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NEWS RELEASE

COLUMBINE-LIKE MASSACRE NEEDN'T HAPPEN AGAIN, SAYS TOP PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCHER SLATED TO SPEAK AT UD

DAYTON, Ohio — By rough estimate, about 20 percent of the nation's teachers are using at least some of the techniques put forth by one of the country's top social psychology researchers to scale back the typical hyper-charged atmosphere that characterized Columbine High School before two students killed 13 in a rampage.

"It's a problem that we must start taking seriously," said Elliot Aronson, a visiting professor of psychology at Stanford University and professor emeritus of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "A great many kids are victimized by a social atmosphere that is characterized by taunting, rejection and humiliation. Although some parents feel that 'It's just high school,' they tend to forget that, for most kids, high school is the major part of their lives. And a great many teen-agers are being subjected to experiences that, as adults, we would not tolerate if they occurred in our work place."

Aronson will talk about "Might the Columbine Massacre Have Been Prevented? You Bet Your Life!" at 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 3, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom at the University of Dayton as part of the Distinguished Speakers Series. Admission is free and open to the public.

In the wake of school shootings, some administrators blindly instituted measures they thought might be effective. Some posted the Ten Commandments, others insisted on "sir-and-ma'am" manners. Some encouraged students to be on the lookout for fellow classmates who were isolated or volatile and to report them to authorities.

Wrong, Aronson said.

"By asking the 'normal' students to point out the 'strange' ones, ... the high school principal is unwittingly making a bad situation worse by implicitly sanctioning the rejection and exclusion of a sizable group of students whose only sin is unpopularity. By doing this, he is making the life of the unpopular students even more hellish," he wrote in *Nobody Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion After Columbine* (Worth Publishers, 2000).

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He calls the book "the result of 40 years of my thinking and scientific research aimed at trying to understand the intricacies of humans interacting with one another."

Aronson, who received the "Nobel Prize of psychology," the American Psychological Association's 1998-99 Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award for his lifetime of research, has developed and promotes a system of cooperative learning that forces students to recognize the contributions others can make. He calls it the "jigsaw classroom," and he deliberately left it in the public domain so others could adopt the methods.

"The key element is that the structure makes it necessary for kids to work together in a cooperative manner where they must pay attention to one another and learn from one another if they are going to do well on the upcoming exam," he said. "The jigsaw method gets kids pulling together, like a smoothly functioning basketball team, rather than pulling against each other.

"The key result is that students gain more empathy and compassion for one another, like each other more, enjoy school more and do better on objective exams than students learning the same material by more traditional, more competitive means."

The system works well in elementary schools, but it can be incorporated with success for older students, too, Aronson said.

"The results of our work are so powerful that I firmly believe that if the jigsaw method had been used in Columbine High School, or better still, in the elementary schools that fed into Columbine High School, the 13 people who were killed in that massacre might well be alive today," he said.

The notion that competition, rather than cooperation, is at the center of American life is outdated, Aronson said. "Although some in this country still believe that extreme competitiveness is the royal road to success, the fact is that that is an anachronism. Extreme competitiveness is a 19th-century model. In the business world as well as in the scientific world, we are looking for people who know how to work in teams.

"Although it may be important to learn to compete, it is at least as important to learn to cooperate, to work together, to take pleasure in a teammate's stellar performance. The world is changing rapidly."