Educational Leaders for Effective Practice

The Importance of Prevention

> Schools that satisfy students' basic needs benefit from students' improved attitudes and behavior. In addition to helping their students learn and grow -- academically, socially, emotionally, and ethically -- these schools also help the students avoid problems ranging from emotional distress to drug use to violence. . . . The mission of our public schools historically has been -- and still needs to be -- to prepare students to be productive citizens, to cultivate moral character, and to promote an appreciation of the arts and culture. Emphasizing the importance of learning along with other qualities that are essential to our society, such as fairness, concern for others, and responsibility, helps promote a shared commitment to the school's goals, establishes common ground, and shapes the norms that govern daily interactions.
>
> Learning First Alliance (2001). *Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools,* p. vi

Students cannot learn if they are distracted by problems at home or at school. They cannot do well on standardized tests if they are consumed with fear of bullying by other students. They cannot achieve if they are experimenting with drugs and alcohol, or face violence and fear at home, or have mistakenly looked for a sense of belonging through anti-social groups like gangs. Most studies agree that school failure, represented by low grade point average, is one of the most consistent risk factors for, and a major predictor of, substance abuse. Research also indicates that academic success can reduce involvement in a variety of risky behaviors that compromise students' health (Dryfoos, 1990).

> "Children who are hurting cannot learn effectively, and if they aren't getting the necessary attention, their presence in schools drains energy, focus, and potential from the learning environment," writes Maurice Elias and his colleagues in *School Psychology Review*. "Many schools already have mandates for violence prevention, bully prevention, drug prevention, character education, and the like . . . often it is assumed that evidence-based programs can be `plugged in' and then work effectively. How academic, social and emotional learning intervention programs fit in with one another and with the rest of the school day matters a great deal to learners. Creating this fit takes more time to work out than one might infer from written accounts and preventions."
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> Elias et. al., 2003

Addressing these risk factors is complex and, to do it effectively, requires a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach (Adelman, 1993, 1996a, 1996b; Catalano and Hawkins, 1995; Comer, 1997; Dryfoos, 1998; Greenwald et. al., 1996; Sailor and Skrtic, 1996; Schorr, 1997). Years of research have demonstrated the critical role that schools can play in promoting the healthy development and learning of young people. Comprehensive prevention programs that combine research-based strategies targeted to a common goal have been shown to be effective in preventing violence and substance abuse among young adolescents. *Safe, Supportive, and Successful Schools* identifies these four key elements of a comprehensive approach:

- Providing appropriate academic instruction
- Creating a caring school community
- Teaching appropriate behaviors and social problem-solving skills
- Implementing positive behavior support systems (Osher et. al., p. 63).

These four elements are central to meeting both school improvement and school safety goals (Osterman, 2000).

[Click here](#) for a brief overview of several studies of interventions that have successfully prevented problem behavior and/or improved academic performance

Although research has shown that these practices are linked to school success, few schools use such multiple strategies or research findings as the basis for selecting programs because it is difficult to find comprehensive and reliable information. Schools appear to rely on well-marketed instructional programs that have not been evaluated or shown to work.

"Despite the availability of evidence-based programs, many schools still do not use them," according to Mark T. Greenberg and colleagues in *American Psychologist.* For example, a study conducted by Ennett et. al. surveyed educators from a national sample of public and private schools and found that only 14 percent used interactive teaching strategies and effective content in delivering substance use prevention programming (*Prevention Science, 4,* 1-14).

Research Findings from Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention

Nan Tobler identified the following principles of effective substance abuse prevention through a synthesis of findings of multiple studies (Tobler, 1986; Tobler, 1998; Tobler, 1993; Tobler and Stratton, 1997):

- Interactive drug prevention programs are far more effective than the non-interactive ones.
- Interactive programs that are community-wide are even more effective.
- Smaller programs delivered to fewer than 500 students were more effective in reducing drug use.
- Systemwide change programs (either school-community-media-family) or entire school system efforts, which are often called comprehensive, collaborative prevention programs, are far more effective than either the social influences or comprehensive life skills programs.

In "Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General," the authors described similar findings for violence prevention programs. They also point out that the manner in which a program is implemented can have an enormous impact on its effectiveness.

> "Even the best programs are effective only when implemented with high quality and fidelity to the program's design," the authors write. "In other words, using an effective strategy is only part of what is required to achieve effective results (Youth Violence, 2001)."

The existing research supports the premise that prevention programs that are implemented with fidelity and adhere to the above cited principles of effectiveness are effective means of preventing substance abuse and violence in schools.

The Impact of School Connectedness

> ". . . . Every school must make the creation of a safe and supportive learning community one of its highest priorities. Each component of this -- safe, supportive, learning, community -- is critical."
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> *Learning First Alliance. 2001. Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools*

Effective prevention programs go beyond simply focusing on interventions. Your plan must be comprehensive and impact all of the elements in a school community. According to Alison Adler, this means creating a single school culture. "A Single School Culture is not a program but a way of organizing and running a school. It begins with shared norms, beliefs, values, and goals and results in agreed upon processes and procedures that produce consistency in practice. A Single School Culture results in consistency of both adult and student practices related to behavior, academics, and climate" (Adler 2005). The implementation of this approach has been shown to be an effective school-based prevention strategy.

Another essential element of effective prevention programs is that they impact the degree to which students feel connected to their schools. The National Longitudinal Study of Health, a study of 90,000 middle and high school students, also found that students who feel "connected" to school -- as measured by the strength and quality of their relationships with teachers and other students -- are more likely to have improved attitudes toward school, learning, and teachers; heightened academic aspirations, motivations, and achievement; and more positive social attitudes, values and behavior. They are also less likely to use drugs, be violent, commit suicide, or exhibit other at-risk behaviors (Resnick et. al., 1997). Others have presented similar findings (Verdugo and Schneider, 1999; Gottfredson, 2001).

Research also shows that the students' sense of school as a community is related to a number of improved outcomes, including reduced drug use, victimization, and delinquency, increased positive interpersonal attitudes, enjoyment of school, school engagement, and academic motivation (Battistich and Horn, 1997; Solomon et. al., 2000). Other studies also find evidence of reduced violence and sexual activity (O'Donnell et. al., 1995), and improved school climate, reading and math achievement, and anger control(Cook et. al., 2000).

Other aspects of school life bear similar evidence of the impact of school connectedness. Students who participate in extracurricular activities have better attendance, lower dropout rates, lower rates of drug use, higher academic achievement, and higher aspirations than nonparticipants (Brown and Theobald, 1998; Camp, 1990; Jenkins, 1996).

Well-designed prevention programs based upon the principles of effectiveness have been shown to be successful. Some examples of effective prevention efforts are the *Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, Reconnecting Youth and PATHE.* The *Resolving Conflict Creatively Program* is a K-12 school program that cultivates the social, emotional, and ethical development of children through teaching conflict resolution and intercultural understanding. Key findings from the Atlanta pilot sites of this effort include the following:

- 64 percent of teachers reported less physical violence
- 75 percent of teachers reported an increase in student cooperation
- 92 percent of students reported feeling better about themselves
- 90 percent of the parents reported an increase in their own communication and problem-solving skills
- Student attendance rates improved
- Rates of course failure decreased
- In- and out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school decreased
- Drop-out rates decreased (Aber et. al., 1996)

Reconnecting Youth is a school-based peer group program that builds life skills among adolescents at high risk for behavioral problems in general and drug involvement specifically. Five months after the intervention, participants in the program showed a tendency to curb their progression of drug use. In addition, fewer drug control problems and consequences were recorded. Students enrolled in the program also showed increases in grade-point averages and self-esteem, and exhibited more positive, connected relationships with teachers, friends, and family (Eggert et. al., 1994; Eggert et.al., 1995).

PATHE is a school-based delinquency prevention program that combines an environmental change approach with a direct intervention for youth at risk. A study that compared PATHE students to a control group showed similar outcomes: a decrease in delinquency and drug use; a reduction in suspension rates, significant decreases in alienation for both middle and high school students; increased attachment to school resulting in higher attendance, grades, promotion rates, and graduation rates. The study also found improvements in staff morale, school safety, and teacher-administration cooperation (Gottfredson, 1984; Hahn et. al., 1994).

Key Learnings

> The school environment and individual academic performance affect a young person's inclination to engage in risky behaviors . . . [and] ultimately affect his or her health and well-being. Not only do schools provide students with the solid academic foundation needed to promote future well-being, but they also help equip students with the skills that enable them to make choices about healthy lifestyles throughout life, including avoiding substances and violence.
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> Learning First Alliance, p. 1

Schools can enhance their efforts to reduce or prevent substance abuse among young people by coordinating multiple, complementary strategies that "address change not only at the individual level but also at the school, peer, family, community, and larger society levels" (Learning First Alliance, p. 1). The Middle School Drug Prevention and School Safety

Program, funded by Safe and Drug Free School, U.S. Department of Education, was designed to provide this kind of support to schools.

This event looks at the importance of, and need for, implementing effective prevention programs in schools, and some key lessons learned from the Middle School Drug Prevention and School Safety Program, funded by the federal government to coordinate prevention programs in our schools. Tomorrow, we will examine the role of the coordinator as an essential mechanism for supporting the coordination and implementation of effective prevention programs. We will look at how coordinators in a variety of schools and settings were able to secure sustainable improvement using research-based principles of prevention. In the days ahead, we will draw upon research on program effectiveness and intervention, while offering the tools you need to create a coordinator position or function in your school or district. We will provide you with research, lessons learned from six years of experience, links to on-line core training and courses, as well as examples from practitioners in the field.

Discussion Questions

Please think about the questions below and share your responses, comments, and/or any questions about today's material in the discussion area.

- How do you see prevention and academics connecting?

- What are the most important issues facing your school or district now?

- How would you want to use a prevention coordinator to address those issues?

This completes today's work.

Please visit the *Discussion Area* to share your responses to the discussion questions!

Resources for Day 1:

Adler, Alison. (2005). *Single School Culture -- Components and Strategies for Implementation.* Keynote address to the 2005 Governor's Institute for Educators. Available: http://www.center-school.org/profdev/documents/adler-backhus.pdf

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Elias M., Zins J.E., Graczyk P.A. and Weissberg, R.P. (2003) Implementation, Sustainability, And Scaling Up of Social-Emotional and Academic Innovations in Public Schools. *School Psychology Review*, 32 (3), 303-319.

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Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education (2002). *Leaving No Child Behind: Results-Based Strategies for Safe and Drug-Free Schools.*
Siliva, S. (July, 2005). Personal communication.

Silvia, E.S., and Thorne, J. (1997). *School-based prevention programs: A longitudinal study in selected school districts. Executive Summary. Final Report.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Smith, K (January, 2005). Personal communication.

Tobler, N. (1986). Meta-analysis of 143 adolescent drug prevention programs. *Journal of Drug Issues 16,* 537-567.

Tobler, N. (1998). Principles of effectiveness of school-based drug prevention programs:The rationale for effective peer programs. *Peer Facilitator Quarterly, 15,* 109-115.

Tobler, N. (1993). Updated meta-analysis of adolescent drug prevention programs. In C. Montoya, C. Ringwalt, B. Ryan, & R. Zimmerman (Eds), *Evaluating School-Linked Prevention Strategies: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs.* San Diego, CA: UCSD Extension, University of California, 71-86.

Tobler, N. & H. Stratton (1997). Effectiveness of school-based drug prevention programs: A meta-analysis of the research. *Journal of Primary Prevention 18* (1), 71-128.

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U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Institute of Education Sciences. 2005. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2005.* Available: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/index.asp?ShowFileName=Exec_Summ.asp

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Overview of Effective Interventions

The following summaries report on a number of programs in use in public schools throughout the United States that have demonstrated success in preventing problem behavior and/or in improving academic performance.

- Long-term follow-up of inner-cty children who had participated in a comprehensive, K-5 prevention program showed positive findings in the areas of behavior and school performance. Students receiving the full intervention reported less heavy drinking, fewer violent delinquent acts, less frequent sexual intercourse, fewer sexual partners, and less pregnancy at age 18. They also had higher school-reported grade point averages and self-reported achievement, and were less likely to repeat a grade (Hawkins et. al., 1999).

- *Project Support*, a three-year drug and gang prevention program for elementary school students, produced positive outcomes in both behavior and school performance. These students produced positive outcomes in both behavior and school performance. These included less crime against people and property, better attendance, less tardiness, higher academic achievement scores in reading, math, and language, and increased pro-school attitudes (Simun et.al., 1996).

- A study examining a "caring classroom" program developed for elementary school children with disruptive behavior shoed an overall decrease in disruptive behavior and an increase in academic achievement. Most students receiving the program had improved report card grades, and some students had better rates of assignment completion (Lindmark et.al., 1996).

- When compared with a control group, students participating in the Behavioral Monitoring and Reinforcement Program had better grades and attendance immediately following the intervention. The year after the intervention ended these students also displayed fewer problem behaviors at school and reported less substance abuse and criminal behavior. Five years after the program ended, these students were less likely to have a juvenile record (Bry, 1982; Bry and George, 1979; Bry and George, 1980).

- Evaluation results from STATUS (a school within a school program involving youth at high risk in junior and senior high schools)

demonstrated that intervention students reported reduced delinquent behavior, had reduced levels of negative peer influences, earned higher grade point averages, perceived school to be significantly less punishing and more rewarding, were significantly more attached to school, had more positive self concepts, and persisted in school longer (Gottfredson, 1990; Gottfredson, 1997).

- Compared to the control group, students in the Social Skills Training (a social skills program for upper elementary students that uses drama simulation games to help students improve interpersonal problem-solving abilities) group demonstrated the following directly after program participation: more assertive responses, fewer passive and aggressive problem-solving responses, and increased popularity. One year later, they also had increased grade-point averages (Rotheram, 1982).

- Children involved in the Seattle Social Development Program (a school-based program for grades 1-6 that seeks to reduce childhood risks for delinquency and drug abuse by improving parent-child communication and changing teachers' classroom management practices) study were followed through the sixth grade. Fifth grade students in the intervention group showed the following changes: reduced antisocial behavior, particularly aggressiveness (for males); reduced self-destructive behavior (for females); improved academic skills; greater commitment to school; reduced levels of alienation; better social bonding to others; less misbehavior in school; and, fewer incidents of drug use in school (Hawkins et. al., 1992b; Hawkins et. al., 1991).