



School safety is more than plans, protocols, and physical security. In this issue, we explore how leaders build readiness through systems, relationships, and visible leadership so students and staff feel prepared, connected, and supported before, during, and after a crisis.

The Plan Is Not the Practice

Your school has a safety plan. But would it work today?

Most schools can point to a safety plan.

The harder question is this: *If you needed it today, how confident are you that everyone would know what to do?*

Procedures, drills, communication systems, and clearly documented expectations all matter. But having them in place does not automatically mean a school is prepared. Leaders need to know how those systems will function when circumstances change quickly and people have to act.

Consider a few questions:

- Could staff explain their responsibilities without first pulling up the plan?
- Have key procedures, including communication and reunification, been practiced in ways that reveal what needs to be adjusted?
- Do students have at least one adult at school they trust and feel comfortable turning to when something doesn't feel right?
- Where during the school day are adult visibility and connection weakest?



A strong safety plan gives a school direction. Leadership turns that plan into daily practice.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

What is one part of your safety plan you need to test, clarify, or strengthen?

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Leadership for School Safety

School safety remains an active leadership responsibility woven into everyday practice. Before any crisis occurs, building a strong foundation through visibility, honesty, fairness, and consistency is critical. Daily relationships need to be intentionally cultivated, so students feel valued, respected, and connected to trusted adults.

My approach to safety planning centers on three areas:



PREPARE

- Build relationships, visibility, and trust so students feel safe to speak up.
- Use age-appropriate drills, walkthroughs, and debriefs.
- Clarify communication systems in advance, with defined roles for every member of the school community.
- Practice, practice, practice.



RESPOND

- Act quickly and calmly when a crisis occurs.
- Protect lives, account for students, and staff.
- Coordinate reunification and share accurate updates with family and emergency partners.
- Stay flexible as conditions change.
- Focus on reducing rumors and miscommunication.



RECOVER

- Prepare for recovery as part of readiness.
- Support mental health and well-being.
- Restore routines carefully.
- Rebuild trust through clear communication and connection.
- Reflect honestly on what worked and what needs strengthening.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A calm response in a crisis depends on clear systems, practiced roles, and strong relationships long before the moment arrives.

When leaders approach safety this way, schools are better prepared to respond, recover, and move forward with trust and resilience.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

After a crisis, how prepared is your team to support recovery, restore routines, and rebuild trust?

CONTINUE READING

School Safety Is More Than Locks and Cameras

BY DR. PAM VANHORN

[READ PAM'S BLOG POST →](#)



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FROM THE FIELD

Leading on the Move: Safety Through Presence

As a junior high school principal, I know school safety starts long before a crisis occurs. I believe a thriving culture is our strongest safety strategy. Inspired by this, I replaced my stationary office routine with a **mobile desk on wheels**. On most Tuesdays and Thursdays, you will find my office in the hallways, blacktop, and cafeteria.

Moving into common areas allows me to:



Build daily, productive relationships with students and staff.



Maintain an active, visible presence during transitions.



Foster trust, connection, and belonging.

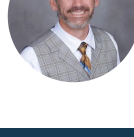
Students at my school drop by for high-fives, and my staff ask questions without walking to the main office. As we have prioritized proactive connection over passive supervision, our **suspension rate has dropped from 9.02% to 6.68%**. Real safety isn't just locks and cameras; it's being present, so everyone feels seen, safe, and supported.

CONTINUE READING

School Safety: A Practical and Tactical Resource Guide for Administrators

BY DAVID E. JOHNSON, GLENN G. NORLING, PAMELA VANHORN, JEFFERY YARBROUGH, & SHAUN HURTATO

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