

# Recommendations of the Project

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*a project funded by the European Commission*

WE, the participants to the Conferences on Safe Educational Environments, held in Brussels in 2012 and in Kaunas in 2013

## **BEING AWARE THAT:**

- given the often hidden violence in education, it will take a wide range of actors to successfully implement safety policies in education;
- violence prevention and safety policies require commitment of governments, school officials and other stakeholders in education;

## **CONCLUDE THAT:**

recommendations for preventing violence and development of safety policies to protect the dignity of students should reflect the need for the following collaborative approaches:

### *1. Promote freedom from violence*

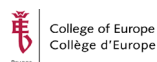
Violence is among the most serious obstacles to the development of students. Freedom from violence is a prerequisite for students to be able to reach their full potential. Students cannot make free choices about their education when they are subjected to violence or the threat of violence. All stakeholders in education must therefore protect the dignity of students and prevent and reduce violence. Efforts to prevent violence and conflict and promote freedom from violence in education are key.

### *2. Create, implement and monitor an action plan for safety in education and violence prevention in schools*

In many countries, students are required to be at school under compulsory attendance rules. A stable school setting enhances a safe learning environment.

Formulating and implementing a coherent plan is the first critical step towards violence prevention. Developing a violence and associated school safety plan raises legal questions about constitutional rights, due process, liability, privacy and records, discipline.

Schools should develop proactively clear and consistent policies to promote a safe educational environment and publish, implement and maintain these safety policies.



With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union.

Schools have a duty to provide reasonable supervision of students and maintain the safety of the school grounds. If these measures are appropriate, the risks of violence as well as its effects at school aftermath will be reduced.

School officials, teachers, or the school board face potential liability for civil damages for students harmed in the violent acts of students or non-students. This is especially the case, when they fail to supervise a specific area at school where prior instances of violence occurred, when they fail to warn students about a pre-existing danger, or fail to adhere to their school safety plan.

Schools must ensure that primary-, secondary-, or higher school-age students and parents are informed in an understandable way about the provisions of the school conduct code and of the safety plan. As a part of procedures related to student enrollment, schools should ask students and parents to sign forms stating they have read the school conduct code.

### *3. Promote and monitor adherence to legal standards to protect the right to dignity of students in education*

Safety policies and violence prevention should take into account relevant legal principles:

#### 3.1. Reasonableness

In order to be valid, the aim of safety plans and actions of the school and the methods used should be legitimate and reasonable. That is the standard that school safety and violence prevention policies and plans should meet.

Schools are required to show the same degree of care and supervision that a reasonably prudent parent would employ under the circumstances.

School officials should balance student's access to education, autonomy and privacy with the need to make the school environment safe and maintain order and control.

#### 3.2. Privacy issues

Schools are involved in significant record-keeping (including student's school records, medical, disciplinary records, crime reports, educational records) and should take reasonable steps to ensure that confidentiality is maintained.

Privacy issues should be taken into consideration in counseling matters within schools and between schools, social and health organizations, and law enforcement agencies.

### *4. Act in a rights based, and a relevant and systematic manner*

School safety efforts may include metal detectors, cameras, dress code policies, search and seizure measures.

Students' speech rights may be limited where they infringe on the rights of others, or if they disrupt class work or cause substantial disorder.

School safety efforts must be conducted in a manner reasonably related in scope to the circumstances, no more invade student's rights than necessary to maintain order in schools.



Teachers and staff should be careful to document their preliminary observations, sources of information, investigate evidence and verify the reliability of the information given by others.

Pre-established procedures should regulate the use of metal-detecting methods to inspect students for metallic objects, and require a reasonable suspicion in order to be used. Metal detector searches are permissible security measures when a school policy governing such searches is in place and when notice has been given stating that such searches will be conducted at that school.

Where a student has an expectation of privacy in the area being filmed, the use of a camera is normally unacceptable.

Schools have the responsibility to ensure the safety of teachers and students and have an obligation to take action in dealing with undisciplined youths, who may potentially threaten the safety of the other children in attendance.

Schools may respond with discipline to threats of violence made by students. Certain procedural requirements must be followed if a student is to be suspended for a substantial period of time or expelled from a school: notice to the student and parents, a fair and impartial hearing, right to be represented by counsel, reasonable time to prepare, the opportunity to review evidence, the opportunity to examine or present witnesses, record proceedings, decisions based on substantial evidence.

#### *5. Joint responsibility*

All stakeholders in education bear a responsibility for achieving lasting safe educational environments. No school can be successful without ownership and commitment from students, parents, teachers, and school officials. Schools must cooperate with others.

School policies should be aimed at awakening the child respect for the law and for the dignity and integrity of all the members of the school community.



'The recommendations reflect the views only of the participants, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the recommendations contained therein.'