

**The
Alabama Joint Interim
Legislative Committee
On School Violence**

FINAL REPORT

August 31, 2000

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SPECIAL NOTE

THE QUOTES ON EACH DIVIDER PAGE ARE FROM ALABAMA TEACHERS. THEY ATTENDED THE AUGUST 2000 ALABAMA CAREER/ TECHNICAL EDUCATION "PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE" AND THESE ARE BUT A FEW OF THE HUNDREDS OF WRITTEN COMMENTS REGARDING WHAT THIS STATE IS DOING TODAY IN OUR CLASSROOMS WITH OUR STUDENTS OF ALL AGES REGARDING THE PREVENTION OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE.

Preface

Violence in our schools has become a number one concern by all. It brings fear into our learning environments and impacts student learning and teacher teaching. Fear has been identified by this State's leadership as our number one enemy.

The Alabama Legislature has requested this committee to seek findings, reach conclusions, and render recommendations on the issue of school violence. Emphasis must be directed toward prevention, crisis management and heightening awareness. The following resolution establishes the committee to proceed as instructed.

The Governor, in his letter of October 20, 1999, has asked the committee to determine the needs and find a means in proposals focused on freeing our schools of fear.

“Our students attended State training to be peer mediators. They then participated in ‘Peer Helping Training’ which was the implementation of the peer tutoring program at the school.”

Joanne Ojard
Spanish Fort High School

I.

Alabama --- Let's Face This Fact

**"Nearly 3.0 million crimes occur on school campuses each year." (Nationally)
National Crime Survey, 1999**

The Alabama Joint Interim Legislative Committee on School Violence takes this mission very seriously.

The States of Oregon, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky and Colorado have recently experienced the most tragic of tragedies on a school campus.

The State of Colorado Columbine tragedy may be the single most recognized violent invasion of a student's world of learning. Thirteen deaths were the result of shooters on April 20, 1999. One of those deaths was Rachel Scott.

On May 27, 1999, Mr. Darrell Scott, father of Rachel, was asked to address the U.S. House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on School Violence. An excerpt from his speech is as follows:

"The death of my daughter, Rachel Joy Scott, and the death of that heroic teacher and eleven other children who died must not be in vain. In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how fingers began to be pointed. I am here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy, for it was an event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies. Our laws ignore our deepest needs. You regulate restrictive laws through legislative creed and yet you fail to understand. We create a void that allows evil, prejudice and hatred to rush in and wreak havoc. The real villain lies within our own hearts. The young people of our nation hold the key."

Committee staff met and visited at length with Mr. Scott on Friday, August 11, 2000, in Alexander City, Alabama, for the purpose of trying to understand from a father what words he might offer to the State of Alabama in addressing the prevention of school violence and creating safer schools. Mr. Scott offered in his own words to Governor Don Siegelman, to this committee, and to the citizens of Alabama the following letter:

August 11, 2000

Governor Don Siegelman
State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130

Joint Interim Committee on School Violence
C/o Senator Ted Little, Chairman
Suite 740
11 South Union Street
Alabama State House
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Governor Siegelman and Members of the Committee:

I have had the privilege to understand and listen to your plans regarding the prevention of school violence. Having personally experienced such a tragedy in my family with the loss of our daughter Rachel in the Columbine crisis, it has awakened me to the true causes of such violence.

What I have learned since Columbine is that most often plans are put into place that are the result of having experienced school related tragedy. It is my hope for you to do all you can now in advance of possible violence. Do not learn like many states are learning, that it takes the loss of life or lives to bring about stronger preventative programs.

There is no pain like the one my wife and I wake up to every day now. I can only implore you as the leadership of this state to think and act for your children because it is for the protection of young lives that we must treasure.

If I can be of any help to you personally in sharing this message further, please feel free to contact me through Senator Ted Little's office.

Sincerely,

Darrell Scott

“My classes are involved in discussions on violence in the home and in relationships. They do research in the community to find agencies that help in violent situations. Resource speakers in the community are invited to the class to share preventive information.”

Maxine Rooks
Grissom High School

II.

National Programs and Information

This section represents material presented to the committee as established reference material. It is very current (note dates) and it represents this reports plan to "stair step" the mission starting with national programs.

The availability of information and a broad cross-section of successful work accomplished in the area of school violence throughout the U. S. have enabled this committee to consider numerous sources of the best resources thought most helpful at this time with respect to the resolution's charge.

A. **"Making A Safe Haven - Review of School Safety Plans, Perceptions and Practices in the South": Southern Legislative Conference, April, 2000**

"Safe schools are those where students, staff members and visitors feel safe and welcome and have the opportunity to learn, teach, work, and engage in activities without being threatened, intimidated, bullied, harassed, or made the victims of a crime."

Statistics worthy of note:

- "In 1997, students were victims of about 1.1 million violent crimes at school."
- "Between 1993 and 1997, an average of 8.4 percent of teachers were victims of nonfatal crimes while at school."
- "In 1996, 9 percent of students in the U.S. in the eighth grade responded that they felt either unsafe or very unsafe while attending school. In Alabama, 11 percent felt unsafe in responding to the same question."

Statement worthy of note:

In 1999, the Metropolitan Life Survey mentioned, "When it comes to causes of violence, school staff and law enforcement tend to trace them back to the family, specifically, to a lack of parental supervision at home and a lack of family involvement. Students in grades 7-12 inverted this ranking, placing much of the blame on peer pressure, followed by drugs and alcohol, a lack of parental supervision and, finally, a lack of family involvement."

Current Safety activities by State as of April 2000 are as follows:

Alabama

The Alabama Legislature formed a joint committee in 1999 to investigate school violence. The State now has a 24-hour, toll-free hotline (1-800-SAV-KIDS) that provides school children an opportunity to anonymously report possible school violence. Through July 2000, 2,574 calls have been received since May 1999 and 86 have been imminent threat calls.

Arkansas

The Safe Schools Committee focused on awareness, prevention and intervention. The 1999 General Assembly passed measures - to hold parents responsible for allowing minors to possess firearms on school property, requiring school districts to vote on the adoption of a school uniform policy, extending the prohibition of firearms on school property to buses and bus stops. The State has distributed over \$5 million in funding and resources to schools through both federal and State programs for school safety.

Florida

Legislation in Florida has been adopted which addresses teacher authority and enforcement of attendance to zero-tolerance policies and "second chance" schools. An academic component has been added to the student suspension policy, greatly expanding alternative education programs and encouraging a transition program for students placed on either in or out of school suspension. The State also allows for habitually truant students to have their driving privileges withheld or revoked. The

State Department of Education is authorized to collect, compile and analyze data on school safety.

Georgia

In 1999, Georgia passed HB605, which requires local school boards to implement character education for all grade levels and to provide opportunities for parental involvement in connection with this program. This Act also provides for professional development in classroom management for teachers; requires local boards to adopt age-appropriate codes of conduct; provides for written reports from teachers on students whose actions repeatedly interfere with the learning process and extends to teachers the authority to remove such students from class, and provides for grants to local schools from the State Board of Education for use in alternative educational programs.

Kentucky

The Kentucky General Assembly passed HB330, which established the Kentucky Center for School Safety and set up a statewide grant program to assist local school systems with alternative programs. The primary purpose of the center is to be a clearinghouse of information and materials, to promote interagency efforts, evaluate existing safety programs and to provide the Governor with an annual report on the status of school safety in the State.

Louisiana

The Legislature appropriated \$2 million to a competitive grant program for the expansion or creation of alternative education programs. Louisiana mandates that students expelled or suspended from schools be provided an education through alternative programs, with a waiver available to systems lacking financial ability to create such programs.

Maryland

The Maryland Department of Education has provided training to 10 local school systems in the Second Step program, a pre-school through grade 9 program designed to reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior and increase social competence by teaching empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Every school system has implemented either peer mediation or conflict resolution programs or both in selected schools.

Mississippi

The Department of Education has sponsored two safe school conferences in June 1999, with focuses on prevention, conflict resolution and preparedness. A safety and crisis hotline has been established.

Missouri

The General Assembly has appropriated \$9.3 million for the fiscal year 2000 for initiatives including alternative education grants, anti-violence curriculum development and conflict resolution programs.

North Carolina

The State created the Center for the Prevention of School Violence by executive order of the Governor and is part of the University of North Carolina system. Efforts to deal with violent students have resulted in processes, which allow violent students to be more easily removed from schools. The reporting of crime and violence on school property, more communication between and among schools, law enforcement and court officials, and the expansion of immediate school actions directed at safety are areas of emphasis at the center. This includes a dramatic increase in the assignment of school resource officers to schools as well as legislatively - required safe school planning.

Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Bar Association has developed a peer mediation program - Peaceful Resolution for Oklahoma Students (PROS) - which is available to schools free of charge.

South Carolina

In 1999, the General Assembly allocated \$7 million to put school resource officers in every public high school in the State. South Carolina also has the "5 Goals 4 Kids" program which was developed by a coalition of State agencies to address five critical school issues: truancy, gun injury, after-school opportunities, alcohol and drug abuse and health insurance. In June 1999, the program was selected by the U.S. Department of Justice as a national model to combat school violence. Elements of the program include community-based mentoring, after-school programs and the creation of a confidential State hotline.

Tennessee

The School Safety Act of 1998 provided an appropriation of \$10 million for the creation and distribution of school safety grants to local school districts for prevention and intervention programs. Local school districts must devise and submit a proposal to the State Department of Education's School Safety Center for approval. All plans must include a 25 percent local match, and needs to address one or more of the following: development of innovative violence prevention programs; conflict resolution; disruptive or assault behavior management; improved school security; peer mediation; and training for employees. The General Assembly provided an additional \$5 million, or about \$4 per pupil, during the 1999 session to continue the program.

Texas

Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs, which is funded in the State's largest 22 counties and some smaller ones, receive \$20 million from the State. This is over and above an \$18 million grant fund to help school systems adjust to new requirements of providing alternative education programs for expelled students, a grant pool which has since grown to \$36 million.

Virginia

In 1999, the Governor pledged \$1.5 million to increase the number of school resource officers in schools. The State provides extensive training opportunities for school personnel.

West Virginia

A Safe Schools Conference was held in November 1999 and involved more than 500 educators, community members, legislators, and State Board of Education members. The focus was on character education issues involving racial and cultural diversity, working with law enforcement in schools, and a student's perspective on violence in schools.

Based upon the above information, all States are addressing school safety in different ways with significant success. However, the common ground appears to be in the areas of prevention and intervention and funding.

**B. "Children Exposed To Violence",
National Conference of State Legislatures,
Briefing Paper, April/May 2000**

Excerpts:

"Of the 22.3 million children between the ages of 12 and 17, 1.8 million have been victims of sexual assault, 3.9 million have been victims of serious physical assault; and 9 million have witnessed serious violence."

"Exposure to violence shapes how children remember, learn, feel and solve problems."

"A study published in 'The Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry' found that among urban eighth and tenth grade students, 41.3 percent reported seeing one or more shootings or stabbings in the past year."

"State actions have included: In Arizona and Arkansas, the States allow out-of-court testimony in any criminal case ... Delaware added murder and endangering the welfare of a child to the list of crimes where children are allowed to submit out-of-court statements instead of appearing in court ... California and Massachusetts require courts to consider evidence of domestic violence in granting child custody ... Idaho doubles penalties for domestic assault or battery when committed in the presence of a child ... Oregon makes it a felony to assault another person when witnessed by a child ... Oklahoma law specifies a mandatory minimum sentence for domestic violence committed in the presence of a child ... Illinois allows the court to order a defendant to pay for counseling for a child who witnessed domestic battery."

"In a partnership between the Yale Child Study Center and local law enforcement in New Haven, Conn., a mental health professional at the Yale Center is on call 24 hours a day to police and provides clinical support to children who are victims of or witnesses to crimes and violence. Since 1991, more than 500 children have been helped. This program has now been replicated in seven States across the country through funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention."

**C. "Healthy School Environment",
National Conference of State Legislatures, Briefing Paper,
August/September 1999**

State lawmakers have provided leadership in addressing school environmental issues. In 1999, lawmakers in 36 States proposed more than 100 pieces of legislation related to aspects of a healthy school environment.

**D. "Do Our Kids Feel Safe?"
USA Weekend, One Year Later: The Lessons of Columbine,
April 2000**

129,593 students in grades 6-12 from urban, suburban and rural schools, public and private, responded to USA Weekend's Annual Teen Survey. It is the largest survey of its kind.

"The most surprising - and potentially significant - is the portrait students paint of school today as a place where insult too often turns to injury. Students report that small things - a slight, a look, a shove, a dispute between couples - can erupt into arguments, fist fights, or worse, rather bigger problems, such as gangs or racial conflict. Stupid things easily can trigger something worse."

"We must make headway reducing the trigger mechanisms. Students collide over everything and anything - music, how people act and dress."

"More than half of these students say there is a gun in their home and half of these say that they can get their hands on it."

"Forty percent say that they want 'bad' kids sent away."

"Connection is key. Our "boy code" doesn't allow a young male to share his fears. Not only do boys suffer personal pain when they try to express their love, caring and sensitivity, but also they are shamed and ostracized, ultimately fostering academic failure and intensifying their emotional distress. We impose on boys this male-gender straight jacket, that narrow band of what's acceptably masculine expressiveness in our society. Instead of metal detectors, we need emotion preceptors. For boys who are not allowed to cry tears, may someday cry bullets instead." Dr. William Pollack, Harvard Medical School Professor, Director, Center for Men & Young Men, McLean Hospital, Belmont, Mass.

**E. "School Violence: Lessons Learned",
State Legislatures, February, 2000**

"To identify at-risk kids **early** and provide help to prevent violent behavior is now the challenge of all Legislators. The punitive approach of the 90's must no longer be the focus. It is more difficult for a Legislature to design solutions that involve the economic, education, human service, health and justice areas. Solutions today are comprehensive and coordinated. Solutions must be multi-faceted. There is no quick fix and no single solution. And solutions cannot be devised in isolation. The best policies encourage collaboration between States and communities and between schools, law enforcement agencies, mental health, and children and family services. Legislators can expect groups on both sides of gun control and constitutional rights to be well mobilized and to demand attention. The cause of violent events, the different contributing factors are best dealt with, 'The government is guilty, the parents are guilty, it is all of us'."

"**Rarely** are there laws in a comprehensive package that sets forth the rights and responsibilities of educators and defines their relationship to law enforcement authorities and the juvenile justice system. Lawmakers should be careful to maintain a balance between State and local authority."

"Another important role for Legislatures is making sure that State money is invested in **effective** programs. Legislatures everywhere are grappling with the problem of taking years of facts and laws and reworking them into a comprehensive, research-based plan for involving communities, families and schools in devising solutions to youth violence."

"I would never have guessed 20 years ago when I got into juvenile justice that today we would be talking about home visitation by trained nurses as a way to prevent school violence," says Clay Yeager, executive director of the Governor's Community Partnership for Safe Children in Pennsylvania.

**F. "Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools", A Partnership
Between Office of Juvenile Justice, U.S. Department of Justice,
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education,
U.S. Department of Education, 1996**

The essential ingredients for creating safe, orderly, drug-free schools include:

- Placing school safety high on the educational agenda
- Involving parents and citizens
- Building and developing the team
- Conducting the school site assessment
- Reviewing the law
- Creating a Safe School Plan
- Formulating a contingency plan
- Creating an educational climate
- Searching for ways to serve students and ways students can serve

"This represents the beginning of a continuing team process to create safe schools. This guide begins with action steps to accomplish the plan - for schools, for students, for parents and for community and business groups." The committee wishes to highlight these action steps in this report.

G. Georgia Emergency Management Agency, 1999

Legislation signed into law directs the Georgia Emergency Management Agency to provide training and technical assistance on the issues of school safety to the education, Emergency Management, and public safety communities of Georgia. The agency presented a presentation to this committee on how the new coordinating process in Georgia is better able to deal with crisis and is building relationships with schools.

**H. "Preventing Chaos in Times of Crisis",
Association of California School Administrators, 1995**

"This manual will help school principals and their designees prepare for, manage, and evaluate site-based response to various crisis situations."

**I. "Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence",
International Association of Chiefs of Police, February, 2000**

"The purpose of this document is to present different strategies and approaches for members of school communities to consider creating safer school environments."

**J. "Protecting the Privacy of Student Records",
National Center for Education Statistics, 1997**

"The primary purpose of this document is to help State and local education agencies and schools develop adequate policies and procedures to protect information about students and their records." An additional reference can be the "Family Education Right to Privacy Act" (FERPA).

“Our county held a county-wide rally for all students in our county. We started with “Families First” focus and then had speakers from Rose Haven on domestic violence. The Chief of Police talked about personal safety. My class was trained to be peer mediators and they shared information with health classes. One of my students entered the ‘Illustrated Talk Star Event’ on the national level and was a gold medal winner which used the topic of ‘STOP the Violence’.”

Yvonne Jacoway
Cherokee County High School

III.

Current Alabama Plans

The State of Alabama has aggressively sought to prepare itself in the unfortunate event we experience school violence. Those plans presented to the committee and what has been learned through additional research are as follows:

A. The Lieutenant Governor’s Task Force on School and Youth Violence, 1995

Nine public hearings were held in studying the most serious problem of school and youth violence. Insight was received from students, parents, counselors, youth leaders, law enforcement officials, ministers, other community leaders, and even gang leaders.

Summaries were:

- Community-Based Actions
- Legislative Recommendations
- Violence in the Media
- Law Enforcement
- Juvenile Justice
- School-Based Responses
- Parenting and Early Intervention

In review of this work, there are major opportunities identified that can be further advanced today. Additional information follows regarding this section in the Action Initiatives.

**B. School Conduct Intervention Program, July, 1995
Alabama State Department of Education in Cooperation with
Juvenile Courts Division, Administrative Office of Courts,
Office of Prosecution Services**

“This program will open new avenues of opportunities for students and parents to address improper conduct and will provide means by which this legislation and applicable State Board of Education resolutions may be successfully addressed.”

**C. Manual of Laws and Regulations, School Safety and Discipline,
Alabama Department of Education, August, 1997**

“This document contains current Alabama Laws relating to responsibilities of each local Board of Education and its personnel.”

**D. Alabama Schools, Public and Private, Incident Response
Department of Public Safety, Manual for School Location and
Contact Persons, April, 2000**

“The listings in this reference manual were compiled from information acquired from the database in the Office of the State Department of Education.”

**E. Critical Incident Management, School Violence,
Department of Public Safety, February, 2000**

“Critical Incident Management is an issue that has to be addressed before the incident event occurs. Planning is essential for a successful outcome. This operation allows the Department of Public Safety to operate in conjunction with local agencies. This plan is basically an umbrella that would cover the Departments’ response with the understanding that local law enforcement would have already responded.”

F. School Emergency, Standardized Crisis Response and Law Enforcement Plans, The Office of the Attorney General and The Office of the Governor, State of Alabama, 2000

These plans include:

- School's Individualized School Emergency Plans
- School's Law Enforcement Incident Response Packet
- Emergency Assistance Resources available from State agencies
- Resources: Parents and School Safety
- Resources: The Media and Crisis Management
- Guide to Uniform School Emergency Plans
- Crisis Planning Resources
- USDOE "Early Warning, Timely Response" Guide to Safe Schools
(This guide is found to be key to this committee's purpose)

G. Grade A, School Safety, Discipline & Attendance Report Card, State Superintendent of Education, 1997

"The primary responsibility of this section will be to provide assistance to local education agencies concerning all aspects of safety, discipline, and school attendance. The emphasis is broad including such responsibilities as alternative schools, dropouts, discipline, safety, related legislation and State Board of Education mandates."

H. School Safety Planning for Critical Incidents, Amelia Center, 1999

The information focuses on Preparation, Prevention, Response and Recovery. Specifically -

- What is a critical incident?
- When a critical incident strikes your school
- Critical incident response and recovery
- Identifying and Implementing Community Resources

I. Suggested Format for School System and Individual School Safety Plans: Alabama State Department of Education

"By using the components in this recommended format, technical assistance available through the department, and other resources, local education agencies should develop a well-written plan that will be effectively implemented by all students and school personnel."

J. Due Process Handbook For Alabama Public School Principals: A Guide to Preventive Law, Alabama State Department of Education, 1998

"This document was developed by the authors, Dr. Harold Bishop and Dr. Albert Miles, for the State Department of Education. It contains information to assist principals in implementing due process procedures for students and parents. It provides guidance regarding student suspension and/or expulsion; corporal punishment; reasonable searches and seizures; and other disciplinary procedures." Dr. Ed Richardson, State Superintendent of Education.

**K. School Incident Report (SIR):
Alabama State Department of Education, 1998**

"This program provides the framework for all Alabama public schools and school systems to collect school safety and discipline information in a uniform manner."

**L. Developing Strategies for Safer Schools:
Alabama Association of School Boards, 1999**

"This was conceived to provide school board members with additional information on specific issues related to education governance that are not addressed in other publications. It describes a process school system officials can use to develop policies and procedures in the area of school safety."

M. Code of Student Conduct: Jefferson County School District, 1999/2000

On page twelve (12), the code describes "Problem Solvers". The intent and text is of interest to this committee. This term was not mentioned in the Birmingham town meeting, nor did this committee mention it during the course of research. This grievance procedure and success of it needs to be determined.

**N. Teachers, Principals, and Law Enforcement: A New Partnership,
Mobile County District Attorney, 1999**

This work defines the juvenile delinquency process, terms of juvenile law, incidents at school, principals/assistant principals, resource officers, pupil personnel/attendance counselors, records custodian, teachers, victims, and witnesses.

**O. Institute for Biological Detection Systems
Auburn University**

The Institute met with the committee and presented concepts to assist in the reduction of the possibility of school violence. The two concepts presented were the employment of Law Enforcement Canine Detection Teams and the incorporation of existing school structural information onto CD-Rom Discs.

While the committee recognizes that all work accomplished in the State has not been considered or reviewed, it feels that this information is suitable to assist the committee in understanding what has been accomplished for the good of the student.

“Our classes discussed violence on the basis of dealing with conflicts and stress. My students have a share time for one week to discuss situations openly in the classroom. Other students gave suggestions for how they would solve the conflict without violence and in a positive situational setting.”

Sylvia Lynn Craft
Stone Middle School

IV.

State Tour and Town Meetings

The locations of Mobile, Montgomery, Birmingham and Huntsville were selected for the purpose of heightening awareness in what has been accomplished in our State by many agencies and departments. The purpose was to learn what could be done to advance the State of Alabama even further into the prevention of school violence.

The members of this committee accomplished and learned the following from our town meetings:

- Awareness was heightened regarding the State's commitment to keeping focused on this most serious problem and what the State has accomplished to date
- It became clear that there were some common concerns and issues from all corners of the State in the areas of prevention
- The media response to the tour and mission of the committee was of high interest
- The willingness of the public to assist in anyway possible
- There are many "success pockets" accomplishing meaningful results in the areas of school violence and are unknown, for the most part, by the public and State
- In practice, the lack of consistency in the way we discipline students is a concern
- The best use of guidance counselors in the State may be directed more toward counseling a higher percentage of their time
- In all town meetings and in information learned, the "School Resource Officer" is thought to be a valuable resource where needed
- The laws in place today are practical and do empower school officials to make decisions that reduce possible school violence
- The State can do more in the areas of prevention and intervention
- Funding is viewed as the key to meaningful progress by most activities
- Sound database information can be a strong tool in preventing school violence
- Structuring a student's day from 3 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday is a strong positive step in reducing possible violence
- In-school suspension needs to become more part of the plan
- The level of trust between students and school leadership is a concern in reporting possible violence and keeping the student anonymous
- Having gatherings and meetings that bring together a cross-section of professional experience is encouraged
- Awareness was raised regarding the need for social workers in the school systems as a liaison between home-school-community. School social workers focus on family and community factors that influence learning and impact on the prevention and intervention of school violence

The committee sought written opinions from the public hearings. Some of these comments were and are supported by written 5 x 7 cards on file:

- "The media should be limited in what they can report."
- "Most school systems policies do not address standardized school policy violence and weapons to include punishment."
- "Character education must be made part of the prevention of school violence."
- "Better conflict resolution training involving students, parents and educators is needed."
- "Schools need to be given the right to expel problem students."
- "Teachers need to be supported by school boards and the court system."
- "Implement better ways to enforce the current rules on the books."
- "Law enforcement in public schools is not governed by anybody, no set standards."
- "Schools must use resources that are already available, such as counselors. They should counsel and teach conflict resolution only."
- "Children have a need to be known by significant adults. Programs, which connect students with adults, should be implemented in our schools. These need to be long term in nature (three years)."
- "Fund delivery systems that can be used to raise the awareness level of middle and upper income families. Family violence and school violence go hand in hand in these groups."
- "I am afraid that it is much easier to legislate morality in our children, than it is to be selfless, patient, and sacrificial models."
- "The State and local governments must be solicited to fund educational programs for, profit and non-profit agencies, that are aimed at primary services to our youth."
- "Training of professionals should focus on identifying red flags early in our youth."
- "More counseling efforts are needed in dealing with depression."
- "Require a conflict management course for all marriage licenses and all pregnancies."
- "First time offenders parents should be called in for a counseling session with the child."
- "I have found that some of our teachers are very militant toward the children. Counselors should sit in and visit classes in random and observe the teachers."
- "All this talk is no good if actions are not taken."
- "Disciplinary authority needs to be returned to the teachers in the classroom, particularly in grades K-5."
- "I am very impressed with the participation from youth and adults in this meeting. We need more of this."
- "More money must go into prevention."

A special opportunity was made available to the State tour and town meeting in Huntsville on July 10, 2000. Thirty-four (34) students, grades 6-12, from north Alabama, 10 different schools, private and public, equally male and female, from various backgrounds (Caucasian, African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanics), joined together to discuss and answer school violence questions in an electronic survey. The students never knew what another student stated, nor was the identity of the student known by anyone. The criterion was that each student had to answer each question.

The most noteworthy results from this survey, which are supported by the actual survey results, were as follows:

6 of the 34 students stated that they never feel safe in school.

19 of the 34 students always feel safe in school.

13 of 34 have personally witnessed an incident or threat that made them feel unsafe.

16 of 34 students stated that their personal safety has never been threatened.

10 of 34 stated once, 6 sometimes and 2 almost always.

In the first minute of a crisis, 16 of 34 students know exactly what to do, and 18 are unsure.

15 of 34 students defined school violence when a bully is pushing another around. 10 of 34 said when one is killed.

Only 10 of 34 students would report it immediately when their safety at school is threatened.

16 of 34 students know their guidance counselor.

6 of 34 students trust the school leadership to protect their identity if they turned in another student.

The 34 students listed their top reasons they think school violence occurs: when no one (in authority) listens to them; when they feel rejected by someone; students pressuring others; things at home are so bad and students being mistreated by teachers.

19 of 34 students feel that a plan needs to be created to work with students who are a problem.

21 of 34 students stated that their school could be made safer by asking them what they think.

24 of 34 students cited parents not being home or caring as a cause of school violence. 6 of 34 stated that home was not the primary cause.

9 of 34 students were neutral as to parents being held responsible for the crimes of their children.

The 34 students had up to three choices regarding what needs to be done to reduce school violence. There were 89 responses.

22 stated listen to the students

13 stated act fast before it is too late

12 stated to help those students who need help, we ignore them

11 said to make our schools more firm, but caring

10 stated to stop giving preferential treatment to athletes and students of important people

When asked to give one example in school where they personally were in fear because of circumstances that they thought might lead to school violence, their responses were:

"One example is when a couple of kids at my school said they were the JNCO mafia."

"At my school, there have been many threats of bombs and shooting. There are certain students that threaten others everyday and they need to be stopped, not made more mad by taking stupid insignificant things away."

"One of the moments I was in fear was when someone brought a knife to school and threatened to stab someone."

"A person this past year in our school got in trouble for some reason. The teachers decided to search his locker and found a hit list with the names of a bunch of kids that had been mean to him. They found some weapons in his book bag along with the list. We heard he was coming back for revenge on a certain date after they expelled him."

"A boy at school sent around a list for people to sign if they wanted to live. He said he was going to bomb the school."

"I have never honestly been scared for my own safety at my school."

"A kid in 6th grade said he would beat me up for my jacket, and so I never wore that jacket to school for the rest of the year. This kid had been held back two times already and he had always been a problem with teachers."

The 34 students were asked if only one thing was to be done to make a difference in the prevention of school violence, what would it be. Some of their responses were:

"Treat everyone fairly."

"Help the students who need help."

"I think if students get to know the police/security officers in school and get a feeling of security, they will be able to tell them when they feel unsafe."

"It's the kids and their parents who are responsible. Don't blame outside influences."

"Letting students openly pray in schools."

"School authority should talk to the students and respect the students. They should try to learn from the students and be aware of their problems."

"If the authorities wouldn't let certain athletes get away with the crime of mistreating other students and failing to discipline the student just because of their position."

"Teachers should strive to create a bond of friendship between themselves and potential problem students."

**Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)
Survey of 450 teachers, Alabama Career/Technical Education
Professional Development Conference, August 2000**

These teachers represented 450 Alabama State schools. They represent an educational focus that directly impacts the prevention of school violence.

Number of Students Impacted

Teachers and students have impacted over 18,000 Alabama students as they have implemented "STOP the Violence" program.

Examples of teacher written survey results on record are as follows:

"Gun violence pledge - whole school."
Kathy Crawford, Huffman Middle School

"My class has worked with our local children's advocacy center. This center provides help for children and parents, such as counseling services. We help provide them with teddy bears. This year we will help with school supplies."
Karen Casey, Saks High School

"We make charts on different levels of violence and use these as part of our discussion. The chief deputy in Choctaw County came and presented a program on youth violence in our county. We received a \$500 grant to continue the program this school year."
Linda F. Turner-Gaines, Tom Orr AVC

"We did a lesson plan for 8-12 grades and plan to do this for K-6 grades this year. We did news articles and posters. We also did a display board."
Joyce Finch, Sulligent High School

"We use paper dolls made with brad holders so that the arms and legs move and the elbows bend. Anywhere the hands cross, they are not to be touched."
Cindy Wigley, Marshall Technical

"Students research ideas that bind their family together by taping pictures representing what ties their family together."
Martha J. Foster, Putnam Middle School

"We produced a business card for each student in our school with an emergency number provided by 'STOP the Violence' workshops."
Nancy Billings, Whitesburg Middle School

"Students developed 'Teasers are Losers!' a puppet show about teasing and bullying and was presented to 4th graders."
Mary Beth Henry, Priceville Junior High School

"Each day, each period, each student writes down five things he/she is thankful for. Then, one student reads an inspirational article, usually from William Bennett's "Book of Virtues" and sometimes from 'Chicken Soup' book."

Mary Ellen Holmes, A. P. Brewer High School

Underscoring was done for easy reading purposes of statistics and quotes.

The sum of what has been presented here represents student, teacher and parent written word of their concerns regarding school violence, what is being done today and what needs yet to be done. To listen to the people may be the most important task of the State of Alabama. These are supported by actual data available for review.

“We teach violence prevention in home-awareness videos on marital abuse, child abuse and elder abuse. These videos stress tips on what can be done if involved in these situations. Also, it tells them what to look for in an abuser.”

Malea Ertle
Meek High School

V.

State's Successful Practices

As the committee proceeded with the task of absorbing where and how the State is creatively addressing prevention and intervention, it has been made aware of many outstanding efforts. These individuals, organizations, county educational systems, associations, and State agencies warrant additional exposure and additional funding considerations for the prevention of school violence. Although new programs have been identified, the committee wishes to be certain that we also focus on some of the best practices in the State.

Some of these successes are as follows:

Boys and Girls Clubs of Alabama

**Character Counts - Mobile Chamber of Commerce/
Mobile County School System**

Children's Policy Council

**Community Mediation Program
Better Business Bureau of North Alabama**

Community Youth Partnership

**Comprehensive School Team
Hoover School System and Jefferson County School System**

Department of Education - School Safety Plans

Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)

Make the Right Choice

Mobile Interagency Cooperation

Montgomery Public School System - "HIPPY"

Obligation, Inc.

Project Lift: Lanier High School

Safe Harbor

**School To Career and
Brewbaker Technology Magnet High School**

Second Chance Foundation

S.T.E.P. Foundation

Teaching Tolerance

Teen Think Tanks of America, Inc.

The Amelia Center

This committee is aware that additional successful practices exist in the State as resources for the prevention of school violence. It is the mission of this report to cause the continued search for those practices that can become partners in seeking solutions for safer schools.

“Students in my class wrote poems about stopping violence in homes and schools.”

Sarah Mitchell
Theodore High School

VI.

Status of Laws in Alabama

As the committee explored what we had to work with, the status of Alabama's laws in dealing with school violence are advanced. Such laws do indeed provide the legal framework to both act as a deterrent and as a protection for school officials to act as needed within the law to prevent school violence.

Legislation from 1998 through May, 2000

Act 99-433 - §12-15-100; §12-15-101; §12-15-102; §41-9-622, and §41-9-623. This law allows for the sharing of juvenile arrest records by all law enforcement (to the same extent adult arrest records are available). **Effective date: September 1, 1999.**

Act 99-572 - §15-20-21 to §15-20-37. This law completely reorganizes the Community Notification Act into 18 logically divided code sections. **Effective date: September 1, 1999.**

Act 98-490 - §13A-6-26. This law provides that a person who expressly or by implication threatens to do bodily harm or does bodily harm to a person, a family member or a friend of the person, or any other person, or uses any other unlawful criminal means to solicit or cause any person to join or remain in a street gang is guilty of the crime of compelling street gang membership. **Effective date: August 1, 1998.**

Act 2000-11 - §13A-11-11. Under existing law, knowingly reporting, initiating, or circulating a false report of a fire, explosion, or certain other catastrophic or emergency circumstances is a Class A misdemeanor. **Effective date: June 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-807 - Not yet codified. This bill creates the crime of making a terroristic threat. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 99-567 - §13A-8-170. This law creates the crime of failure to pay for gasoline. **Effective date: September 1, 1999.**

Act 2000-615 - Not yet Codified. This bill establishes the crimes of cruelty to a dog or cat (2nd degree) and of intentional extreme cruelty to a domesticated dog or domesticated cat (1st degree). **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-321 - Not yet Codified. Existing law does not regulate tattoo parlors or the tattooing and body piercing of individuals. This bill provides for the regulation of tattoo parlors and tattooing and body piercing. **Effective date: July 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-670 - Not yet Codified. This bill creates the crime of possession of alcohol in an open container in a passenger vehicle. This bill provides for several exceptions. **Effective Date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 99-397- §32-5B-5 and §32-5B-6. This law allows law enforcement to issue a warning to drivers for not following Alabama's seat belt law (§ 32-5B-1ff) regardless of other violations for six months following the passage to the act (until December 9, 1999). After that date there will be no prohibitions on enforcing the seatbelt law and citations may be issued solely for violation of the seatbelt law. **Effective date: June 9, 1999.**

Act 2000-791 - §28-1-5. This bill allows persons 19 years of age or older to serve alcoholic beverages in certain establishments licensed by the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-760 - Not yet Codified. This bill authorizes a hospital to take possession of a child who is 72 hours or younger in age if the child is voluntarily delivered to the provider by the parent of the child and if the parent did not express an intent to return for the child and provides for immunity. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-266 - Not yet Codified. This bill creates the crimes of domestic violence in the first, second and third degree and provides for the penalties for such a crime. The bill also provides the procedures relating to the arrest of persons based on complaints of domestic violence and provides for the persons subject to arrest without a warrant. **Effective date: July 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-597 - Not yet Codified. This bill provides that persons arrested for an offense involving the abuse, assault, strike, shove, kick or otherwise touching of a person or subject him or her to physical contact, or the attempt or threat thereof, of a family, household, dating or engagement relationship member, or for violation of a protection order, may not be released on bail until after an appearance before a judge or magistrate. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 99-447 - §30-5-9. This law increases the criminal penalties for a second or subsequent conviction of a violation of the Protection From Abuse Act (§§30-5-1FF). **Effective date: September 1, 1999.**

Act 2000-322 - Not yet Codified. This bill provides for the Department of Human Resources, Child Support Enforcement Division, to establish a program to increase child support collection by publishing in newspapers with general circulation throughout the State, and posting on the DHR website the names of ten obligors who are delinquent in their support payments. **Effective date: October 1, 2000.**

Act 99-432 - §32-5A-191. This law provides the following sentencing enhancement for violation of the DUI law (§32-5A-191): When any person over the age of 21 years is convicted and a child under the age of 14 years was present in the vehicle at the time of the offense, the defendant shall be sentenced to double the minimum punishment that the person would have received if the child had not been present in the motor vehicle. **Effective date: September 1, 1999.**

Act 98-488 - §13A-6-27. This law creates the crime of criminal use of a defense spray such as mace or pepper spray if the spray is used to evade law enforcement or in the commission of another crime. **Effective date: August 1, 1998.**

Act 98-494 - §13A-7-29. This law increases the minimum fine upon the first conviction for criminal littering from \$100 to \$250, and further provides that the fine be \$500 upon a second or any subsequent conviction. **Effective date: August 1, 1998.**

Act 98-467 - §§13A-12-200.1ff. This law significantly enhances enforcement procedure against sellers or distributors of obscene materials. **Effective date: July 1, 1998.**

Act 2000-677 - §32-5A-191. This bill provides that a second DUI offender is subject to a mandatory sentence of five days of imprisonment or community service for not less than 30 days. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-554 - §32-7A-1ff. This bill will require proof of motor vehicle liability insurance prior to the registration and licensing of motor vehicles. Proof must also be provided to law enforcement upon being stopped. **Effective date: May 17, 2000.**

Act 2000-554 - §13A-6-67 and §15-20-26. This bill makes the crime of sexual abuse in the second degree a Class C felony, if the person is convicted for a subsequent offense within one year of the first conviction. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 99-361 - §16-22A-1ff. The law institutes a criminal history background check on applicants (and certain employees) to the State Department of Education who have unsupervised access to a child. **Effective date: July 1, 1999.**

Act 2000-612 - §12-15-130 to §12-15-134. This bill renames the Alabama Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council and the county juvenile justice coordinating councils as the "Alabama Children's Policy Council" and "County Children's Policy Councils" respectively, and adds several new members to the Council. This bill provides that the Commissioner of the Department of Children's Affairs shall be chairman of the council, renames the State Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council Fund as the "Alabama Children's Policy Council Fund," and provides that certain reports formerly submitted to and prepared by the Administrative Office of Courts shall be submitted to and prepared by the Department of Children's Affairs. **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 2000-749 - §12-17-24.1. This bill allows for the remaining judicial circuits to establish a family court division by submitting an implementation plan for approval by the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court. "Teachers need to be supported by school boards and court system." **Effective date: August 1, 2000.**

Act 99-390 - §41-10-620ff and §41-15B-2ff. This law amends the law concerning the Children's Trust Fund that establishes a funding source for intensive child and family programs. This law reduces the allocation of funds to \$60 million (originally \$85 million) from the National Tobacco Settlement (eventually, funding can go up to \$70 million). **Effective date: June 9, 1999; however, the funds will not become available until the Tobacco Settlement money is received.**

“Our students visited three elementary and middle schools and presented our STOP the Violence Program. It was great! We targeted 5th and 6th graders and put on our program.”

Joy C. Gibson
Mary G. Montgomery High School

VII.

The Preliminary Report

Per the resolution, the committee presented its preliminary report in order to meet mandated guidelines of the resolution. The report is on file, as of July 14, 2000, in the Office of the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate. Copies of said report are available upon request.

“My parenting class students presented a puppet show to Kindergarten students to help prevent violence in the home. There are three puppets who have different forms of abuse — physical, sexual and mental. We use this as a project in promoting home safety for children and set aside a day to promote family unity and good family relations.”

Betty McWhorter
Cedar Bluff High School

VIII.

“Bottom Up - Top Down” Partnership

A Participating 50/50 Safe Schools Partnership
In Search Of Better Solutions For Safe Schools

The Alabama Joint Interim Legislative Committee on School Violence has completed the research, reviewed the 1995 Task Force on School Violence recommendations, coordinated a State tour and town meetings, held regional sub-committee meetings regarding best practices within the State, and invited statewide input in consolidated work sessions with professionals for their input into the final report. **The sum of these efforts has been applied in search of better solutions to propose to the Legislature and Governor regarding safer schools.**

In this regard, the committee has addressed the key questions asked by the Legislature, **“to present findings, conclusions, and recommendations while focusing on preventive measures, crisis management and heightening awareness.”** A vigilant focus has been applied to the process to ensure that the Governor’s request to the committee is answered, **“determine the needs and find a means.”**

In considering all of the above, the committee finds that it should direct the final report to the **Alabama student** - to the **parent** - to the **schools** - to **Alabama Businesses** - to the **State Board of Education** - to the **Office of the Attorney General** - to **law enforcement** - to the **citizens** and to the **Legislature and Governor**.

It is within this framework, that the following findings, conclusions and recommendations are rendered:

“I worked with my 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. We did 5 day — 45 minute workshops with each group on conflict resolution, games on understanding differences, skits, character traits and self control.”

Jackie Sively
J.B. Pennington High School

Findings

- a) The **State of Alabama has enacted laws** to help deter school violence and provide safe schools. There remain new opportunities to enact laws that will complement with existing law.
- b) The State of Alabama and related departments have **completed** safety and school violence plans that are extremely thorough in our ability to respond to school violence.
- c) The "1995 Task Force on School Violence" was a **critical starting point** in moving Alabama forward in addressing safe schools. The work of this committee remains current and worthy of the strongest of considerations in key areas.
- d) The student population **feels removed** from the issue of school violence, particularly with prevention. Our students are requesting an increased role in providing safer schools.
- e) Communications is a **vital concern** across the State in effectively utilizing all available resources to be more successful in finding and implementing solutions.
- f) There is much room for **needed emphasis and solutions** in the areas of prevention and intervention as the State commits additional energies and resources to solutions statewide.
- g) A cohesive framework **is needed to bring** together the multiple services and resources that can better enhance the State's commitment to providing safer schools.
- h) There are many specific **successful ongoing best practices** within the management of the operating entities. However, beyond the boundaries of the entity, progress is limited and often stops.
- i) There is an obvious **lack of funding** to accomplish significant results in the areas of prevention.
- j) In Alabama, there are **many professionals** whose expertise and experience highly qualifies them to address all aspects of violence in schools.
- k) In a review of the status of other State's progress on school violence, there are several **highly successful** programs that warrant the strongest of consideration by Alabama.
- l) Interagency relationships, in dealing with school safety, are **being integrated** into current planning and are becoming a priority in the prevention of youth violence.
- m) The legislative calendar is not such that will allow for **timely decision making** on matters that may require a greater priority due to the next session scheduled for February, 2001.
- n) The **strong commitment** to school safety concerns by many Alabama citizens, from multiple professions, should not go unnoticed.
- o) The State has **not involved** the media as much as can be possible to be an active messenger of school safety best practices and making the public more aware of what has been accomplished.
- p) The State safe schools hotline **has received 2,579 calls** since its activation in May 1999.

- q) Students in north Alabama contributed to the research by taking an electronic survey on school violence during the State tour.
- r) A considerable amount of **concern exists** statewide regarding the manner in which guidance counselors are being utilized.
- s) There is **strong support** for the school resource officer role where those persons are employed for school violence prevention purposes.
- t) The committee has found multiple **confusing definitions** of school violence. This lack of consistency impacts the way operations are perceived and final funding decisions.
- u) The **students, teachers and parents presented in writing** how they felt and what they recommended be done statewide.

The underscoring and bolding represents key words that connect back to the information learned for the purposes of this report.

“Students are to act out different situations in groups as the rest of the class discusses different ways of resolving problems.”

Twanda Kirkland
Bullock County High School

Conclusions

- a) The possibility of an existing **organized entity or body** is warranted to pull together the untold programs and plans that are being utilized today in school violence.
- b) **New possible legislation** should be researched, planned and written to submit to the Legislature in 2001 that is directed toward prevention and safer schools by the Legislative Reference Service.
- c) Specific State emphasis and progress in school safety should be directed toward **prevention and intervention** in concrete ways.
- d) **Appropriate funding** to make even more significant inroads in providing safer schools is a critical element to successfully addressing the needs of this State.
- e) Specific **recommendations of the 1995 Task Force** should be implemented where consistent with the 2000 Action Initiatives.
- f) A highly visible **student platform** is needed to actively participate on school violence issues provides a concrete format to act as the State's "first line of defense."
- g) **Communications** on school safety should become a top priority between organizations, public or private. Timely and accurate communications is critical to meaningful solutions.
- h) The **people resources** in this State that have contributed to this final report should be harnessed and more effectively utilized in the areas of prevention and intervention in ongoing statewide solutions.
- i) New **operating partnerships** are an important strategy as the State addresses how we can more effectively prevent school violence and deal further with the causes. Such partnerships need to address how the State can better link the policy makers with those who interact with the student every day - parents, teachers, counselors, nurses, social workers, school officials, school resource officers, and most importantly, other students.
- j) The committee's report should identify ways in which the State should **act on initiatives**. Great sensitivity must be employed in the identification process in the areas of timing and cost.
- k) The **State must assure** itself that it has done everything possible to ensure the highest of desired results in dealing with a school violence crisis.
- k) Based upon the findings of this committee the **media has a major opportunity** in Alabama to become a partner in the providing of safer schools.
- l) The **State Safe Schools Hotline (1-888-SAV-KIDS)** is making a difference in the providing of safer schools. The hotline has received 2,573 calls through July 2000 since it was adopted, with 86 of those calls being eminent threat calls. The 1999-2000 year indicates 1,039 calls compared to the 1,537 calls a year earlier. The hotline appears to be of great value and the committee wishes to applaud the efforts of the State to introduce this as a prevention tool.
- m) Emphasis on **building relationships** in education is warranted.
- n) It is in the best interest of providing safer schools to recognize some of the **best practices** in the State that are making a difference. Many are local to their area of

influence and some are statewide. A few have a regional and national mission.

- o) The committee has learned that all parties involved with the solutions to youth and school violence prefer to use the term "**safe schools**" rather than school violence.
- p) Offering concrete **solutions** to safer schools is warranted.
- q) Businesses and schools define the term "school violence" differently. It has been requested of the committee to offer a more **universal definition** that can be adopted where needed.
- r) Outreach, through the many statewide practices, appears to be **making a difference with regard to building relationships** and therefore trust.
- s) **Communications can and should be improved upon with the schools directly** in event of a crisis with the Emergency Management Agency county offices and State office.

*“Chilton County FACS teachers hosted a county-wide “STOP
the Violence” Forum.”*

Pam Ousley
Maplesville High School

Recommendations

- A. The State of Alabama should create and appoint members to the **Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools (ACSS)**, effective September 1, 2000.
See Action Initiative I

- B. **New laws should be enacted and implemented that enhance our active posture directed toward safer schools.**
See Action Initiative III

- C. **The recommendations from the 1995 Task Force** that this committee wishes to consider for additional consideration and **re-recommending** are:

In the report, it is stated, "***Lori and I want our children to obtain the best education possible but we are troubled with the growing threats to them and their classmates' safety. Teachers should be able to teach and students should be able to learn free of fear.***" Lt. Governor Don Siegelman, 1995

This committee of 2000 sees no change in that charge, as it applies even more to Alabama today. This was pre-Columbine, pre-Kentucky, pre-Florida, pre-Oregon, pre-Mississippi and pre-Georgia.

These recommendations are viewed to be either work in progress and need additional emphasis, have not been implemented and/or directly link to current action initiatives from the 2000 Committee. Each is linked to a 2000 Action Initiative.

(The page numbers referenced are to the 1995 Task Force Report).

1. **Media** - "A media summit ... to address the growing evidence of the entertainment medias bad effects on children." **Page 4**
See Action Initiative IV
2. **Law Enforcement and School-Based Response** - "School Resource Officers have been a success in many communities and should be encouraged. The State can provide financial assistance and guidance." **Page 7 and 17**
See Action Initiative V
3. **Law Enforcement** - "Law enforcement and school officials should gain access to N.C.I.C. records concerning pertinent criminal information about juvenile offenders." **Page 8**
See Action Initiative III
4. **Juvenile Justice** - "Better coordination and cooperation among State and local agencies dealing with children is so essential that all funding from the Children's First package to a county should be conditioned on the activation of each county's juvenile justice coordinating council." **Page 11**
See Action Initiative I
5. **Juvenile Justice** - "The after-care a child receives after his release from an institutional setting is critical. Yet aftercare capacity has been tragically lacking in this State." **Page 12**
See Action Initiative I
6. **School-Based Response** - "1995 school bond issue capital funds for alternative schools... such alternative schools should use curriculum- based education, including conflict resolution curricula and a maximization of parental participation and responsibility." **Page 16**
See Action Initiative II

7. **School-Based Response** - "... the annual accountability report from each school system must include a section on school safety and discipline." **Page 16**
See Action Initiative I
8. **School-Based Response** - "Schools should attempt to establish after-school, week-end and summer school programs, whenever possible, for students who need additional school and academic opportunities." **Page 16**
See Action Initiative II
9. **School-Based Response** - "The State Board of Education should consider enhancing vocational - educational course opportunities - especially at the middle school level." **Page 17**
See Action Initiative II
10. **Parenting and Early Intervention** - "Expansion throughout the State of such model pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk children..." **Page 19**
See Action Initiative II
11. **Parenting and Early Intervention** - "The requirement, whenever or wherever possible, of parental involvement in State programs involving education, public assistance and any others involving children." **Page 20**
See Action Initiative II
12. **Parenting and Early Intervention** - "Violence prevention and conflict resolution training for teachers, day care workers, counselors, and other professionals working with children." **Page 20**
See Action Initiative II
13. **Parenting and Early Intervention** - "Convening of a two day statewide symposium bringing together community leaders who work with children and youth throughout the State to share their ideas and successful programs with others. They could use this opportunity to develop a coordinated community outreach violence prevention plan." **Pages 20 and 21**
See Action Initiative I
14. **Community-Based Action** - "State government should assist in the publication of a manual of community-based programs across the State that are working." **Page 23**
See Action Initiative I
15. **Community-Based Action** - "Statewide and regional work shops should be convened to bring together community and church leaders who work with children and youth throughout the State to share their ideas and successful programs." **Page 23**
See Action Initiative I

"I BELIEVE THAT THIS REPORT AND THE
RECOMMENDATIONS COMING FROM IT,
INCLUDING THE CHILDREN FIRST LEGISLATIVE
PROPOSALS WHICH, IN LARGE PART, SPRUNG FROM
THIS TASK FORCE, ARE THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE
AND FAR-REACHING PROPOSALS ON THESE VITAL
ISSUES EVER PROPOSED IN OUR STATE."

Lt. Governor Don Siegelman, 1995

The sum of these fifteen (15) recommendations of the seventy-one (71) presented in the 1995 Task Force Report link directly to opportunities of 2000.

- D. **The State shall adopt a new operating “Bottom Up - Top Down” partnership.** This will become a primary focus of the proposed council. In an effort to bring together the multiple influencing forces needed to address the prevention of school violence, the State should adopt “Bottom Up - Top Down.”
See Action Initiative I
- E. To ensure an ongoing commitment to prevent school violence, it is recommended that the **“Safe Schools Institute” (SSI)** be seriously considered, without cost to the State. Initial seed money is to be considered from businesses in Alabama for one year, with an ongoing commitment pending matching funds from other sources.
See Action Initiative I
- F. **The State must take advantage of the ongoing successful practices and consider the merits of incorporating these successes, history, and professionals into the State’s school violence opportunities and action initiatives.** To accomplish this end, it should consider adopting those practices that can best deal with the prevention of school violence. This may include the possibility of providing additional funding, and supporting the missions of those practices to advance their purpose even further. It is extremely important to recognize those persons who are the pioneers of their cause and to embrace their energies as key factors in the future success of the best practice.
See Action Initiatives
- G. **The impact of school resource officers in the State is significant.** The State should commit to a statewide presence of school resource officers in every school and make the necessary funding available to implement, where needed, what we know to be an ongoing successful preventive measure.
See Action Initiative V
- H. **School counselors, in some schools, are not being fully utilized as intended.** School officials should revisit how school counselors can better serve student needs.
See Action Initiative VI
- I. **The expertise of social workers is an important element in dealing with the causes of school violence.** The State should ensure through new solutions, that social workers must be involved in the team approach toward working with each Alabama student who may require such services.
See Action Initiative VII
- J. **The Emergency Management Agency in the State should become a more pivotal partner** in the simplification and organization of how the State and local schools or LEA’s are preventing, planning, and responding to school violence.
See Action Initiative IX
- K. **The trained professional teachers in the areas the State health curriculum and of family and consumer sciences with emphasis on family, career and community leadership are an important resource to better prevent and deal with the causes of school violence.** Character education must be the primary focus. The State has these resources in almost every State school with a current emphasis on dealing with school violence.
See Action Initiative II
- L. **The “alternative school” practice requires fine-tuning and increased funding.** Progress has been being made, and we must hire trained professionals and faculties to adequately staff these facilities allowing for creativeness such as flexible schooling and innovative programming.
See Action Initiative I

- M. **Training of teachers** in the areas of conflict resolution, peer mediation, respect for diversity, promoting positive cultural identity and child development theory is recommended. In-service programs to train teachers about the warning signs of at risk children and to make appropriate referrals is needed.
See Action Initiative II
- N. **Curriculum programming in our schools may wish to focus more on those courses that help young adults grow** physically, mentally, emotionally and socially in an environment that promotes skills in relating to others without violence.
See Action Initiative II
- O. **A State "Student Advocacy Board for Safe Schools" reporting to the Council and Governor should be created and heard** as this State searches for and decides what is best for this State in dealing with any issue that impacts the Alabama student and school violence concerns.
See Action Initiative I
- P. **The practice of "outreach" to the people in this State is a successful method in touching opportunities that can often go ignored and this approach should be embraced and is being recommended as we must consider "going to the home" to deal with some of the true causes of school violence.** Those best practices that employ this as its mission should gain priority from the State in search of better solutions.
See Action Initiative I
- Q. **A national "Teaching Tolerance" program is in place and managed by the Southern Poverty Law Center based in Montgomery, Alabama.** The "Teaching Tolerance" program offers free curriculum and staff development resources including a small grant program for classroom teachers. The recommendation is to consider including the "Responding To Hate At School" materials as a resource in teaching youth to be more tolerant. Alabama principals, superintendents and presidents of the school board associations have received these materials.
See Action Initiative II
- R. **Emergency Management Agency/School Communications.** This agency has established and maintains a statewide communications system. It has installed instant communications with 67 local counties operating centers to coordinate response plans. It now knows what the needs are from those counties experiencing disaster. This capability should be extended to the public schools.
See Action Initiative IX
- S. **School Outreach is underway.** Each school has many programs that take the school to the families and communities. The older traditional school property no longer has boundaries. **Formalizing these outreach efforts with a plan and a person coordinating the school's outreach plan can be better targeted to needs and can be a stable parent, teacher, and student relationships builder. The community is today's school auditorium!**
See Action Initiative IX

These recommendations are intended to represent findings and conclusions that are linked directly to opportunities within this State. It is these opportunities that this committee wishes to pursue through specific action initiatives. The committee hopes for an avenue to be developed to pursue these initiatives in a most logical way.

“Violence prevention is implemented with my students in child care and elder care services by those students having to have nonviolent attitudes and no discipline referrals to remain in the class. Students work hard to remain in class as it is a popular class to take.”

Glenda Palmer
Greenville High School

Opportunities & Action Initiatives

The Committee has identified opportunities that can directly impact Alabama providing safer schools. To accomplish the prevention of school violence, the committee recommends that emphasis be placed on the causes of such violence. Using this frame of reference, this report will list opportunities and an action initiative. All suggested actions will include the proposed party responsible for implementation, a reasonable time frame to complete the task and potential cost considerations.

The committee has learned that the State's school systems have planned every move in order that they might respond to a crisis with great effectiveness. Safety plans, as a preventive measure, exist within every school system. These individual initiatives are commendable themselves, but the collective implementation of these plans will strengthen our efforts toward reducing fear in our schools.

As charged by the Joint Legislative Resolution and the Governor's letter, these primary objectives will be addressed in this concluding section: heightening awareness, crises management, and prevention and intervention. In doing so, this report will have also determined the needs and found the means to bring about the needed solutions.

Critical to the successful implementation of these initiatives are the available funding streams. Those potential sources of funding that may be applied to these efforts are the following: State Board of Education "At Risk" monies, The Children's Trust Fund, Office of Juvenile Justice for Delinquency Prevention, Governor's Office - Drug and Substance Abuse, Children's First, Teen Pregnancy and Prevention Funds, Alabama Fatherhood Initiative, and the ABC Board. Each of these budget units has goals that are compatible with this effort and funds that may be accessed.

The master plan of action initiatives is as follows:

- ❑ **Initiative I - Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools:** This volunteer Council shall be created to act in an advisory capacity to the Department of Children's Affairs. This Council will work in collaboration with all other departments and agencies for the purpose of creating safer school environments and specifically with the Children's Policy Council. **Page 50**
- ❑ **Initiative II - "Prevention Through Teaching":** This effort focuses on the training of teachers at all levels and partnering with successful violence prevention programs. This initiative addresses the four critical (grade) groups; Pre K, K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. **Page 54**
- ❑ **Initiative III - New Laws:** This initiative asks for consideration of laws that complement the 1998-2000 legislation enacted to prevent school violence. These recently passed laws provide a sound foundation for additional legislation. **Page 59**
- ❑ **Initiative IV - Role of and partnership with the Media:** This initiative focuses on establishing an improved working relationship with the media. An effort will be made to engage the media in a plan of action to work for the prevention of school violence. **Page 60**
- ❑ **Initiative V - School Resource Officers:** This initiative asks that over a three year period school resource officers be phased into every middle school and high school. This phasing, where needed, will be based on priority as determined by incident report statistics of the schools. **Page 61**

- **Initiative VI - School Counselors:** Counselors are considered a primary tool in the prevention of school violence, however there remains a concern that counselors are only spending minimal time providing non-academic counseling. This initiative asks that a plan must be implemented by all principals so that school counselors are better utilized as non-academic counselors. **Page 62**

- **Initiative VII - Social Workers:** The causes of school violence include the home environment. Social workers must be included in the school's effort to address violence within the school. **Page 63**

- **Initiative VIII - Emergency Management Agency School Communications -** Communication is critical to crisis management. Schools must now be equipped for immediate communication with the local and State Emergency Management Agency. Appropriate radio equipment is essential and this initiative asks for just that. **Page 64**

- **Initiative IX - School Outreach:** Some schools are reaching out more than ever, offering school resources, including students and staff. To build on these efforts, a formal outreach plan is recommended for all schools. A critical aspect of this formal plan is to include ways to build the parent - student - teacher relationship. **Page 65**

Action Initiative I

Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools

On many occasions, great needs go unmet due to lack of enthusiastic support. This committee recognizes the need in this State for a full-time, everyday champion for safe schools. This champion would focus on opportunities and ensure that the State's commitment to the prevention to school violence is being met. This champion will be called the Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools.

Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools

The coordination of a comprehensive State safe schools master plan shall be the responsibility of the Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools. For the purposes of utilizing existing resources and keeping bureaucracy to a minimum, this volunteer council should be connected to the Department of Children's Affairs, reporting to the Commissioner. Not only does this best utilize existing resources, it will afford a faster turnaround on funding requests and better identify specific funding opportunities for prevention. The role of the Council shall be to work in concert with the Children's Policy Council, to oversee the Bottom-Up - Top Down partnership, the Student Advocacy Board for Safe Schools, the implementation of the Safe Schools Institute and to study and recommend the application of successful practices. Throughout this process the student will be kept as the top educational priority.

The Council shall provide an opportunity for professionals and students to impact school violence. The volunteer member nominees shall be presented to the Department of Children's Affairs by the Joint Interim Legislative Committee, with selection made by the Department and final approval by the Governor. The Council shall be made up of 18 professionals working in the area of school violence prevention and ten students trained in peer mediation. Due to current opportunities, quick action to establish the Council is warranted.

Children's Policy Council

The Children's Policy Council, formally the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, has an increased role in the distribution of funds for school violence purposes. The 67 local county councils perform needs assessments, print materials, notify the public, and are commanded to give an annual report every July. The recommendations of the local councils go to the State Policy Council, Governor, and Legislature. Such recommendations determine the funding streams which impact how funding is directed to certain programs, based upon county needs. The Council gives the State the means to solve the potential problems of youth and school violence. The final funding decisions are based upon these annual reports with the Legislature being the final voice determining funding decisions. The Children's Policy Council was an initial recommendation from the 1995 Task Force on School Violence.

Bottom-Up - Top Down Partnership

The citizens of Alabama have strongly suggested that a vehicle be established that links more closely the student and the State's leadership for the prevention of school violence. To accomplish that objective, the Bottom-Up - Top Down partnership is to be created. The "Bottom Up" portion of the partnership is made up of students, parents, and teachers. The "Top Down" represents the State's policy makers, starting with the Governor. Working together, it is this partnership that will find the best solutions dealing with heightening awareness, prevention, intervention and crisis management.

Student Advocacy Board for Safe Schools

Those students, who have been previously trained in the area of peer mediation, will be the officers of the newly created **Students' Advocacy Board for Safe Schools**. It is suggested that the appointed council seek out from the Department of Education, existing students that are active in school violence prevention programs. Membership is open to all students in the State. These students represent: FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America), FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America), DECA (an association for students in Marketing Education), HOSA (Health Occupations Student Association), FFA (an association for students in Agriscience Education), Skills USA - VICA (an association for students in Technical Education), and TSA (Technology Student Association). The first annual meeting of the Student Advocacy Board shall be October 6-7, 2000 in Birmingham. An expected attendance is approximately 3,000. The second annual meeting is scheduled in Birmingham in October 2001.

Safe Schools Institute

To ensure an ongoing long-term commitment in the providing of safer schools, this action establishes the **"Safe Schools Institute of Alabama" (SSIA)**, without cost to the State. Initial seed money should come from Alabama businesses for two years with on-going commitment pending matching funds from other sources.

This Institute shall be located, ideally, in Montgomery to facilitate working directly with State departments and officials. It is recommended that State universities work in collaboration with the council to accomplish the mission of the institute. The States of Kentucky and North Carolina have successfully created similar operations.

The Institute shall set up a statewide grant program to assist local school systems with alternative programs. It may have nine major components, which are: establish a clearinghouse of information and materials concerning school violence and safety; provide and coordinate training, technical assistance and program development for schools; analyze data collected; evaluate existing school safety programs; administer grants to local school systems; promote interagency efforts to address school discipline and safety issues; prepare and disseminate information regarding best practices in creating safe and effective schools; advise the State Board of Education on administrative policies; provide an annual report to the Governor, Board of Education, and others on the status of school safety in the State.

It shall be a primary focus of the council to address the possible benefits to the State in looking at best practices around the State that can be implemented elsewhere and may require additional funding. For example, Dr. Michael Windle, Professional Social and Behavioral Sciences, (Psychology), UAB, has submitted a request for a grant to establish a "Comprehensive Youth Violence Center", with word to be received any day. Should this be accomplished, and if not, it would be advantageous to both the State and the Center to work together as indicated above. The mission of the Center would be research and possibly education and treatment.

The Study of Successful Practices for Future Application **"Project Lift": Lanier High School**

In collaboration with the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce, the program was initiated through the "School to Career" program. The students of the high school who had been identified through test scores that needed help remediation, motivation and encouragement volunteered to participate in the program. Approximately 100 plus students participated in "Project Lift".

“Make the Right Choice”: Mobile District Attorney’s Office

This program, sponsored by the Mobile District Attorney’s office, utilizes a comprehensive community approach to intervene with at-risk children to deter criminal behavior. Three elements of the plan are to identify at-risk children, deter criminal behavior, and educate children and their parents on the laws and outreach efforts of the program.

Interagency Cooperation: Mobile

The Interagency Cooperation among community resources is exceptional and provides a model for the rest of Alabama. The following agencies collaborate on a regular basis to improve services for children: Mobile County Public Schools, Juvenile Justice System, District Attorney’s Office, Department of Human Resources, Mobile Mental Health, Drug Education Council, United Way, City/County Government, and many non-profit organizations (Boys & Girls Clubs, etc.)

Obligation, Inc.: Birmingham

This private organization advocates the elimination of violence in the media (TV, computer games, etc.). The causal effects of students watching violence are well established. The messages may promote violence. Parents may not be aware of the messages hidden in ads and programs. Schools need to be sure that all media relationships work together to prevent advertising of a questionable nature.

Safe Harbor: Birmingham

This private Christian-based agency provides community education about current youth culture to schools, parent groups, student groups, the law enforcement community, and many other venues. This program provides one-on-one mentoring for teens and support groups for parents of at-risk, rebellious teens. The goal is to provide the prevention and intervention of destructive behaviors through education and relationships.

“School To Career” and Brewbaker Technology Magnet High School: Montgomery

The “School To Career” system and other groups became aware that there was not enough funding to furnish the technical needs of the school. They joined forces to secure \$3.5 million to purchase school technology in 1999-2000. The school will open August 28, 2000. This action represents “School to Career” being the catalyst in partnering with business to solve a problem that was not a function of the true purpose of “School to Career.”

Safety Plans: State Department of Education

The State Department of Education has accomplished a difficult goal in working with and approving safety plans for public schools. Some schools safety plans have been revised and resubmitted for approval. The Commission could assist the Department in ensuring that those plans are important through heightening awareness.

Teen Think Tank, Inc.: Huntsville

This report includes many of the statistics and suggestions from their elite survey. **One of the primary benefits learned from this group was the value added to the process in listening to students.** What they had to say was very helpful and their concerns in this matter were as strong, if not more so, than the professionals in the business. It would be a tremendous oversight for the State of Alabama to not include the students in the safe school planning and activities.

Community Partnership for Youth: Huntsville

This program was established in 1997 when a 17- year old boy murdered his parents and attacked three siblings. The Community Partnership for Youth was established to become a middleman for youth and/or parents to connect families seeking sources that can assist with problems. This program receives approximately 10 calls per month and refers them to a qualified source.

Other practices within the State are included in other initiatives due to the potential application and nature of the practice.

Special Projects

There are special opportunities in the State to aid in the prevention of school violence. Such projects include the possibility of State schools license plates connecting to national programs such as chain reaction, the and the currently registered e-mail address ALASAFESCHOOLS@aol.com and the web page at ALASAFESCHOOLS.com.

Action Initiative I Summary

The joint efforts of the Safe Schools Advisory Council and the Children's Policy Council, both reporting to the Department of Children's Affairs, gives the State of Alabama a formidable force in School violence prevention.

Initiative Intent: To establish the Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools to heighten awareness and to champion prevention

Party Responsible: Governor through Executive Order

Date to Complete: September 15, 2000

Cost to Complete: Approximately \$100,000

Action Initiative II

Prevention Through Education

One of the most effective solutions to the problem of school violence is through educational programming that addresses pre-k, k-5, 6-8, 9-12 grade levels. This committee has learned that there are multiple existing practices that are successfully addressing the causes of school violence. To better highlight these practices, this report targets specific grade level ranges.

Pre Kindergarten (Birth to Four)

Researchers have shown by observing children and their primary caregivers over time that whether children form secure attachments hinges on the quality of care they receive; children who are abused or neglected are unlikely to be securely attached to their caregivers. Moreover, the quality of care and security of attachment affect children's later capacity for empathy, emotional regulation and behavioral control.

The early quality learning experience is recognized by this committee to be critically important in considering the causes of later school violence. Therefore, this committee wishes to recognize an example of a successful practice targeting this age level.

The "**HIPPY - Home Instruction Program For Preschool Youngsters**" program in Montgomery is considered to be playing a key role in educating our youngest students. The mission is to prepare at-risk children to enter kindergarten prepared for academic success. Each family received nine books correlated to 150 lessons. Five hundred 3, 4, and 5 year old children participate from Montgomery's most impoverished neighborhoods. Children were pre- and post- tested to measure the progress of the child. Ninety four percent of the "HIPPY" children mastered the kindergarten readiness test in May 2000. This committee requests that the emphasis through education to this age level youth is very important in a pro-active manner, and deals with those possible causes that later on may be manifested in future

aggressive behavior. **The success of Pre-K programs such as "HIPPY" should become pilot programs for the State.**

Grades K - 5

The development of a student in these years of formal education should include character education. The Legislature has mandated that character education be taught in the school system. However, there is no existing program that accomplishes this objective. Character education is currently being treated differently in various school systems and in many instances is not being treated as a top priority. Much of this problem stems from lack of programmatic modeling. The State simply does not have a set character education curriculum at this time. This committee recommends the following for consideration for possible statewide implementation.

The Mobile County School System has committed to a national "**Character Counts**" educational program for school counselors to incorporate the program in their counseling roles. Three Mobile counselors were trained in Chicago and have returned to become the trainers of other counselors in the system. "Character Counts" focuses on the core values known as "Six Pillars of Character." "Character Counts" would provide elementary schools a direct resource in which to incorporate the State mandated character education program. The program has been successfully implemented in other States, most recently in Minnesota and Texas. The cost of a "Character Counts" teacher kit is \$150. **The outstanding success of this national program and the current isolated areas within Alabama to utilize this program suggests that the State should participate in a more committed fashion. This State has previously identified "character" as a concern and has committed to it being a part of the educational process. Alabama has 14,618 teachers in Grades 1-3 X \$150 totals \$2.2 million.**

Grades 6-8

Through the State tour, town meetings, and research of the committee, it has been learned that after-school care, the teaching of tolerance, and comprehensive

educational programming are strong tools with prevention. The Committee wishes to show examples of successful practices within the State.

After-School Care

The Boys and Girls Clubs Of Alabama - The role the Boys and Girls Clubs have played in the prevention of school violence is considered to be major. There are clubs in 24 cities. These community-based organizations provide safe places where children, ages 6 to 18, learn positive behaviors through their development of skills that offset negative influences. The average age of the 32,000 members in Alabama is 12, representing 30% of the total membership. The remaining age groups are equally split, with 55% representing ages 9 to 13. The committee has been overwhelmed at the outstanding work of these clubs at each of the town meetings. The participating students offered input that has been most helpful, as this report has been written. The clubs primarily offer daily after-school programs. Working with local school systems by maintaining contact with school principals and teachers to initiate remedial education programs, the clubs emphasize the importance of school attendance and participation in school and community activities.

The clubs of South Alabama also work with adjudicated teens through residential programs that seek to change bad habits by stimulating positive behaviors through a holistic approach that involve the teen's parent(s), or guardian, and his or her siblings. The teen's decision to embrace a behavioral change is reinforced through a caring staff that emphasizes the importance of goal setting, a high school education, and the development of anger management and conflict resolution skills. An aftercare program that involves their family and presentation of methods to support a change in lifestyle follows their stay. The clubs of Alabama discourage inappropriate behavior in the school setting while at the same time recognizes scholastic achievement and respect for authority. The Strickland Youth Center, and their two programs - the Camp Martin Leadership Camp (male youth) and GROWTH (female youth) is serving the citizens of this State with results that are making a difference in the lives of youth.

The Alabama Legislature recognized the Boys and Girls Clubs of Alabama with a potential \$2.5 million conditional appropriation this fiscal year which ends September 30, 2000.

Although this practice is shown in this middle school category, it covers all ages and has a solid statewide network. National studies indicate that high rates of youth violence occur during the period from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. This after-school program hits right to the core of prevention by offering structured activities and teaching after-school. It was recommended by the 1995 Task Force for this State to address the concern of after school opportunities. The link with the school systems is a critical piece to the team approach in the area of prevention. This committee believes that the mission of this organization acts as a major factor in reducing possible school violence.

Teaching Tolerance

The nationally recognized **"Teaching Tolerance"** program of the Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Montgomery, offers free curriculum and staff development resources. The center distributed 140,000 "Responding To Hate in School Guide" materials in September 1999. Since then, they have received 90,000 requests for more information. The program offers small grant programs to classroom teachers. The committee feels that family and consumer science teachers

are the most appropriate vehicles to administer "teaching tolerance" as it meshes with current curriculum in their course of study. **It would most appropriate to consider that possible small grants be issued to 128 middle school family and consumer science teachers, representing the 67 county school systems and 61 city school systems. These Grant monies could be used as teacher's work with students in the teaching of tolerance. This program is considered to have a strong impact in the area preventing possible school violence as the program deals directly with the causes of a lack of tolerance.**

Comprehensive Educational Programming

Based upon the findings of the cases of school violence, violence may be effectively reduced in Alabama classrooms by a course that is presently an elective course taught at the middle school level. This recommended elective course should be seriously considered as a **required course** at the middle school level. The course content includes: **family relations, personal development, self esteem, self-control, parenting skills, racial, cultural and economic diversity, abusive relationships, communication skills, problem solving, physical and psychological health, drug and alcohol abuse, stress management, conflict resolution, anger management, violence prevention, and peer mediation.** The course should also include community mentoring with the involvement of both parent and citizens. Community service projects will be incorporated through students' participation in FCCLA. Family and Consumer Sciences teachers could make a greater impact on the lives of students in Alabama if such a course was required. **The current Alabama Course of Study - Family and Consumer Sciences already addresses this course content.** The 1995 Task Force on School Violence specifically recommended that "The State Board of Education should consider enhancing vocational/educational course opportunities especially at the middle school level", making this course a viable option for students as it addresses the causes that are associated with school violence. This State having more than 500 FCCLA students trained and training others in peer mediation is a strong indication of the merits of this initiative.

Grades 9-12

Through an electronic survey of students, parents completing opinion cards, and teachers sharing their prevention projects, the committee learned of interventions that work to prevent school violence. The committee would like to suggest that the successful practices presented here serve as model programs for the State.

Community Mediation Program

"Peace Education through Mediation": The Better Business Bureau of North Alabama has sponsored 27 peer mediation programs in public schools, grades 4-12. The number of students trained from 1994 to 2000 totals 675. Students have been trained to mediate disputes between other students. Ninety percent of the mediations are resolved peacefully. Guidance counselors in these schools report a 30 to 50 percent decline in the number of discipline referrals. This committee recognizes the outstanding contributions made by the Huntsville BBB sponsored program.

Comprehensive School Teams

Comprehensive School Teams, Student Assistance Plan, Hoover City System and Brookville Elementary School: These examples represent Comprehensive School Teams to assist students. Although there may be a plan in place for every school, it has been learned that some schools are not actually operating to the fullest extent of the plan. The composition of these teams represents social workers, guidance counselors, school resource officers, and nurses. The findings indicate that Brookville Elementary has been highly effective in utilizing the team approach. It has been recognized nationally for the "one stop shopping" approach. It has a full-time nurse practitioner and full-time social worker employed as members of the "school team." Although this is shown to be an effective practice at this grade level, it is equally if not more impact at all grade levels.

Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)

Alabama FCCLA has taken a strong stand on stopping violence. This student-led organization emphasizes "peer-to-peer" outreach that empowers young people to recognize, report, and reduce the potential for youth violence. The peer education program provides young people with attitudes, skills, and resources to address youth violence prevention. The State of Alabama was selected as one of eleven pilot States in 1999-2000 to pilot the STOP the Violence - Students Taking On Prevention program. The U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funded the program. **Four hundred Alabama FCCLA members attended training workshops in the State to learn how to reach their peers with anti-violence education, recognize the warning signs of violence, promote the need for young people to report troubling behavior, collaborate with school and community resources to address youth violence, and develop and implement local action projects aimed at reducing the potential for violence in their school.** Alabama FCCLA has 17,599 students affiliated with the national FCCLA office, and 640 family and consumer sciences teachers statewide. At the August 2000 Alabama Career/Technical Education Professional Development Conference, the 640 local FCCLA advisers expressed their commitment to continuing the "STOP the Violence" program in their school and community. This student-led organization focuses on building bridges between school, family, and community. Other FCCLA projects are designed to bring family members into the action and bring school activities into the home. One such example is Berry High School, where the FCCLA members developed and implemented a 1999-2000 monthly project plan that focused each month on improving the parent/child relationship. The existing State network of FCCLA students and trained teachers is a major State resource when considering utilizing existing statewide programs. The 640 family and consumer sciences teachers and the 17,000 plus students who are FCCLA members represent a strong educational State program that is focusing on stopping the violence that warrants study for this State to use in a broader context. The numbers of students trained in peer-to-peer mediation are in the hundreds. This practice by Alabama FCCLA should become the backbone to future solutions through education. Serious consideration should be given toward this organization becoming a model of how Alabama should treat violence prevention through students being the first line of defense. In summary, FCCLA is about "students helping students."

Second Chance

This program gives students expelled from public schools a Second Chance to change the direction of their life. The student and parent attend a remediation program together, with the intent of getting the student back in school. In the months of April to June 2000, the Foundation served 125 persons. In one year, it has placed 25 students back in school and has learned that the most important area of the mission is to help each student in setting personal goals. The operation has been highly successful. This program also works with middle school children.

S.T.E.P. Foundation

The mission is to offer a helping hand to teenagers, teachers, parents, and the community with "Strategies to Elevate People" that bring about life change and produce life changes. The many areas of activity include Counseling, Crisis Intervention and Referrals; The STEP Angels/Champions; Tuesday Night Club; Mentoring; and Summer of Choice. The key efforts of S.T.E.P. include going into housing communities and working with people who do not have some of the advantages that most families may take for granted. They try to build bridges of safety and islands of commitment by using various churches and volunteers to build relationships with people living in public housing communities. S.T.E.P. has helped to reduce the rate of unwed pregnancies in the State of Alabama. This information is from the State Department of Public Health dated October 1999.

Teacher Training

The training of teachers at all grade levels has been discussed and is considered to be needed. Training areas needed include conflict resolution and anger management. More specifically, recommendations have been given to the committee that this training can be done using two in-service days which are currently built into the school year calendar. To include teacher training in these areas would be a bold step toward possible prevention of school violence.

Action Initiative II Summary

These education-based approaches to the prevention of school violence are critical. More critical however is the need to address **all** grade levels. The key is partnering. Partnering can occur in many forms. The State can come together with profit and nonprofit agencies; State agencies can form interagency groups; nonprofits can come together to enhance their chances for funding. Best practices can be shared and experiences offered. Parents and students can provide suggestions and needed help.

It is important to note that the 1995 Task Force recommended school-based responses such as alternative schools, after-school programs, enhancement of vocational education opportunities, and parenting and early intervention programs, pre- kindergarten programs and teacher training.

Initiative Intent: To better utilize education as a tool for the prevention of school violence at all age levels

Party responsible: Governor, State Superintendent of Education, and Commissioner of the Department of Children's Affairs

Date to Complete: August, 2001 should be the timeline for the establishment of new practices where appropriate.

Cost to Complete: Unknown at this time

Action Initiative III

New Laws

Schools need access to information about students in their schools, who have been involved with criminal activity, whether it's drugs, a shooting or shoplifting. This information is necessary for the protection of other students and can help the school access the steps they should take, if necessary to help the student. Both the 1995 Task Force and the recent town meetings reconfirmed the importance of schools having juvenile information.

Alabama law currently prohibits juvenile arrest information to be shared with schools. On a very limited basis, schools have access to adjudication information for the worst of crimes, but by that time, it is usually too late for the schools to respond properly.

It is strongly recommended that this problem be addressed and solved in the 2001 legislative session. Due to these privacy laws, schools (and sometimes even law enforcement officers) are currently unaware of a student criminal arrest or adjudication, conditions of student's probation, or past violent behavior toward other students (that would be available in a criminal history). Other States have passed "information sharing laws" to protect their students. Alabama should join them.

Action Initiative III Summary

Alabama should supplement its juvenile record laws to allow schools access to juvenile criminal records for the protection of the school where a delinquent juvenile attends.

Initiative Intent: To prevent possible school violence

Party Responsible: The Governor, the Attorney General and the Legislature

Date to complete: End of 2001 legislative session

Cost to complete: Nominal

Action Initiative IV

Role and Partnership of the Media

The 1995 Task Force recommended a "media summit" to address the "growing evidence" of the entertainment media's bad effects on our children and their values and what steps can be taken at the State level on a voluntary level or legal basis. The evidence of the 1995 Task Force, coupled with the concerns of today, would suggest that within the academic calendar year of 2000-2001, a media summit be convened. The opportunities for the media to become a contributing factor in the prevention of school violence are many and the single most important area can be in heightening awareness.

Action Initiative IV Summary

The common view that the media can be a factor in promoting violence is a concern. There are two ways to address this issue. One is for the media to work together with the State and Boards of Education to help to prevent school violence. The second is for the media to be a pro-active citizen in reducing content that can be a negative influencing factor in the values of our youth.

Initiative Intent: To heighten awareness and increase relationship

Party responsible: Governor and Board of Education

Date to complete: To host media summit no later than May 2001

Cost to complete: Nominal

Action Initiative V

School Resource Officers

The success of **School Resource Officers (SRO)** in schools has been significant. More than 100 school resource officers are in place in the State. The findings of this committee are strongly directed toward Alabama employing a school resource officer in every middle and high school, where needed, based upon the incident reporting statistics of the school. The opportunity to build additional trust between the student and law enforcement is also a major concern by the students. The SRO can enhance that trust. This opportunity was recommended from the 1995 Task Force. These officers should be post-certified where possible, but they should also be specifically trained as an SRO. Where and when needed as determined by the LEA and in the incident reporting statistics, officers should be added. **The action initiative is to recommend that Alabama implement a phased program over a three- year period to have an SRO in every middle and high school by the start of school year 2003. Phasing the implementation of this initiative would appear prudent. It should be noted that School Resource Officers alone are not the answer, as Columbine had such officers at the time of crisis.**

Action Initiative V Summary

This act of adding School Resource Officers is a strong factor in preventing school violence. In the Task Force recommendations of 1995, this was a concern. The Governor and Legislature should join together to implement a phased program over three years to accomplish this most effective tool in prevention.

Initiative Intent: To prevent school violence and build trust with students

Party responsible: Governor and Legislature

Date to complete: Three years, 2003 (in three phases)

Cost to complete: Subject to a fiscal note

Action Initiative VI

School Counselors

The effective use of the School Counselor has been a concern voiced statewide in each town meeting. It has been learned that many students do not know their counselor. There is considerable awareness by teachers and parents that how they are being used is not in the best interest of the student. **The best utilization of school counselors should be in the non-academic counseling of students and the building of student relationships.**

Action Initiative VI Summary

A combined collaborative effort including the school counselor, principal and State Superintendent of Education should exist to determine how counselors could better meet student needs. There is a widespread concern how little time is actually spent counseling students.

Initiative Intent: To improve school relationships with the students, school principals and to identify problems in the early stages

Party responsible: Department of Education

Date to complete: The plan to be developed by May 2001, and implement by August 2001

Cost to complete: Unknown at this time

Action Initiative VII Social Workers

The licensed professional social worker's expertise is extremely important; the committee has learned this through numerous sources at town meetings. Although having school-based social workers in every middle and high school could be costly, this committee emphasizes the need for the service to be provided to our students, families and teachers. School-based social workers provide intensive service for students facing multiple risk factors, including counseling, mental health services and crisis intervention. Further they assist teachers in minimizing discipline problems and other classroom disruptions. They are available to provide in-service training to staff. Also, they work to increase parental involvement and often prevent costly litigation by mediating disputes among students, parents and schools. They liaison with State and community agencies: DHR, DMH, DPH, DCRS, DCA and DOE.

Thirty-five social workers are currently employed in our schools. Their funding is derived from a variety of sources; grants, Title I, local school funds, and one county health department. There are 161 school systems in Alabama and approximately 126 are without school-based social workers. Having school-based social workers would be a positive step toward the prevention of violence in our schools.

Action Initiative VII Summary

The social worker is an important member in the comprehensive team approach to preventing violence. Every effort must be made to include these services in dealing with the student and families.

Initiative Intent: To go directly to the causes of youth and school violence

Party responsible: Legislature and DHR and DOE partnership

Date to complete: End of next legislative session

Cost to complete: Fiscal note to determine

Action Initiative VIII

Emergency Management Agency/ School Communications

This Agency has accomplished much in the area of improving communications within the 67 county local emergency management offices. It has implemented the system to better coordinate disaster responses. The Agency now knows immediately what those counties needs are in disaster. No school, however, in Alabama has a unit that connects with the Emergency Management county office. Certain high schools do not have the "NOA Weather Warning Radio" and if they do, it only serves as a warning device. Today, if a disaster from school violence occurred and the phone lines were cut, there would be no way to communicate with that school in responding to the crisis. **Pursuing the purchase of units for all schools warrants the most serious of review. Direct communication with the Emergency Management Agency on the 800 MHz State emergency frequency to all schools would greatly enhance administration of safety programs, and most importantly, enhance emergency response capability.** A dispatch only base station radio on State contract would be necessary. There are 1,445 public schools in Alabama and at the cost of \$400 per unit; the total cost would be \$578,000. This breaks down further to .78 cents per student (732,042 as of 1999-2000).

In reviewing opportunities in how this State might further improve how emergency plans are managed and coordinated, a feasibility study would be of value to learn if the Emergency Management Agency should play a more prominent role in the coordination of the development and exercising of emergency plans for all schools. Maintaining the integrity of emergency plans is critical.

Action Initiative VIII Summary

Our schools ability to respond immediately to any disaster is the concern. The need for the units should be based upon how critical those minutes may be in responding to disaster. Immediate consideration should be given to school communications between schools and school buses while they transport students. This State's schools would appear highly vulnerable at this time in a disaster.

Initiative Intent: Increased crisis management effectiveness

Party responsible: Legislature or alternative funding sources

Date to complete: As soon as possible

Cost to complete: Approximately \$578,000

Action Initiative IX

School Outreach

Outreach is a valuable tool in the building of relationships. It is suggested that schools adopt an "outreach plan" that specifically showcases the programs and -students to the community. It is recommended that parents participate in this effort. Such an outreach plan should develop improved levels of trust between the school and families. Outreach works. An individual at each school could be selected and identified as the chief outreach officer of the school.

Action Initiative IX Summary

Perhaps it may not be defined as such, but the findings of this committee detail specific examples of on-going outreach activities. These are isolated and could be better part of a formal outreach program in every school.

Initiative Intent: To bring together in formal projects teachers, students and parents for the purpose of improved relationships

Party responsible: School principals and superintendents

Date to complete: Each school plan August 2001

Cost to complete: None

“We had a ‘STOP the Violence’ lock-in at the local skating rink! Students arrived at 11:30 p.m. Games, speakers and skating entertained them until 6:00 a.m. The Probation Officer, Probate Judge, Circuit Court Judge, Sheriff and students also discussed the ‘STOP the Violence’ agenda. It was a huge success.”

Tammy White
Vinemont High School

Closing Statement

"... be not afraid"

This committee has been in search of better solutions for safe schools. Then Lt. Governor, Don Siegelman, stated in his 1995 Task Force Report that he wished to have "learning environments free of fear." Our primary mission has been to accomplish just that through these actions:

- ❑ It has sought the findings, reached conclusions and rendered recommendations as mandated by legislative resolution
- ❑ It has determined the needs and has found the means or identified the process to secure those means as charged by the Governor
- ❑ Involved Alabama's citizens who are committed in building safer school environments through and for our students
- ❑ Looked into to the eyes and visited with the father who has lost his daughter in school violence at Columbine in 1999
- ❑ Incorporated the 1995 Task Force efforts into this report where appropriate
- ❑ Offered solutions based upon the research and contributions of many professionals in multiple fields of expertise.

This committee stands united in its resolve to establish a champion for safer schools - the Alabama Advisory Council for Safe Schools. It is critical that this champion has a daily, committed focus to support the collective efforts of all in providing safe schools in Alabama. We seek action and solutions with accountability.

Advancing forward with a sense of urgency is our mandate to the Legislature and Governor. This committee has been privileged to serve this State in a most important way.

To our Students and Teachers - be not afraid!

To our Legislature - take advantage of these opportunities!

To our Governor - may we be so bold, please hurry!

Joint Interim School Violence Committee Members

Senator Ted Little, Chairperson

Commissioner Pam Baker, Vice-Chairperson

Lieutenant Governor Steve Windom

Attorney General Bill Pryor

Senator Vivian Davis Figures

Senator Steve French

Representative Bill Fuller

Representative Yvonne Kennedy

Representative Albert Morton

Honorable Randall Hillman

Sheriff James Jones

Police Chief John Wilson

Dr. Eddie Johnson

Mr. William Minor

Dr. Dale Wisely

Dr. Karl Kirkland

Mr. David Shuford

August 31, 2000

Senator Ted Little, Chairperson
Joint Interim Legislative Committee on School Violence

