Safety in All Policies

A Brief on Engaging the Education Sector in Preventing Violence in California

Prevention Institute
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Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and wellbeing by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on community prevention, injury and violence prevention, health equity, healthy eating and active living, positive youth development, health system transformation and mental health and wellbeing.

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SUMMARY

Violence is preventable. Multiple sectors have a role in addressing the underlying contributors to violence to prevent it from occurring in the first place. These sectors include early childhood development, education, housing, community development, business, transportation, and more. In fact, the State's crime rate has decreased in large part due to interventions across multiple sectors. The education sector already plays a powerful role in preventing violence.[1] A window of opportunity is opening for the education sector to play an even more significant role in creating safer communities, while improving education outcomes – through *Safety in All Policies*, a multi-sector approach.

The notion of *Safety in All Policies* (SiAP) comes from *Health in All Policies* (HiAP), a collaborative, multi-sector policymaking approach gaining national momentum.[1] In California, a Health in All Policies Task Force was created in 2010 by Executive Order of the Governor to bring together 22 state agencies, departments, and offices to work together to support a healthier and more sustainable California. Growing momentum notwithstanding, the term – HiAP or SiAP – can be misleading, as it can imply a focus on policy only, while in fact, considerations for health and safety can be embedded in policies as well as in organizational practices and in broader decision-making. The term also doesn't explicitly acknowledge that a multi-sector approach fosters win-wins that prevent violence while advancing sector outcomes. For example, since violence impacts school attendance and educational outcomes, the education sector has a vested interest in further reducing its occurrence.

This brief focuses on the education sector (K-12) and recommends the following eight actions for implementation at the local level:

1. Expand initiatives to address pedestrian and bicycle safety such as Safe Routes to School to also address gangs, graffiti, blight, and alcohol outlet density;
2. Establish joint/shared use agreements with community groups to ensure that young people have safe places to be during non-school hours;
3. Build on the attention to trauma-informed practice to acknowledge and prevent trauma at the community level;
4. Close the achievement gap between African American and Latino students and white students through improved school attendance and extended learning;
5. Promote positive discipline approaches, including restorative justice practices;
6. Expand positive school climate efforts, including universal violence prevention programs;
7. Promote opportunities for social support, school connectedness, and youth development through curricular and extra-curricular activities; and,
8. Expand school-based family engagement and education efforts, especially through programs targeted toward families with young children.

This brief makes the case for these recommended actions and suggests roles for the California Department of Education and the California State Legislature in support of these local efforts.[2]

1 For complete guidance on the roles and contributions of multiple sectors and maximizing multi-sector collaboration to prevent violence, see Prevention Institute's *Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence: A Guide for Using Collaboration Multiplier to Improve Safety Outcomes for Young People, Communities and Cities.* For a closer look at the role of education based on Prevention Institute's Collaboration Multiplier tool, see page 107 of *Part 3: Roles and Contributions of Sectors, Agencies and Departments*.

2 For a more detailed discussion of the roles of a variety of State governmental entities in California, see Prevention Institute's *Safety in All Policies: A Brief to Advance Multi-Sector Actions for a Safer California*.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is prevented through the actions of multiple sectors.[3] In addition to criminal justice, mental health, education, housing, community development, business, transportation, planning and others influence risk and resilience factors for violence[4] through their policies and practices. As such, these sectors are positioned to build safety considerations more prominently into their policies and practices and contribute to a safer California. Given that violence impacts the outcomes of multiple sectors, these sectors and others also have an inherent interest in reducing its occurrence. A window of opportunity is opening for the education sector to further to prevent violence while advancing education outcomes – through *Safety in All Policies*, a multi-sector approach to fostering safer communities in California.

The notion of *Safety in All Policies* (SiAP) comes from *Health in All Policies* (HiAP), a collaborative, multi-sector policymaking approach gaining national momentum.[2] HiAP was first used in 2006, with the aim of collaborating across sectors to achieve common goals, which can enhance outcomes. For example, a national assessment of large cities and violence prevention found that communities with more coordination and communication across multiple sectors have lower violence rates.[3] HiAP is a strategy to include health considerations across different sectors that influence health, such as transportation, agriculture, land use, housing, public safety, and education. In California, a Health in All Policies Task Force was created in 2010 by Executive Order of the Governor to bring together 22 state agencies, departments, and offices to work together to support a healthier and more sustainable California.[4] Growing momentum notwithstanding, the term – HiAP or SiAP – can be misleading as it can imply a focus on policy only, while in fact, considerations for health and safety can be embedded in policies, as well as in organizational practices, and broader decision-making. The term also doesn't explicitly acknowledge the win-win nature of such an approach. For example, safe schools promote higher attendance and improved learning outcomes.

High-quality education that fosters positive social-emotional development in young people protects against violence, whereas academic failure increases the risk of violence.[15] [16] [17] [18] Youth who feel connected and committed to school are at a lower risk of harming others through violence, including dating violence,[19] youth violence,[20] and bullying,[21] and are at lower risk for suicide.[22]

3 For complete guidance on the roles and contributions of multiple sectors and maximizing multi-sector collaboration to prevent violence, see Prevention Institute's *Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence: A Guide for Using Collaboration Multiplier to Improve Safety Outcomes for Young People, Communities and Cities.*

4 Risk factors are conditions or characteristics in individuals, families, communities and society that increase the likelihood that violence will occur. Resilience factors are conditions or characteristics in individuals, families, communities and society that are protective, thus reducing the likelihood that violence will occur, even in the presence of risk factors.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Almost every sector can contribute to the reduction of violence. The education sector has ample opportunities to prevent violence by fostering safe environments and norms at and around schools and shaping the lives of millions of children and youth across California. While the role of the education sector in preventing violence may seem intuitive, it's helpful to clarify the role of the education sector and the connections between education, violence, and violence prevention.

The education sector in California, consisting of educators and schools working in partnership with students, parents/caregivers, and community partners, prepares students from early childhood to adulthood to live, work and thrive.[5] The education sector has a vested interest in safety: experiencing and witnessing violence interferes with students' learning,[6 7 8 9 10 11 12] decreases school attendance,[13] interferes with teaching and school administration, reduces funding for schools,[14] and consumes limited and valuable resources. The education system enhances resilience factors and reduces risk factors associated with violence, in particular by promoting connection and commitment to school and minimizing academic failure.

State support for local efforts

While violence prevention must build on local assets and culture and reflect local priorities, the California Department of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the California State Legislature can support local efforts through the provision of guidance and mandates, the removal of barriers, and the creation of incentives. The California State Legislature has supported local efforts, for example, through the enactment of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in 2013. The LCFF shifts all State funding for violence prevention directly to local districts, placing the responsibility for ensuring adequate planning, funding, and accountability for safety to school districts and County Offices of Education. Additional recent legislative efforts include the passage of AB 420, which prohibits the expulsion of any student for disruption or willful defiance, and prohibits the suspension of students in grades K-3 for either of these reasons.

The California Department of Education has played a critical role in offering guidance and resources, including forums, workshops and website resources, and partnerships with organizations to develop innovative models. The State Legislature could consider substantive ways to increase resources to CDE so that it can continue to play its critical leadership role in preventing violence. In this new era of local control, guidance on effective violence prevention is all the more needed so that local communities can implement strategies that address local strengths, needs, and opportunities, while drawing on what we know works from research and practice. For example, CDE can provide guidance on data-informed programming using data sources such as the California Healthy Kids Survey.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The following eight actions and are recommended for implementation at the local level, particularly in schools located within neighborhoods and communities highly impacted by violence. The first four actions bring together the education sector with at least one additional sector to achieve greater impact. This is important because beyond individual sector contributions, it's also critical that the contributions of the sectors be coordinated; communities with more coordination and communication across multiple sectors also have lower violence rates.[23] In order to clearly establish safety and the prevention of violence as a priority, these recommendations can be adopted as part of a district and/or school's Local Control and Accountability Plans and comprehensive safety plans, as appropriate, and communicated through student handbooks and other district and school documents.

1. Expand initiatives to address pedestrian and bicycle safety such as Safe Routes to School to also address gangs, graffiti, blight, and alcohol outlet density.

While many Safe Routes to Schools initiatives focus on pedestrian and bicycle safety, in many communities, programs also address threats and incidents of violence faced by students on their routes to and from school. Programs can include a wide array of different approaches to make communities safer from crime and violence and increase school attendance.[24] Strategies include streetscape design measures that can increase walkability, decrease car speeds, and reduce crime, including Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approaches that reduce opportunities for crime and influence the decisions that precede criminal acts.[25] These programs rely on multi-sector partnerships between education, transportation, planning, business, and public health. These partnerships can expand programs such as Safe Routes to School so that they also address gangs, graffiti and blight, and alcohol outlet density.

2. Establish joint/shared use agreements with community groups to ensure that young people have safe places to be during non-school hours.

Afterschool opportunities provide safe spaces for young people, decrease violence, and offer many other benefits.[26] Yet concerns about neighborhood safety and vandalism, as well as concerns about liability can keep school facilities locked or underutilized after school hours. Promoting access to safe spaces during non-school hours can be particularly important in California's low-income communities of color where there is often a dearth of parks and green space. Schools can partner with parks and recreation, planning, public works, and other sectors to establish joint/shared use agreements that allow for the use of schools facilities for recreation by the public during non-school hours. Increasing access to safe spaces can reduce the risk of violence while promoting physical activity and a sense of community.

3. Build on the attention to trauma-informed policies and practice to acknowledge and prevent trauma at the community level.

Traumatic experiences such as witnessing or experiencing violence, losing or being separated from a parent, abuse and neglect leave some children in a state of hyper-arousal that makes them more likely to respond situations with a fight or flight response that increases the likelihood of present and future violence. Through joint efforts between education and health and human services and others, schools can implement trauma-informed practices and ensure linkages to mental health services. Trauma-informed practices include screening and referring to appropriate services; offering specialized mental health services; and helping students exhibiting symptoms of traumatic stress to self-regulate and establish a sense of safety and connectedness.[27]

Beyond addressing individual needs, it's also important to recognize the impact of community-level trauma. For schools in communities with high levels of violence, this can mean both that there are high levels of trauma across the student and staff population within the school walls, and among the members of the community (adults and youth) that the school serves. Addressing trauma, or any other epidemic, at this scale, means not only insisting on trauma-informed care for individuals, but also exploring how to address trauma at the population level.

Indeed, the impact of trauma extends beyond the individuals who directly witness or experience violence. Vicarious trauma impacts, for example, teachers and other service providers in high-violence communities. The result is both high levels of trauma across the population as well as a break-down of social networks, social relationships and positive social norms across the community – all of which could otherwise be protective against violence.[28] New models are emerging to promote community healing and counter the effects of trauma. Schools can take steps to understand the impact of community trauma on its students and staff and implement healing models. Schools can also establish strategies to protect against trauma, including working with young people to reclaim and improve public spaces, collaborating with the community to build intergenerational connections and networks, and organizing and promoting regular positive community activity.

4. Close the achievement gap between African American and Latino students and white students through improved school attendance and extend learning.

Given that academic failure increases the risk of violence, helping all students achieve academic success is an important strategy for the prevention of violence. In California, African American and Latino students are at greater risk for school drop-out and future unemployment. Students who miss school at an early age are more likely to struggle academically and, in later years, to drop out entirely.[29] Lacking an education, these children are more likely to end up unemployed and at risk of becoming involved in violence and crime, both as victims and as offenders. Research suggests that improving school attendance and engagement can reduce the effects of the risk factors for low academic achievement and help close the achievement gap[30] – and thereby, contribute to the prevention of violence. After commissioning a study to examine the scope, causes and effects of truancy and absenteeism, California Attorney General Kamala Harris concluded that to be smart on crime, prevention of truancy must be a core goal of the State's public safety policy.[31]

Through partnerships between education, health and human services and others such as philanthropy and the private sector, local communities can close the achievement gap through promoting school attendance and extended learning. Strategies to improve attendance include measuring for chronic absenteeism (not just average daily attendance) and increasing attendance among those students who are chronically absent through strategies such as targeted outreach and family engagement, increasing connection to learning activities, and overcoming barriers to attendance.[32] Providing extended learning time through after-school programs, and addressing the phenomenon of summer learning loss are also important strategies for closing the achievement gap.[33] [34] Family support organizations can add school attendance and extended learning campaigns to their existing programs, local funders can provide support to attendance improvement projects, and private sector partners can collaborate with schools to offer incentive programs to encourage and reward improved attendance.[35] Such local efforts can also support extended learning programs.

5. Promote positive discipline approaches, including restorative justice practices.

Effective discipline practices are an important violence prevention strategy. These practices include a move away from a zero tolerance approach, which has been shown to have limited effectiveness and unintended negative consequences, toward supporting a student to change behavior while remaining in his/her educational setting .[36] [37] Effective discipline practices also address the disproportionate rate of expulsions and suspensions of students of color. Rates of expulsions and suspensions are decreasing in California.[38] More can be done to build on these successes.

Approaches that orient discipline toward positive reinforcement, rather than negative punishment, and address behaviors at a systemic level, including restorative justice practices, are effective in supporting a positive school climate (Recommended Action 6), improving student attendance, and maintaining a safer school environment.[39] School-based restorative justice practices promote positive relationships within the school community, and teach students the skills to solve their own problems, repair harm, and prevent future problems. Preliminary research suggests that school-based restorative justice reduces violence, school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the juvenile and criminal justice systems.[40] In addition, as part of discipline reform, schools can enhance policies and practices related to School Resource Officer conduct, communication with students, families and other community members, and record-keeping.[41]

6. Expand positive school climate efforts, including universal violence prevention programs.

California schools are approaching a tipping point in adopting policies and practices to improve school climate. The inclusion of positive school climate (as measured by suspension rates, expulsion rates, and other local measures, such as school safety) as one of the eight priority areas to evaluate school districts' use of LCFF funds is a positive direction for California. Positive school climate "fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society,"[42] and includes: norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe; people who are engaged and respected; educators who model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; and other elements.[43] Studies

have shown that positive school climate contributes to less aggression and violence;[44] [45] less harassment[46] [47]and less sexual harassment.[48] A positive school climate approach is a contrasting approach to school security strategies, and in fact, there is some evidence that strategies such as metal detectors and other security measures may negatively impact climate and students' perceptions of safety.[49]

Positive school climate efforts can include universal school-based violence prevention education programs, delivered to all students in a school or particular grade, which can reduce violence by 15 percent in as few as six months.[50] [51] These programs teach all students and staff emotional and social skills for non-violent conflict resolution and improve the campus climate as a whole. Some programs address a specific form of violence, such as dating abuse, and address violence as well as other youth risk behaviors such as substance abuse and sexual risk behaviors.[52] [53]

7. Promote opportunities for social support, school connectedness, and youth development through curricular and extra-curricular activities such as athletics, arts, and service-learning.

A strong sense of connectedness to schools and relationships with caring adults can protect young people against aggression and violence.[54] [55] Further, participation in youth development activities decreases involvement in delinquent behavior, increases academic achievement, and improves students' attitudes about themselves.[56] Steps to improve school connectedness include effective classroom management practices, training educators to better address the diverse needs of students, enhancing open communication and decision-making processes, and engagement of community partners on campus. Promoting social support and youth development through afterschool opportunities, mentoring programs, athletics, arts, and service-learning opportunities reduce violence while promoting healthy skill development and fostering positive relationships among youth and between youth and older peers and adults.[57]

8. Expand school-based family engagement and education efforts, especially through programs targeted toward families with young children.

Parents/caregivers and other family members can have the most influence on young people in shaping their values, capacities and behaviors toward nonviolence. There is growing evidence that school-based family engagement programs can improve family relationships and cohesion and have substantial, long-term effects in reducing violent behavior, especially when the programs are started early.[58] Local communities can work to expand school-based family engagement programs. Specific programs for middle school and high school that include training to parents and caregivers can address specific forms of violence such as dating abuse and sexual assault during developmentally sensitive times and set a foundation for a safe and healthy adulthood.[59] [60] Education for parents and caregivers on child development, communication skills, and nonviolent problem-solving may also improve family functioning.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Attendance Works: *www.attendanceworks.org*
- California Department of Education: *www.cde.ca.gov*
- California School Boards Association and California Partnership to End Domestic Violence. *Promoting healthy relationships for adolescents*: Board policy considerations. Sacramento, CA. 2014.
- California School Boards Association: *www.csba.org*
- California School-based Health Alliance: *https://www.schoolhealthcenters.org*
- Educators Network for Effective School Discipline: *www.edsource.org/about-edsource/school-discipline-network#.VOT-obnwvIW*
- Joint Use: *www.jointuse.org*
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: *www.pbis.org*
- Prevention Institute. *A Multi-Sector Partnerships For Preventing Violence: A Guide For Using Collaboration Multiplier To Improve Safety Outcomes For Young People, Communities And Cities*. Oakland, CA. 2014.
- Prevention Institute. *A Multi-Sector Approach to Preventing Violence: A Companion to Multi-Sector Partnerships for Preventing Violence, a Collaboration Multiplier Guide*. Oakland, CA. 2014.
- Prevention Institute. *Fact Sheet: The Links Between Violence and Poor Learning*. Oakland, CA. 2011.
- National Center for Safe Routes to School: *www.saferoutesinfo.org*

ENDNOTES

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