fact that good theory is not currently meeting the needs in all situations, it is important to evaluate where implementation of school safety initiatives might be improved. Participants in this study demonstrated remarkable creativity and resilience in the face of challenging circumstances, and illustrated many avenues through which personal effort and an innovative use of resources could positively impact a school’s safety situation. However, the participants also outlined several areas where Departmental attention and school safety resources could be redirected so as to contribute more effectively to improving safety in Western Cape schools. This research is by no means comprehensive in its treatment of the problems, resources, innovations and barriers that face schools in South Africa; rather, this study sought to illustrate the urgency of the issue of school violence, to offer a brief glimpse into the resources currently available to address the issue,

and to give practical examples of both innovative responses and current barriers that are relevant to schools in the Western Cape that are experiencing low to moderate levels of violence. It is the hope of this researcher that this paper will stimulate further discussion on these important issues, and that it will offer insight to those in schools looking for practical suggestions for improving safety, and to those working to improve school safety policy at the Departmental level.

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*Christine, a post-graduate student at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies of the University of Notre Dame, Illinois, USA, completed an internship at the CPLO from July to December 2007.*

### Thanks

This research project required collaboration and coordination among many people and would not have been possible without the generous support provided by several key individuals and organizations.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Ms. Nariman Khan of the Western Cape Education Department Safe Schools Program and Dr. Ronald S. Cornelissen of the WCED Education Research Directorate, for their time and assistance in arranging interviews with schools in the Western Cape.

I would also like to thank the staff at the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office and the Catholic Institute of Education for arranging contacts with schools and for providing ongoing feedback and support during the writing of this report.

I would like to thank Mr. Rithwaan Omer for providing transportation services during the interview phase of this research, and finally, I would like to extend my deep gratitude to the teachers and administrators who generously shared their stories, experiences and perspectives with me. This research truly would not have been possible without their participation, and it is my hope that this final report does justice to their thoughts and perspectives, and that it can contribute to ongoing debate on how to improve school safety in the Western Cape.