

# The **Safe Schools/Healthy Students** Initiative: A Legacy of Success

**Improving** Schools. **Building** Communities. **Changing** Lives.



Safe Schools  
Healthy Students

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## PROBLEM IN BRIEF

In response to a series of deadly school shootings, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative was launched in 1999 as a comprehensive response to address the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of students and to make sure kids felt safe in their schools. Today, there is still a critical need for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative:

- **Bullying:** More than one in three students ages 12 to 18 were bullied at school in 2007.<sup>1</sup>
- **Physical fights:** Nearly one in three high school students took part in a physical fight in 2009.<sup>2</sup>
- **Underage drinking:** Nearly one in three adolescents ages 12 to 17 drank alcohol in 2008.<sup>3</sup>
- **Serious in-school crime:** Students today are more likely to experience crimes such as theft, assault, and rape in school than outside school.<sup>4</sup>

A student's mental health is seriously impacted when exposed to disruptive behaviors, aggression, and violence in schools.<sup>5</sup>

The number of students who were victims of in-school crime in 2007 is equal to the population of Manhattan.

## Safe Schools/Healthy Students Works!

People consider childhood a carefree time. But life can be hard for kids of all backgrounds. Children of all ages may face issues that prevent them from learning and achieving, such as school violence, bullying, emotional distress, and substance abuse. These issues threaten the safety and health of our country's young people.

### But did you know there is a Federal government Initiative that actually makes kids safer?

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative is an unprecedented collaboration between the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Justice. This effort has served more than 365 grantees comprised of schools and communities across the Nation. This successful Initiative harnesses the power of schools, local agencies, and community partners to ensure:

- **Students feel safe in schools, free from violence and bullying.** This enhances their ability to learn.
- **Students avoid drugs, alcohol, and violence.** This helps them live healthier, safer lives.
- **Students have increased access to mental health services** that help them cope.

- **Students don't feel isolated,** because they can connect with their schools and communities.

The success of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative is evident in data collected from the program's grantees. Because of the program, **more than 90 percent of school staff saw reduced violence on school grounds.** And almost **80 percent said Safe Schools/Healthy Students had reduced violence in their communities.**

These data come from a recently completed 5-year evaluation of the program. Evaluators reviewed grantee performance reports, public information and census data, and a collection of annual outcome data, as required by the Government Performance Results Act. Also, interviews and surveys were conducted with grant project directors and their partners.





# Safe Schools/Healthy Students Is Different.

## Collaborating With Other Key Community Partners...

What makes the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative so unique? It's the belief that **when local agencies work together, more can be accomplished** with fewer wasted resources.

As part of this Initiative, school districts are required to partner with their local mental health, juvenile justice, and law enforcement agencies. But many schools don't stop there: they include other strategic community partners. This approach fosters unprecedented local collaboration that enables and encourages true change. And that's the real difference.



“The partnership formed for this project is deeper and more meaningful than anything that has come before it in our county.”

— *School district representative*



## ... And Developing a Comprehensive Plan Integrating Successful Programs!

The partnerships formed in these communities have at their disposal a series of **successful programs and services that make a positive difference with their children.**

By focusing on five key areas, Safe Schools/Healthy Students communities use data to decide what their students and families need and then develop initiatives and programs to satisfy those needs. These key areas include:

- Safe school environments and policies;
- Substance use, violence prevention, and early intervention;
- School and community mental health services;
- Early childhood social and emotional development; and
- Supporting and connecting schools and communities.

## EXAMPLES OF OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Boys and Girls Club • Big Brothers, Big Sisters • YMCA • Emergency Management Services • Hospitals • Parks and Recreation • Universities • Faith-based Organizations • Substance Use Prevention Organizations • Chambers of Commerce • City Government





“Safe Schools/Healthy Students brought us together to achieve the same goal. We are working hard to make the community a better place for the children who live within it.”

— *Mental health partner*

## **SAFE SCHOOLS/HEALTHY STUDENTS PROVIDES COMMUNITIES WITH THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:**

### **SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS AND POLICIES**

- Preparedness plan to address crises in schools
- Security measures for school grounds and facilities
- Reporting on school safety and security incidents
- Parental involvement
- Student disciplinary policy
- School resource officers
- Plans to improve school climate

### **SUBSTANCE USE, VIOLENCE PREVENTION, AND EARLY INTERVENTION**

- Social and recreational student activities
- Mentoring
- School-wide substance use prevention curricula
- School and community institution policies and procedures about alcohol and substance use

### **SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

- Screening and assessment
- School-based mental health services
- Child and family support services
- Referral and follow-up in and outside school

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- Screening for developmental milestones and school readiness
- Training of early childhood service providers
- Parent and caregiver training and support
- Pre- and post-natal home visits by nurses

### **SUPPORTING AND CONNECTING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES**

- Parental and community involvement
- Staff bullying prevention, discipline, and drug and/or violence prevention training
- Family and community involvement in schools
- Mentoring
- Afterschool programs





**Fewer** students witnessed violence.  
**Fewer** students were involved in violent incidents.  
**More** teachers and students felt safer.

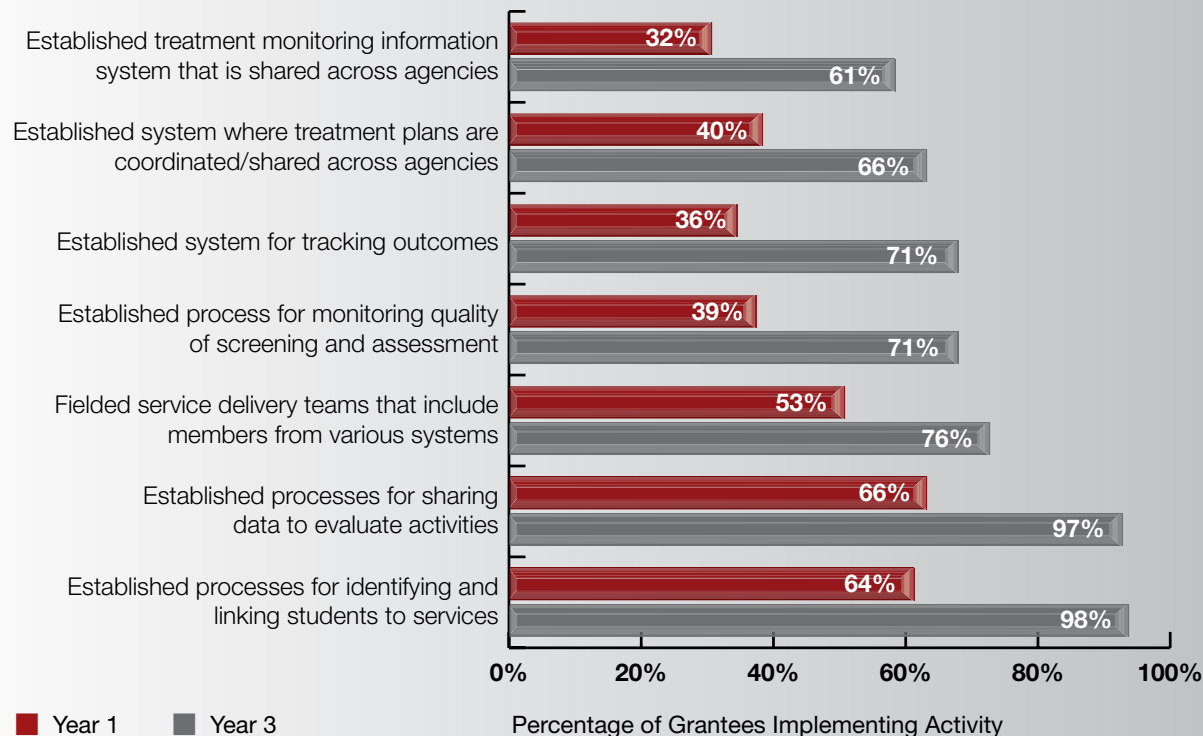
## **Safe Schools/Healthy Students Achieves Its Promise.**

Safe Schools/Healthy Students helps make schools and students safer, as shown by the following data.

**As a result of this Initiative, schools and communities became safer, and fewer students were exposed to violence.**

- Fewer students reported that they had experienced violence (a 7 percent decrease since grant award).
- Fewer students reported that they had witnessed violence (a 4 percent decrease).
- Fully **96 percent** of school staff said Safe Schools/Healthy Students had improved school safety.
- More than **90 percent** of school staff said Safe Schools/Healthy Students resulted in less violence on their campus.
- Nearly **80 percent** of school staff said Safe Schools/Healthy Students had reduced violence in their community.

## Increased Coordination and Service Integration



A large number of school staff said they were better able to detect mental health issues in their students and also saw reductions in students' alcohol and drug use.

- There was a dramatic **263 percent** increase in the number of students who received school-based mental health services, and an astounding **519 percent** increase in those receiving community-based services.
- Nearly **90 percent** of school staff stated they were better able to detect mental health problems in their students.
- More than **80 percent** of school staff reported that they saw reductions in alcohol and other drug use among their students.

There was a dramatic **263 percent** increase in the number of students who received school-based mental health services, and an astounding **519 percent** increase in those receiving community-based services.




**Longstanding “silos” were broken down as schools started working closely with community agencies.**

- More than **98 percent** of grantees established processes to identify and link students to needed services.
- More than **70 percent** of grantees fielded service delivery teams that included members of diverse systems.
- More than **60 percent** of grantees established a system to coordinate mental health services across agencies.
- More than **60 percent** of grantees established a cross-agency treatment-monitoring information system.

**Grantees increasingly used data to drive their decision making and community operations.**

- More than **97 percent** of grantees established processes to share data in order to evaluate activities.
- More than **70 percent** of grantees established a process to monitor the quality of mental health screening and assessments.
- More than **70 percent** of grantees established a system to track outcomes.



“The potential for lasting, positive impact on this generation of children is phenomenal.”  
— *Law enforcement partner*



# Safe Schools/Healthy Students Shows Communities How.

The successful Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative relies heavily on the actions and efforts of community stakeholders. Schools, community agencies, local law enforcement agencies, and juvenile justice systems cooperate, coordinate, and integrate their services.

When communities share information and resources, there is a huge potential for cost savings. And even if they don't receive funding from Safe Schools/Healthy Students, communities can adopt the Initiative's successful strategies.

## Your community can:

- Build strong partnerships by communicating regularly to ensure you understand each other's needs and challenges and to get buy-in early.
- Develop a clear partnership structure with defined roles, a well-articulated mission and vision, teams or committees, and shared decision making strategies.
- Elicit strong support from the superintendent of schools and board of education.
- Collect and use data to choose the right programs, ensure that programs are carried out properly, and monitor results.

More than 98 percent of grantees established processes to identify and link students to needed services.

- Help partners integrate services by educating them about how to share information and streamline referrals without violating privacy laws.
- Network with counterparts from other school districts.
- Respect cultural differences in the community and use effective outreach and hiring practices.







# Evaluation Methodology

The current national evaluation of this Initiative is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. This report focuses on the results of 59 grantees that received Safe Schools/Healthy Students funding beginning in 2005 and 2006. Located in urban, rural, suburban, and tribal areas in 30 states and the District of Columbia, these grantees serve more than 1 million students in 1,473 schools in 125 school districts.

The evaluation design integrated quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the following sources:

- Grant applications and performance reports;
- Public information and census data;
- Site visits during the first year of the grant;
- Annual online surveys of grant project directors and school staff;
- Telephone interviews with project directors (annually) and partners (in the second and third years);
- Annual outcome data, as required by the Government Performance and Results Act, on measures related to substance abuse, access to mental health services, school violence, and attendance; and
- Focus groups with project directors and local partners.



## (Endnotes)

- 1 Dinkes, R., Kemp, J., Baum, K., & Snyder, T.D. (2009). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2009 (NCES 2010-012/NCJ 228478). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991–2009 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey data. Available at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline>
- 3 Office of Applied Studies. (2009). Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings. (HHS Publication No. SMA 09-4434, NSDUH Series H-36). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k8nsduh/2k8Results.cfm>
- 4 Dinkes et al.
- 5 Tolan, P.H., & Gorman-Smith, D. (2002). What violence prevention research can tell us about developmental psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, 14, 713-729.



The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative is a collaboration of the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Justice.