

Ensuring School Safety

Case Study #6

Standard 6.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Questions

1. How can an administrator make students, parents, and faculty feel safe in light of a threat of violence?
2. How should an administrator respond to the media's negative press?

Situation

One day there was fight immediately after school. A large group of boys physically assaulted a male student. The young man's injuries caused him to be hospitalized. Rumors quickly spread that it was gang related. The next day, students received text messages claiming that there would be retaliation at the school on Friday. Media coverage reported the threat as well.

Students, parents, and faculty were alarmed. The principal responded by meeting with the faculty. He shared what information he could and assured the faculty that an investigation was underway. He felt confident that the perpetrators would be apprehended. He answered questions and took suggestions about how the faculty could make sure that they diffuse any talk of retaliation. He urged them to inform the resource officers of any information that they uncover.

A day after the principal met with the faculty, he decided to bring in school resource officers from the school system's police force to speak to the students. Choosing to speak in grade level meetings, the principal reassured the students that their school was indeed safe. The police representatives expressed that violence and retaliation would not be accepted. They also stressed the legal consequences for anyone who committed further acts of violence. The principal urged students to come to school on Friday. He promised that there would be heavy police presence. He also stated that arrests had already been made against some of the students who attacked the young man earlier in the week. Finally, the principal sent home a letter to parents discussing the measures that the school had taken to ensure that it was indeed a safe environment.

On that Friday, roughly 40% of the students stayed home. However, there were no further incidents of violence in relation to the fight earlier in the week. The county's PR person handled all media relations.

Answer

1. Administrators must act quickly to reassure the constituents that the environment is indeed safe. Administrators must also take all threats seriously. Launching investigations, contacting the appropriate resource personnel, and communicating openly with faculty, students, and parents will ensure that safety is the first priority. Administrators must also make sure that violators of safety receive all consequences at their disposal.
2. Administrators must gather all information and discuss all responses with the appropriate personnel. The administrator must seek to have accurate information before responding to the media. Furthermore, the administrator must follow board policy in relation to the media. Most school systems have PR spokespersons who handle all media addresses.

Evaluation

The administrator's response was proficient. He addressed the problem immediately and sought to diffuse any further threats of violence. He also sought to assure the students, parents, and faculty that the school was indeed safe. Holding student meetings, informing the parents, and communicating with the faculty reassured everyone that he took the threats seriously.