

Violence Prevention

Snapshots from the Safe Schools/ Healthy Students Initiative



Violence Prevention: Snapshots from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

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Introduction

Safe, nonviolent school environments are essential to learning. Schools without violence help students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally; allow teachers to focus on teaching; and free up administrators to run schools effectively. In the same vein, nonviolent neighborhoods support achievement by helping students feel safe on their way to and from school and in their communities.

School-based programs that focus on preventing violence, substance abuse, and mental illness contribute to student success.¹ Reducing school violence results in increased student attendance and lower dropout rates, which in turn lead to increases in achievement, reductions in grade repeating^{2, 3, 4, 5} and increased future college attendance.⁶

School violence not only makes students and staff feel unsafe, but it also undermines the academic mission of schools. Devoting resources to maintaining order in schools with serious violence and discipline problems takes time, energy, and money away from education.⁹ Administrators, teachers, and staff play a critical role in preventing violence and fostering safe, supportive school environments.

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power against another person, group, or community, that is likely to cause physical or psychological harm.⁷ **School violence** is youth violence that occurs on school property, during a school-sponsored event, or on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events. A young person can be a victim, a perpetrator, or a witness of school violence.

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention⁸

Characteristics and Consequences of School Violence

While the majority of our nation's schools are relatively safe, violent acts occur on and around school campuses, including bullying, dating violence, physical and sexual assault, gang activity, gun violence, and hate-motivated violence. Violence in schools comes both from within, perpetrated by students on peers and staff, and from the outside, perpetrated by those who are not members of the school community. Violence can move from the community into schools or from schools into the surrounding community.

Data show school violence is a pervasive issue in the United States. In the 2009–2010 school year, 74 percent of public schools recorded at least one violent incident on campus, 16 percent reported gang activities on campus, and 23 percent reported daily or weekly bullying among students. In 2009, approximately 11 percent of students admitted to fighting on school grounds in the previous year, with ninth graders fighting more than students in any other grade.¹⁰

Violence in schools can be ongoing, such as systematic bullying and gang activity, or a one-time event, such as a physical or sexual assault. While male and female students are equally likely to be *victims* of school violence,¹¹ males are much more likely than females to *commit* violence.¹²

Rates and types of violence and victimization differ among age groups as well. More middle school students than high school students report being bullied at school, while high school students report more gang presence on their campuses.¹³ Contrary to what many believe, the overall incidence of violence is highest in middle schools, and middle school students are the most frequent targets of violent behavior.¹⁴ Violence prevention programming that begins in high school, therefore, may be too late to prevent and mitigate much of the school violence problem.

Although high-profile violent school events such as school shootings can make it seem like these extreme events are common, school violence-related deaths are exceedingly rare, representing less than two percent of all youth homicides.¹⁵

In addition to physical harm, students who are victims of school violence can suffer emotional consequences, including loneliness, depression, and adjustment difficulties, and are more likely to exhibit their own violent behaviors.^{16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21} Many youth who are victimized by violence also experience academic consequences, such as being more prone to truancy,²² poor academic performance,^{23, 24} and dropping out of school.^{25, 26} Additionally, any instance of violence at school not only affects the individuals involved (victims and perpetrators), but can also disrupt the educational process and affect bystanders, the school, and the surrounding community.²⁷

Experiences of school violence are not confined to students. Approximately 7 percent of teachers report they have been threatened or physically attacked by a student from their school.²⁸ In addition to experiencing the physical and psychological consequences of violence, teachers who are victimized may feel disillusioned, and many leave teaching altogether.^{29, 30}

It is important to note that no one risk factor, including mental illness, can be blamed for school violence. According to the Institute of Medicine, "Although studies suggest a link between mental illnesses and violence, the contribution of people with mental illnesses to overall rates of violence is small, and further, the magnitude of the relationship is greatly exaggerated in the minds of the general population."³³

While there is no way to predict with certainty which students will commit violence in school, individual, family, social, and community risk factors may influence students' behavior. Effective violence prevention programs seek to reduce risk factors (e.g., exposure to violence, poor academic performance, substance abuse, limited family involvement, association with delinquent peers, and living in dangerous or impoverished communities), increase protective factors (e.g., having a healthy sense of self, strong problem-solving skills, warm and supportive family relationships, positive peer relationships, and living in economically stable environments),^{31, 32} and create an environment that promotes nonviolence.



Safe Schools/Healthy Students and Violence Prevention

The federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative addresses underlying factors that contribute to school violence, student substance abuse and mental health problems, school failure, school dropout, truancy, and suspension and expulsion. The National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention (the National Center) provides training and technical assistance to SS/HS communities as they form partnerships to assess school and community needs and resources, implement and adapt evidence-based interventions, evaluate their efforts, and ensure sustainability.

The SS/HS Initiative exemplifies how schools and communities can address violence prevention by applying a public health approach, which acknowledges that violence is much more than a juvenile justice problem to be handled by police, courts, and detention facilities. Instead, **SS/HS grantees form strong, districtwide partnerships that work together to assess school and community needs and build community commitment to addressing violence.** Grantees select, adapt, and implement age-appropriate, evidence-based violence prevention programs and interventions that both build positive, nonviolent school environments and address the needs of students at risk of becoming violent or disruptive.

Data show that the work of SS/HS sites in violence prevention has a positive effect. Since implementing their SS/HS initiatives, grantees have reported the following:

- A 17 percent decrease in violent incidents in schools
- An 11 percent decrease in the number of students who report experiencing violence at school (usually in the form of physical fights)³⁴
- 90 percent of school staff stating SS/HS improved schools safety
- 90 percent of staff reporting less violence on school campuses as a result of SS/HS
- 80 percent of staff reporting SS/HS reduced community violence³⁵

To better understand the factors that contribute to these positive outcomes, the National Center conducted interviews with 11 SS/HS grantee sites, from fiscal years (FY) 2006–2009, who implemented effective approaches to school violence prevention. This Snapshot explores the experiences of the grantees interviewed and presents best practices for school violence prevention efforts.



Guiding Principles for Effective School Violence Prevention

Each of the 11 SS/HS sites interviewed implemented violence prevention approaches and evidence-based interventions (EBIs) that were appropriate for their schools' unique violence-related problems and that built on the culture and strengths of their community. School violence prevention efforts are most effective when implemented as long-term approaches aimed at achieving lasting results. While each site's specific approach to violence prevention was different, many shared key strategies that led to successful outcomes.

Strategy 1: Employing a Multifaceted, Comprehensive Prevention Approach. Just as there is no one single risk factor to determine who will commit school violence,³⁶ there is no one-size-fits-all approach to preventing school violence. Rather, schools need to employ a range of strategies to address the many causes and types of school violence. Comprehensive programs build skills and knowledge among students, while also striving to change both the school- and community-level factors that can influence student behavior. **SS/HS grantees engaged broad-based support from teachers, administrators, parents, youth, and community members to identify and address the individual, interpersonal, and community factors that contributed to school violence.**^{37,38} They also focused on preventing violence before it started by creating a safe, supportive school environment for all students and staff (*universal prevention*), while at the same time building students' skills in anger management and conflict resolution, building positive relationships for youth who were at risk for engaging in violence (*selective prevention*), and providing mental health counseling and diversion programs for students who had already engaged in aggressive or violent behavior (*indicated prevention*).³⁹

Assessing school safety and preparing for crisis response

While not all violent situations can be avoided, schools can take important steps to increase safety on and around school grounds. A thorough safety assessment can reveal how to alter the physical environment to improve school safety (e.g., improving lighting, increasing signage, limiting and monitoring entrances and exits). In addition, safety assessments can help identify potential threats before they escalate.

When violent events do happen, schools that are prepared can respond effectively to reduce further harm and address the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of affected students. Establishing a crisis intervention team with representatives from schools and local law enforcement and conducting ongoing staff training can ensure maximum effectiveness if a violent incident occurs. Detailed safety plans and protocols for responding to a range of potential violent situations include provisions for delivering crisis intervention services, such as mental health counseling and evacuation and notification procedures.

Strategy 2: Selecting and Adapting Appropriate Evidence-Based Interventions. Many EBIs address violence prevention in and around schools. Some focus on promoting an overall positive school climate by establishing supportive school norms, fostering resiliency, and promoting healthy communication between students and adults. While these programs may not directly target violence, they aim to increase prosocial skills that may, in

turn, lead to decreases in aggressive and violent behavior.⁴⁰ Other EBIs emphasize strengthening protective factors against violence, such as problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Finally, some EBIs focus specifically on students at higher risk of committing violence, helping them manage anger and reduce aggressive behavior.

To effectively implement violence prevention EBIs, schools should use data to identify the specific nature of the violence problem in their school and surrounding community, and determine available resources to address these issues. They can then select and adapt the EBIs that best address the identified needs, while taking into account the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the populations they serve. (The Glossary describes the EBIs and promising practices used in violence prevention by the sites featured in this Snapshot.)

Restorative Practices

Originating from the American Indian and Alaskan Native cultures, Restorative Practices (also known as Restorative Justice) seek to repair the damage for individuals who have been harmed, those who have committed the harm, and the surrounding community members who may also have been affected. This approach may include victim-offender mediation, family group conferencing, and talking circles, which give everyone affected by the harm a voice to help repair the damage done. Restorative Practices provide the person who caused the harm an opportunity to make peace with the victim and surrounding community.⁴¹ The approach not only repairs relationships, but it reduces violence, crime, and bullying.⁴²

Strategy 3: Leveraging Partnerships. Whether it happens in the schools or in the surrounding community, violence has a profound impact on students. Having the right partners at the table, including mental health, juvenile justice, law enforcement, and other youth-serving agencies is essential to a comprehensive approach to violence prevention. These **partnerships can strengthen a school's ability to identify at-risk students as well as trends in violent behaviors in the community that could impact students and schools.** Well-suited partners can help provide prevention programming and a referral system for students who need more intensive services, such as mental health support, substance abuse treatment, or diversion programming.

Strategy 4: Raising Community Awareness and Gaining Community Support. Many communities raise public awareness about school violence as a precursor to implementing violence prevention initiatives. High visibility events, such as kick-off celebrations sponsored by partners, can bring attention to the issues affecting the community and serve as a platform for highlighting nonviolence messages. They can also send the message that violence prevention work in schools must be supplemented by work within the community.

At many SS/HS sites, large events sparked the formation of expanded partnerships and engaged a wider range of concerned community members, including parents. Getting community buy-in establishes a collective sense of responsibility for addressing violence that affects students, their families, and community members. SS/HS sites work closely with community partners to develop a common language and joint approach to addressing violence prevention, while tailoring community solutions to address violence. **By meaningfully engaging community members, school violence prevention initiatives can benefit from the power of collective impact,**

No two schools are exactly alike, so it is impossible to establish one plan that will work well in all schools. Violence prevention programs work best when they incorporate multiple strategies and address the full range of possible acts of violence in schools. For any set of policies to work, it must be established and implemented with the full participation and support of school board members, administrators, parents, students, community members, emergency response personnel, and law enforcement. Without such shared responsibility, the chances of safe school policies being successfully implemented and accepted are low.⁴³

—Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice

building on the strengths and resources of multiple community players, and paving the way for lasting programs that benefit communities for the long term.

Some SS/HS sites implemented broad-based educational campaigns to develop a brand for the district's violence prevention efforts, providing a platform for sharing information and garnering support for their efforts. Social media campaigns also helped change students' perceptions about what types of behaviors are acceptable and encouraged positive behavioral norms among students, staff, and the community.

Strategy 5: Engaging Youth as Partners. Youth can be instrumental in developing creative solutions to addressing school violence in ways that resonate with their peers. Many SS/HS sites engage youth as active participants in violence prevention planning and implementation.

Youth who have a leadership role in prevention programming and messaging increase their individual commitment to violence prevention. Moreover, **student leadership and volunteer opportunities can build important protective factors against committing violence, such as problem-solving skills, experience working collaboratively, and a sense of empowerment and responsibility.** Building on their strengths and interests, participation in violence prevention programming can build students' confidence and enable them to see that they have an important role to play. Finally, many violence prevention programs, such as mentorship opportunities, provide positive role models for youth and help them establish positive relationships with adults.

Case Examples

The pages that follow illustrate how the 11 SS/HS sites implemented innovative and sustainable approaches to violence prevention in their schools and communities. In many cases, the work started during these initiatives has been sustained well beyond SS/HS grant funding to create enduring change.

This Snapshot is part of a series.

To learn more about SS/HS work related to bullying, see:

<http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/publications/best-practices/bullying-prevention-and-intervention>

To learn more about SS/HS work related to Law Enforcement, see:

<http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/publications/best-practices/law-enforcement>

Adams 12 Five Star Schools—Thornton, Colorado (FY 2007)

Under the SS/HS grant, the Adams 12 Five Star Schools, also known as the Adams County Youth Initiative (ACYI), implemented a countywide plan for crisis response and threat assessment in collaboration with the county's school districts and local law enforcement. In addition to the crisis response plan, ACYI implemented programs to address issues of bullying, gangs, and juvenile crime.

Threat Assessment and Crisis Response. Safety plans prior to SS/HS varied greatly from school to school and did not reflect a partnership between the schools and local law enforcement. ACYI created the Crisis Response Planning Committee, bringing together representatives from each school district, local law enforcement agencies, and emergency management staff to create a unified crisis response plan for all schools throughout the county.

A critical component of ACYI's crisis response plan involved ensuring that school staff, the community, and families understood their roles in emergencies. Principals and school staff engaged in regular crisis response training, thereby increasing staff's familiarity and comfort level with emergency protocols. Schools also requested that families update their emergency contact information and reminded them of the appropriate course of action during an emergency.

ACYI's new crisis response plan was put to the test when a gun was found in a classroom in Adams City High School. Police officers and district personnel quickly responded, communicating and collaborating as outlined in the crisis response plan. This joint response ensured the safety of staff and students, while assigned personnel efficiently assessed the nature of the threat.

Establishing Common Vision. According to SS/HS Project Director Becky Hoffman, "The best way to mobilize a community is to be clear on your vision, be clear about the problem, and be clear about the plan. If you can combine those factors with the right people and the right timing, you will be able to successfully prevent youth violence."

Making sure that you have a common agenda, that everybody is on the same page about what safety and violence prevention look like as a community, is first and foremost.

—Becky Hoffman, SS/HS project director

With so many partners involved, coming to consensus on a common vision and agenda was a challenging yet necessary part of ACYI's

approach. **ACYI emphasized the importance of using data to drive decisions and making sure that both senior leadership and frontline staff were involved in discussions regarding the county's approach to violence prevention.**

Implementing Prevention Programs. ACYI worked closely with partners to ensure that programs serving youth in the community were data-driven. ACYI offered technical assistance to the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC), helping them to evaluate program effectiveness and to use data to inform resource allocation. ACYI funded a gang prevention program at the JAC to prevent the siblings of gang members from entering gangs.

In partnership with local law enforcement, ACYI also implemented a summer camp for youth in areas with high juvenile crime rates. The summer camp helped prevent summer learning loss and provided at-risk students with safe, structured activities during out-of-school months to prevent youth violence. Working with school resource officers, who provided in-kind security and support to the camp during the summer months, ACYI mobilized existing resources to make this program possible.

From 2005 to 2013, juvenile crime rates in Adams County dropped by 44 percent, with very violent crime and repeat juvenile offenses dropping by 92 percent.

Albemarle County Public Schools—Charlottesville, Virginia (FY 2009)

The Albemarle County Public School's SS/HS Initiative, known as the Albemarle/Charlottesville Project (ACP), strove to create a positive school climate through universal, prosocial interventions, while also leveraging partnerships and community resources to address emerging violence issues.

Improving School Climate by Addressing Prevention at the Universal Level. ACP worked to improve school climate by first reviewing data from schools and the community on the most prevalent types of youth violence in the community, including bullying, gang violence, and dating violence. As SS/HS Project Director June Jenkins explains, "We're addressing these issues by making changes in the overall school climate, rather than addressing one issue at a time. **Any time we can increase protective factors for kids, we are helping them be more resilient, and that means that we're going to prevent violence.**"

The evidence-based interventions ACP implemented—**Responsive Classroom,* Developmental Designs, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program,** and **Restorative Practices**—fostered positive behaviors and relationships, built student resiliency and problem-solving skills, and encouraged open communication between students and staff to problem solve and resolve classroom conflicts. In ACP's 2012 Elementary School Climate Survey, 91.2 percent of students agreed that there was an adult in the school whom they could go to for help if they had a problem. In addition, between 2009 and 2012, the number of students in grades 6–12 involved in a physical fight at school dropped 34.3 percent.

Creating Shared Ownership to Address Gang Violence. While promoting a positive overall school climate, ACP nimbly addressed urgent, emerging issues. When several high school students were involved in gang activity, **ACP held a forum to bring attention to the issue, encourage dialog, and heighten a sense of urgency.**

Through established partnerships, ACP brought the right partners to the table to discuss gang activity as a community issue and created a sense of shared responsibility. SS/HS Project Coordinator Lois Wallenhorst explains, "Having a group of partners in the discussion where they all had a stake in the issue allowed defenses to come down."

Strengthening Partnerships. The forum served as a catalyst for further action. ACP participated in an advisory group—Gang Reduction Through Active Community Engagement (GRACE)—of approximately 20 agencies, including law enforcement, city government, and other local youth-serving agencies.

Working closely with law enforcement, GRACE conducted a needs assessment to identify areas of high gang activity and learned that both local and national gangs were present and actively recruiting.

Armed with this knowledge, ACP developed teacher and parent resources to identify warning signs of youth gang involvement, added several gang-related questions to its School Climate Survey, and planned to formalize prevention and intervention strategies for youth at risk for gang involvement. **By uniting law enforcement's strengths in intelligence gathering and enforcement with SS/HS's expertise in education and prevention, the community developed and implemented a successful gang prevention strategy.**

Like the criminal acts they commit, criminal street gangs know no boundaries. It is, therefore, critical that we approach dealing with such activity from a regional perspective that involves not only law enforcement, but our schools, churches, non-profits, civic groups, local governing bodies, parents, and a broader citizenry. If we are to have any success reducing gang violence in our community, we must do a better job sharing information and coordinating assets with a view towards prevention.

—Tim Longo, chief of police,
Charlottesville Police Department

* Evidence-based interventions and promising practices marked with blue-bold are described in the Glossary.

Grossmont Union High School District—La Mesa, California (FY 2007)

Grossmont Union High School District (GUHSD) heightened its violence prevention efforts in response to increased community violence. Realizing the power of peer learning, GUHSD trained older students to teach younger students about violence prevention. The successful implementation of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and partnership with law enforcement created an effective, lasting approach to violence prevention.

Using Student Leadership to Increase Feelings of Safety at School. According to SS/HS Project Director Jenée Littrell, “Students are more likely to internalize a message from another student than from an adult.” With this in mind, GUHSD created Camp LEAD (Letting Everyone Achieve Their Dreams) for students at risk for violence prevention. Camp LEAD brought teachers, students, and school resource officers (SROs) together at a retreat in the mountains to engage in experiential leadership training and to address violence prevention, bullying, classism, ableism, and racism. By the end of camp, **students realized that they had more similarities than differences, and they learned to be compassionate with each other.**

Students also learned that they had the power to change their life trajectory. One student came to camp having attended “white power” rallies with his family. He had been incarcerated in a juvenile detention center multiple times and was not on track to graduate. At camp, he learned to interact positively with students of different ethnicities and backgrounds. After returning home, he became more cooperative and engaged at school, got on track to graduate, and was no longer involved with the juvenile justice system.

Camp LEAD also allowed students to see teachers and SROs in a new light. SROs came to camp dressed in plain clothes (as opposed to the uniforms they wear at school) and interacted with students in skits and other group activities, which helped to increase students’ positive feelings about law enforcement and SROs.

After participating in the program, disciplinary referrals decreased: participating students’ referrals decreased from an average of 2.67 in the semester prior to participation in camp to 1.73 in the semester following participation.

Helping students reflect and understand the reasons behind their behavior, such as male modeling at home or trauma, can prevent them from engaging in violent activities. When students have some insight into why they behave the way they do, they can choose to self-refer to mental health services and learn to manage their emotions differently.

—Jenée Littrell, SS/HS project director

Implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. After seeing the positive impact of Camp LEAD on school climate, school administrators realized that implementing **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** as a universal strategy for violence prevention in two of its schools would help to create more positive school norms and expectations. At one school, the idea of student leadership carried over from Camp LEAD, with students taking charge of creating PBIS videos. Students also spread the message about appropriate behavior. **“It was student-generated voices and leadership that helped us train the rest of the students,”** said SS/HS Project Director Jenée Littrell.

Creating Effective Partnerships. SS/HS strengthened the relationship between GUHSD and law enforcement. Prior to SS/HS, when violence occurred in the community, the impacts were felt at school in part because little collaboration existed between the school and law enforcement. **Through SS/HS, law enforcement and GUHSD began sharing information and were able to strategize how to handle events in the community and in the schools.** The partnership between GUHSD and law enforcement also helped students develop trusting relationships with law enforcement officers, so much so that students became comfortable calling the police for help when they witnessed violence or suspicious activity outside of school.

Hot Springs School District—Hot Springs, Arkansas (FY 2008)

Strong partnerships between the Hot Springs School District (HSSD), the local juvenile justice agency, and community organizations helped to support and sustain youth violence prevention in the county. Evidence-based Interventions (EBIs) addressing prevention at multiple levels of influence and providing mentorship opportunities were the defining characteristics of HSSD's youth violence prevention approach.

Addressing Three Tiers of Prevention. At the start of the SS/HS grant, HSSD was aware that many students were ending up in detention centers and court due to illegal activities, such as fighting, theft, and drug use. HSSD decided that, **rather than focusing only on the highest risk students, they would reach all students through a three-tiered approach to violence prevention.** In the first tier—universal prevention—HSSD reached out to the entire student body with violence prevention programming and practices, such as **Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.)** and **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**. The second tier of interventions—selective prevention—was geared toward students at risk of committing violence. It featured a mentorship program, behavior plans, social skills training, and small group and individual counseling. In the first semester of the 2012–2013 school year, 10 percent of students participated in Tier 2 violence prevention programming. For students in need of more intensive support, including those with prior juvenile justice involvement, Tier 3—indicated prevention—offered service coordination and wraparound care plans that addressed both student and family needs. During the first semester of 2012–2013, eight percent of students were enrolled in Tier 3 services.

To ensure appropriate service coordination for youth in need, HSSD maintained a close relationship with the juvenile justice agency, and school district staff accompanied students to juvenile court to provide the school's perspective. A probation officer also visited the schools weekly to collaborate with school staff about how to address students at risk. The juvenile court judge noted that she was very impressed with changes that she had seen in the high school and middle school students.

Parenting and Mentoring Youth. In addition to school-based interventions for students, **parents and adult mentors in the community played a crucial role in youth violence prevention.** HSSD provided resources for parents with the goal of better serving at-risk students. Parenting classes that addressed such issues as parenting a strong-willed child and teaching children to be respectful and responsible helped parents of high-risk students learn more effective ways to interact with their children.

Partnerships with community organizations allowed HSSD students to engage in meaningful mentorship opportunities. In particular, a local children's center developed a community-wide mentoring program to help community members select volunteer mentoring opportunities from a variety of options, including working with youth in juvenile court, schools, and community centers. This approach aimed to provide youth in a range of settings with positive role models who could help them make healthy choices. In addition, volunteers from faith-based organizations tutored students at their respective schools. SS/HS Project Director Stephanie Nehus notes, "We are just so fortunate to have all these organizations coming together monthly and offering what they can. Partnerships are critical."

The mentoring piece has been a key. When our students see somebody who cares about them and comes consistently to mentor and be a positive role model for them, students make better choices and turn away from violence that they might have otherwise gone toward.

—Stephanie Nehus, SS/HS project director

North Wasco County School District #21—The Dalles, Oregon (FY 2008)

North Wasco County School District #21 (NWSCD) addressed its community's increase in violence by implementing the trauma-informed **Sanctuary Model**, promoting community awareness about violence and the effects of trauma, and engaging partners to shift organizational and community culture.

Choosing the Right Model to Meet Community Needs. North Wasco is a small, rural community healing from the negative effects of several historical community-based traumas that resulted in class divisions within the community: construction of a dam altered the community's geography and economy; a major manufacturing plant closure impacted the workforce; and the restructuring of the local school district resulted in unresolved community conflict. **With this history and recent increases in violent events, NWSCD chose a trauma-informed care approach to violence prevention.** They implemented the evidence-based Sanctuary Model as a way to bring community partners together, foster a shared vision for a more peaceful community, and facilitate systems change to support nonviolence. With its trauma-informed approach to creating and sustaining nonviolent cultures in schools, organizations, and communities, the Sanctuary Model was a perfect fit for NWSCD.

Creating Community Awareness. A spike in violent crimes in the summer of 2012 prompted NWSCD and its partners to hold a candlelight vigil to raise awareness about school and community violence. During the vigil, they made a public statement about the community's expectations for peace and publicized the school district's adoption of the Sanctuary Model. Articles about the vigil were featured on the front page of the local paper.

According to SS/HS Project Director Trudy Townsend, since the community awareness campaign and the initial implementation of the Sanctuary Model, rates of violence in North Wasco County have decreased.

Engaging Partners to Create Innovative Responses. The local mental health agency, the Department of Human Services, law enforcement, juvenile justice agencies, the faith-based community, local nonprofit agencies, and local businesses have adopted the Sanctuary Model. They engage in joint trainings, and a community core team meets monthly to practice tools and support each other. This approach has forged and strengthened **partnerships, with partners adopting a common language, values, and tools.**

In the past, there were times when juvenile justice wanted to arrest a student, but the school district had been working with the student and saw that he was improving. Now, the school district can talk about the student's strengths in a way that the juvenile justice system can completely understand.

—Trudy Townsend, SS/HS project director

This cultural shift has changed NWSCD's approach to addressing potentially violent situations. In December 2012, the North Wasco community was shaken by a shooting at a nearby shopping center. Shortly after, a student came to school dressed as the shooter carrying a suspicious backpack. Law enforcement officials and school administrators used the Sanctuary Model to diffuse this situation. In the questioning process, the focus shifted from "What's wrong with this student?" to "What happened to the student and how can we help him?" NWSCD, law enforcement, and the local human services agency immediately got the student into counseling with a mental health care agency. Faith-based partners provided the student with support, and all partners used the Sanctuary Model to treat him.

Evidence supports that there are fewer disciplinary issues at NWSCD's schools. From 2008 to 2013, there was a 36 percent decrease in the number of calls for police response at school campuses, and a 75 percent decrease in the number of police calls at the Dalles Middle School. Additionally, office discipline referrals have decreased; for example, referrals decreased 21 percent at the Chenoweth Elementary School between 2012 and 2013.

Putnam County Educational Service Center—Putnam, Ohio (FY 2008)

Although the nine rural school districts and three elementary parochial schools that make up Putnam County Educational Service Center (PCEC) are generally considered safe, bullying and other forms of violence have negatively impacted students. To address violence, PCEC employs evidence-based interventions (EBIs), addresses the three tiers of prevention, and partners with law enforcement.

Using Data to Inform Violence Prevention and Crisis Response. PCEC used schoolwide surveys to identify “hot spots” of bullying and physical fights in the schools. To prevent violent incidents, PCEC increased staff presence in these areas and installed security cameras and radios.

Addressing Prevention at Multiple Levels. PCEC also strategically selected and implemented EBIs to address the three tiers of prevention. At the universal level, EBIs foster a positive school climate where students learn to regulate their emotions and stand up against bullying. For early elementary school students, PCEC was asked to pilot the **Good Behavior Game (GBG)**, a classroom-based behavior management strategy that prevents violence and behavioral health problems among young students, especially those who show signs of aggression. SS/HS Project Director Pat Smith notes, **“GBG allows us to prevent violence early on rather than reacting to it after it has already occurred.”** For middle and high school students, PCEC has implemented the **Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)**, which Ms. Smith indicates has helped decrease bullying in all of the school districts.

At the selected level, PCEC connects students who are displaying behavioral problems with school counselors. At the indicated level, students who are identified as at risk for committing violent acts receive counseling through school-based mental health providers. They may also attend an alternative school focused on service-based learning and **Reconnecting Youth**. This school connects students to the community, and provides them with more individualized attention. The supportive environment of the alternative school helps students learn coping strategies and reduce violent behaviors.

Identifying the Right Partners. PCEC enlisted the help of community partners to create an effective violence prevention plan. When PCEC started its SS/HS Initiative, all of the county’s school districts had a school safety team, but the teams met infrequently. National tragedies pushed the teams to be more thoughtful about safety planning.

PCEC safety teams worked closely with law enforcement to develop guidelines for school visitors and lockdown drills and to increase the number of locked doors in the schools.

We used to think, “It’ll never happen here,” but now we know something like that could happen, so we use all the resources we can for prevention.

—Pat Smith, SS/HS project director

The Recovery School District—New Orleans, Louisiana (FY 2009)

The Recovery School District (RSD) used a three-tiered prevention approach to address the elevated levels of violence that their students experienced. Through violence prevention programming in schools, mentorship programs, and community partnerships, RSD empowered students to express themselves in nonviolent ways.

Changing School Culture. SS/HS staff sought to change the culture of the schools through a three-tiered approach to violence prevention. Programming at the universal level included the use of the evidence-based intervention (EBI) **Too Good for Violence**, which engages all students in developing protective factors and improving non-violent attitudes. At the selective level, to identify at-risk students and students with immediate needs, RSD conducted a comprehensive screening and implemented **Aggression Replacement Training (ART)**, an EBI that engages high-risk students in anger management and moral reasoning training. At the indicated level, students needing the most targeted interventions were referred by staff to local mental health agency partners. RSD staff also attended trainings to learn more effective ways to interact with students and to foster a positive, nonviolent atmosphere in the schools.

As a result of RSD's violence prevention approach, students recognized a difference in their peers and in themselves. According to SS/HS Project Director Debra Morton, students and staff noticed the change in students who participated in violence prevention programming. After one high school student with a reputation for very aggressive behavior went through ART, her peers and teachers remarked on the positive change in her behavior. The student's transformation positively influenced her peers, teachers, and the school environment. Data confirm that similar transformations occurred across the district: between 2010 (when ART implementation began) and the 2012–2013 school year, RSD witnessed a 77 percent decrease in the number of suspensions and a 78 percent decrease in fights on campus.

Empowering Youth. Partnerships with community agencies, including a youth empowerment program, further strengthened violence prevention efforts in RSD. Students at one RSD high school formed a nonviolent protest to voice their concerns about their school becoming a charter school. Violent unrest at this school had been featured in previous years in the national media. However, in this instance the students designed a peaceful response to express their frustration about not being included in the conversation about the fate of their school.

Garnering Support. In addition to strong support from school leaders, community members became involved in supporting youth violence prevention. A community-based mentorship program trained men to mentor male students, which led to an "amazing turnaround in some of the kids," according to Ms. Morton. School staff observed that students involved in the mentorship program used more positive and constructive language when interacting with their peers.

Successful violence prevention begins with having a real conversation, a real dialog, with everyone on the same page about what the initiative is going to look like. If the school leadership is not committed and genuinely involved, you won't have much success.

—Debra Morton, SS/HS Project Director

Sanford Maine School Department—Sanford, Maine (FY 2007)

Faced with significant violence and poverty, the Sanford, Maine, School Department (SMSD) completed a school- and community-wide assessment to determine violence prevention and student support needs. SMSD implemented targeted interventions for high-risk youth and drew together community members to support youth violence prevention efforts.

Conducting Comprehensive Assessments. Sanford, Maine, faces the highest rate of violence in the state, including assaults on school grounds. SMSD conducted a comprehensive assessment during the first year of its SS/HS grant to uncover the contributing factors. The initial assessment included school climate surveys of parents, students, and teachers, as well as infrastructure assessments of the school buildings. **As a result of the community assessment, SMSD identified a lack of positive adult role models for youth and poor communication between community agencies as significant contributing factors to youth violence.** SS/HS Project Director Cathy Lounsbury explains, “There was no easy, fast answer because of the complexity of the issues that affected the community.” SMSD developed a systematic plan to address the specific needs revealed in the assessment.

Involving Community Members. The assessment led to a realization that preventing youth violence in Sanford required the participation of a broad-based coalition that included not only the schools and mental health and law enforcement agencies, but also non-traditional partners such as faith-based organizations, business owners, and sports teams.

With the goal of reducing youth violence, the coalition developed task groups in which community members worked on the specific aspects of the youth violence issue they felt drawn to. The coalition connected many players in the community and created opportunities for youth to work with an adult volunteer mentor outside of school.

Engaging Youth in Violence Prevention. Implementing evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and providing positive structured activities for youth served as important elements of SMSD’s approach to youth violence prevention. **SMSD used the EBI Reconnecting Youth to enable high-risk students to increase their engagement in school, make healthy decisions, and improve their communication skills.** When the Reconnecting Youth leader noticed students’ interest in film and media, the leader established a club for students to make their own films. Students who had previously missed weeks of school began coming to school even during vacation time to work on their films.

The idea is that all kids are our kids and if we are going to decrease violence in the community, we all need to be involved in the effort. We needed to find a message that resonated with each segment of the population about why the issue of youth violence prevention was important for them.

—Cathy Lounsbury, SS/HS project director

Additionally, school resource officers from the Sanford Police Department implemented the Sanford Cadets program for high-risk youth, which ran on weekends, afterschool, and during the summer months. Officers involved youth in community service projects and youth learned about good nutrition, health, and fitness. Through a partnership with the YMCA, participating youth received a free membership to the YMCA to encourage physical activity and healthier lifestyles. Community members also called upon the cadets to help out as volunteers during community events. The structure of the Sanford Cadets program and the emphasis on community service offered students an opportunity to develop leadership skills, strengthen their self-esteem, and improve self-discipline.

Santa Maria Joint Union High School District–Santa Maria, California (FY 2008)

Staff at Santa Maria Joint Union High School District (SMJU) found that racial tensions, rapid population growth, and poverty posed challenges to preventing youth violence. SMJU's response was to use age-appropriate programming and strategic community partnerships to create systemwide change, with communication and conflict resolution central to its approach.

Implementing Age-Appropriate Interventions. In Santa Maria Valley, a rural, agricultural community with most public schools serving predominantly Latino students, the SS/HS Initiative worked with three K–8 school districts and the SMJU high school district. **SS/HS staff delivered age-appropriate violence prevention programming**, providing students in younger grades with the universal programs **Too Good for Violence** and **LifeSkills Training**, which familiarized students with alternatives to violence and helped them learn the skills to get along with others and behave in a peaceful manner.

Engaging Youth in Conflict Resolution. In addition to universal violence prevention programming, high school students who had been involved in violence participated in higher level interventions, such as conflict resolution. In the five SMJU high schools, school administrators required students who had engaged in verbal or physical violence to participate in **Resolving Conflict Creatively**, an evidence-based intervention (EBI) designed to teach students to address conflict in positive, nonviolent ways. With this EBI, both parties involved in a violent incident engage in group and individual mediation, giving students the opportunity to discuss the conflict, how they could have dealt with the situation without resorting to violence, and how they could react to similar situations in the future. Since students engaged in violence continued to attend school together following the incident, finding a way for them to move past violence and to develop mediation skills was crucial for preventing future violent incidents.

In the group mediation sessions, students who had been involved in the program for a while connected with new students and modeled conflict resolution skills in a way that teachers could not. **Students who completed the program returned to their school with the skills to serve as positive role models for their peers.**

After completing the program, students reported less fighting, with 11 percent reporting having been in a fight in the previous 30 days compared to 48 percent prior to participating in the program. Students also reported being able to better resolve conflicts: When students experienced a conflict post-program, 89 percent reported that the conflict was resolved, compared to only 43 percent before the program.

In many ways, students become peer instructors and add value to the program. We're creating a cadre of students who have learned about conflict management and sending them back into the school where they may influence other students to resolve conflicts. The process is repeated over and over again, which is enriching the school environment.

—Al Rodriguez, SS/HS project director

Partnering with Community Organizations. SS/HS Project Director Al Rodriguez emphasizes that collaborating with community organizations to prevent violence is central to the success of violence prevention in schools. He believes that **networking with community organizations can lead to greater change and a sustainable approach to violence prevention by creating a ripple effect throughout the community.** He also says that successful violence prevention programs in schools are important, but often these programs are not enough to create sustainable change for youth in the community. Since schools are often challenged with maintaining violence prevention programs over time, engaging local business leaders in violence prevention efforts can help to leverage resources to sustain programs. In Santa Maria, Mr. Rodriguez works hard to cultivate relationships with private foundations and to build a broader community conversation regarding violence prevention.

The School Board of Broward County—Fort Lauderdale, Florida (FY 2007)

The School Board of Broward County (SBBC), the sixth largest school district in the country, leveraged partnerships to expand the reach of its violence prevention programming. By engaging youth, SBBC raised awareness in schools and across the community about the importance of working to prevent violence.

Partnering for Change. Following a series of violent incidents on campus in 2008, SBBC’s Core Management Team (CMT) partnered with the local county government to host a summit for representatives from all cities in the county to discuss youth violence. Participants broke into small groups organized by geographic area to identify resources and develop individualized violence prevention action plans. The action plans were based on the unique strengths and needs of the communities involved.

Broward County also came together to form the Safe to Be Me Coalition in response to a homicide on a school campus involving a same-sex couple. **The coalition became a catalyst for nearly 30 agencies to come together to help keep all students safe.** Many members of the SBBC CMT served on the coalition, which created a support guide and accompanying video to help school personnel better support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.

Engaging Youth to Raise Awareness. SBBC worked with youth to create Choose Peace/Stop Violence, a community campaign in which schools collaborated with the community to prevent violence. During the annual Choose Peace/Stop Violence week, which is held in September, SBBC plans school and community violence prevention activities, including:

- Hosting violence prevention speakers
- Having youth contribute to the campaign theme, such as “Your Choice. Your Actions. Your Life.” which served as the core messaging for the campaign’s public service announcements (PSAs)
- Having teachers facilitate classroom activities designed to reinforce the PSAs so students receive consistent violence prevention messaging

The success has been collaboration. I talk a lot about the power of collective impact. There is something great to be said about getting all the major players together to galvanize efforts.

—Amalio Nieves, SS/HS project director

SS/HS Project Director Amalio Nieves emphasizes that listening to youth is key to a successful violence prevention initiative because campaigns developed by adults often do not resonate with students. He believes that **allowing students to develop their own messages about violence prevention in creative ways can empower youth to take ownership of violence prevention in their schools and communities.**

Youth summits also engaged students to act as agents of change in their schools. Developed through a partnership with United Way of Broward County and the CMT, the summit allowed students to explore ways in which they could impact their environments for the better and learn about how their decisions can have far-ranging consequences.

Data suggest these activities are making a difference. In the first two years of the Choose Peace/Stop Violence initiative in Broward County, the total number of violent incidents in those schools that did not participate in focused violence prevention work increased by 27 percent, while the number of violent incidents in schools that did focus on violence prevention decreased by 39 percent.



SS/HS grantees from around the country are successfully implementing comprehensive, multi-faceted violence prevention initiatives that promote positive, nonviolent school and community environments. The SS/HS sites profiled in this Snapshot demonstrate that districtwide partnerships can work to engage communities; data-driven decisions about violence prevention can inform policies and practices; and carefully selected evidence-based interventions can reduce risk factors and promote protective factors among youth.

These successes, which build on the strengths of the communities, challenge and reshape norms about youth violence, and engage youth as partners in prevention, can serve as models for other school districts and communities. Working collaboratively with community partners, SS/HS grantees have decreased violent behavior among students and promoted safe, nonviolent environments in which students are most likely to succeed.



Glossary of Evidence-Based Interventions (EBIs) and Promising Practices Used by SS/HS Sites

Aggression Replacement Training

Aggression Replacement Training (ART) is a cognitive behavioral intervention program designed to help youth improve social skills and manage anger through guided group discussions and reinforcement techniques. The program, consisting of 30 sessions over 10 weeks, is geared toward providing chronically aggressive children and adolescents with training in social skills, anger control, and moral reasoning.⁴⁴

Developmental Designs

Developmental Designs is a research- and evidence-based approach aimed at building developmentally appropriate social-emotional skills for middle school students. Focused on advancing important skills such as self-management, relationship-building, and academic skill-building, Developmental Designs aims to meet the needs of adolescents to help them be successful students. This approach helps teachers to reduce misbehavior in the classroom, motivate students to achieve academically, and create inclusive learning environments.⁴⁵

Gang Resistance Education And Training

The Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program uses law enforcement officers to teach a school-based gang and violence prevention curriculum. The program aims to prevent delinquency, youth violence, and gang membership for youth through the use of age-appropriate curricula for middle and elementary school children and their families.⁴⁶

Good Behavior Game

The Good Behavior Game (G.B.G.) is a classroom-based behavior management strategy for elementary school that teachers use along with a school's standard instructional curricula. G.B.G. uses a classroom-wide game format with teams and rewards to socialize children to the role of student and reduce aggressive, disruptive classroom behavior, which is a risk factor for adolescent and adult illicit drug abuse, alcohol abuse, cigarette smoking, antisocial personality disorder, and violent and criminal behavior. G.B.G. contains four core elements: classroom rules, team membership, self- and team-behavior monitoring, and positive reinforcement of individual team members and the team as a whole.⁴⁷

LifeSkills Training

LifeSkills Training (LST) is a school-based program that aims to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use and violence by targeting the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky behaviors. LST is based on both the social influence and competence enhancement models of prevention. Consistent with this theoretical framework, LST addresses multiple risk and protective factors and teaches personal and social skills that build resilience and help youth navigate developmental tasks, including the skills necessary to understand and resist prodrug influences. LST is designed to provide information relevant to the important life transitions that adolescents and young teens face, using culturally sensitive and developmentally and age-appropriate language and content. Facilitated discussion, structured small group activities, and role-playing scenarios are used to stimulate participation and promote the acquisition of skills. Separate LST programs are offered for elementary school (grades 3–6), middle school (grades 6–9), and high school (grades 9–12); the research studies and outcomes reviewed for this summary involved middle school students.⁴⁸

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program works to prevent or reduce bullying by changing the school environment to become less conducive to bullying. It is not a curriculum but a systems change approach for schools to implement and sustain over time. The program, targeting students ages 6 to 15, has also been shown to reduce substance use and delinquency.⁴⁹

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a systems approach grounded in applied behavioral analysis, instructional design, and mental health, calls for schools to design individualized support systems to meet the cultural and programmatic needs of their student population and school environment. PBIS uses three tiers of prevention supports, reaching all students through primary prevention practices and providing intensive support for students with chronic problems at the tertiary level.⁵⁰

Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills

Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills (RY) uses a partnership model to deliver interventions to increase school performance, decrease drug involvement, and increase mood management for high-risk high school students. Students participate in activities designed to improve personal and social protective factors for high-risk youth. RY teaches students techniques to improve self-esteem, decision-making skills, and communication strategies.⁵¹

Resolving Conflict Creatively

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), a school-based, violence prevention program for kindergarten through eighth grade, promotes positive conflict resolution and the creation of a more caring and peaceful school environment. The RCCP curriculum aims to develop children's conflict resolution skills and promote positive interpersonal relations. The program teaches children to recognize and take a stand against prejudice and respect diversity. Trained teachers implement classroom activities, and the program recruits students to serve as peer mediators as well.⁵²

Responsive Classroom

The Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach that focuses on the development of academic and social-emotional skills rather than a single issue. Teachers using the Responsive Classroom approach implement a number of classroom practices, such as engaging students in the creation of a set of classroom rules, providing students with some amount of choice in their class work, and facilitating collaborative problem solving.⁵³

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices draw from longstanding traditional approaches to justice that attempt to address the needs of all people affected. Restorative Practices are most effective when used schoolwide and can lead to the improved well-being of all members of the school community. Restorative Practices exist for all three tiers of intervention, addressing all members of the school community based on situational needs. Successful implementation of Restorative Practices involves monitoring and using data to inform practices.⁵⁴

Sanctuary Model

The Sanctuary Model is an evidence-supported, trauma-informed systems change process that centers on a set of interconnected values called the “Sanctuary Commitments.” These values include commitments to emotional intelligence, social learning, open communication, democracy, social responsibility, and growth and change. With these commitments, the Sanctuary Model aims to enable an organization to develop structures and processes to counteract the effects of traumatic experiences.⁵⁵

Too Good for Violence

Too Good for Violence (TGFV), a school-based prevention program for kindergarten through 12th grade students, provides youth with tools to enhance prosocial behaviors and improve protective factors related to conflict and violence. TGFV consists of a developmentally appropriate curriculum for each grade from kindergarten through 8th grade, and a separate curriculum for high school students. At each level, the program provides students with a series of weekly violence prevention and character education lessons.⁵⁶



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