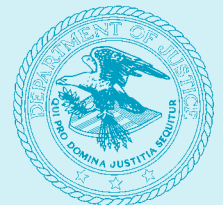



# SAFE *schools* HEALTHY *students*

▶ *capturing  
safe schools  
healthy students  
experience  
through  
local outcomes*





The overall impact of the SS/HS initiative on Gage County is immeasurable. Partnerships exist between all school districts and with community agencies. A new coalition with a full time director is operating to serve quality of life issues in all of Gage County. Programs are run more efficiently as the appropriate partners are involved. Programs result in greater behavior change because everyone is working off the same plan. There is more trust among partners around the county. Evidence based programming is more widely accepted. Schools are collecting data needed by all agencies. Decisions are being made because of data, not intuition alone ... The impact of SS/HS will not leave Gage County for some time. It will only grow as the success of the coalition continues to grow.

**Michael W. Shain, PhD, Director of Evaluation Services**  
**Gage County Safe Schools/Healthy Students**  
**Beatrice, Nebraska**



# Welcome

## October 2008

In 1999, when Congress enacted legislation creating the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, the degree to which it would affect the lives of children, families, schools, and communities could not be envisioned. Since its inception in 1999, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative has reached 336 school districts located in rural, urban, and suburban settings in 49 of the 50 states. Local communities participating in the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative indicate that this federal program has changed their community for the better and in many cases, for the long term. Many of the programs and services started under the initiative continue through partnerships begun by this program.

Three federal agencies—Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice—have jointly guided the development and growth of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. This joint venture, in and of itself, represents a unique approach for the federal government in working with local schools, agencies, and communities to foster systems change. Safe Schools/Healthy Students focuses on implementing programs that are grounded in evidence-based practice and address locally identified goals and objectives. The initiative is rooted in the belief that schools and communities working in partnership can achieve the goal of a safe and supportive school environment for our children.

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students grantees were funded to implement core elements of this program. This document, based on local evaluation reports of 37 of the sites, describes the challenges these communities faced and some of the important results they achieved. The experiences outlined here reflect the range of actions and activities that schools and communities participating in the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiatives are undertaking. Their stories provide evidence that the initiative is producing positive results at the local level in reducing school violence, raising academic achievement, reducing alcohol and other substance abuse, increasing access to mental health services, and creating safer school environments.

Safe Schools/Healthy Students is a program that is making a difference.

# The Challenge

## ▶ December 1, 1997

Three students were killed and five others wounded in West Paducah, Kentucky, when a 14-year-old boy fired on schoolmates as they participated in a prayer circle at Heath High School.

## ▶ March 24, 1998

Four students and one teacher were killed and 10 others wounded at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, as students marched outside during a false fire alarm. A 13-year-old and an 11-year-old student shot at students and teachers as they exited the building.

## ▶ May 21, 1998

A day after a 15-year-old student was arrested for bringing a gun to school, he returned to Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, and killed 2 students and wounded 22 others. His parents were later found dead at home.

These devastating events had a profound impact, both on those who mourned the loss of loved ones and on entire communities shocked and bewildered by the tragedy. On the one hand, we know that for the majority of American children, schools are among the safest places to be, with less than 1 percent of all violent deaths occurring on school grounds. And on the other hand, as demonstrated by these violent events (as well as the April 1999 shooting at Columbine High School and other more recent events), some schools have serious violence problems that significantly compromise learning and leave students and teachers feeling vulnerable.

Research has demonstrated that school violence is generally a symptom of larger community problems, such as substance abuse, depression and other mental health problems, and poor academic achievement.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Reducing the risk of mental illness and improving academic success can result when communities undertake a comprehensive approach that builds connections between students, families, and caring adults.

But schools alone cannot effectively address the problems of mental illness, substance abuse, and poor academic achievement. Schools must come together with parents, law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies, mental health organizations, community groups, and elected officials to develop and carry out a comprehensive plan of action.



# Safe Schools/Healthy Students: Meeting the Challenge

In April 1999, Congress launched the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative under the collaborative leadership of the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice. Funded in part in response to the tragic school shootings in 1997, 1998, and 1999, the SS/HS Initiative is based on the premise that schools and communities working in partnership can achieve the goal of a safe and supportive school environment for our children. Prior to 2007, the SS/HS Initiative awarded three-year grants of \$1 million to \$3 million to school districts that collaborated with juvenile justice, local law enforcement, and mental health agencies to promote the healthy development of school-age children. Beginning in 2007, awards are four-year grants ranging from \$750,000 to \$2.25 million.

As of September 2008, the SS/HS Initiative had awarded grants to 336 local education agencies in a range of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Grantees have implemented a variety of programs based on the unique needs and resources of each community. Approaches have ranged from providing mental health and social services directly to students to delivering prevention training and education to school staff, students, and family members to improving safety by addressing the physical aspects of the school setting. Along with this diversity of strategies, the SS/HS sites all share the common goal of implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of evidence-based programs, those with proven positive effects in similar communities, to increase the health and safety of all students.

This brochure features the successes of and lessons learned from 37 diverse SS/HS grantees funded from 1999 to 2002. It also highlights the importance of continued support for this groundbreaking federal initiative, which enriches the lives of so many children and families across our nation.

School safety and quality education are not about any one method or approach: security personnel, academic intervention services, or discipline policies. Nor are they about any single risk factor such as single parent homes or the availability of guns in the community. We have learned that safe schools require broad-based efforts on the part of the entire community, including educators, students, parents, law enforcement agencies, businesses, and health and human services agencies.

**Dr. Thomas J. Kelsh, Principal Investigator**  
**Utica Safe Schools/Healthy Students Partnership**  
**Utica, New York**

The SHIPS for Youth collaborative has changed the lives of children and families in Jefferson County for the better. From the summer youth camps to the after-school programs to the ATOD counseling to pregnancy prevention programs and youth leadership development, SHIPS for Youth has provided a ray of light and hope in an economically depressed county in Georgia.

**Task Force Member**  
**Jefferson County Community**  
**SHIPS for Youth, Inc. Collaborative**  
**Jefferson County, Georgia**

# Understanding Risk and Protective Factors and the Public Health Approach

The SS/HS Initiative is based on an innovative way of thinking about keeping young people safe and helping them do well in school. It draws from research demonstrating that disruptive behaviors in children and adolescents can be traced back to early risk factors. A landmark study<sup>4</sup> showed that certain risk factors can be detrimental to a child's mental health. In particular, these factors include a child having poor social skills or impulsivity or being a victim of abuse; living in a family that uses inconsistent or harsh discipline; parental criminality or mental illness; and social factors such as poverty. Nearly half of children entering kindergarten in the United States experience at least one risk factor. There is now solid evidence that when risk factors occur early in life, they can increase the likelihood of—but not necessarily cause—childhood mental disorders that can continue into adulthood. Some of these risk factors, such as poverty, cannot be modified by a health program. Other risk factors, such as poor social skills, can be helped.

However, both research and practice have also shown that children's vulnerability to mental health problems, violence, and substance abuse may be influenced positively by many protective factors in themselves and in their families and communities. Protective factors that help to boost the child's chances of healthy social and emotional development include social and conflict management skills; warm, supportive relationships with parents or other caregivers; and a connection to family, school, and community. Schools, families, and youth-based organizations have an important role to play in increasing and strengthening protective factors in the lives of children.

For most young people, the presence of protective factors—and the interaction among those factors—enables them to become resilient to risk factors. SS/HS grantees work within their communities to address risk and protective factors in a myriad of settings that touch young children and their families. Grantees do this by using a public health approach that enables communities

to better identify problems and underlying influential risk and protective factors, and to implement appropriate solutions.

Research has shown that when interventions are directed at risk and protective factors rather than categorical problem behaviors, it is both feasible and cost-effective to address multiple outcomes using a coordinated set of programs.<sup>5</sup> Based on this research, grantees are supported in the use of a *public health approach* to their project that involves four steps:

1. Use data to identify the problems to be targeted and the modifiable risk and protective factors associated with those problems.
2. Strategically select evidence-based interventions (EBIs) that can have a meaningful impact on the risk and protective factors for an identified population.
3. Monitor and evaluate interventions to ensure that they are having the desired effect and make adjustments to interventions as needed.
4. Educate professionals and the public about the importance of prevention and how to effectively implement it.

# Building Powerful Partnerships to Support Youth

A cornerstone of the SS/HS Initiative is the robust community partnerships—involving school staff, law enforcement, mental health services, juvenile justice, and other community groups—that form to strengthen protective factors for youth. Issues that affect the learning environment of schools—such as bullying and fighting; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; need for mental health services; and truancy—cannot be solved by schools alone. These diverse and complex problems not only affect students and their families but also frequently spill out into the community. A community collaborative approach can be very effective in responding to these issues. In each SS/HS community, diverse groups come together to share expertise, pool resources, and build joint programs to protect young people. The collaborative nature in which the grants are conceived and carried out not only ensures that each site's continuum of programs and services are efficiently and effectively delivered but also that key interagency relationships are forged—relationships that are critical to sustaining this type of community-based effort over time. The broader vision of the SS/HS Initiative is that SS/HS partnerships serve as catalysts for change within their communities, with the overarching goal of creating safer schools and healthier students through systems change.

To ensure a comprehensive approach that builds on the strengths of community partners, SS/HS grantees are expected to integrate core elements into their programs, including:

- **Safe school environments and violence prevention activities:** School staff and community leaders, along with families, make a joint effort to establish safe school environments, including schoolwide safety policies and practices and violence prevention programs.
- **Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention activities:** Prevention efforts that focus at the classroom and community level to reduce students' unhealthy and risk-taking behaviors.
- **Student behavioral, social, and emotional supports:** Well-planned programs that provide support for students' social and emotional needs, foster positive relationships for youth with peers and adults, and promote meaningful parental and community involvement.
- **Mental health services:** School and community services that identify mental health problems and provide appropriate early prevention to reduce the onset of disruptive behaviors and provide improved access to intervention services for at-risk children and adolescents and their families.
- **Early childhood social and emotional learning programs:** Prevention efforts that enhance school readiness and develop children's social and emotional skills by providing training for parents, caregivers, and professionals in early child-care centers, and that screen for developmental milestones and school readiness. In addition, intervention programs and activities address needs of higher-risk children.



Mental health service agencies have developed strong relationships with school systems and now know how to navigate the school system. Schools are receptive to the services and have learned that the services provided throughout the grant period are services they cannot do without. Those partnerships are strong and working towards increasing mental funds for our kids and families.

**Steven Rider**  
SS/HS Evaluator for Education Service District 123  
Pasco, Washington



In SS/HS sites, school-community collaborations give rise to culturally appropriate programming that serves the unique needs of the community. Efforts made possible by SS/HS funding include the following:

- Easy-access student and family assistance centers in neighborhood schools that refer children and families to mental health services and substance abuse counseling, as well as provide on-site counseling and tutoring services for students
- Annual statewide school-safety conference for school resource officers and local school and community partners that focuses on crisis response, integrating services with mental health and school personnel, and terrorism
- Substance abuse programs that use evidence-based strategies to prevent kids from trying drugs and to help those kids who are addicted to break the habit
- School-based mental health programs that bring mental health providers inside the school building
- On-site probation services that allow juvenile offenders to stay in school and out of trouble
- Learning centers that help school dropouts earn their high school diplomas and train them for jobs
- Leadership programs that develop students' leadership skills, including communication, planning, organization, teamwork, and critical thinking
- Afterschool programs that get kids involved in sports and the arts and keep them off the streets and that motivate students to improve their behaviors and academic performance

[The] project allowed the school and their partners, the police department and Railbelt Mental Health Service, to move from “territorial perspectives” and “protected areas of service” to actually become equal partners with the school district in meeting the needs of students. This was a major change for all three organizations that heretofore had been very protective of their areas of service. These partnerships are likely to continue without the SSHS grant.

**Ardy Clark, Sunbow**  
Nenana City Schools' Alaska Native Safe Schools/  
Healthy Students Initiative  
Nenana, Alaska



## Focusing on Key Outcomes

While the 37 SS/HS grantees profiled in this monograph implemented a variety of programs to match their communities' unique needs, they nevertheless all met the following key outcomes:

- **Building safer and healthier communities:** SS/HS partnerships between schools and local law enforcement agencies led to reduced violence and an improved quality of life for students and community members. Specifically, SS/HS services resulted in fewer school suspensions, bullying incidents, and reports of disciplinary action. In addition, SS/HS programs contributed to reduced alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. And, not surprisingly, school attendance was up and student achievement was on the rise.
- **Making mental health services accessible to more students:** Students cannot learn properly when they are grappling with mental health problems or distracted by disruptive behavior from classmates. School-community partnerships fostered by SS/HS expanded the range of mental health services for students and made these services accessible to more individuals, thereby increasing students' chances for success.
- **Improving academic performance:** SS/HS school districts found that when certain elements were all in place, namely, evidence-based programs that made students feel safer, strategies that provided a range of mental health services, and outside-of-school programs that reinforced learning, their long-term goals of boosting test scores and improving academic outcomes became more achievable.

The following section outlines the critical accomplishments of 37 SS/HS grantees in the areas of safer and healthier communities, accessible mental health services, and improved academic performance.

Not only has the [SS/HS] grant served as a catalyst for change, but it has helped save the lives of hundreds of Native American students who received the opportunity to stay in school, be safe, drug-free, and physically and mentally healthy.

**Nicole Lounsbery, Project Director**  
Flandreau Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative  
Flandreau, South Dakota

Middle and high school administrators reported that the reduction in out-of-school suspensions, as well as the drop in truancy facilitated by the anti-truancy activities of the School Resource Officers, helped the district to remain in compliance with No Child Left Behind.

**Joann Lang, Project Director**  
Tyrone Area School District SS/HS Initiative  
Tyrone, Pennsylvania

The SS/HS Initiative has been the vehicle that has changed the environment of our community from me and my to “our” children, family, and community. It has brought unity, educational reform, and policy changes.

**Jefferson County Safe Schools/Healthy Students Task Force member**  
Jefferson County, Georgia

## Safer and Healthier Communities

Making schools safer and healthier calls for creating a caring school environment in which all members feel connected, safe, and supported. Research has shown that when students have close connections with peers and adults in the school, their risk for engaging in violence is reduced.<sup>6,7</sup> Schools may choose to implement a variety of evidence-based programs to promote a strong sense of community among students and adults in the school.

In Community School 9 in the **Bronx, New York**, the SS/HS initiative implemented the school- and community-based services and programs of Project CASE (including Peace Builders conflict-resolution program, Connecting Conduct to Character classroom management training, an on-site intervention teacher and a substance abuse prevention and intervention specialist who provided counseling and academic support for at-risk students, and a family referral system for social services), which resulted in:

- An 18 percent increase in students feeling safe in their schools
- Decrease in negative behaviors, including a 50 percent decrease in gang fights; 38 percent decrease in acts of vandalism; 53 percent decrease in stealing things; 28 percent decrease in skipping classes; and 25 percent decrease in students fighting, hitting, or attacking someone

The SS/HS initiative in the San Juan School District in **Blanding, Utah**, successfully implemented Prevention Dimensions, a SAMSHA CSAP Exemplary Substance Abuse Prevention Program. Over the grant period:

- Alcohol use among students of Native American descent declined from 25 percent to 0 percent and from 31 percent to .2 percent for the middle and high school populations, respectively; for the entire San Juan County student population, alcohol use declined from 12 percent to 0 percent and from 44 percent to .1 percent for the middle and high school populations, respectively, over the course of the grant.
- Drug use among Native American students declined from 42 percent to 0 percent at the middle school level and from 39 percent to .2 percent at the high school level.

The urban **Millville, New Jersey**, SS/HS Collaborative implemented a variety of violence prevention programs that contributed to a 46 percent decrease in violence and vandalism incidents, as well as a 72 percent decrease in juvenile arrest rate by Port Norris State Police and a 52 percent decrease by Woodbine State Police, two communities within the regional collaborative. These interventions included Responsive Classroom, New Jersey Peer-to-Peer, 2nd Step Violence Prevention, Peace and Respect, and mentoring/case management and mental health services.

In **Nenana, Alaska**, a rural native village, the partnership between the city schools, Native Council, Railbelt Mental Association, and city police department resulted in a 47 percent increase in grade 6–12 students reporting feeling safe at school over the grant period, so that 91 percent of students reported feeling safe at school in the final grant year. It also contributed to a 39 percent decrease in students reporting being bullied a “few times” and a 50 percent decrease in students being bullied “often” over the grant period. They accomplished this by creating a

permanent safety team that employed before- and afterschool monitors; adopting new policies of no tolerance for weapons, violence, drugs, and alcohol; implementing Internet safety/security; and installing surveillance equipment.

The Gage County Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative in **Beatrice, Nebraska**, reported a 57 percent decrease in the suicide rate over the three-year grant period. In addition to SS/HS suicide prevention training for 43 professionals from 22 Gage County agencies, this decline could be correlated with the increase of both mental health services to youth and their families and services in such areas as drug abuse prevention for at-risk families.

In rural **Louisville (Jefferson County), Georgia**, SS/HS implemented the Family Literacy Initiative for single, pregnant women, which offered a range of services, including developmental childcare at local child-care providers, parent education group sessions, and home visits using a research-based Parents as Teachers curriculum. Among students participating in this initiative, bullying other students decreased by 49 percent, being bullied by others decreased by 53 percent, and disciplinary problems decreased by 55 percent over the four-year grant period.

Through SS/HS funding, the Genesee Intermediate School District in **Flint, Michigan**, trained educators and implemented the Michigan Model Curriculum lessons on violence prevention and provided training and support for the Peer Mediation program. Over the grant period, they saw a 16 percent decline in students witnessing violence and a 45 percent decline in physical assault incidents at school.

This project has permanently altered the expectations of students and parents around school safety. For example: Security cameras that monitored student conduct in school and campus caught on tape 30 students who were held accountable for rule infractions. Both students and parents accepted the consequences handed out, thus setting the stage for people to understand that safety is a pervasive climate, not just an absence of violent acts.

**Dr. Rick Phillips, Local Evaluator**  
**ESD 101 Safe Schools/Healthy Students Program**  
**Spokane, Washington**



# Accessible Mental Health Services

Counseling services provided at schools allow parents to sidestep the financial bureaucracy of Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program, which has a limited yearly registration period. Children are treated in a timely fashion and intervention is possible within a short period of time, which improves their well-being and contributes to the well-being of the school and community.

**Dr. Toni Turk**  
SS/HS Project Director  
San Juan School District  
Safe Schools/Healthy Students  
Blanding, Utah

Schools and youth-serving organizations are recognizing the need to identify disruptive behaviors and emotional problems in young people early and intervene before more complex problems such as school failure, involvement in the juvenile justice system, or a full-blown mental illness results. School settings, in particular, present a key opportunity to promote mental wellness among children. Every day, over 52 million students attend more than 114,000 schools in the United States. When combined with 6 million adults working at those schools, almost one-fifth of the nation's population passes through our schools on any given weekday.<sup>8</sup> Children of all economic, geographic, and racial and cultural groups have equal access to a public education.

An especially pressing need is for school programs that provide access for students to mental health services, whether on-site or in the community. According to a new national survey released in 2005 by SAMHSA, one-fifth of students receive some type of school-supported mental health services during the school year.<sup>9</sup> The advantage to school-based interventions is that they address the underlying causes of many behavioral problems in children while also supporting academic achievement. Growing evidence shows that school mental health programs improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences, reducing discipline referrals, and improving test scores.

In **Lawrence, Massachusetts**, SS/HS partner agencies worked collaboratively to make referrals to ensure that mental health services were implemented as quickly as possible. The SS/HS project reduced the waiting time for services from six weeks to an average of less than two weeks, and by the grant's end, the Lawrence Public Schools and third parties had provided mental health services to 1,510 students and families through intensive case management, parent and family support groups, and afterschool support groups, substantially exceeding their initial target of 500. In addition, there was a 36 percent decrease in reported behavioral and psychological crises over a two-year period.



...the impact of the provision of school based mental health services has been dramatic and the positive influence on students and families is reflected in the data from interviews of the principals in the regional collaborative. This is dramatic evidence of success in an area where services in the past have been limited, difficult to arrange, and frequently marked by delayed response to mental health service needs. By contracting directly with service providers the response time has been dramatically reduced and the numbers of students and families receiving services has sharply increased.

Dr. Ronald Butcher, Mr. Charles Brett,  
Dr. Edward White  
Evaluators  
Millville Safe Schools Healthy Students Collaborative  
Millville, New Jersey



In **Toledo, Ohio**, SS/HS schools with on-site mental health professionals decreased expulsion rates by 60 percent, while the percentage of fourth-grade students passing all proficiency tests increased by 57 percent.

In **St. Cloud, Minnesota**, the ISD742 SS/HS initiative's network of mental health providers in the community and schools' Mental Health Triage Program and the Mobile Wellness Center cut the waiting time for students needing a mental health assessment by more than half and saw student emergency room visits for mental health reasons decline by 83 percent. In addition, Triage and the Mobile Wellness Center provided a comprehensive mental health assessment that was previously inaccessible to many students who needed it.

In **Spokane, Washington**, ESD 101, mental health services had been unavailable to at-risk youth without transportation to treatment in a central county location. Prior to the SS/HS project, students who were referred to outside mental health agencies often resulted in "no shows," poor follow-through, and unsuccessful results. In sharp contrast, Spokane's SS/HS in-school counseling services yielded increased student acceptance and utilization of services, which led to improved outcomes and perceptions of school safety. Countywide mental health referrals increased by 58 percent; in addition, the mental health outreach to families contacted 30 children who received services for the first time.

# Improved Academic Performance

The Learning Center has been and continues to be the biggest success story in this area. Though originally intended as an alternative path to completing high school, it has expanded to serve a three county area and even offers English as a Second Language programs for adults. Its acceptance and utilization has exceeded original project expectations.

**Steve Kitzi, Project Evaluator**  
**Rural Underpinnings for Resiliency and Linkages,**  
**(RURAL)**  
**Hays, Kansas**



Reducing barriers to learning is an important first step in improving students' academic outcomes. As schools work to comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, they come to realize the importance of removing the emotional, behavioral, and academic barriers that interfere with student success. A growing body of evidence indicates that school mental health programs improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences, reducing disciplinary problems, and improving test scores.<sup>10,11</sup>

In **Hanford, California**, SS/HS programs contributed to a 60 percent increase in mathematics scores and a 35 percent increase in English/language arts scores as measured by the state Academic Performance Index over the SS/HS grant period. These programs included tutorial instruction for students in reading/language arts and math, implementation of literacy coach services and Accelerated Reader and Math programs, intensive professional development, and weekly collaboration time for teachers to plan and coordinate standards-based instruction.

The SS/HS initiative in **Poplar Bluffs, Missouri**, resulted in a 55 percent decrease in the number of retentions in grades 3 and 8 and a 45 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions for grades 7–12 over the grant period. In addition, the number of students scoring at or above grade level increased by 28 percent in grade 3 and by 43 percent in grade 7. The initiative contributed to these results by providing tutoring, afterschool programming, increased professional development for teachers, literacy programs, mental health services, and social interventions for students.

The **Bronx, New York**, Community School 9 SS/HS initiative resulted in a 36 percent improvement in students meeting standards in English language arts (ELA) and 38 percent improvement in students meeting standards in mathematics, with one school achieving a 70 percent improvement in students meeting standards in mathematics and a 63 percent improvement in students meeting standards in ELA over the four-year

The essence of Project CASE, and primary source of the program's success over the four years of the grant, was the on-site staff—the Intervention Teacher and Substance Abuse Prevention Intervention Specialist counselor. When both of those positions were filled, the school environment was more noticeably positive and supportive. There were fewer incidents of violence and disruption in the halls and classrooms, and more positive attitudes among students about academic achievement.

**Gaylen Moore**  
Program Evaluator, Project CASE  
Bronx, New York



grant. The SS/HS initiative contributed to these results by providing at-risk students with academic support, both one-on-one and in small groups, during the school day and afterschool homework assistance. In addition, the initiative provided professional development, including classroom management, for staff and workshops for parents.

The SS/HS initiative in Educational Service District 123 in **Pasco, Washington**, resulted in a 17 percent increase over the project period in the number of children who entered school ready to learn by providing ongoing professional development, building training capacity, and implementing the Strengthening Families parent program and the related Ready for Kindergarten program for 800 children.

In **Millville, New Jersey**, the SS/HS project initiated programs that contributed to a 24 percent increase in language arts proficiency in grade 4 and a 59 percent increase in mathematics proficiency in grade 9 over the grant period. These additional educational programs included the Million Minutes Schoolwide Reading Challenge, the Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) principles for all students, an AVID elective class for selected students, and a Ruby Payne Conference on how schools can better teach children living in poverty.

One SS/HS grantee, the J. Sterling Morton High School District in **Cook County, Illinois**, focused on strengthening family connections through a wraparound family case-management program to enhance services to at-risk youth and their families. Through the program, outreach workers made home visits to families, and a bilingual psychologist was made available to families. The results were striking: After just three months of case management, children in the program had statistically significant improvements in their school functioning.

# Enduring Effects of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

In community after community, the SS/HS program has been the catalyst for bringing schools and youth-serving organizations together to build and expand evidence-based programs to prevent violence, promote mental health, and boost young people's academic achievement. The dividends for children, families, and communities at large have been unprecedented: lower rates of school violence, more mental health services for more children, better attendance, and improved academic performance. National evaluation data for the SS/HS grantees from 1999-2002 has shown changes, for example, in these areas:

- In middle schools, a significant reduction in students witnessing bullying or fighting and in feeling unsafe at school
- In high schools, a significant decrease in alcohol and tobacco use

Many communities have drawn on the strength of their SS/HS partnerships to bring additional community resources to bear on these issues. The community investment, in the form of additional funding, staff training, and institutionalization of program components, is laudable. By obliging schools to forge working partnerships with community organizations, the SS/HS Initiative gives funded sites the roots they need to grow and the community investment they'll need to thrive over time.

Below are some examples of the lasting effects of SS/HS community partnerships:

- The **Hays, Kansas**, Learning Center, which enabled Hays County high school dropouts as well as adults to complete their high school education, has not only been sustained but also has expanded to serve a total of eight districts. The Learning Center has contributed to a decrease in county drop-out rates from 18 percent in 1999 to 2 percent in 2004.
- During the four years of the SS/HS grant, the **Jefferson County, Georgia**, collaborative developed a permanent infrastructure consisting of nine strategy teams that are committed to sustaining SS/HS activities and services. The collaborative also developed a sustainability plan that is currently ensuring that almost all of the programs and activities originally funded through the SS/HS grant will continue and thrive.
- In **Millville, New Jersey**, the SS/HS project director and local partners applied for nine grants and were successful in achieving funding in five grants, which will provide support into the future for key pieces of the SS/HS Initiative.
- The San Juan School District in **Blanding, Utah**, has institutionalized many components of its SS/HS initiative. The School Resource Officers report that, as a result of SS/HS, their roles have largely shifted from law enforcement to education and prevention support, their rapport with students has increased, and student behavior has improved over and beyond the SS/HS program. In addition, four of the five district high schools have institutionalized Learning Centers, which offer students academically challenging curricula for credit recovery and provide opportunities for academic acceleration, including online Advanced Placement classes.
- Educational Service District 123 in **Pasco, Washington**, has sustained many SS/HS activities and programs, including regular collaboration and trainings for school resource officers, school crisis response emergency plans in place at schools, and eight lead crisis response individuals. In addition, the mental health counselor position at the detention facility resulted in such positive system changes and improved services to youth with mental health needs that the Benton and Franklin counties chose to permanently fund the position after the SS/HS grant ended.





- In **Deschutes County, Oregon**, following the end of SS/HS funding, local school districts and law enforcement agencies began providing funding for School Resource Officers, and the Safe School Alliance continues to work on improving safety in all county schools.
- In **Utica, New York**, 25 out of 32 programs implemented through SS/HS are still actively running in one or more schools.
- In **Poway, California**, SS/HS funds allowed the creation of the Abraxas Continuation School, a one-room schoolhouse within the high school that continues to serve high-risk youth.
- In the **Los Angeles Unified School District**, many services originally funded by SS/HS have not only been continued but also expanded. For example, county probation funding has expanded on-site probation services to all middle and high schools throughout the district.
- Recognizing that the key to program sustainability was the community's understanding of the services and the impact of the services provided, **Covington, Kentucky**, Public School District's resource development coordinator created print materials and obtained media coverage of programs and events, which greatly increased community support. Nine of the 16 SS/HS programs have been sustained beyond the grant.

The Security Assistant program is well integrated with the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. Data . . . demonstrate the impact of the Security Assistant program on targeted areas of student behavior, including skipping class, defying authority, inciting disorder, and using tobacco . . . School and district leadership have been very positive about the impact of the program at both schools. Funding to sustain these positions is now built into the schools' yearly allocation from central office.

**Janice M. Wilkerson, Project Director**  
**Ready to Learn**  
**Covington Independent Public Schools**  
**Covington, Kentucky**

The local SS/HS has served as a catalyst for systems change in our county. Individual organizations and programs now realize they are part of a "bigger picture" or a "mosaic of services" and welcome the opportunity to collaboratively plan, implement, provide, monitor and sustain essential local services. Local children and families currently have access to services that would have never been possible without the support from SS/HS funding.

**Carol A. Norris**  
**Evaluator, Jefferson County Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative**  
**Louisville, Georgia**

# Safe Schools/Healthy Students: A Good Investment for All

Ten years ago, the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice joined forces to create the SS/HS Initiative to address nationwide concerns about youth violence and school safety. The results of the initiative have been impressive. By requiring communities to carry out evidence-based interventions to address the identified health and safety needs of children and families in their communities and to forge broad-based partnerships, the SS/HS Initiative has judiciously invested federal resources, producing exceptional results in schools and communities across the nation.

Proven prevention programs more than pay for themselves—they strengthen children’s resilience and reverse the trajectory of developmental challenges that often result in school failure, delinquency, substance abuse, and other negative consequences. Recent analyses of prevention and promotion programs for children and adolescents found significant economic benefits from reductions in the costs of crime alone. For example, evidence-based programs such as Functional Family Therapy produce benefit-to-cost ratios that exceed 20 to 1. That means that every dollar spent on these EBIs today can be expected to return 20 or more dollars in the years ahead.<sup>12</sup>

The SS/HS Initiative has given rise to a wealth of vibrant, community-based programs that are improving the lives of children and giving their families hope for a better future. Like never before, schools and youth-serving organizations are sowing the seeds of change in SS/HS communities across the country. Thus far, 336 grantees have been successful in implementing innovative programs to serve families, schools, and the community. But there are still many more children across this country who desperately need the services that SS/HS provides. SS/HS is a wise investment for all Americans.



Such programs will ensure that more communities across the United States enhance the protective factors that build young people’s resilience to mental illness and substance abuse and enable them to succeed academically.

On a daily basis, news headlines remind us that no community can be complacent in its efforts to make its schools and its students safe. None of us are as strong separately as all of us working together to help our children reach their full potential. We must continue to harness this energy and commitment at the local, state, and federal levels to improve the lives of all children, youth, and families. Such investments will contribute to a safe and healthy future for all.

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