] JUSTICE BLACKMUN, concurring in the judgment.

I join the judgment of the Court and agree with much that is said in its opinion. I write separately, however, because I believe the Court omits a crucial step in its analysis of whether a school search must be based upon probable cause. The Court correctly states that we have recognized limited exceptions to the probable-cause requirement "[where] a careful balancing of governmental and private interests suggests that the public interest is best served" by a lesser standard. Ante, at 341. I believe that we have used such a balancing test, rather than strictly applying the Fourth Amendment's Warrant and Probable-Cause Clause, only when we were confronted with "a special law enforcement need for greater flexibility." Florida v. Royer, 460 U.S. 491, 514[**748] (1983) (BLACKMUN, J., dissenting). I pointed out in United States v. Place, 462 U.S. 696 (1983):

> "While the Fourth Amendment speaks in terms of freedom from unreasonable[searches], the Amendment does not leave the reasonableness of most [searches]to the judgment of courts or government officers; the [***47] Framers of the Amendment balanced the interests involved and decided that a [search] is reasonable only if supported by a judicial warrant based on probable cause. See Texas v. Brown, 460 U.S. 730, 744-745 (1983) (POWELL, J., concurring); United States v. Rabinowitz, 339 U.S. 56, 70 (1950) (Frankfurter, J., dissenting)." Id., at 722 (opinion concurring in judgment).

See also Dunaway v. New York, 442 U.S. 200, 213-214 (1979); United States v. United States District Court, 407 U.S. 297, 315-316 (1972). Only in those exceptional circumstances in which special needs, beyond the normal need for law enforcement, make the warrant and probable-cause requirement impracticable, is a court entitled to substitute its balancing of interests for that of the Framers.

[*352] Thus, for example, in determining that police can conduct a limited "stop and frisk" upon less than probable cause, this Court relied upon the fact that "as a practical matter" the stop and frisk could not be subjected to a warrant and probable-cause requirement, because a law enforcement officer must be able to take immediate [***48] steps to assure himself that the person he has stopped to question is not armed with a weapon that could be used against him. Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1, 20-21, 23-24 (1968). Similarly, this Court's holding that a roving Border Patrol may stop a car and briefly question its occupants upon less than probable cause was based in part upon "the absence of practical alternatives for policing the border." United States v. Brignoni-Ponce, 422 U.S. 873, 881 (1975). See also Michigan v. Long, 463 U.S. 1032, 1049, n. 14 (1983); United States v. Martinez-Fuerte, 428 U.S. 543, 557 (1976); Camara v. Municipal Court, 387 U.S. 523, 537 (1967).

The Court's implication that the balancing test is the rule rather than the exception is troubling for me because it is unnecessary in this case. The elementary and secondary school setting presents a special need for flexibility justifying a departure from the balance struck by the Framers. As JUSTICEPOWELL notes, "[without] first establishing

discipline and maintaining order, teachers cannot begin to educate their students." [***49] Ante, at 350.Maintaining order in the classroom can be a difficult task. A single teacher often must watch over a large number of students, and, as any parent knows, children at certain ages are inclined to test the outer boundaries of acceptable conduct and to imitate the misbehavior of a peer if that misbehavior is not dealt with quickly. Every adult remembers from his own schooldays the havoc a water pistol or peashooter can wreak until it is taken away. Thus, the Court has recognized that "[events] calling for discipline are frequent occurrences and sometimes require immediate, effective action." Goss v. Lopez, 419 U.S. 565,580 (1975). Indeed, because drug use and possession of weapons have become increasingly common [*353] among young people, an immediate response frequently is required not just to maintain an environment conducive to learning, but to protect the very safety of students and school personnel.

Such immediate action obviously would not be possible if a teacher were required to secure a warrant before searching a student. Nor would it be possible if a [**749] teacher could not conduct a necessary search until the teacher [***50] thought there was probable cause for the search. A teacher has neither the training nor the day-to-day experience in the complexities of probable cause that a law enforcement officer possesses, and is ill-equipped to make a quick judgment about the existence of probable cause. The time requiredfor a teacher to ask the questions or make the observations that are necessary to turn reasonable grounds into probable cause is time during which the teacher, and other students, are diverted from the essential task of education. A teacher's focus is, and should be, on teaching and helping students, rather than on developing evidence against a particular troublemaker.

Education "is perhaps the most important function" of government, Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483, 493 (1954), and government has a heightened need for an immediate response to behavior that threatens either the safety o schoolchildren and teachers or the educational process itself justifies the Court in excepting school searches from the warrant and probable-cause requirement, and in applying a standard determined [***51] by balancing the relevant interests. I agree with the standard the Court has announced, and with its application of the standard to the facts of this case. I therefore concur in its judgment.