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THE ECONOMY OF SAFETY POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS. CASE STUDY: INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ORADEA

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Abstract

“Prevention is always better than cure” is a concept that fits perfectly when it comes to safeguarding in schools. In the last few years, schools have been challenged deeply because of different incidents, especially after Coronavirus, with serious consequences. One regards the economical side of institutions. The present paper tries to show why it is a must to have a Safeguarding Policy in schools, and the case study reflects such documents in an international school in Romania: International School of Oradea.

Key words: *economy, safety, policy, implementation, school.*

INTRODUCTION

School safety is crucial for the well-being and success of students. In recent years many countries have started taking this issue even more seriously as the pandemic period displayed the importance of safety and wellbeing in the schools.

Ignoring safety measures can lead to serious consequences, both financially and emotionally. The economy of safety in school is no longer limited to financial investments and requires the schools to have strong communities working together to create a safe and secure environment which fosters learning and growth. Addressing these safety measures within a plan has many positive results which will be described in this paper.

I. A SYSTEM IN CRISIS

The current situation of school safety shows very high numbers in certain areas. In the United States of America in a study performed in 2019 22.2% of bullying incidents have been reported by 12-18-year-old students. (*Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2021*).

With the rapid development in the field of technology and mobile devices, cyberbullying is also another type of risk which is common in many schools. Bullying is not the only type of risk existing in the schools. The high crime rates and physical aspects need careful planning and organization of the resources.

To create a safe and secure learning environment all the aspects from playground injuries to bullying, all the safety elements need to be addressed to create a safe and secure learning environment.

One of the biggest benefits of investing in school safety therefore having a safe environment is the fact that a safe and secure school environment promotes better physical and mental health, leading to improved academic performance and overall success. As it enhances the performance and well-being of the students, students are more eager to be in the school and this results in them developing nicely. Regarding the economical development of the countries there is a 2010 study in which economists Eric Hanshek and Ludger Woessmann states “if the UK could halve 50 point gap with Finland on the international PISA student assessment, this could eventually boost the annual GDP growth rate by around 20 per cent. (*Hanushek and Woessmann, 2010*).

There is also a long-term financial benefit to investing in school safety. By investing in safety measures, schools can avoid the financial burden caused by accidents, such as medical expenses and lawsuits. Positive impact on school reputation is another result as schools with a strong commitment to safety build trust with parents, students, and the community, enhancing their reputation as an educational institution.

II. SECURE ENVIRONMENT, SAFE SCHOOL

To improve school safety first strategy would be the implementation of safety protocols and procedures addressing specific issues like playground expectations, school access policies, antibullying policies, health and safety policies.etc. Developing clear protocols and procedures that address potential hazards and emergencies ensures a proactive and efficient response to any safety situation.

Installing safety equipment, like surveillance cameras, secure entrances, and well-maintained facilities, creates a secure environment for students and staff. Here although the initial investment can be significant considering the long term benefits it is very important that all institutions take this into account. Utilizing advanced technology, such as smart security systems and real-time monitoring, strengthens school safety measures and enhances emergency preparedness.

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Besides having all these measures another essential factor is the collaboration among the stakeholders. It is very important that everybody working in school acknowledges their responsibility and there is a systemic approach to continuous training.

III. SAFETY MEASURES-BEST PRACTICE

International School of Oradea is a private institution, created in 2017, in the city of Oradea (in the North-West side of Romania, at the border with Hungary), by both Lumina Educational Institutions, the Municipality of Oradea and Oradea Local Development Agency. It is a non-profit school that offers two lines of education: a British Curriculum education (based on the National Curriculum of England), where the language of instruction is English and since the last three years, it is providing also a Romanian Curriculum education, with an intensive English programme, where the language of instruction is Romanian. At the moment there are almost 200 students learning in both sections, with ages between 2 and 12 years old. There are more than 30 teachers that work at International School of Oradea.

The values of International School of Oradea are “Learn, Respect, Succeed”, promoting a safe and supportive learning environment for each child, which nurtures a joy for learning, creativity and excellence in all fields of development, in direct connection with the local community, in order to develop in our students skills that will enable them to be in the near future independent, successful and respectful adults, giving back to the global society the things they were initially taught.

The school's mission and philosophy are based on democratic values such as truth, freedom, justice, human rights, the law and collective effort for the common good, stating that each school pupil and member of staff is a unique human being that is capable of growth and development, spiritual, moral, but also intellectual and physical. ISO celebrates and recognises achievement and believes that relationships are fundamental for all individuals' fulfilment. Families are the basis of a society in which people care for others, a sources of love and support for all their members, and they are essential to be involved in all the learning and pastoral sectors of our students' interests.

In order to accomplish all these, the ISO community needed to be organised and informed about the ways all community, together, build the school's objectives. A series of policies were written and created in order to prevent any situation or harm that can appear, and the process is still an on going one, evaluated and reedited annually. Everybody has access to some of ISO policies, even before registering to our school, which are published on the site of the school and that regards different sectors, such as teaching, learning, assessment and recording, positive behaviour, playtime, cookies, admissions, complaints, confidentiality.

At the International School of Oradea, through several policies such as the Health and Safety Policy and Safeguarding Policy the safety measures are implemented and made known to everyone involved in the activity of the school¹.

Regarding the safeguarding policy having the necessary checks before hiring new staff members, controlling access to the building and having strict rules such as staff members not being allowed to take photos of the students with their personal devices, or parents not being allowed to remain alone with any student unsupervised in the school premises are just some of the examples. All the CCTV cameras and collaboration with professional security companies also add an extra layer of security for the school community.

Other than these measure, the risk assessments are being made for any external school event and in acquisition of new school equipment such as playground items, their compliance for the children use are checked.

There is an active role named Health and Safety officer and this person is in charge for the regular maintenance of the site, planning and practice of regular drills for different emergency situations so the students are aware of the expectations and trained in this regard.

Although it is an essential factor, there can still be some challenges such as lack of funding and resources. Referring back to the safety in schools being a collaborative responsibility, the part of the governing bodies is to ensure that the schools allocate a significant part of their budget for the safety. Postponing any regular maintenance work might result in a bigger financial loss on a long term. Limited training or access to expertise might be another challenge for which the schools can collaborate with other schools to create some common resources or some online platforms might be referred as they are usually more cost effective.

If all these safety measures have not been considered from the beginning, when some new measures would like to be introduces there might be some resistance from different stakeholders. Therefore it is impotent, informing all the parties with the importance of these measures and offering training for them to raise awareness. Finally the procedures should be supported with strict policies to make sure everbody understands that it is not an optional matter. Other than this there is also an annual week which is celebrated as a Safety Week where the school collaborating with some of the parents organizes focused activities to improve the understanding of the students in different matters such as food safety, road safety etc.

The school regularly invests for different training and implementation procedures either through some online platforms or working directly with professional partners.

¹ www.isor.ro

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CONCLUSION

As a conclusion creating safe schools benefits students, schools and communities, leading to improved well-being, financial savings, and a positive reputation.

Therefore it is important for any community to prioritize school safety through a collective effort and the educational stakeholders to invest in resources, training and sustained commitment.

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