

## Frank DeAngelis

Principal Columbine High School 1996-2014, Motivational Speaker & School Security Consultant  
12650 W. 64th Ave. Unit E #265  
Arvada, CO 80004  
(303) 885-0750  
frankdeangelis1@yahoo.com

I recently had an opportunity to present at the Family and Community Engagement Conference in Boise. It was a memorable event. I'd like to share some of my experiences from Columbine and my reflections on the safety investment proposed for Idaho schools.

If someone had said to me years ago that something horrific would happen at Columbine, I would have said: "No, no way, not in *this* community." An impressive 92% of our kids graduated on time and over 88% went on to college, with 25% of the student body getting some type of a scholarship. It was a community of pride and tradition. There was a lot of parental support; it was and still is a highly respected school. I thought – we all thought – that the unthinkable could not happen *here*. When I describe our community the reaction often is: "Frank, your community is just like ours!" I tell them that no one is immune. I state, "On Any Given Day!"

Some background about me. I started my career at Columbine High School in the fall of 1979. I was hired to teach social studies and I was the assistant football coach and head baseball coach and Senate sponsor. I went on to serve as the dean of students, an assistant principal, and then, in 1996, I was hired as the principal of the wonderful high school. It was a dream job.

On April 20, 1999, and I was completing my third year as principal and my 20th year at Columbine High School. It was a beautiful Colorado spring day – about 70 degrees, sunny with blue skies.

At 11:20 a.m. my secretary ran into my office and screamed that there is a report of gunfire in the hallway and bombs exploding. My first response was that this had to be a senior prank, this cannot be occurring at this wonderful school. I encountered the gunmen, who were firing their weapons toward me as I ran down the hallway to protect some female students who were unaware of the circumstances. I realized that "Any Given Day" had become a reality.

Twelve of my beloved students and my dear friend, Dave, lost their lives. Twenty-six additional students were injured. I was witnessing the unthinkable. The lives of the members of the Columbine School Community changed forever when the first shots were fired. People to this day ask me: "When did it get back to normal?" I tell them we had to redefine normal. I told the nation that I became of member of a club that no one wanted to join.

I made a promise on the evening of April 20, 1999. There is nothing I can do to bring back my Beloved 13 but I would do everything in my power to not allow them to "die in vain." After the tragedy at Columbine, I would reach out to communities who experienced the "unthinkable."

Once I retired in 2014, I traveled to do presentations throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. I am encouraged by what safety precautions are being implemented since the Columbine Tragedy. There have been lessons learned and what encourages me is people are coming together to come up with plan to keep our students safe.

One of my most memorable trips was my trip Boise, Idaho. It was inspirational to meet people who attended that were there on behalf of our children. It was an honor to hear Superintendent Sherri Ybarra speak and to have a private conversation with her. Her passion for her job and for her community radiated during our conversation. She shared why she is launching a multi-pronged school safety initiative dubbed KISS: Keep Idaho Students Safe, this is what I learned from our conversation. "In this time of increased violence and debates about school safety, it's important to join together with resolve and ideas to help Idaho students, educators and families feel – and be – safe. No single strategy or program is the answer, so KISS will add a toolbox of new measures to existing approaches that are already having an impact, from a new safety course for teachers to programs for preventing bullying and teen suicide."

As I did more research, I was impressed with how Superintendent Sherri Ybarra's initiative helps students thrive by addressing local safety and security concerns and equipping school personnel with a toolkit for student safety, all the while respecting local control. Supported by five elements, KISS addresses Idaho's current partitioned approach and elevates school safety and security into a coordinated statewide partnership between local school districts and public charter schools, the State Department of Education, other state agencies and community stakeholders.

During my presentations across the nation, I stress many of the points that comprise the initiative. It was refreshing to see what Superintendent Ybarra is doing to protect the students of Idaho. There is a Nigerian Proverb “It **takes** a whole **village** to raise a child.” Superintendent Ybarra’s initiative epitomizes the statement.

I support this approach and look forward to working with Sherri. As I state on numerous occasions, they are all of our children; another life lost is one too many!