

Ten Years after Columbine:

Nation Earns D+ on School Violence-Prevention

Ten years after the massacre at Columbine High School a study by the non-profit organization Community Matters shows that despite the outlay of billions of dollars and passage of “zero tolerance” laws, our schools are not significantly safer.

“There has been an overemphasis by schools on an ‘outside-in’ approach that focuses heavily on security, crisis management and punitive measures,” says Community Matters Founder and Executive Director Rick Phillips. “What is needed is an ‘inside-out’ approach that focuses on strengthening relationships and actively empowering young people to improve the school climate and change social norms.”

The Report Card on School Violence-Prevention is based on a careful review of existing school violence and climate data and Community Matters’ experience working with hundreds of schools nationwide as part of its Safe School Ambassadors program.

Using the familiar letter grades from “A” to “F,” the Report Card is based on a review of results and outcomes, rather than effort and intentions.

“The Report Card is not an indictment of any individual school system, policy or leadership team,” says Phillips, “Rather it is a call to action for all of us to work together to find more effective solutions.”

The Report Card evaluates seven different areas of concern: Federal Funding, Legislation and Policies, On-Campus Security Measures, Prevention Programs and Curriculum, Staff Involvement, School/Community Partnerships and Youth Involvement.

It is the Youth Involvement measures which are of particular concern as students continue to be seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Phillips calls on schools to do a better job at engaging young people as partners in decision-making and school improvement activities.

“Bullying continues to be a major factor leading to violence,” according to Phillips. “Schools need to reach out to all students, particularly marginalized students. They must empower and equip these young people with the skills, support and opportunities to intervene effectively among their peers to reduce bullying and violence and to improve school climate.”

Community Matters’ mission is to collaborate with communities to engage, equip and empower young people to become change agents and peacemakers. In the wake of Columbine, Community Matters created the Safe School Ambassadors program to help prevent and stop bullying and violence in over 650 schools in more than 26 states.

To view the full report card, visit www.community-matters.org/columbinereportcard.php.

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