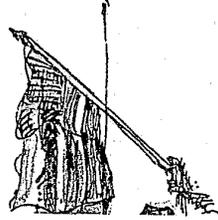
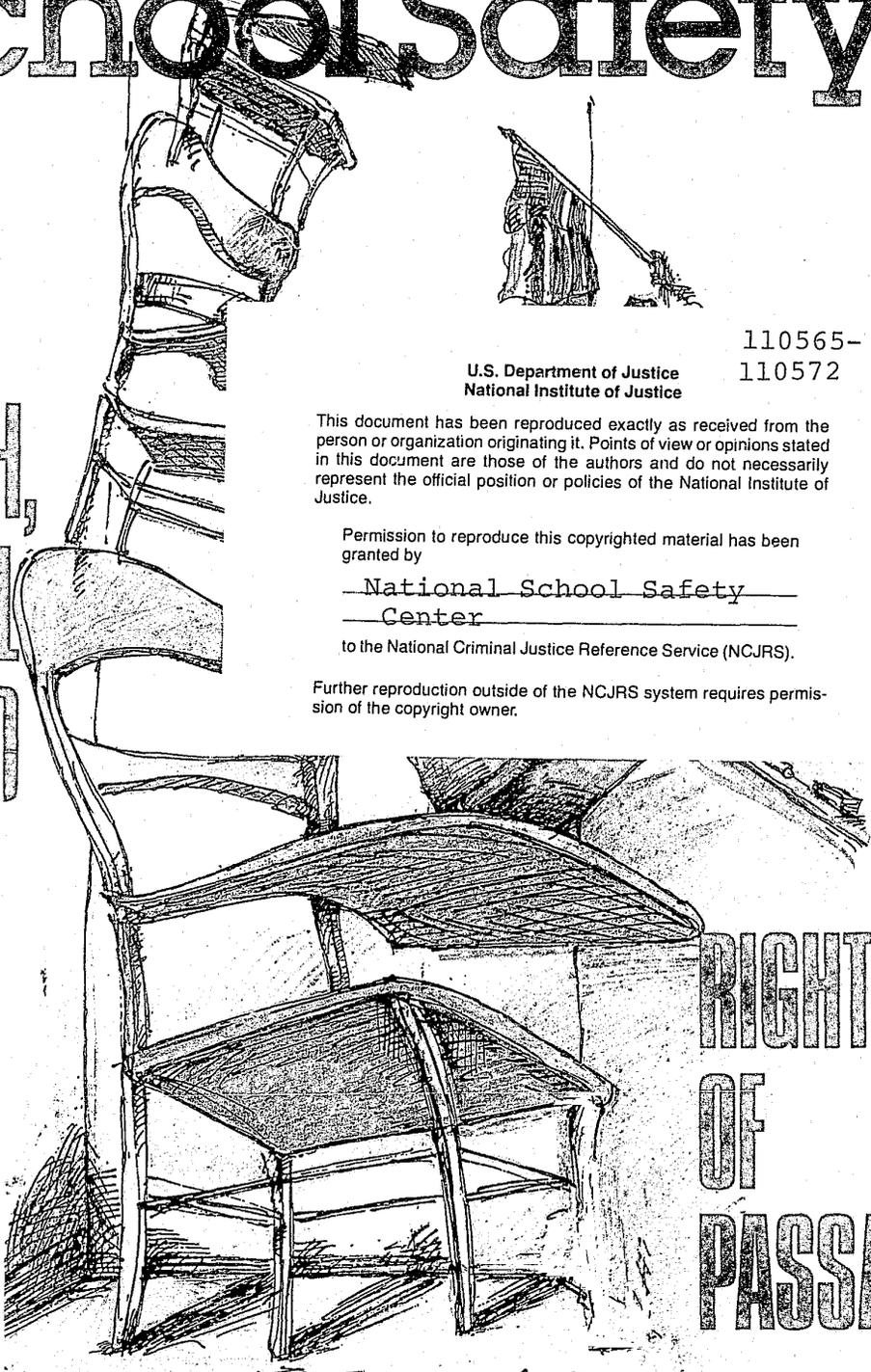


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School Safety

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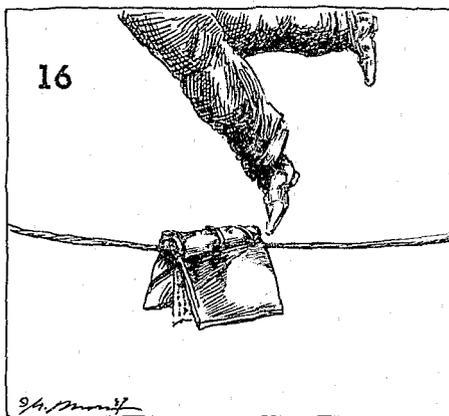
Just as passing from grade to grade, growing up requires learning and balancing a series of rights and responsibilities. Cover by Geoffrey Moss. Copyright © 1978, Washington Post Writers Group. Reprinted with permission.

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BY RONALD D. STEPHENS

A caring attitude, combined with the skills that ensure their schools are safe and productive, make these leaders worthy of national recognition.

They dare to care: 'Principals of Leadership'

"He knows students' names..."

That observation about a principal of a Midwest school with more than 1,500 students provides insight into one basic element of leadership.

The principal, Gary A. Faber of West Bloomfield, Michigan, has been selected as one of 10 school leaders from coast to coast for special recognition in the "Principals of Leadership" program, now in its third year.

Principals of Leadership, sponsored in 1988 by the National School Safety Center, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, has led in honoring outstanding men and women for their inspiring work heading schools for students in grades K-12.

In its very first year the program cited the work of such principals as the still-controversial Joe Clark of Paterson, New Jersey, and George McKenna of Los Angeles, who turned around their downward-spiraling ghetto schools.

Clark's megaphone and baseball bat affront some professional educators, but few doubt that he genuinely cares about those boys and girls who follow the rules he imposes to create an atmosphere of learning where previously there was only chaos. *Time* magazine recently

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remarked that the principal, walking his corridors, knew his students by name.

Another past Principals of Leadership honoree, George McKenna of Washington Preparatory High in Los Angeles, doesn't see eye to eye with Clark, but the two men hold a similar belief in personal contact with students. McKenna's motto for his school is, "We are family."

Again and again, an obvious degree of caring was cited to describe those who have earned recognition in the Principals of Leadership. Whether the school building itself is brand new or nearly a century old, whether it's located in a crime-ridden big-city neighborhood or an out-of-the-way small town — and even if the past atmosphere has been one of failure and hopelessness — schools can be made to work with the strong leadership of a caring principal.

Almost invariably, schools involved in the Principals of Leadership citations endured the same discipline problems common everywhere today. But remedying these problems was given high priority in recognition that unless schools are safe and students feel secure, then learning — in an atmosphere of fear — doesn't really have a chance.

"A good principal is only as good as his faculty," commented Faber, whose school is suburban, the building recent and the students almost all white middle class. The conditions may sound ideal compared to inner-city schools, but today

no school escapes the burdens of drugs and discipline. Faber's school, when he took over, reflected the full range of behavioral difficulties evidenced in society itself. He installed a special suspension class and a demerit system as well as incentives to urge students to be responsible for their own behavior.

From a school similar in size, but located in Chandler, Arizona, in a building more than 60 years old, a principal commented, "We have teachers who really care about the kids, and the kids respond to that." Robert Caccamo, who taught in New York City 25 years ago, said he tried to create "a positive school climate based on trust and caring."

He succeeded in that he was named a Principal of Leadership this year. "When students feel safe from harm or threats, when students feel comfortable and accepted, and when they feel a part of the school, they become active, anxious learners," Caccamo said.

When principals and teachers really care, it seems to have a way of rubbing off on the students, uplifting the whole school in the process. Take the case of Jefferson Junior High School, built in 1892 in Washington, D.C., where more than 90 percent of the students come from low-income black families. Those details alone might have presented a prescription for educational disaster if not for another Principals of Leadership honoree, Vera M. White.

The ghetto school she runs has no drugs and few dropouts. Goals and expectations are high, and the school is so safe that parents from neighboring districts line up to apply for admission for their children.

What makes the difference? "Experience has shown that our students are successful because they know what is expected of them. School spirit is good. . . . Students know that the principal is willing to look after their interests at all times," White said. "Students are expected to respect themselves and respect others in the pursuit of learning. This protects the rights of all students."

Actually a part of the River Park Towers housing project in the Bronx, Intermediate School 229 sits in one of the lowest socioeconomic congressional districts in the country, with 100 percent minority students. Through the efforts of Felton Johnson, another Principals of Leadership honoree, the school has taken "a U-turn toward excellence." It has become "an oasis of learning" in the ravaged Bronx, according to numerous awards the school has earned for academic achievement and excellence, including recognition from the U.S. Department of Education.

Almost identical problems confronted another school half a nation away, Estacado High School in Lubbock, Texas, where the students also are from low-income minority families. Low morale, poor achievement, minimal community support and high absenteeism were conditions of operation.

Principal Carrol A. "Butch" Thomas stepped in and within a year people were saying, "It's not the same school. . . ." A student newspaper headline read, "Are you sure this is Estacado?" Cited in the Principals of Leadership, Thomas credits teamwork among parents, faculty and students for creating an atmosphere of "new pride."

Sometimes it seems as if students are choosing every possible alternative to avoid a topnotch education. It must seem to some principals that students virtually have to be forced to choose

learning. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the most unusual honoree in this year's Principals of Leadership, Shannon Reffett, who supervises an educational program that is part of the Indiana state prison system.

Reffett's job as supervisor of education is to convince inmates of the reality that they could change their lives by attending the Westville Correctional Center School. "We had to make the students choose learning," he said.

Bolstering self-esteem — the lack of which landed too many of Reffett's students in their predicament — is an important factor at any school.

Karen R. Kundin, principal of Kachina Elementary School in Glendale, Arizona, said, "I feel it's just as important to reinforce self-esteem as to improve academics." More than 90 percent of her K-8 students are from white families, but discipline and academic rank hit bottom five years ago.

Her caring administration and effective leadership set standards of excellence that virtually wiped out discipline problems and brought about a new school spirit. "Pride in school is evident," she said. The improvements earned her inclusion among the Principals of Leadership.

The schools mentioned in Principals of Leadership faced severe discipline problems at one time, but every one of them installed, encouraged and enforced firm rules governing student behavior.

"In an effective school, enforceable rules must be clearly stated, widely communicated and consistently upheld," said another Principals of Leadership honoree, Minnie W. Floyd of Palms School in West Los Angeles.

Floyd quickly earned a reputation at Palms as an innovator, bringing a spirit of discussion to face problems and organizing challenging classes to interest students. A spokesman for the state of California, which singled out the achievement of the school, said, "The students there feel the professional staff cares about what happens to them. . . . It was clear that the atmosphere in the

school was enthusiastic. Kids were happy. You see a lot of smiles."

At Schenley High School Teacher Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, drugs and alcohol were a big problem among students as recently as the early 1980s. Additionally, there was a concomitant academic slump.

Principals of Leadership honoree John R. Young enhanced Schenley's position as a proving ground for new programs and methods, upgrading the institution in all directions he pursued. "If we do not have an environment conducive to learning and supportive of the student's belief in himself, all the good intentions and special programs will be of little or no value," Young commented.

That statement is echoed by 1988 Principals of Leadership honoree, Yvonne G. Allen of Whiteville, Tennessee, who oversees a school for youths up to grade eight, the majority from low-income black families, almost half of them one-parent households. "Quality education — the lifeblood of a child's future — cannot exist without a safe learning environment," Allen said.

Like all 10 persons cited in the 1988 Principals of Leadership program, her accomplishments rested on more than a single feat. All of the honorees have been lauded in national and state school recognition programs, newspaper and magazine stories, and recommendations from professional education associations and involved individuals.

But the foregoing should not suggest that all school problems can be resolved by a caring approach alone. The caring must be combined with the competence to know what to do, the commitment to get it done and the courage to do it even when public pressures might make one's stand unpopular.

One constant factor, which the National School Safety Center considers axiomatic, is that progress in learning is unlikely unless a school atmosphere first provides students with a feeling of safety and security. This feeling of safety and security begins by establishing an attitude of caring. □