

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 12, 1999

VIDEO MESSAGE FOR TELECONFERENCE
"SAFE SCHOOLS, SAFE STUDENTS: WHAT PARENTS CAN DO"

DATE: August 12, 1999
LOCATION: The Cabinet Room
TIME: 3:05- 3:15 p.m.
FROM: Thurgood Marshall, Jr., Bruce Reed

I. Purpose

To deliver a message to the Department of Education's *Safe Schools, Safe Students: What Parents Can Do* teleconference.

II. Background

At the White House Mental Health Conference you announced a series of teleconferences on safe schools to be held this year. This live, interactive event broadcast from the Newseum will be produced by the Department of Education and is sponsored by the Pfizer foundation. Secretary Riley will host the event, giving parents and families a chance to voice their concerns and find out what they need to know to keep their students safe in the coming school year.

This 90-minute teleconference, scheduled to begin at 7:30p.m. tonight, will include discussions by Secretary Riley, Attorney General Reno, as well as National PTA President Virginia Markell, Teacher and NEA Executive Committee Member Eddie Davis, and a panel of experts. Local educators, community leaders, law enforcement officials, and mental health professionals will join the conference via satellite at over 160 sites across the country. The program will also incorporate questions from live audience members, viewer call-ins, and videotapes related to school safety.

III. Participants

Teleconference Participants:

YOU (via video)

Attorney General Reno

Secretary Riley

Virginia Markell, President, National PTA

Eddie Davis, Teacher, NEA Executive Committee

Olivia del Valle, Zavala, Principal, Zavala Elementary School, Austin, TX

Theodore Feinberg, Senior Psychologist, North Colonie Schools, Latham, NY and
Chairman, National Emergency Assistance Team
Kate Stetzner, Superintendent of Schools, District 1, Butte, MT
John Sisco, Boston Public Schools Safety Department
Anne McGintis, Hamilton County Board of Education, Chattanooga, TN
Mike Woodruff, Author, *KidsToday* and *Young Life*
Donald Cook, Vice President, American Academy of Pediatrics
Ron Coleman, Michigan State PTA President
Viewers in over 160 satellite sites across the country

IV. Press Plan

OPEN PRESS

V. Sequence of Events

- YOUR video begins the teleconference.
- Secretary Riley delivers remarks and introduces Attorney General Reno.
- Attorney General delivers remarks.
- The teleconference discussion begins.

VI. Remarks

To be provided by speechwriting.

Badly Beaten, A D.C. Teacher Tests Himself

ROTC Instructor Returning To Show Students He Cares

By DeNeen L. Brown
Washington Post Staff Writer

A1

On what would soon become the most painful and humiliating morning of his teaching career, the morning he was attacked and beaten into unconsciousness by youths loitering in his school, Lt. Col Frank Scotti, an ROTC instructor at the District's Roosevelt Senior High School, could sense trouble coming.

He could smell it as strong as the odor of marijuana smoke pushing its way toward his basement classroom.

The 9:30 bell had rung, and Scotti looked out of his office to see a half-dozen young men smoking marijuana, not an uncommon sight in that isolated, darkened corridor.

"The bell rang. You're supposed to be in class," Scotti told them, "and you're certainly not supposed to be doing that," pointing to a marijuana cigarette.

"[Expletive] you," Scotti said one of the young men shouted. "You white [expletive]."

"Yeah, I know, I heard that one before," Scotti said. "You should get to class."

Scotti went back in his office and called security again. When he looked out, the group of young men had returned.

"Fellows, go to class," he said once more.

The group stared at him, hard, cold stares.

Eyes reddened from reefer. They didn't back off.

Scotti replays what happened next over and over again in his mind.

He turned to find safety in his office, but the group followed.

Scotti kept walking, until they surrounded him.

"The big guy was in my face. I could smell his breath," Scotti said. His office was just across the hall, but at that point it could have been a mile away. Scotti took a step. Before he made it, he saw a blinding flash of white.

He had been hit from behind. He fell, hard.

When he awoke, his attackers were gone and one of Scotti's students was cradling him.

Seven weeks after the attack, Scotti, 52, plans to return to Roosevelt this morning. Although he

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SCOTTI, From A1

has a metal plate in the bone under his eye and still has numbness in his jaw, he's determined to show his students—the ones who come each day to learn something—that he won't let them down.

He's not sure what to expect. Someone may yell something insensitive about the attack. There could be more incidents if security has not been improved. But Scotti says he has to go back for the students in his classroom—those he knows are good.

"It might have been easy for someone who has been beaten up by kids to say, 'Kids are no good.' Or for a white person who has been beaten up by black kids and called racial slurs to say, 'Black kids are no good, or vice versa.'"

Scotti had taught his students in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program that they can't quit simply because they run into obstacles. They have to find a way to get back on their feet.

Some of the students still have a hard time talking about that day of the attack. It's hard, they say, seeing a man who stood for something in their lives knocked down.

"I feel he's not a person who gives up and he won't let a couple of thugs bring him down," said Rasheena Williams, 15, a Junior ROTC cadet who is in the 10th grade at Roosevelt. "The cadets are overwhelmed. The cadets, they have a lot of respect for him for coming back."

Many teachers have been attacked in schools in the District and across the country. But the beating Scotti took that day was especially severe.

Scotti, an Army veteran who fought in Vietnam, was taken by ambulance to Walter Reed Army Medical Center. He had a broken nose. The orbital bone that supports his right eye was shattered. He had a concussion and cuts on his face. The nerve in his jaw was traumatized. His knee was bruised.

Sgt. Major Kinsey Jones II, who teaches Junior ROTC with Scotti, was conducting a class on citizenship when the attack occurred at the school at 13th and Upshur streets NW. "I went to the back door and I saw blood all over the hallway. I went to my right and saw Colonel Scotti standing there, trying to gain his composure. He was soaked from head to his waistline with blood. In nine years of teaching, I had never seen anything like it."

Last month, two former Roosevelt students, Kenneth Matturi, 19, and Nabieu Seisay, 20, were arrested and charged with aggravated assault in the attack. A third man, Nicholas Kennedy, 19, also has been arrested and charged with aggravated assault. Four other young men allegedly involved in the attack—including men whom Scotti recognized as Roosevelt students—have not been charged.

According to D.C. Superior Court records, Seisay told police that both he and Matturi slugged Scotti, and Matturi said he pushed the teacher. Seisay and Matturi said they did not like Scotti's attitude. The two were not supposed to be in the school but had easy access because the city's fire code prevents principals from bolting or chaining exterior doors. Because of the rule, principals say, it is difficult to prevent outsiders from getting into school buildings.

Students, parents and community leaders such as school board Vice President Sandra Butler-Truesdale (Ward 4) have called futilely for extra security at the school to help prevent such incidents. Scotti and other teachers said they knew it was only a matter of time before something happened.

A week after his surgery, Scotti went back to Roosevelt one night for a PTA meeting. He wanted to test his feelings about the school. He was nervous.

But when he appeared in the auditorium, he was wrapped in a swell of support. His colleagues hugged him. Students who he didn't know came up to him to say they were sorry about what happened.

Some of his students had visited him in the hospital. "For a kid to do that, is something," Scotti said. "One night there were so many up there, we had to go in the visitors' lounge."

Some of them would be crying. Some of them were first-year students. Others had been in the Junior ROTC program three years.

"That's a lot for kids. That restored in me that the majority of kids are good," Scotti said. "If I was going to be a role model for them, I would have to get rid of my anger."

Scotti began teaching at Roosevelt in 1992. The mission of the Ju-

nior ROTC class is not simply to recruit young people for the armed services, he said. "Our mission statement is to motivate young people to become better Americans. We teach and instill citizenship and leadership. We instill self-esteem, teamwork, accomplishment, self-discipline, a desire to excel, contribute to community, church, family, the nation."

Scotti takes his mission seriously. He accepts any student who is directed to his classroom.

"We bring all kids in. They are all on the same playing field. I don't care where he lives. I don't care if he's just out of jail. I don't care if she has two babies," Scotti said. "We're trying to make an impression on them before the men on the streets get their hands on them."

The Junior ROTC classes, which meet every day, often include discussions on life. As Scotti and Jones are teaching the students how to drill, they also are teaching them how to survive.

Scotti, who has four adult children and two grandchildren, lives in a huge house on an acre lot in Manassas, a 90-mile roundtrip to and from Roosevelt. He and his wife leave the house by 5:30 in the morning to beat traffic. Scotti usually arrived at Roosevelt about 6:30. He would run laps on the track behind the school, shower and prepare for an 8 o'clock class. The early morning class is scheduled for students who want to take ROTC but cannot fit it into their schedules.

When he was recuperating, Scotti

thought more than twice about not returning.

"The money, I don't need that. I don't need to ride in there 90 miles a day," Scotti said. Even some friends questioned him about why he bothered to teach in an urban high school with all its problems, when he could easily find a job in a suburban school closer to home.

"My friends would say, 'Why do you drive way in there? You can get a job out here. Why would you go in that mess?' I give them the same answer. I honestly believe those are the kids who need help. The kids who come every day are good kids."

Scotti says he hopes things have changed at the school. He hopes there is more security, that politicians find a way to lock doors so that outsiders don't get in the building.

"I don't know how I will be received. I expect someone will say, Scotti, do you want to get your ass kicked again? That will make me feel rotten. Again, I will have to remind myself I am the teacher and I am the role model."

Scotti decided he couldn't be a hypocrite, telling his students one thing and doing something else.

"I feel I now have an opportunity without sounding like a hero. Since I preached all this about [how] you are going to run into bad things in life and you'll have to make sacrifices to get along . . . now all of a sudden, where did Scotti go? He got beaten up by some punks. We didn't do anything to him," Scotti said of what his students might be thinking.

"I feel I would be letting them down if I didn't go back."

THE WASHINGTON POST

MONDAY, MARCH 18, 1996

School
Educ -
School
Safety

GOP's Hope: Make Clinton The Issue

Party Seeks to Define Itself, Draw Contrast

By John E. Yang
Washington Post Staff Writer

As the focus of the presidential race shifts from the Republican primaries to the fall showdown, House and Senate Republican leaders are eyeing an agenda that will minimize contention while maximizing political gain to help Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) in his race against President Clinton.

They want a congressional session that is at once free of drawn-out, bruising battles with Clinton and gets the basic work of funding the government done in a businesslike manner but that also produces legislation that defines who the Republicans are—and vetoes that define who the president is.

The hope is to make Clinton, not the Republican Congress, the issue. "We should pass what we have to pass, stay out of trouble and go home," said one Republican senator.

"Our goal is to get rid of the veto president, the person standing between America and the agenda that they want—a balanced budget, welfare reform, Medicare reform, Medicaid reform," said Rep. John A. Boehner (Ohio), House Republican Conference chairman.

That is also the message Dole repeatedly emphasizes on the cam-

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AGENDA, From A1

ampaign trail, often referring to Clinton as "old veto Bill."

While they know where they want to be politically by the time the presidential and congressional campaigns reach the final days this fall, GOP leaders in both chambers are still struggling with the details of how to get there.

"We're still feeling our way," acknowledged one House Republican leader.

"There's no consensus that I can see at all," said Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.), chairman of the Conference of the Majority.

Part of the problem is differences of opinion over whether it is better to get something enacted in order to have an accomplishment—even though Congress would have to share credit with Clinton—or to get something vetoed to have an issue.

"In some areas, maybe we shouldn't send him anything," Senate Majority Whip Trent Lott (R-Miss.) said last week. "But in other areas we may send him a bill and see whether he signs it or vetoes it. For example, is he going to want to veto a product liability bill because plaintiffs' lawyers own him?" Clinton said Saturday he would veto the bill.

In any case, the desire to avoid controversy is strong. They know from bitter experience that it is the president who has benefited from extended high-profile fights over the budget between Congress and Clinton. Republican leaders saw Clinton's standing in polls rise during the two government shutdowns while theirs sank.

"We're really not interested in getting in some prolonged battles with the White House because that allows him to define himself by opposing us," a House GOP leader said.

There will be "less acrimony," House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) predicted. "We're now into a more routine legislative agenda. . . . We're going to be more into a methodical, well-planned agenda."

Asked yesterday what his top three priorities are this year, House Majority Leader Richard K. Arney (R-Tex.) said: "A balanced budget; meaningful reform of welfare, Medicaid and Medicare; a tax reduction

for the American people. . . . We've got to get a recalcitrant president to sign this into law, and we can turn this country in the right direction."

On NBC's "Meet the Press," Arney said: "Our position is to move legislation to the president. We would hope that he would sign the legislation. . . . If he doesn't. . . he'll have to deal with that when he deals with the American people out on the campaign trail."

Already, House and Senate Republican leaders have abandoned their plan to use legislation raising the federal government's borrowing authority to pressure Clinton to accept elements of their balanced budget plan. Instead, the leaders insist the measure must be something the president could easily sign.

In addition, House leaders already this year have:

- Decided to try to avoid a politically precarious vote this year on repealing the ban on several types of assault weapons, an issue that had propelled some House Republican freshmen's 1994 victories. "The Senate's not going to go along with it, so it would just force members here to walk the plank," said a House GOP leadership aide. "It's a public relations nightmare."

- Given up hopes for a wide-reaching overhaul to the nation's civil litigation system—part of the "Contract With America"—in favor of more-limited changes in court awards for faulty products.

- Postponed consideration of a bill intended to scale back federal health, safety and environmental regulation when it became clear that moderate Republicans in the House and Senate objected to some provisions.

House leaders also said they hope to minimize contentious policy provisions on spending bills for the next fiscal year. Last year, fiscal 1996 appropriations bills bogged down in intraparty disputes over abortion, the environment and labor policy.

Indeed, House leaders want to dispose of the current budget squabble as quickly as possible so they can move on to next year's budget and spending bills. "We've got to get on to '97 and finish it before the electoral season," said House Appropria-

tions Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.).

At the same time, though, House and Senate leaders say they are looking for legislation that can help highlight the differences between the Republicans and Clinton, and underscore Dole's moniker for Clinton, "the veto president."

"There clearly will be bills that define us and vetoes that will help define him," said a House Republican leader.

"As a strategy, I would love to make this president the record-holder for vetoes," DeLay said.

House leaders said they would like to use that tactic to amplify the divisions between Clinton and them on questions of values, such as on welfare reform, and the economy.

Indeed, many congressional Republicans say Clinton's vetoes last year of legislation overhauling Medicare and welfare and balancing the budget in seven years are enough to run against him.

"We did a lot and he vetoed it," said Sen. Robert F. Bennett (R-Utah). "We can run against him as the do-nothing president."

Staff writer Helen Dewar
contributed to this report.

THE WASHINGTON POST
MONDAY, MARCH 18, 1996

Educators aim to head off more violence in U.S. schools

CHICAGO (Reuters) — U.S. students returning to school this month are facing new efforts to ensure their security, from metal detectors to no-taunt pledges, but some experts worry the focus on safety may produce a fortress mentality at school.

Recent school-shooting rampages, especially the one at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., that killed 15 people, have intensified the debate on how to keep students safe without making them feel their schools have become prisons.

"There's a concern in general that schools are sort of opting for a bunch of quick fixes in the short term," said Ann Beeson, an at-

torney for the American Civil Liberties Union who monitors school security.

"We have to ask ourselves if we want students to have to go to school in an environment that's much more like a prison or a fortress than an educational environment," she said.

In Chicago, all public high schools and middle schools are equipped with metal detectors, while at least two hand-held detectors are available at all Chicago public elementary schools. The only backpack students are allowed to carry to one school is made of see-through mesh to reveal smuggled weapons.

"We have an obligation to pro-

vide for their safety first," Chicago Public Schools Chief Paul Vallas said. "When they're 18, then we can worry about some of these civil liberties issues. But the bottom line is: Security is important."

Not all public schools in major cities have metal detectors. Only about 20 percent of New York City public high schools and middle schools had metal detectors as of May.

School systems across the country have advertised telephone "tip" lines where students or parents can anonymously report potentially dangerous situations. Some Ohio schools have devised code words that, when relayed in a seemingly innocuous message

over the public address system, instruct teachers to lock classroom doors and get their children under their desks.

Other communities have conducted all-too-real drills on what to do if there is a shooting at school. One such mock attack was held last week at Brashear High School in Pittsburgh, complete with police helicopters and heavily armed SWAT teams tending students feigning wounds.

Government statistics indicate gun-related problems in schools have lessened, despite high-profile incidents such as the Columbine shooting.

A recent report by the U.S. Department of Education cited 3,930

students who were expelled last year for bringing a firearm to school, down 31 percent from the previous year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said the number of students who reported carrying a weapon of any type to school during the previous month fell to 18 percent in 1997 from 26 percent in 1991.

"I think we need to keep [high profile incidents] in perspective with the real safety within most schools," said Ginny Markell, president of the national Parent Teacher Association.

But some studies send mixed messages. The CDC research, which was conducted before the

Columbine shootings, found that even though fewer students were carrying weapons to school, there was no drop in the percentage of youths who felt too unsafe to go to school.

A study on student bullying by the American Psychological Association found that four out of five students at one Midwestern middle school admitted they had engaged in some form of physical aggression, social ridicule, teasing, name-calling or threatening within the past month.

In their effort to deal with violence, schools are not just increasing security. Many also are taking aim at cliques of the sort that have been blamed for violent outbursts.

The Washington Times

MONDAY, AUGUST 23, 1999

Law -
School safety

Columbine fallout reins in Web pages

Schools crack down on student speech

By Ryan Alessi
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

Gene Lolli, principal of Field High School near Akron, Ohio, was shaken by what he saw on his computer screen:

Four-letter words. Essays dotted with what Mr. Lolli called "disturbing" revelations by students who saw themselves as "outcasts." Sarcastic references to violence.

All of it posted on a Web site by students calling themselves the "Field Dominion of Freaks." The Field Dominion of Freaks' site surfaced just a week after two students went on a shooting spree at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo.

Mr. Lolli's first reaction: "I was greatly concerned. It was enough to make us all stand up and really take notice of what was going on."

School administrators across the country have taken notice in unison. Since the Colorado shootings, they have been advised to keep watch for warning signs of troubled students through conversations, in essays and on personal Web sites. Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the gunmen at Columbine, posted violent references on their Web site, which was ignored by school officials.

But the ACLU and some courts say schools go too far by disciplining students for Web sites created off school property.

"Some schools have rationalized it by saying that, 'We're not trying to discipline students for what they did off-campus, we're disciplining them for bringing threatening words into the school,'" said Andy Brumme, staff counselor for the ACLU in South Carolina. "But when someone calls up a Web site on school grounds, that's not the publisher's fault."

Since the Littleton shootings, ACLU staff members say their offices have been inundated with hundreds of calls about schools violating students' free speech. And a growing percentage of these calls relate to students' Web pages. Among the most publicized cases:

- Stow High School near Akron tried to expel a student for calling his school "a living hell" on his personal Web page, said Raymond Vasvari, Ohio ACLU legal director.

- The Kansas and western Missouri ACLU office represented a student who was suspended for his Web page showing his school engulfed in a mushroom cloud. The now-defunct Web page, said Dick Kurtenbach, the office's executive

director, was titled "This is a Joke."

- A South Carolina high school suspended and recommended for expulsion a student after he wrote ROTC members should "eat feces and die," said Mr. Brumme of the state's ACLU office, who represented the student. The school revoked the punishment after the student, who was a member of the school's junior ROTC program, served four days of his 10-day suspension.

Jeffrey Sultanik, a Lansdale, Pa., lawyer who lectures on Internet use in public schools, said administrators have a case if students abuse schools' computers.

"Beyond this, I think it will be increasingly difficult for school administrators to start regulating off-school behavior, unless they can show some immediate danger to the school," he said.

Still, he suggested, school officials could legally suspend students from extracurricular activities instead of classes.

Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, said school environments have been tense since Littleton, causing some administrators to be overcautious — especially with the Internet.

"The Web is new territory and schools that reacted harshly to students' sites probably acted illegally," he said. "Schools that overrun students' rights will end up losing those court cases."

But disciplining students for what they put on personal Web pages did not just begin after Littleton.

A week before the shooting, the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression at the University of Virginia awarded one of its annual "Jefferson Muzzles" — given to people or groups who have tried to limit speech — to an eastern Missouri school district.

In February 1998, Woodland High School suspended a student for using a personal Web site to criticize the school and staff members with vulgar language.

Robert O'Neil, director of the Jefferson Center, said the case was just one example from last year. The center has no exact numbers on Web-related punishment by schools. But Mr. O'Neil said he sees a trend in that direction.

"In every case," he said, "the school system eventually backed down or were forced to back down through legal action."

• Distributed by Scripps Howard

Inmates trade cell for a tent Makeshift housing more comfortable

SPARTA, Ga. (AP) — Eric Willis has seen the inside of four different prison facilities since he began a 10-year sentence for drug dealing. His current quarters rank as the strangest and the most comfortable: a tent.

"When I first heard about it, I thought it would be hotter than the regular cells," he said inside the cool tent at Hancock State Prison, as the temperature outside soared near 100 degrees. "But out of all the places I've been, this is definitely the nicest and the most relaxed."

Prison officials moved 168 inmates into the insulated tents of "J Unit" earlier this year.

Originally designed as a temporary fix, the move created an unexpected benefit — inmates like the 29-year-old Willis, just eight months away from release, are willing to behave to get assigned to the unit. For one thing, the tents are air conditioned in the summer, while the main prison has only fans.

The four tents — three for housing and one for a dining hall — and a cinderblock administrative building cost about \$514,000, or \$2,763 per bed, according to Corrections Department spokesman Scott Stallings. A new prison with 1,000 beds costs about \$32 million, about \$32,000 a bed.

"This was initially a quick fix," said J Unit manager Dwayne Johnson. "We got a deal on them, but they've worked out much better than we thought."

They look more like doublewide mobile homes than something you would camp in. They're made of insulated canvas walls held up by steel poles, and stand on concrete slabs buffed so frequently they shine brighter than linoleum.

Each tent houses 65 inmates sleeping on rows of bunk beds and is attached to its own cinderblock bathroom and shower area. Features include fluorescent lights and two TVs.

"Last month, we only had two discipline reports filed, out of all 168 inmates," Mr. Johnson said. "They know that if they act out, they're gone. And they want to stay."

g one recent swing through Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire, Bradley drew both Democratic faithful and the curious. He came with old issues of Sports Illustrated featuring cover photos on Bradley, who took home an Olympic gold medal in 1964 after joining the Knicks. Others showed up with basketballs for Bradley to autograph. Many toted one of his books, including Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., who has campaigned for Bradley in Iowa and plans to stump for him in New Hampshire and New York, says Bradley is reaching voters. "In a sure and steady way, he is really connecting with people," Wellstone said. "People really like him a lot. Politics today is so unpredictable. I can see how the momentum can quickly switch to Bill."

Mike Collins of the Republican National Committee credits Bradley's rise in the polls to Clinton fatigue: Democrats weary of the Clinton administration, including Gore.

"Right now, he's the default position for Democrats. If they don't like Al Gore, which many of them don't once they get to know him ... They only have one place to go," said Collins. Some lump Bradley and Gore together as both lacking charisma. Bradley earned such a reputation during his Senate career, where he was best known for his focus on tax issues, including a heavy hand in the 1986 Tax Reform Act.

In a New Hampshire hall in Berlin, Bradley worked the crowd to introduce himself to those who don't know him and win over those who do. With red-white-and-blue banners lining the walls, Bradley worked the small crowd of Democrats, opening up with warm stories about growing up in a small Missouri town where his parents had no interest in him being a politician.

Anne Wilson was converted. "People said he was so dull. I think he's a ball of fire," she said. "He's the most thinking politician I've heard in a long time."

Computers Face 9/9/99 in a Warmup to Year 2000

By Ashley Dunn
Los Angeles Times

A possible preview of the millennium bug is set to strike Thursday when computers will reach an unusual date that could cause some older programs to malfunction.

Thursday is the ninth day of the ninth month of the 99th year of the century a date that is recorded on some computers as 9/9/99. Year 2000 experts have long warned about this date, since it was sometimes used in the early days of computer programming, back in the 1960s, to mark the end of a data file.

As with the Y2K problem, few computer programmers back then thought their programs would survive until 1999 and could someday cause problems.

Y2K repair work has routinely looked at this issue and most experts predict there will be few problems Thursday.

"It's not something that will bring the house down, by any stretch of the imagination," said Kazim Isfahani, senior Y2K analyst for technology research and consulting firm Giga Information Group. "We don't anticipate any problems."

Several other critical dates have come and gone with few problems. These include the beginning of fiscal 2000 on July 1; the 99th day of the year on April 9; and, on Aug. 21, the rollover back to week zero for some receivers of the global positioning satellite system.

"With the passing of each successive critical date, the risk goes down of something happening on Jan. 1," Isfahani said. "It's certainly a positive sign that we are moving in the right direction."

Beyond the well-publicized concerns related to the start of the year 2000, there are several other critical computer dates on the horizon. They include the beginning of the federal government's fiscal 2000 on Oct. 1; the leap-year day on Feb. 29, 2000; and the 366th day of the year on Dec. 31, 2000, which some programs may not be able to handle.

Schools Are Adopting Broad Array of Safety Measures

By Melissa Healy
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON As kids scramble back to classrooms across the United States, the jangle of school bells has some dissonant new accompaniments: the electronic beep of metal detectors, the robotic swivel of surveillance cameras, the crackle of walkie-talkies and the thwop-thwop-thwop of SWAT-team helicopters.

After a sobering two years of school shootings, a growing number of school systems this fall has embraced measures designed to safeguard children against the armed rage of violent classmates or deranged adults.

In communities large and small, urban and rural, violence-plagued and crime-free, police departments and special intervention teams have spent the summer mapping school grounds and plotting responses to violent incidents. Mock drills, complete with "victims" playing out their roles, have been conducted at schools from Berkeley, Calif., to Pasadena, Md.; Pittsburgh even used helicopters to evacuate the "wounded."

In hundreds of school districts, pupils must wear newly issued identification cards to get onto school grounds. Businesses that specialize in security cameras are working overtime to market, produce and install them.

Across the country, the most numerous and visible of the new security measures are mechanical. But many schools' security plans, to the chagrin of most teens, also will clamp down on students in ways large and small.

In Broward County, Fla., as in many communities, high school students at South Plantation High will no longer be able to leave the campus for lunch. In Miami and San Diego, book bags which could hide weapons are barred. In Gilbert, Ariz., "white supremacy clothing" such as the trench coats worn by teen killers in Littleton, Colo., are banned. McKinney, Texas, bans baggy pants, T-shirts with violent or sexual messages and unusually dyed hair.

More dramatically than any of the last two years' other violent incidents, April's massacre at Littleton spurred school officials into action. Two teen-age boys shot and killed 12 students and a teacher at Columbine High School before taking their own lives.

Not all have drawn the same lesson from Columbine. While most school systems have primarily beefed up their physical safeguards, many others have either supplemented or supplanted those measures with low-tech solutions such as kind words and plain talk. "One of the major lessons from Columbine is that we don't have anyone saying anymore that it couldn't happen here," said Joanne McDaniel, assistant director of the Center for the Prevention of School Violence in Raleigh, N.C.

In the wake of the Columbine shootings, experts faulted the Colorado school's size, its physical layout and the local police department's response to the crisis. But McDaniel said that parents and school officials have been most affected by the idea that every school has its potential Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold the two Columbine shooters. Given the right combination of psychological factors, parents and officials have come to understand, these children could move from merely troubled to deadly.

In many communities, that has led parents and school officials to conclude they had better start focusing on their school's psychological environment from student bullies to disengaged teachers and administrators. Many experts believe that defusing children's violent impulses will have more impact in the long term than disarming gun-toters at the door or mounting exercises that prepare for their deadly outbursts.

"Making schools safe is as much a matter of the heart and changing attitudes and actions as it is a matter of bringing in a tool that will create a safe environment," said Ron Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center in Westlake Village, Calif. "This is not just about hardware but about software about valuing each individual. Many strategies we see schools taking are more about 'snooper-vision' than about supervision."

In schools in and around New Orleans, a focus on "software" has translated into adoption of school uniforms. Hundreds of schools across the country are urging students to break their code of silence and use telephone "tip lines" to report an overheard threat or flag a dangerous situation. Other schools are trying to curb outcasts' violent tendencies by opening lines of communication among students and between kids and school officials.

At Powell Middle School in Hernando County, Fla., for example, principal Cy Wingrove plans to expand a crime-watch program that outfits students with walkie-talkies and distinctive jackets to monitor the halls. By seeking out troubled or disengaged youngsters for the special role, Wingrove hopes to give them a stronger sense of responsibility.

Throughout the Port Huron, Mich., school district, principals will begin lunching regularly with larger array of students, not just class leaders.

"The theme this year is listening to kids at all levels," said Port Huron's superintendent, William D. Kimball. "We're focusing on prevention, trying to be more aware of the kids, to identify our problems earlier."

Although the district has ruled out the purchase of metal detectors and is moving slowly on the question of surveillance cameras, it has accelerated a program to train all school employees from teachers to food service workers to bus drivers in conflict resolution.

The focus on low-tech prevention rather than high-tech intervention came after Port Huron school officials foiled a plot in May by four students who threatened to outdo the Columbine shooters. A fellow student who had heard of their alleged scheme alerted school officials; two 13-year-olds and two 14-year-olds were arrested before any harm was done.

In the Hopkins school district in the Minneapolis suburbs, every teacher is assigned to mentor a small group of students throughout their high school career.

"We're establishing a long-term 'let me be the adult in your life' thing," said the district's social worker, Sharon MacDonald. "Maybe that way we won't have kids slipping through the cracks. We're having them write their goals, we're meeting with their parents. We're really forcing ourselves down their throats, believing that this is what's good for them and good for the community." A few districts are starting from scratch by building schools that enhance students' sense of community and protect schoolchildren by drawing them into the larger world.

A Quarter of Students Don't Attend Neighborhood Schools, Report Says

By Richard Lee Colvin
Los Angeles Times

Even as a national political debate intensifies over ways to provide parents with alternatives to the nearest public school, the reality is that nearly one in four students already are exercising such choices either on public or private campuses.

A study, which encompasses students from kindergarten through 12th grade and which will be released Wednesday, estimates that nearly 8 million children nationally attend charter schools, magnet schools and other alternatives to neighborhood schools that began emerging a generation ago. Federal data show that the number rose steadily during the 1990s and is 2.5 million greater than it was in 1993.

Meanwhile, about 6 million children attend private schools, some through publicly and privately funded voucher programs. That number has remained about the same proportionally for at least three decades.

Yet, even as the options have expanded, researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University have not been able to find proof that students are learning more as a result of having such choices.

The findings were compiled from state data and from a federal household survey conducted in 1996 and updated to this year by Policy Analysis for California Education. The think tank's report is sure to be controversial politically.

Proponents of school vouchers, which provide public money for students to attend private schools, argue that parents don't have enough choices. The issue has been hotly debated both in political campaigns and in courts.

"Anybody who claims there is a public school monopoly out there is about 20 years behind," said UC Berkeley professor Bruce Fuller, the report's lead author. "We're no longer dragging kids to public schools without any choice."

The new study says that nearly 500,000 California students already are choosing to attend a school other than the one in their neighborhood. About half of those students are taking advantage of open-enrollment policies, which allow them to select a school outside their neighborhood. The rest are attending magnet schools, which offer specialized programs in topics such as math and science, or charter schools, which operate with greater independence than other public schools.

Open-enrollment policies are popular particularly with better-educated families, who are more likely to be white. The report's authors could find no evidence, however, that participants learned more or were less likely to drop out of school.

Similarly, despite the growth of charter schools to nearly 1,500 nationally, evaluations of their effectiveness are "few in number and often flawed," the report said.

Experts who have studied existing publicly funded voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland have reached conflicting conclusions about their benefits. A new study of a voucher program in New York, cited by the authors, did show significant student gains.

Advocates of greater school choice contend that alternatives within the public school system are still tightly controlled and limited in number. Meanwhile, polls show that education tops the concerns of voters and that support for vouchers is growing.

Still, the available alternatives to public schools have not been sufficient to slake the growing thirst for such choices, particularly in urban areas.

Magnet schools first appeared about 20 years ago as a way to encourage voluntary desegregation by encouraging middle-class parents not to flee to the suburbs. Typically, such schools spend more than other schools, have more experienced teachers and, studies have found, help students make significantly greater progress academically.

But Paul E. Peterson, a voucher advocate who directs the program on educational policy and governance at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, said such programs are not set up to serve the needs of inner-city children attending the lowest-performing schools.

Moreover, the impact of magnet schools and other alternatives to neighborhood schools spotlighted by the new report pale in comparison to the choices available to middle-class parents.

"Most people in the United States have a choice, because they can pick the suburb they live in and when you pick your suburb you pick your school," Peterson said. "The segment of the population that has very little choice is low-income people, living in cities." Terry Moe, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and an advocate of vouchers who reviewed the study, said the growth of charter schools is the most encouraging trend noted in the report. But he criticized the limit on the growth of such schools in California to no more than 100 a year.

The Clinton administration is encouraging the creation of as many as 3,000 charter schools, offering \$300,000 to each school over three years to subsidize start-up costs. This fall, 10 percent of the students in the Washington, D.C., school district will be attending charter schools.

City Searches for New Approach to AIDS Prevention

By Mary Curtius
Los Angeles Times

SAN FRANCISCO In the 1980s, the message health officials put out to the gay community was simple, straightforward and effective: If you are going to have sex, use a condom, every time.

"It was the old health education model," recalled Linda Fisher-Ponce, who was then an HIV counselor with the city of San Francisco. "Someone would stand in the front of the room with an easel and colored chalk and do a group session."

Health officials and AIDS activists agree that the message worked astonishingly well. Gay men radically altered their sexual behavior, and the rate of new HIV infections declined steeply.

But here in the city that for so long has been ground zero in the fight against AIDS, it came as no surprise when studies presented during a government-sponsored forum on HIV prevention in Atlanta last week showed there has been a disturbing upsurge in risky sexual practices among gay men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged a greater emphasis on prevention.

In San Francisco, AIDS organizations say, it isn't easy to come up with effective messages for a gay community whose culture has drastically changed since the AIDS crisis began. Some gay men here are pushing to reopen bathhouses, closed by the city in the 1980s, and want to ease restrictions on sex clubs that now require men to have sex in communal rooms, where they can be monitored by staff to ensure that they are using condoms.

Others say it is time for health officials to leave it to gay men to negotiate the most intimate aspects of their lives.

"People's perceptions of HIV and AIDS are much different now from what they were then," said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, director of the Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention and Control Services for San Francisco's Department of Public Health. "Back then, their friends, lovers and cousins were dying and people were scared to death."

Today, Klausner said, "people aren't seeing people dying of AIDS, they aren't seeing people sick from AIDS walking down the street."

The San Francisco AIDS Foundation conducted in-depth surveys with 200 gay men from 1996 through 1998 and found that most were no longer listening to traditional prevention messages.

"What was clear from those interviews is that men were not paying attention at all to the primary prevention messages that were coming out of AIDS organizations. Use a condom every time? Forget it!" said Rene Durazzo, director of programs for the foundation.

Durazzo and other activists agree that unsafe sexual practices among gay men are on the rise, but they are quick to point out that