



**DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**EVALUATION OF THE  
SAFE CHILD PROGRAM**

**OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION & MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS**

# **THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Safe Child Program is designed to prevent sexual, emotional and physical abuse of young children, and to address the problem of threats posed to the children by strangers. The program, which targets children in pre-k through second grade, is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women and Hands in Action as a community service. The Safe Child Program was first implemented in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools in the 1993-94 school year. That year 27 elementary schools participated. The program has been expanded each subsequent year. By 1996-97, the year in which this evaluation was conducted, 89 schools were participating in the program. Currently, there are 110 schools participating.

The evaluation of the Safe Child Program addressed three basic aspects of the program. They were: (a) the implementation of the program, (b) its perceived impact, and (c) the reactions of the participants. In the following sections, the key outcomes associated with each aspect are enumerated.

### **The implementation of the program.**

- A large majority of the teachers in the participating schools have been trained and are teaching the Safe Child Program.
- Training is generally regarded as adequate, but there are gaps in the coverage.
- For the most part, both teacher-trainers and teachers reported that they have enough materials, and most stated that they are satisfied with the quality.
- The assessments of parent involvement were generally favorable, but less so than other aspects of the program.
- Parents of students in participating schools reported more meetings on the issue of child abuse than those in non-participating schools, but large numbers in both sets of schools reported none.

### **The perceived impact of the program.**

- The Safe Child Program is seen by teachers and principals as improving on the similar program that it replaces.
- The Safe Child Program is seen as better organized and managed than comparable programs.
- Teaching children about abuse and strangers is perceived as effective by both parents and teachers regardless of the program being used.

- Compared to other selected safety topics, the time devoted to the threat of strangers was high while that devoted to sexual abuse was comparatively low.
- The Safe Child Program has fostered greater awareness among parents.

### **Reactions of the participants.**

- The parents who have a knowledge of the program have a favorable impression of it.
- Principals and teacher-trainers generally give the Safe Child Program high marks.
- The teachers also have a generally favorable opinion of the program.
- Some indications of dissatisfaction with the program emerged in the surveys.

### **Summary and recommendations.**

The evaluation has revealed that the case for the adoption of the Safe Child Program in the district's elementary schools is favorable. Several outcomes favor adoption. First, there is evidence that the program increases parent awareness and involvement. Second, most teachers who use the program tend to support it, and this support increases with experience. Third, there is evidence that the program is better structured than other similar programs.

However, other outcomes of the evaluation do not favor a total adoption of the program. These include: a) all programs dealing with safety and abuse are regarded by teachers and parents alike as being effective; b) a program on abuse and safety is already in place, and the cost of materials and program training must be assumed by each school in which the Safe Child Program is adopted; c) the Safe Child Program does not appear to increase the time devoted to the topics of strangers and sexual abuse; and d) dissatisfaction with the Safe Child Program is small but strongly stated, and concentrated by school.

Based on these outcomes, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. Schools should be fully informed of the features and advantages of the Safe Child Program, and encouraged to consider it seriously for adoption. However, the final decision to adopt it should remain at the school level. Ideally, the program's adoption should be contingent on receiving the approval of a majority of the instructional staff who will be responsible for its delivery.
2. Steps should be taken to ensure that all teachers of the Safe Child Program are adequately trained in the program.
3. Further inquiry should be made into whether there is a need to provide teachers with inservice on teaching of young children about the dangers of sexual abuse.

## Introduction

### The Safe Child Program

**Description of the Program.** The creator of the Safe Child Program, Dr. Sherryll Kraizer, has described the program as follows:

The Safe Child Personal Safety Training Program [is] a standardized, scripted, videotape curriculum that provides training for teachers, parents and children ages three through 10 in five age-appropriate segments .... The Safe Child program emphasizes prevention of sexual, emotional and physical abuse by people known to the child, prevention of abuse and abduction by strangers, and safety for children in self-care .... the curriculum builds from children's everyday experiences and teaches them how to apply generalized skills to specific risk-associated situations. (Kraizer, Witte & Fryer 1989, p. 24)

In the 1996-97 school year, the Safe Child Program was implemented in 89 elementary schools within the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). These schools volunteered to provide the program to students in pre-k through second grade. Programmatic training was provided by Dr. Kraizer and district level personnel to staff members designated by school site administrators. In turn, these staff members scheduled and implemented school site training for classroom teachers and parent groups.

The Safe Child Program is implemented in three phases. The first phase is the teacher training component which includes: (a) an introduction to the program; (b) an overview of the problems of child abuse; (c) the dynamics of child abuse; (d) specific techniques for teaching the classroom program, recognizing and reporting abuse; and (e) other required implementation information. Phase two of the program addresses the implementation of parent seminars. Information provided to parents includes: (a) the introduction to the program; (b) an overview of the problems of child abuse; (c) specific prevention techniques taught to their children for recognizing and reporting abuse; and (d) treatment and resources for help. Phase three of the program contains the classroom implementation component. Each day's lesson begins with a videotape presentation; an accompanying teacher's manual provides a script which includes such activities as role-playing, discussion, and classroom activities. A typical lesson can range from 20 minutes to an hour. Over a ten-day period in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and over a five-day period in both grades one and two, the children are sequentially and developmentally introduced to a range of prevention tactics.

**Origins of the Program.** The Safe Child Program "evolved from Children Need to Know: Personal Safety Training, developed by Health Education Systems [of] ... Palisades, New York" (Kraizer, Witte, & Fryer, 1989, p. 27). At that time, Dr. Kraizer was Director and President of Health Education Systems. (This earlier program is described in Kraizer, Fryer & Miller, 1988.) To date, the Safe Child Program has apparently been widely applied. An article reporting the results of an evaluation conducted under the supervision of Dr. Kraizer and her staff draws on participants "from rural, urban and suburban schools in three states" (Kraizer, Witte, & Fryer, 1989).

**History of the Program in Miami-Dade County.** Sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women and Hands in Action as a community service, the Safe Child Program was first implemented in the MDCPS in the 1993-94 school year. That year, 27 elementary schools participated. The program has been expanded each subsequent year. By 1996-97, the year in which this evaluation was conducted, 89 schools were participating in the program. Currently, there are 110 schools participating.

## **The Evaluation**

**Design of the Evaluation.** The primary purpose of the evaluation of the Safe Child Program was to generate information to facilitate decisions regarding the further extension of the program. The strategy of the evaluation was to elicit responses from the major participants in the program regarding its implementation and perceived effectiveness. The evaluation addressed three main topics: (a) the implementation of the program; (b) its impact on students; and (c) the participants' reactions to the program.

**The Surveys.** The chief source of data for the evaluation was a series of surveys. Six populations were targeted using five separate instruments. The six populations were: 1) the principal of each school participating in the Safe Child Program in 1996-97; b) the teacher-trainer (or if more than one, the teacher-trainer serving as contact person) at each of the participating schools; c) all pre-k through second grade regular teachers at each participating school; d) a randomly selected sample of 500 pre-k through second grade regular teachers at schools not participating in the program; e) a randomly selected sample of 500 parents of pre-k through second grade students in the participating schools; and f) a randomly selected sample of 500 parents of pre-k through second grade students in the non-participating schools. Copies of the survey instruments are found in the appendices. The text of the instruments forwarded to parents were in three languages: English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.

Table 1 gives an overview of the mailing dates and response rates of the surveys. A review of the table reveals that the principals, with 69.7 percent, had the highest response rate, followed by the teacher-trainers with 61.8 percent. Slightly more than half of the teachers responded: 51.9 percent of the participating group, and 54.2 percent of the non-participating. The parents' responses were the lowest: 26.6 percent for the participating group, and 26.0 percent for the non-participating.

A response rate substantially lower than 100 percent necessarily introduces the question of bias, in the sense of self-selection among the respondents. To address this potential problem, a number of questions in the teacher survey requested information that could reinforce confidence in the comparability of the two groups of teachers. Specifically, on the two surveys of participating and non-participating teachers, the respondents were asked to rate the importance of six goals of teaching. The analysis revealed that the mean responses of the two groups did not exhibit a statistically significant difference in any of the items. Both teacher surveys also included a list of seven safety topics, and respondents were asked to indicate the approximate amount of time spent on each over the course of the school year. Once again, the analysis revealed that the amount of emphasis placed on the different topics by both groups of teachers is

Table 1  
Surveys Conducted

Target Population	Date	Surveys	
		Forwarded	Returned (%)
Principals of Participating Schools	April	89	62 (69.7)
Teacher-Trainers	April	89	55 (61.8)
Teachers in Participating Schools	May	1,223	635 (51.9)
Teachers in Non-Participating Schools	May	500	271 (54.2)
Parents, Participating Schools	June	500	133 (26.6)
Parents, Non-Participating Schools	June	500	130 (26.0)

very similar. The teachers in both groups cover the same topics to roughly the same degree, and assign the same order of importance to them. The implication is that the two groups do not differ with respect to their professional philosophy or attitudes toward safety instruction, and are thus generally comparable in the aspects addressed by this evaluation.

In the same manner, information requested in the parent survey served to reinforce the confidence in the comparability of the participating and non-participating groups. As previously noted, the survey instrument was provided to each parent in three languages: English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. The proportions by language returned from each group were all but identical. As such, the groups do not vary by preferred language. Additionally, the two groups do not exhibit a statistically significant difference in the number of years they had been associated with their child's school at the time of the survey. Finally, several questions in the parent survey addressed various aspects of their school involvement. Both groups were asked about the number of visits made to the school during the year, and about the number of conversations with the child's teacher. In all cases, the analysis of responses revealed no statistically significant difference in the two groups. Consequently, the two groups of parents, like the two groups of teachers, are generally comparable in the aspects addressed by the evaluation.

### Implementation

*What has been the extent and adequacy of the training for the program?*

**A large majority of the teachers in the participating schools have been trained and are teaching the Safe Child Program.** With regard to the training and the implementation of the program, the results of the surveys of the teacher-trainers and the participating school teachers are quite similar. A total of 855 pre-k through second grade teachers were reported in the count

returned by the teacher-trainers. Of this number, 733 (85.73 %) had been trained in the Safe Child curriculum; and 651 (76.14 %) are reported to be teaching the program. Corroboration of the latter figure comes from the survey of teachers in the participating schools, where 71.6 percent of the respondents affirmed that they were teaching the program.

**Training is generally regarded as adequate, but there are gaps in the coverage.** The Safe Child training takes place in two steps. A teacher-trainer for each school, usually the school's counselor, is trained by the creator of the program. The teacher-trainer in turn trains the teachers who will teach the children. The teacher-trainers rate highly the training they received. On a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 1=poor), the mean rating was 4.15 (n = 54). However, the teachers of the program (n = 453) were not so enthusiastic. Overall, 58.1 percent indicated they received "sufficient" training, with only 16.3 percent rating the training as "outstanding."

Finally, it should be noted that 15.5 percent of the teachers indicated they had not received training. This percentage, however, differs significantly by grade. Of those reporting that they have not received training, approximately one fifth are new to the program. This is basically due to a timing problem, since many of the teacher-trainers had not begun their training when the surveys were forwarded. However, 11.5 percent of those who had been teaching the program for 2 years indicated they had not received training, and 10.7 percent of the teachers with 3 or more years experience in the program indicated likewise.

#### *Have the materials been of sufficient quantity and quality?*

**For the most part, both teacher-trainers and teachers reported that they have enough materials, and most stated that they are satisfied with the quality.** Of the 54 teacher-trainers responding to the survey items concerning materials, 83.9 percent reported that overall, the program had provided sufficient materials at their school. As to the materials' quality, on a 5-point scale (5 = excellent, 1 = poor), the teacher-trainers' responses yielded a mean rating of 4.13, which indicates they were highly satisfied.

Many of the responding teachers praised the program's materials in their comments. However, there were some complaints. They concerned primarily: (a) the problems of having to share the video materials, (b) the fact that the videos were only available in English, and (c) appropriateness of the material for younger children in the program. A few teachers were highly critical of the materials.

Overall, the participating teachers found the Safe Child curriculum and materials as good as or better than others they had used, but not by much. These ratings yielded a mean of 2.21 on a 5-point scale, where 1 was "much better" and 3 was "about the same." A t-test revealed that this mean rating is significantly different than 3, the neutral point of the scale ( $p = 0.000$ ). The mean rating, furthermore, does not vary across grade-levels, but does vary across years of experience with the program. For example, the mean rating improves from 2.28 for teachers with 1 or 2 years in the program (n = 294) to 2.05 for teachers with 3 or more years (n = 123). This difference is also statistically significant ( $p = 0.005$ ).



*To what extent have parents been involved in the program?*

**The assessments of parent involvement were generally favorable, but less so than other aspects of the program.** Parent participation is a major aim of the Safe Child Program. Meetings with parents are routinely conducted to acquaint them with the program, provide them with materials, and encourage their participation. Both the surveys of the principals and the teacher-trainers included items which dealt with the parents' involvement in the program. Principals were asked to rate the degree of parents' support for the program. Their mean rating on a 5-point scale (5=high, 1=low) was 3.47 (n = 60). The difference between this mean rating and the mid-point of the scale proved to be statistically significant (p = 0.000). Additionally, teacher trainers were asked to rate the parents' response to the program on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 1=poor). Their mean rating of 3.38 (n = 50) also proved to be significantly different from the mid-point of the scale (p = 0.03). Nevertheless, although these ratings seem encouraging, they are much lower than the same respondents gave to other aspects of the program.

**Parents of students in participating schools reported more meetings on the issue of child abuse than those in non-participating schools, but large numbers in both sets of schools reported none.** Parents of children in participating schools and those of children in non-participating schools were asked: "Have you ever attended any meetings at your school about child abuse and avoidance of strangers?" Twice the percentage of the participating school parents as non-participating school parents (22.1 % vs. 11.1 %) reported having attended such meetings. The difference is statistically significant (p=0.03), indicating a greater effectiveness of the Safe Child Program in this regard over other approaches being employed. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the large majority of respondents did not attend any meetings (69.7 % from participating schools and 83.6 % from non-participating).

### **The Perceived Impact of the Program**

*How has the program affected the teaching about abuse and strangers to young children?*

**The Safe Child Program is seen by teachers and principals as improving on the similar program that it replaces.** Information about abuse and threats posed by strangers is a part of the Competency-Based Curriculum. As such, 94 percent of the respondents teaching the Safe Child Program reported that they had previously taught their students about threats to safety. These teachers' ratings of the Safe Child materials versus previous materials yielded a mean of 2.21 (n = 417) on a 5-point scale (1="much better," 5="much worse"), which indicates that they tended to favor the Safe Child materials. This rating does not change when grade is controlled, but does increase for teachers with 3 or more years of experience with the program. When principals were asked how they thought the Safe Child Program compared with previous instruction, 65 percent (n = 60) indicated that the program was better or much better.

In addition, the Safe Child teachers indicated that they spend more time on relevant topics than they did before they used the program. The mean rating of this issue was 2.38 (n = 430), where 1

is "much more" and 3 is "about the same." The difference is small but statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ).

**The Safe Child Program is seen as better organized and managed than comparable programs.** As a stand-alone, separate program, Safe Child appears to lend itself to better and more hierarchical supervision. Thus, it is more likely to be faithfully implemented. As one principal put it, when asked whether the program offered any special advantages: "It is taught and not overlooked in an intensive curriculum, where priorities may have the subject possibly overlooked." Almost all the principals (93.6 %,  $n = 62$ ) affirmed that there was someone at the school specifically in charge of the administration of the program. The teacher-trainers concur, 94.4 percent of them (51) reported that a specific person was "responsible for seeing to it that the Safe Child curriculum is being properly taught."

To properly gauge this outcome, a comparison was made of the teachers' responses from the participating and non-participating schools. Both groups were asked: "Is there someone at your school who has the responsibility of ensuring that students are taught about sexual abuse and the dangers of dealing with strangers?" From the participating schools, 77.1 percent of the teachers responded affirmatively, compared to 64.9 percent from non-participating schools. Just as telling, 14.9 percent of the teachers from participating schools replied that they did not know, as compared to 22.8 percent from the non-participating schools. These differences between the two groups are statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ).

Additional evidence that the organizational structure of the Safe Child Program is readily perceived is revealed in the teachers' responses to the question: "To whom do you go if you have questions or need support concerning Safe Child?" Of the responding teachers, 83.4 percent ( $n = 360$ ) named the counselor/teacher-trainer. Only 3 percent said "no one." Clearly the chain of command of the Safe Child Program is well known. And, insofar as better organization, structure, and supervision contribute to a more complete and thorough delivery of the program, this is an endorsement of the Safe Child Program.

**Teaching children about abuse and strangers is perceived as effective by both parents and teachers regardless of the program being used.** Parents with children in participating schools, and those with children in non-participating schools were asked: "Does it seem to you that your child(ren) knows better how to handle situations where he/she is threatened with abuse, or where he/she is approached by strangers, *as a result of things learned in school?*" Both sets of parents reported that their children had gained ability to handle safety situations. However, both sets of parents reported about the same degree of improvement. A test of statistical significance revealed that there was no significant difference in their responses.

Likewise, teachers from both participating and non-participating schools were asked: "Does it seem to you that your students are better able to cope with situations where they are threatened with abuse, or where they are approached by strangers, *as a result of things they have learned in school?*" As with the parents, there was no significant difference in the mean responses of the two groups. The specific responses from the parents and teachers to the aforementioned items appear in Table 2.

Table 2  
Comparison of Programs' Perceived Impact:  
Gains in Children's Ability to Handle Threat of Abuse or Approach of a Stranger

Respondents	Responses: % (n)				Totals
	Much better able	Better able	No difference	Don't Know	
<b>Parents:</b>					
Participating Schools	33.6 (44)	49.6 (65)	13.0 (17)	3.8 ( 5)	100 (131)
Non-participating Schools	36.5 (46)	42.1 (53)	13.5 (17)	7.9 (10)	100 (126)
<b>Teachers:</b>					
Participating Schools	34.6 (217)	50.0 (314)	4.6 (29)	10.8 (68)	100 (628)
Non-participating Schools	32.6 (88)	50.7 (137)	4.1 (11)	12.6 (34)	100 (270)

In addition, teachers who indicated that they were teaching the Safe Child Program (n = 456) were asked the following question: "In your opinion, how much have your students' skills for coping with threats and dealing with strangers been strengthened by the Safe Child Program?" Overall 52.9 percent of the teachers responded "a great deal." The percentage responding in this manner increased consistently from 44.7 percent for teachers who were new to the program to 65.4 percent for teachers with more than 3 years experience in it. This increase proved to be statistically significant (p = 0.02). Consequently, teachers who use the Safe Child Program feel that it helps their students. Moreover, this opinion strengthens as experience with the program increases.

**Compared to other selected safety topics, the time devoted to the threat of strangers was high while that devoted to sexual abuse was comparatively low.** The teachers of both the participating and non-participating schools were questioned about the time devoted to safety topics. Both sets of teachers reported that they spend the least amount of time on sexual abuse and the second most on threats from strangers. The teachers' specific responses are displayed in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 illustrates that the Safe Child teachers in the participating schools spend

Table 3  
Comparison of Instructional Time: Topic of "Abduction by Strangers"

Respondents	Responses: % (n)				Totals
	more than 5 hours	2 to 5 hours	less than an hour	no time	
Safe Child Teachers	50.7 (223)	34.8 (153)	11.1 (49)	3.4 (15)	100 (440)
Teachers in Non-participating Schools	47.4 (126)	39.5 (105)	10.2 (27)	3.0 (8)	100 (266)

on the average the same amount of time on the topic of threats posed by strangers as do the teachers in the non-participating schools. The distribution of these responses shows the two groups are nearly identical in this respect. Indeed, the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.66$ ).

Both groups of teachers devote much less time to the sexual abuse topic. Table 4 illustrates the amount of time that, according to the teachers, was devoted to the this topic. The Safe Child teachers appear to devote somewhat more time to this topic than the teachers from the non-participating schools. For example, 34.2 percent of the Safe Child teachers provide less than an hour of instruction, as compared to 43.4 percent of the teachers in non-participating schools. However, the difference is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.07$ ). Furthermore, an analysis of the Safe Child teachers' responses reveal that the time devoted to this topic does not increase with their tenure in the program.

Table 4  
Comparison of Instructional Time: Topic of "Sexual Abuse"

Respondents	Responses: % (n)				Totals
	more than 5 hours	2 to 5 hours	less than an hour	no time	
Safe Child Teachers	19.5 (86)	46.3 (204)	27.0 (119)	7.3 (32)	100 (441)
Teachers in Non-participating Schools	16.1 (43)	40.4 (108)	31.8 (85)	11.6 (31)	100 (267)

***What effect has the Safe Child Program had on parent awareness and participation?***

**The Safe Child Program has fostered greater awareness among parents.** It was noted earlier that 22.1 percent of parents with children in participating schools reported having attended meetings about child abuse and avoiding strangers. This compares to only 11.1 percent of the parents with children in non-participating schools. The difference is statistically significant ( $p = 0.03$ ). Parents were also asked the more general question: "Do you know of anything specific that your school is doing to teach your child(ren) how to protect himself/herself from danger or possible abuse?" Substantially more Safe Child parents than non-participating parents believed their schools were doing something about safety (93.1% vs. 76.6%). Likewise, more Safe Child parents indicated they knew specifically of things their schools were doing (53.8% vs. 37.1%). Once again, the differences between the two groups proved to be statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). Thus, the indications are that the Safe Child parents are comparatively more involved and more informed.

## Reactions of the Participants

### *What do the participants think of the program?*

#### **The parents who have a knowledge of the program have a favorable impression of it.**

Asked whether they had heard anything about the Safe Child Program, 71 percent of the parents with children in the program reported that they had. Of these parents, 46 percent reported hearing favorable things. None reported hearing any unfavorable things. However, 29 percent reported that they had never heard of the program.

**Principals and teacher-trainers generally give the Safe Child Program high marks.** Asked to rate the basic design of Safe Child Program on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 1=poor), teacher-trainers gave it a mean rating of 4.09 (n = 54). Similarly, principals gave the support provided by Safe Child personnel a mean rating of 3.92 on a 5-point scale. Finally, when the principals were given a chance to comment on aspects of the program that they felt offered special advantages, 39 of 60 principals did so. The comments included: "It specifically targets primary and early childhood students through role play and examples." Another principal noted: "The program's objectives have been correlated with the [Competency-Based Curriculum] framework. The program provides excellent assistance to teachers with planning and implementation of a prevention program."

**The teachers also have a generally favorable opinion of the program.** Of the more than 300 comments about the program made by the teachers who are using it, the great majority are positive. For example, one teacher noted: "It's a well planned program - it was needed." Another teacher commented: "The Safe Child Program is an experience that I feel each child should have the opportunity to be involved in." Even the teachers in the participating schools who were not teaching the program appeared to be favorably disposed toward it. It was also the perception of the principals that the teachers' attitudes toward the program were positive. The principals' mean rating of the teachers' support for the Safe Child Program was 4.02 (n = 60) on a 5-point scale (5=high, 1=low).

#### **Some indications of dissatisfaction with the program emerged in the surveys.**

Dissatisfaction with the program was noted among a few administrators and teachers. The major source of this dissatisfaction stemmed from the topic of sexual abuse and the teacher's role in acquainting the students with such dangers. One teacher-trainer commented: "Teachers do NOT want to model the behavior of the 'abuser.' They won't do it!! We have switched to [the]Child Assault Prevention (CAP) Program." Several principals alluded to this point, when asked if there were any outstanding disadvantage to the program. One principal responded: "Using teachers as negative role models." In response to a related question, one principal wrote: "Teachers [are] not comfortable." Another stated that teachers were "reluctant." Finally, the comments of the teachers themselves reflect concern with the topic. One teacher stated: "I feel uncomfortable talking about some of the 'touching' topics." Another noted: "I DO NOT like blanket negative statements about fathers or other adults hugging children." Judging from the survey responses, this dissatisfaction is not widespread, but it is strongly stated, and appears to encompass teacher-trainers as well as teachers and to some extent the principal in a few schools.