



## The Problem

*When the lights go on in their eyes educators come closer to the goals of safer schools, better learning, and a changed future for these young people.*

## Identifying Hard-To-Serve Students

While this is a book about programs, the real point of it all is the students these programs are designed to serve. These young people can be extremely challenging, but meeting the challenge can be incredibly rewarding. When the lights go on in their eyes educators come closer to the goals of safer schools, better learning, and a changed future for these young people.

Schools are supposed to be safe, secure, and respectful learning environments. There was a time when the height of misbehavior was knocking Mr. Chips' hat off.

In North American schools in the year 2000, students were the victims of over 1.9 million crimes of violence or theft and over 128,000 serious offences such as rape, robbery, or aggravated assault. Between 1998 and 1999, there were 47 school-associated violent deaths including 38 homicides, and since then the prevalence of school-based crime has increased.<sup>3</sup> Even if tragedy has not struck in a school there is no reason for complacency.

What are educators to do with students who pose a threat? In the annual Gallup poll on public schools, 92 percent of respondents favored removing troublemakers if that would maintain order.<sup>4</sup> They are not wanted in schools but where are they to go? A course that leads to juvenile detention centers and later to prisons is not desirable.

Students who are at risk of engaging in violence often exhibit behavior that can alert teachers and parents to the potential danger. In the wake of Columbine and similar tragedies, educators cannot afford to ignore these signs, which may include:

- victimization or injustice
- bullying or inflicting violence
- fascination with weapons
- an appetite for violence - e.g., violent media
- destruction of property, especially fire setting
- cruelty to animals
- social isolation
- recent loss
- symptoms of depression
- truancy, poor academic performance
- conflict with various forms of authority
- conduct disorders
- failing to acknowledge or recognize the feelings or rights of others
- increased use of drugs or alcohol
- making verbal or other threats.<sup>5</sup>