The Six Elements of Safe Schools/Healthy Students

The SS/HS comprehensive plan provides students, schools, and families with a network of effective services, supports, and activities that help students develop the skills necessary to promote positive mental health, engage in prosocial behavior, and prevent violent behavior and drug use; create schools and communities that are a safe, disciplined, and drug-free environment; and engage parents, community organizations, and social services agencies to help develop an infrastructure that will institutionalize and sustain successful program components after federal funding has ended. The six elements should not be conducted or implemented in isolation. Schools and their partners should develop comprehensive plans that address the unique needs of their communities, families, and students; incorporate programs that have been shown to be effective for the populations they are serving; and demonstrate that the partnership has the capacity to successfully implement and sustain the proposed activities.

Element 1: Safe School Environment
Without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn. School safety should be a shared concern among schools, the community, parents, and students. The goal of this element is to establish a commitment and implement strategies to create safe and orderly schools and communities. To accomplish this goal, school and community leaders—along with families—should determine what major safety and security concerns exist and agree on strategies to address them. Using a team approach is the best way to foster joint responsibility, collaboration, and cooperation. In some schools, obvious security measures are needed to ensure safety. They include installing security devices, conducting random inspections, and providing students and staff with identification cards. However, relying heavily on security devices without adequate staffing and training is not sufficient and can have a negative impact on the school environment. Security involves paying careful attention to training, searching for and closing any security gaps, improving communications, testing security devices and procedures, performing maintenance, and updating technology.

Examples of other allowable activities include installing safety equipment; providing for bike patrols on/near school grounds; conducting security assessments; developing crisis preparedness plans, tools, or guidelines; designing enforcement and investigation techniques; enhancing links with community officials and families; and providing staff development programs that bring together police officers, mental health professionals, and juvenile justice system personnel to provide each other with training and support.

Element 2: Alcohol and Other Drug and Violence Prevention and Early
Intervention Programs
Substance abuse and violence are behaviors that are often related to other factors in the home or the wider community. Schools have developed and implemented curriculums to address alcohol and other drugs abuse, violence, and other problems young people face. Although these programs are important, they are insufficient alone. School-based early intervention and prevention efforts need to be coordinated with broader strategies that address change from the individual, classroom, and school levels, to the family and community levels.

Examples of these activities include (1) involving representatives of targeted families and communities in the design and delivery of mental health, early intervention, substance abuse, and violence prevention programs and encouraging community ownership of these programs; (2) reshaping attitudes and beliefs regarding mental health, substance abuse, and violence; (3) providing social and recreational activities and mentoring as alternatives to substance abuse and

violence; (4) providing services to prevent alcohol and drug use and violence, and providing early interventions to promote the healthy development of youth; (5) providing training and consultation to school personnel; and (6) providing supportive services to families, such as family strengthening programs.

Recognizing the importance of the family is critical. Research demonstrates that family interventions aimed at improving parenting practices and the family environment can be effective in reducing later problem behaviors and alcohol and drug abuse among youth. A comprehensive strategy means that schools collaborate with families and other agencies, such as social services, juvenile justice, law enforcement, and recreation, to create prevention programs. Grantees implement activities that have been proven effective in preventing and/or intervening early to prevent substance use and violence among youth. These strategies should also take into account the populations served, including culture, language, gender, race/ethnicity, disability.

Element 3: School and Community Mental Health Preventive and Treatment Intervention Services

Many children and adolescents have mental health needs but are unable to access appropriate high-quality mental health services. These children are frequently victims of violence (such as child abuse, sexual abuse, and/or assault) and witnesses to violence (including domestic violence, school violence, and community violence). They may also include youth with conduct disorders and related problems, who exhibit aggressive antisocial behavior or abuse drugs. Children who suffer from depression are at increased risk for suicide or self inflicted violence but may not have easy access to appropriate mental health services and may not have been identified as in need of services.

The mental health element has a dual purpose: to provide mental health preventive services early to reduce risk of onset or delay the onset of emotional and behavioral problems for some children; and to identify those children who already have serious emotional disturbances and ensure that they receive appropriate services. The SS/HS Initiative requires a formal arrangement between schools and public mental health providers for the delivery services for children and adolescents with more serious mental health problems, to complement school-based prevention and early intervention services.

At a minimum, schools must (1) provide screening and assessment in the school setting (i.e., screening programs to detect depression and other mental health disorders); (2) provide appropriate school-based mental health prevention and early intervention services for at-risk children and adolescents and their families; (3) provide referral and followup with local public mental health agencies when treatment is needed; (4) provide training and consultation to school personnel; and (5) provide supportive services to families in order that they may participate fully in the educational, social, and healthy development of their children. This element also supports enhanced integration and resource sharing among mental health and social services providers in schools and other community-based programs.

Element 4: Early Childhood Psychosocial and Emotional Development Programs

Early childhood prevention and intervention programs focused on positive development of mental and physical health early in a child's life have great potential for buffering the negative impact of risk factors and interrupting the cycle of violence for high-risk children and families. Under this element, the SS/HS Initiative supports activities that make available preventive and intervention services that enable young children (ages 0−5) to enter school ready to learn. Examples of such services include prenatal nurse home visitation, integrated physical and mental health services for mothers and infants following birth (e.g., developing parenting skills, fostering relationship-

building between infant and mother), family support opportunities for families whose children are in childcare programs, case consultation, crisis intervention, integrated therapy, and help for caregivers and teachers to work collaboratively with families to address the social and emotional needs of children. Since access to families with infants and toddlers may be more difficult because younger children are not yet enrolled in school, activities should include ways to overcome barriers and serve families in need.

Element 5: Supporting and Connecting Schools and Communities
Schools that run smoothly foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviors, so every child can learn. These schools have a strong academic focus, support students in achieving high standards, foster positive relationships, promote meaningful parental and community involvement, and recognize the social and emotional needs of students. In order for schools to successfully educate students, it is important that all students and staff feel safe. Schools that have comprehensive violence prevention and response plans in place, plus teams to design and implement those plans, report positive results such as improved academics, reduced disciplinary referrals and suspensions, improved school climate that is more conducive to learning, better staff morale, more efficient use of resources, and enhanced safety.

This element can be used to support positive discipline, academic success, instruction in appropriate behaviors and problem-solving skills, positive behavior support, appropriate academic instruction. Aspects of supportive school and community culture that may be eligible for funding as part of this Initiative are staff training (if the training focuses on knowledge and skills needed to maintain order and discipline, the prevention of bullying and other harassing behaviors, or the integration of drug and/or violence prevention education into classroom teaching and school activities), family and community involvement in school, mentoring, academic enrichment, alternative education, and expanded afterschool programs.

Element 6: Safe School Policies
Although schools are generally among the safest places for young people, safety is enhanced by schoolwide policies and practices that systemically address the needs of students, school personnel, and the community. These policies should include (1) clear standards of student behavior, with enforcement, which consider the social and emotional needs of children; (2) a discipline code, based on respect, that is widely understood by parents, teachers, and students; (3) penalties that are imposed fairly and equitably and are commensurate with the severity of the infraction and provide alternative interventions that teach positive behaviors; (4) zero tolerance for firearms on school grounds and at school-sponsored events; (5) reintegration of students from the juvenile justice system; (6) management information systems for reporting and analyzing violent and noncriminal incidents; and (7) policies and procedures to ensure that parents and the community are welcome in the schools and have opportunities for meaningful participation in planning and carrying out the school's safety policies.

Evidence of Preexisting School-Community Partnership
The purpose of this grant is to enhance and expand existing partnerships. The Partnership should demonstrate that a school-community partnership has been in existence for 6 or more months prior to submission of the application. The preexisting school/community partnership should involve at least two of the four required SS/HS partners that have worked together on issues of school safety, drug and violence prevention, and/or healthy childhood development issues prior to submission of the application. Grantees should have following evidence of a preexisting partnership: partnership's mission and vision statement, governance and leadership of the partnership, list of member organizations and demonstrated substantial participation of members, and examples of accomplishments.