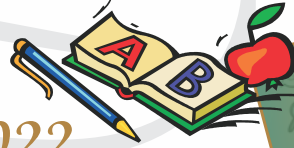


Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education



Joe and Jill Biden lay a wreath at Robb Elementary School, Texas

Do the first things first

What do we want when we go into a classroom and school? Wouldn't it be a sense of safety for those around you as well as ourselves?

The above photo is a reminder of what happened on 24 May 2022 at Robb Elementary School in Texas. An 18-year old gained illegal entry into a building killing 19 children and two teachers. Another sixteen were injured. That massacre wasn't an isolated American school tragedy. Up until August, there have been 27 school shootings since the beginning of the year.

The tragedy at Robb Elementary School is not unique to the USA. Schools across the world have had violent incidents with fatal consequences. To date, South Africa has been spared the rampage of a gunman in a school. Yet there have been times where adults have gained illegal entry into schools and done revenge killings. Amongst the students, there have been those who've brought weapons to school and violently attacked teachers as well as their peers. There have even been deaths.

Before we start a single lesson in any classroom, we need to make sure that everyone in the school is safe from harm. When we use the word "safe" it can be – if we're not careful – defined too narrowly. Safety is much more than making sure that there's controlled access onto the school property. It's more than having a security guard at the gate who ensures that outsiders sign the visitors' register.

Safety includes making sure that the school gives attention to a range of issues including:

- Creating a drug-free environment;
- Doing regular whole-school evacuation drills to counter possible emergencies;

- Ensuring freedom from Gender Based Violence (GBV);
- Giving continuous staff training in first-aid as well as safety and security procedures;
- Inspecting regularly the physical infrastructure of all buildings;
- Making sure that bullying is kept to a minimum in the classroom, at extramural activities and in the staffroom. (Regrettably, no school is totally immune from incidents of emotional, mental and physical bullying.)

It's sad but it's true. Many children and staff members feel fearful about school. They fear being bullied verbally or physically. There are those schools where teachers dread teaching certain classes because of the possibility of physical and verbal bullying. Then there are schools in our cities and towns that are seen as "no-go" zones. Parents refuse to send their children to such schools if requested to do so by district education officials. Teachers refuse to teach in such schools and would rather resign.

School safety affects all students. The National Centre on Safe Supportive Learning Environments in the USA describes the impact that the levels of crime and substance abuse has on a school. It impacts strongly on school-wide test scores, graduation and attendance rates. When students feel unsafe and school gangs fight amongst themselves, it's understandable that they drop out of school.

If we genuinely want to improve the quality of education, we need to give attention to the basics. That means creating an environment that's conducive to learning and teaching. Take out the fear factor of going to school. Make sure that there are no dilapidated school buildings and pit toilets. Classrooms and staffrooms are clean and comfortable.

We work better in an environment in which we feel safe from emotional and physical harm. A pleasant working environment ensures that there's little unnecessary noise, good lighting and thermal comfort (that is, heaters and/or air conditioners where needed). The classroom would have enough space for every learner while the playground would be spacious enough for every learner. Overcrowding is out.

In the next month or two the South African national certificate results will be issued. There will be much pontificating about the results. Where there are areas of under-performance there will be lengthy explanations. How about starting at the basics? How about making schools safe and pleasant learning and teaching environments? Get the basics right and the quality schooling will follow. Do the first things first.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

Reference

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>



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Are the children safe? Ask them



So often those in leadership positions presume incorrectly what are the needs of their customers. In a school, the children are customers. Well-meaning school leaders don't always know the most important needs of the children. This incorrect understanding of real needs can happen anywhere. Qantas – the Australian national airline carrier – had such an experience.

The airline gave a questionnaire to 2,500 passengers to get their views on priority or “essential” needs (Juran 1992:98-99). Here were the findings:

Qantas Airways Survey of passenger needs Order of priority: Essential needs	
1	No lost baggage
2	No damaged baggage
3	Clean toilets
4	Comfortable seats
5	Prompt baggage delivery
6	Ample leg room
7	Good quality meals
8	Prompt reservation service
9	Friendly/efficient cabin crew
10	Clean and tidy cabin
11	Comfortable cabin temperature/humidity
12	Assistance with connections
13	Being informed of delays
14	Transport to cities
15	Accurate arrival information to relatives/friends
16	Well-organised boarding
17	Quick/friendly airport check-in
18	Self-service baggage trolleys
19	On-time arrival
20	Provision of pillows/rugs
21	Assistance with customs/immigration
22	On-time departure

When the data was analysed, Qantas head office staff realised that certain items that they thought were of high importance to their passengers, weren't deemed important. One example was that Qantas gave high ranking to on-time departures and arrivals. It came as a surprise that these two items were ranked 19th and 22nd on passenger priority lists.

There are a number of ways to ask the children how they feel about their safety at school. Three ways to get feedback are:

Circle time: This activity is common in most classrooms in the lower Grades of primary schools. Extend circle time sessions across the entire school to assess the level of safety. Remember that the safety concerns of a Grade One child are hugely different to those of a student in Grade 10.

Focus group: Within a school there are different focus groups. For example, there are specific groups such as children's councils as well as prefect and student leadership bodies. Raise the issue of safety at such group meetings.

Questionnaire: Based on the children's ages, tweak the questionnaire to both their reading ages as well their most likely areas of concern. Ask them to rate on a three-point scale of “Good/ Average/ Poor”, the condition of the school facilities. Items that could be scored include (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>):

- Blackboard
- Classroom furniture
- Classroom lighting
- Laboratory equipment
- Library
- Playground
- Projector/smartboard
- School walls
- Staircase
- Toilets

The questionnaire could get respondents to answer these sort of questions on a four-point scale of “Always/Sometimes/Rarely/ Never”:

Has the following happened to you?

- Abused, insulted and teased
- Harmed in physical fights
- Mean comments about colour, culture, race, religion and sex
- Personal property being stolen
- Sexual advancement or comments by students

Have you seen the following at school?

- Students behave rashly/wildly
- Students destroy school property
- There are gangs or groups that others are scared of
- Use of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs
- Use of weapons such as bats, hockey sticks and knives

Include in the questionnaire, open-ended questions. These sort of questions invite the children to give suggestions on how to further improve school safety. Two of these types of question are:

If you were the principal, what would you do to make the school a safer place?

OR

I would feel safer at school if ...

At one Gauteng, South African school a girl suggested that a karate club be started. A club was started and it was an over-subscribed great success. There was one stipulation made by the girl who made the recommendation. Boys were not allowed to join the club! Their incessant begging was to no avail. In a very short period of time at the school, incidents of boys mocking, taunting and teasing the girls, plummeted.

References

Juran, J M 1992. *Juran on quality by design*. New York: The free press.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/H6QN5RT>
School safety questionnaire.

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>
National Centre on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.



Who's responsible for safety in your school?

In one word, the answer is, "Everyone". Anyone who's involved in the school is responsible. As we know, school safety is much more than ensuring everyone's physical safety. It also includes caring for the emotional and mental safety of every person. In an age-related and responsibility-level way, no one is excused from helping to make the school a safe place.



"Do you want to see the reason you had to rewrite your safety policy?"

You might ask how could a Grade One child be held responsible for maintaining school safety. In the Grade One classroom, the teacher gives the children simple safety rules. Walk along corridors – don't run; line-up outside before going into the classroom – don't storm in; wait your turn at the tuckshop – don't rush the counter. Treat all (yes, all!) your classmates with friendliness and kindness.

Children are in a prime position to deal with bullying issues. When they see bullying, the children move to action. They should not be bystanders watching others being bullied and harassed. Protect them from the bullies. If not personally able to help, children get support from their peers or staff members. A school needs to emphasise that to quickly report such incidents is not seen as "snitching" on your mates. Rather, it's an honourable duty to help make school a happier place for all. A slogan for the need to report bullying is:

If not you, who?

If not now, when?

The staff are crucial to the children's emotional and mental safety. They should be the role models of expected behaviour. The way that they treat their colleagues and the children is the cue of expected behaviour. Others are treated with consideration, kindness and respect. When necessary, they act decisively and firmly when there's bullying. The staff challenge comments that reflect phobic attitudes to other cultures, genders and races.

There will be both children and staff members who, on occasion – and sometimes ongoingly – need emotional and mental support. The school culture reinforces the notion that it's absolutely normal to seek help on mental issues. Teachers are there to give comfort and help. Counsellors and social workers should be available to give specialised support.

A school campus is often on a huge site. It's unfair to expect the leadership to know of every item that is dilapidated or has been broken. The leadership might not know of classrooms and toilets that aren't clean. Get everyone to be aware of what they see around them. It's not snitching when it's reported. It's helping to make the physical environment more pleasant for everyone.

Parents also help in keeping the school safe. They make sure that their families abide by the safety rules. The children don't bring dangerous weapons to school; the children arrive punctually at school. They are collected at closing time. Children aren't left to wander the streets in the late afternoon or early evenings. Parents draw the attention of staff to any safety shortfalls that they might see.

At one public school there was a near-tragedy when a concrete slab fell from the top floor of the building onto a group of children walking below. A few children were injured. Investigations of the incident showed that the education department had been informed that the concrete slab was cracking and could fall down. That warning had been sent to the authorities for three consecutive years.

Provincial education departments are responsible for the physical maintenance of public schools. School leadership should hold them to account. Continually remind indifferent departments of their obligations and warn them of the consequences if there are accidents.

Some schools seem to be accident-prone. Every now and then there is an accident on the property. Then there are those schools that appear in the media because of the abuse of the human rights of learners or teachers. However, there are those schools that don't have to deal with such issues. They're attuned and responsive to school safety issues. Everyone in such schools contributes to creating a quality safe school for all.

Reference

Gordana, S 2020. *A guide to creating a safe school environment.*
<https://unifyhighschool.org/creating-a-safe-school-environment/>





Does your school have SOPs?

In the history of aviation which is the world's safest airline? That accolade goes to Qantas. In its 100 year history, the airline hasn't lost a single aircraft since 1960 nor had a fatal accident since 1951. The reason for this unique safety record is its' unwavering compliance to SOPs. What are SOPs?

SOPs is the abbreviation for Standard Operating Procedures. In 1922, Wilmot Hudson Fysh, a co-founder of Qantas, stated that, "The first aim of this company is absolute reliability of machines and safety to passengers." By using SOPs, attention is given to all aspects of safety. Manuals and policies are in place as to the correct way to do things. Instructions are also given as to what has to be done in emergencies. A school isn't an aeroplane. Yet every quality school strives to guarantee the safety of everyone who goes into it.

SOPs in a school are seen in issues such as:

- Access on to the school site;
- Child protection guidelines;

- Codes of conduct in all aspects of the school;
- Core values;
- Emergency evacuation drills;
- First Aid training;
- On-going inspection of physical facilities;
- Policies on dealing with bullying, drug abuse and human rights violations;
- Procedures for day trips and excursions.

Obviously, there are SOPs that are pertinent to the particular school. A safety-conscious school is resolute about abiding by SOPs. Nobody is soppo about using SOPs. When a safety culture permeates the whole school, a Qantas-level safe environment is created for all.

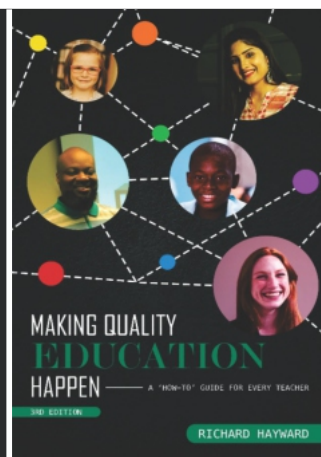
Reference

Wilson, R 2022. Qantas: the safety story.
<https://flightsafetyaustralia.com/2020/11/qantas-the-safety-story/>

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for your school

Richard Hayward's book, **Making Quality Education happen – a "how-to" guide for every teacher** discusses SOPs that apply to every school. To cite examples: choosing core values, implementation process for Total Quality Education, organisational climate evaluations and meeting procedures.

Takealot sells the book at R 200 a copy. It's available from Amazon in kindle format for \$ 8.04. A colour paperback copy costs \$16.99. Smashwords sells the e-book format for \$ 6.99. There's a 20% free read of the book on the Amazon and Smashword sites.



Professional development programmes

The South African Quality Institute (SAQI) has a number of SACE-endorsed Professional Development programmes. The workshops are done by Dr Richard Hayward. Attendees who are registered with SACE, earn Continuous Professional Teacher Development points. Should you like more details, please contact him at either rpdhayward@yahoo.com or 011 888 3262. Indigent schools are sponsored.