



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Dale M. Volker

School Bus Safety

DALE M. VOLKER

Teachers, parents, administrators and students agree that classrooms should be safe havens, free of violence and fear. But far too often, they can resemble battlegrounds, where a small number of students seek to disrupt the learning environment with chaos and violence.

In the past decade, 14,000 school teachers and staff were victimized in New York classrooms, and thousands were so badly hurt that they were forced to miss work. In addition to preparing their lesson plans, grading papers and delivering lectures, teachers shouldn't have to worry about their own safety in the classroom.

Earlier this year, my colleagues and I in the Senate Majority announced a series of statewide public hearings to call attention to the growing problem of assaults on public school teachers. We also took steps to help restore order in the classroom by approving legislation that would make it a felony to attack a teacher or staff member on school grounds -- an initiative which had the support of major teachers' unions throughout the state.

That is why I am pleased to announce that New York State will enact a comprehensive plan to promote a safer and more effective learning environment within New York's schools. The legislative package reflected in the school violence prevention bill and additional legislation requiring fingerprints and background checks for prospective school employees,

includes the following initiatives:

- * Clarifies teachers' authority to remove disruptive students from the classroom; * Makes assaults on teachers or teachers' assaults on students a felony; * Incorporates civility, citizenship and character education throughout the K-12 curriculum;
- * Requires all school districts to create a comprehensive school safety plan; * Establishes new violence prevention programs, defines child abuse in an educational setting;
- * Ends the practice of silent resignations;
- * Requires court notification of student adjudications and convictions; and * Establishes whistle-blower protection for school employees who report acts of violence.

Children can only learn in an environment free from fear -- and teachers deserve to have peace of mind while in their classrooms and have the authority to remove disruptive students. This is a common sense approach to ensuring that unruly students are dealt with directly before violence occurs and gives teachers an added sense of confidence in their own safety and their ability to control classroom order.