

Identification Badges: An Invitational Approach to School Safety

Michelle C. Hart

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

As violence within our schools continues to increase, educators are in need of innovative methods for school safety. The following article examines the use of identification badges as an invitational approach to creating schools without fear. Three high schools were contacted which use identification badges for students, teachers, administration, staff, and visitors. The use of these badges was reported to be an effective and inviting measure within each of the three schools.

More than ever, educators are concerned with violence in our schools and the safety of our students. Statistics justify these concerns as well as reveal a nation that is in great need of new and effective safety procedures for its schools. White (1994) reported that of the 729 school districts responding to a National School Board Association Survey, 82 percent said that violence in their schools has increased over the past 5 years. In response to this increase, schools are installing metal detectors, video cameras, and security fences, as well as hiring security guards. It is hoped that such measures will produce safer schools. However, these procedures send negative messages to students, creating an atmosphere that resembles that of a prison rather than a school.

Juhnke and Purkey (1995) reported not only do these methods present significant financial burden and decrease time for educational instruction, but also contribute to a decline in student and teacher morale. Furthermore, such safety measures create implied criminal expectations of students. Rosenthal and Jacobson's study (1966) concluded that teacher expectations lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Students begin to perceive themselves as they are treated and behave accordingly.

It is apparent that educators need to focus on more positive means of school safety. Such solutions should insure the security of all students, as well as create an environment where students feel they are invited to learn and grow. The purpose of this article is to examine the current use of identification badges and determine their effectiveness within the school.

Background

Juhnke and Purkey (1995) used Invitational Education as a framework for developing a safety program which promotes a more positive atmosphere within the school, one which is conducive to learning. The five propositions of the invitational theory are as follows:

1. People are able, valuable, responsible, and, they should be treated accordingly.
2. Education should be a cooperative activity.
3. Process is as important as product.
4. People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor.
5. Potential can best be realized by places, policies, processes and programs specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally.

The authors offer several suggestions for school safety which are representative of this invitational approach. One of these suggestions includes the use of permanent identification badges (preferably plastic or metal) for identifying those individuals who belong on campus and those who do not. The authors believe that such measures invite students to see themselves as able, valuable, and responsible and encourages them to behave accordingly.

Roberts (1992) stated that identification badges are a cheaper, less-intrusive way to improve school security that is nonetheless highly effective. Roberts' study of a school system in Tulsa County, Oklahoma reveals that badges, which are currently worn by teachers and staff, offer an added sense of security, a sense of pride and camaraderie, and a boost to public relations. Trotter (1992) added a citation within Roberts' article which examines the use of identification badges by students as well. Large cities, such as Dallas, Texas, are depending more on student identification badges as a means for identifying school intruders: intruders whose intent could range from vandalism to murder.

Jim Scisres, School Safety Coordinator in Guilford County, North Carolina, agrees that each individual who enters the building should wear an identification badge. Scisres reports there was an increase of incidents where students from other schools, or students who had been suspended or expelled, were trespassing on campus grounds. In many cases, these students are doing so with intent to harm another student or faculty member. Scisres states, By issuing identification badges, such situations could be avoided. (personal communication, November, 1994)

To further investigate this method, the following sections present information gathered from telephone surveys with three high schools which currently use permanent identification badges for school safety.

Methodology

Telephone surveys were conducted with three high schools: Emerald High School in Greenwood, South Carolina; Samuell High School and Skyline High School located in Dallas, Texas. Emerald High School enrolls 740 students, Samuell High School enrolls 1,300, and Skyline High School, which includes the school system's career center, enrolls 4,000 students.

Survey questions included the following:

1. How long have you used the badges?
2. What are the advantages of this method?
3. What are the disadvantages?
4. What information is found on each identification badge?
6. Are you currently considering any future plans?

The surveys were conducted after school with either the principal or the individual responsible for making and administering the identification badges. Table 1 contains the results of the information gathered in each survey.

Results

Emerald High School

Chuck Graves, principal at Emerald High School, reported that identification badges are used for every individual who enters the building. This includes students, teachers, staff, visitors, and substitute teachers. Graves states that identification badges not only create a secure atmosphere within the school, but also create a sense of family. The school has used the badges for a year and will continue using them.

Each badge has the name of the individual who is wearing it, a picture of that person, and the name of the school. The badges are inexpensive to make and can be made at school.

Graves reported that the school has found several other uses for the badges. For example, each student identification badge contains a bar code which is used to buy lunch, check-out books, and is even used to award prizes as an incentive for wearing the badges. Emerald

High School is located at: 150 By-Pass 225, Greenwood, South Carolina, 29646.

Table 1
School Responses to Use of Identification Badges

	Emerald High	Samuell High	Skyline High
1. Length of time badges in use.	1 year	4 years	7 years
2. Advantages student	Secure atmosphere, sense of family, found other uses (bar code used for buying lunch, checking-out books)	Students feel more secure, teachers can easily identify grade levels by color of badge lunch period	Identify intruders, collaborate, found other uses (color of badge indicates if is in the right
3. Disadvantages	None reported students to remember	Difficult getting	Students lose badges
4. Information found on badges	Names, picture, school's name, bar code	Picture, signature color coded by grades	Name, picture, school name, color coded by lunch periods
5. Those required to wear badges	Students, teachers staff, visitors, and substitute teachers	Anyone who enters the building	Students, teachers, administration, staff, visitors, and substitute teachers
6. Future plans computer	Will continue to use	None reported	Would like to purchase

system to make badges faster

Samuell High School

Dwain Dawson is responsible for making and administering identification badges at Samuell High School. Dwain reported that the school has used the badge system for four years and has been extremely satisfied with the results. Everyone who enters the building is required to wear an identification badge. This method helps students and teachers know who belongs on campus and who does not. Furthermore, students report that they feel more secure with the badge system because they are able to identify outsiders who may be of potential harm.

The school uses a Polaroid camera which is designed for making the badges. A picture is taken and attached to the badge. After the badge is signed by the owner, it is laminated and a clip is attached. Student identification badges are color-coded according to grade level.

Dawson reported that, in the past, students have had difficulty remembering to wear their badges. Dawson, in response, developed an alternative placement classroom for students who have forgotten their badges. The students are required to remain in this classroom for the entire day and complete any assigned work. Dawson stated that this method has helped decrease the number of badges left at home. Samuell High School is located at: 8928 Palisade Drive, Dallas, Texas, 75217.

Skyline High School

Skyline High School contains 4,000 students and each students is issued an identification badge. Furthermore, teachers, administration, staff, substitute teachers, and visitors are all required to obtain and wear a badge. Nelda Curry, presently employed at Skyline, stated that the badges make it easy to identify those individuals who do or do not belong on campus.

Each badge contains the owner's name, a picture of that person, and the name of the school. They are color-coded according to lunch periods. This helps teachers and staff recognize those students who are in the wrong lunch period. Curry reported that although there have been difficulties with students losing the badges, the school is satisfied with this method and believes the effort is worth it.

When asked about any future plans, Curry reported that the school would like to purchase a computer system designed to make the badges at a much faster rate. However, the funds are not currently available to do so. Skyline is located at: 7777 Forney Road, Dallas, Texas, 75227.

Discussion

After examining the literature written thus far concerning identification badges, and the results of the surveys conducted with three high schools which currently use them, the following themes were found:

1. Identification badges help to create a safe atmosphere within the school. Individuals trespassing on the school grounds can quickly and easily be identified. Knowing this, students, teachers, and staff members feel a sense of security while at school.
2. Identification badges are inviting and create positive expectations of students. Although methods such as metal

detectors, security guards, and video cameras sometimes work, they create negative expectations of students. Eventually, students may begin to perceive themselves more as criminals than students, and behave accordingly. Schools must strive to use inviting methods for school security, such as identification badges. These methods convey the message that students are able, valuable, and responsible.

3. Identification badges are inexpensive in comparison with other methods. For example, a metal detector can cost up to \$4,000.00 and may require as many as three or four security guards to operate (Wilson & Zirkel, 1994). This is a large amount to pay considering that an identification badge costs a few dollars to produce, and even in large schools would be a fraction of the cost to purchase and operate a detector.
4. Identification badges help decrease discipline problems within the school. For example, Dwain Dawson, from Samuell High School, states students are less likely to start a fight knowing they can be easily and accurately identified.
5. Identification badges create a sense of family and school spirit. When an athletic team is formed, each player receives a number. Identification badges can be used as a way of creating a team atmosphere within the school. Schools may even decide to use school colors to promote this spirit.
6. Identification badges make it possible to address other students and teachers personally. Consider a school of about 800 students, such as Emerald High School. It would be impossible for school professionals to remember each student's name, and it is unlikely that students will learn those of teachers and staff. However, by wearing identification badges, each student and teacher, even within a large school can be addressed personally and made to feel welcomed.
7. Identification badges have several useful purposes. Badges may be used to check out books, to buy lunch, or can even be used to

award prizes throughout the year. Furthermore, schools may wish to color code their badges in order to recognize different groups. For example, to recognize students who are in a certain lunch period, or to recognize students in different grade levels.

Identification badges alone are not going to solve our schools problems with violence. However, according to schools where badges are currently in use, it is a step in the right direction. Such methods create inviting schools where students feel they are able, valuable, and responsible.

References

- Juhnke, G., & Purkey, W. (1995). An invitational approach to preventing violence in schools. *Counseling Today*, 37(8), 50-55.
- Roberts, K. L. (1992). Facing security concerns. *American School Board Journal*, 179, 40-41.
- Rosenthal R., & Jacobson, L. (1966). Teachers expectancies: Determinants of pupils IQ gains. *Psychological Reports*, 19 (1), 115-118.
- Trotter, A. (1992). ID badges for students, too. *The American School Board Journal*, 179, 40-41.
- White, L. E. (1994). *Violence in Schools: An overview* (Report No. CRS-94-141-EPW). Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 369 159)
- Wilson, J. M., & Zirkel, P. A. (1994). When guns come to school. *The American School Board Journal*, 181, 32-34.

Michelle C. Hart is a graduate student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Inquiries may be sent to UNC-Greensboro, School of Education, Greensboro, NC 27412.