PS for 8/25/88#SCHOOL ISN'T SAFE IN NEW YORK CITY

The New York City school system has announced that it is taking strenuous measures to cope with one of its biggest problems. No, it's not illiteracy or pregnancies or dropouts. It is the dramatic rise in violence in and around the schools.

School Chancellor Richard R. Green said that during May the lack of safety in and around the schools became ""a serious concern for every New Yorker.'' In one week, he reported, there were five assaults on teachers that resulted in serious injuries; one man lost an eye, another man's face was permanently scarred, and a woman lost partial use of her hand.

Dr. Green and Mayor Edward Koch have proposed some rigorous security measures to deal with this problem. These million dollar measures include installing silent buzzers called ""panic buttons'' in classrooms, along with metal detectors and electronically locked doors at school entrances.

Koch is taking a hard line. He urges that students who assault school employees be expelled and that the punishment for assaulting a teacher be upgraded from a misdemeanor to a felony.

Dr. Green has just issued a 55-page report on his first 100 days in office. He is obviously making a conscientious effort to upgrade the New York City schools.

One of his major points is that ""children, parents, teachers and principals cannot continue to associate violence and a drug filled environment with their educational experience. ... We must guarantee that our schools are safe, clean and orderly places where every child has the right to learn; every teacher the right to teach; every principal the right to lead; and every parent the right to expect high quality education.''

The mere fact that the chief of the New York City schools feels

compelled to state such self-evident truths shows what has happened to public schools over the last decade. No one would have believed it if, 25 years ago, someone had predicted that the chancellor would be making a major point of saying such things.

Dr. Green called an impromptu ""educational summit'' the first week of June at which police, school and city officials discussed the problem. The same week, a Bronx elementary school teacher was shot in the leg, and an intermediate school teacher coaching an intramural softball game was beaten severely with a baseball bat.

A few days earlier, another teacher was stabbed and robbed in the bathroom of a Bronx high school. Some of these attacks are thought to have been committed by nonstudents, but they were on school premises.

The New York Civil Liberties Union is more upset about metal detectors than about stabbings in schools. It has offered legal help to parents who may want to challenge the use of metal detectors as a violation of ""students' civil rights.''

Executive director Norma Siegel said he is ""bothered'' by the notion of metal detectors because ""Students shouldn't have to run the gauntlet of school check points to get an education.'' Parents and teachers are more upset about the weapons carried into schools, especially after the chairman of a new York City school safety committee reported that students had been seen carrying .357 magnums, sawed-off shotguns, and even Uzi machine guns to school.

Siegel's statement sounds like the objections that were raised when the airlines installed metal detectors several years ago after a rash of skyjackings. Many people thought it was a personal indignity to have to queue up to be herded through privacy-invading security measures.

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of Americans have accepted such things as having their purses, packages and pockets rummaged through

by strangers. It's worth it to ride safely on airplanes without terrorists threatening our lives and safety.

Sandra Feldman, president of the United Federation of Teachers, probably articulated the sentiments of most when she said, ""Schools where people are living in fear cannot be a good learning environment.''

On July 7, a committee of the New York Senate announced that it was giving the New York City Board of Education a ""failing grade'' in recruiting and retaining teachers. It reported that more than 5,000 teachers left the city school system in 1986, and an estimated 50 percent of all beginning teachers leave in their first three years.

Can't say I really blame them.