

Educational Leaders for Effective Practice

Step-by-Step to Prevention: Research to Practice

"Good training is critical to good implementation. Many successful programs have used a social learning training strategy, emphasized opportunities for peer collaboration and problem-solving, and provided ongoing consultation, supervision, and additional training if needed."

Durlak, J. (1998). *Why Program Implementation is Important*



Coordinators needed to take a systematic approach to their work incorporating proven strategies and a thoughtful plan. Through their core training and follow-up online courses, coordinators learned a step-by-step way to devise and implement a prevention plan for their schools and communities. Dr. Durlak has identified professional development as one of the steps to ensure effective implementation in schools. There are several others we will look at throughout this day.

Ingredients for Sustainable School Improvement

In "Safe, Supportive and Successful Schools: Step by Step" David Osher, Kevin Dwyer, and Stephanie Jackson state that research and practice suggest that [sustainable school improvement](#) requires at least 14 ingredients. We will take a closer look at each of these components:

[Form a school-based team.](#)

[Conduct a needs assessment.](#)

[Develop relationships with school staff and community members.](#)

[Develop an action plan.](#)

[Select a research based prevention program.](#)

[Implement the program, often starting with a pilot program.](#)

[Conduct continual staff development.](#)

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All the schools with prevention coordinators had significant problems in the areas of drugs, alcohol, or violence. Those were the starting points. But coordinators had to gather evidence and go through a step-by-step process in deciding which initiatives to undertake. As part of that process, you will need to select evidence-based programs and practices that fit your school. Be an intelligent consumer. Make sure the programs and practices have produced results under conditions that suggest that they will work in your own school and community (Osher et. al., pp. 5-6). [Here's a link](#) to some of the excellent resources available to you online to help you select the right interventions for your community.

Form a School-Based Team



“Significant school improvement cannot be started by one person, nor does such change begin out of the blue,” write David Osher and colleagues in *Safe, Supportive and Successful Schools*. “A core group of leaders usually begins the change, which is designed to address or expand on the existing school system mission or vision statement.”

It is a good idea for schools to employ two teams: the school wide team that addresses overall performance and the student support team that addresses individual student problems, according to *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide*. At least three people -- the principal, a teacher and mental health specialist -- should serve on both teams, according to the *Action Guide*.

Practitioners suggest first looking to work with an existing school wide team that addresses academic performance and family involvement. Team members should understand the school community. Some should have expertise in areas such as school safety, student support, mental health and school reform. The members should also represent a variety of perspectives.

The coordinator is responsible for leading the team and making sure it stays on track. Alison Adler, who oversaw the work of several coordinators in Palm Beach County, Florida, offered this advice for team leaders.

“Set expectations and high expectations at that but have them known as targets,” Adler said. “Have them believe that they have deliverables. It's not about just talking. It's about doing the work. It's about building a groundswell of support for the work so that at whatever time either the job is sustained but more importantly the initiative is sustained.”



Lisa Pisciotta, a middle school coordinator in Denver, said that it is also critical to encourage team members to take ownership of programs or prevention efforts. That will make them more invested in the programs and the programs can live on even if the coordinator position ends.

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Conduct a Needs Assessment

Day 3 has already discussed the importance of needs assessments. A good assessment is the key to developing your prevention program. The needs assessment is a way to take a systematic look at the issues facing a school and community. An assessment can include gathering existing data, such as school offenses and suspensions. It provides objective data to problems that people might sense but not have the evidence to back up. An assessment also may reveal issues that team members had not been aware of. Assessments also often include surveys of students, faculty and school administrators as well as focus groups. Many times, coordinators meet with community officials who may have access to key data or have conducted their own needs assessments. Police departments will have data on youth offenses and agencies such as the YMCA or Boys and Girls Clubs may have conducted their own youth needs assessments that could be relevant for this work.

“If you come in and bring programs without knowing what the true issues are that is setting up problems that are hard to overcome,” Pisciotta said. “With that needs assessment you can go back to the school and administration and say this is what's happening in our community.”

Added Adler, “Look at what the school has already done and what the community has already decided on the needs for that school and try and mold a plan that works for both groups.”

It is not enough to simply gather data, however, she said.

“When you see data that’s suspicious you should ask a lot of questions,” Adler said. “You should dig down a little bit. You should use a variety of sources of data. School data is not always as accurate as we like depending on who enters it. If a school said that they had 1,500 assaults that could be a coding error. It’s really important to know your data especially if you’re a coordinator going into a school. The last thing you want to say to a school, oh I see you have a high number of this or that without having done your homework.”

For more information on needs assessments see online courses [“Using Existing Data in Your Needs Assessment”](#) and [“Identifying Prevention Priorities and Strategies for Success.”](#)

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Develop Relationships with School Staff and Community Members



Relationship building is one of the most critical jobs of a prevention coordinator. Teachers need to know that the coordinators are there to make their lives easier, not to add work. Principals must support the coordinators for them to be effective. Community members, such as police chiefs, school board members, city council members and heads of nonprofits can become crucial allies in the work of a coordinator. Much of this relationship building involves being a steady, available presence and offering to help rather than asking for something -- at least in the beginning.

These relationships are not only good for the coordinator but good for the school as well.

Trisha Garwood, school coordinator at Portage High School in Portage, Wisc., had her office located right next to the copy room, where teachers came by every day. She stationed herself outside the room each day and talked to the teachers. She also administered a mini-survey to learn more about their needs and concerns. It quickly became clear that teachers felt that incoming junior high students needed some help in adjusting to high school life. They were often disoriented and unprepared to start school. In her first year, the incoming freshmen class was particularly seen as troublesome. With the needs of the teachers in hand, Garwood and school staff put together a plan for a freshman orientation. Under the plan the first day of school was solely for freshmen. They met with teachers, got their schedules, found their way around school, and signed up for extracurricular activities. They also learned how to do seemingly simple things that had caused other freshmen problems in the past. For example, everyone in high school had lockers with padlocks—a change from junior high. Trying to open those padlocks quickly in between classes was often difficult for new freshmen, who would get taunted by their upperclassmen. On the freshmen day, they got a chance to practice opening their locks.

“We did an assessment after the first freshmen day,” Garwood said. “The staff had outstanding reviews. They saw a lot more confidence in the freshmen as they walked down the halls. They were more grounded. They had a sense of respect for the building and a sense of belonging. It was really their school.”

Administrative and Teacher Support Key in Prevention Programs

“Every successful program depends on strong administrative support,” according to the Blue Prints for Violence Prevention Initiative, which identifies effective violence prevention and drug prevention programs that have been evaluated in rigorous, controlled trials. “Even after a program is adopted, administrators can make or break a program depending on their abilities to lead and motivate other people and to articulate the vision of the program... When implementing staff feel fully supported, they will be more likely to follow through with a program and to make it a success.”

Source: Mihalic S, Irwin, K, Fagan, A, Ballard, D. and Elliott, D. (July 2004) “Successful Program Implementation: Lessons from Blueprints.” *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Office of Justice Programs, Washington, D.C.

Trisha Garwood also quickly learned that it was critical to reach out to her community. The high school building was relatively new and had been funded by a referendum. School administrators knew that later on, they might need to ask the community for more funding. So they did not always want to be seen as having their hand out. The area has a high elderly population who could make or break any future referendums. Garwood took a team of administrators to meet with seniors at a local residential facility. When asked for their ideas, they said that they wanted to spend time with kids in a positive way rather than just seeing them as hoodlums hanging out on the streets.

Garwood began organizing a regular euchre night that was attended by more than 100 people-half seniors and half seventh and eighth graders. The game nights have been such a success that the seniors have become some of the students'-and the schools-biggest advocates, Garwood said. Recently they supported the construction of a skateboard park that the students wanted.

[***Click here to read more about the value of school-community partnerships***](#)

For more information on developing relationships see online courses "[Promoting Prevention Through School-Community Partnerships](#)" and "[Linking Violence and Substance Abuse Prevention to Academic Success](#)."

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Develop an Action Plan

An action plan is a blueprint for the work of the coordinator. It is based on the needs assessment and identifies the key priority areas for improvement. The plan will include goals with measurable objectives.

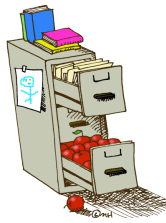
"Detailed planning is essential; vague or tentative plans never eventuate in success," writes Maurice Elias in *School Psychology Review*. "But detailed plans are almost never implemented as envisioned; rather they are temporary, flexible and represent guideposts. Consequently, plans must delineate processes for dialogue, project management, setting benchmarks for program, gathering and communication feedback, and making decisions about significant changes."

Coordinators and team members should build on and strengthen existing resources. While action plans are an important basis for work, they will doubtless change as coordinators get to know their schools better. Karen Smith, who worked in several schools in Alief, Texas, found that she had to modify her action plan to fit the needs of each school. Even though the demographics were similar across schools the needs were different. If the school was low performing on standardized tests, principals might be reluctant to introduce any prevention curriculum. Instead, Smith and her colleagues helped teachers find ways to connect with their students and manage their classrooms, which in turn could help them better teach material for the standardized tests. In another school with higher test scores, Smith might concentrate on building the strengths of the students to continue to do well. There might be more student led activities as well.

[Click here for Action Plan Matrix](#)

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Select a Research-Based Prevention Program



At the heart of the coordinator program is the reliance on prevention programs that have been validated by research. Coordinators were required to use prevention programs that were on the U.S. Department of Education's list of exemplary or promising programs. All had been shown to be effective in research studies.

Among the key prevention strategies that have been favorably evaluated are:

- + [Enhancing students' personal and social skills.](#)
- + [Connecting at-risk students and families with appropriate services.](#)
- + [Providing safe and supervised alternatives.](#)
- + [Restructuring classrooms to promote student engagement.](#)
- + [Influencing school and community norms.](#)
 - + [Establishing and enforcing clear school policies.](#)
 - + [Establishing and enforcing clear community policies.](#)
 - + [Building school-family-community-partnerships](#)

For more information see online course [Selecting Research-Based Prevention Programs for Your School.](#)

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Implement the Program, Often Starting with a Pilot Program

Choosing a research-based prevention program is only the first step. The next step is to implement that program within the specific problems and population of a school and community.

Quality implementation refers to the degree to which an intervention is delivered as it was intended to be delivered. However, many researchers in the field assert that successful implementation actually depends on some degree of adaptation. Programs must be adapted to accommodate complex and often idiosyncratic school settings as well as to meet the needs of a variety of audiences. One group of researchers have proposed that program modification is acceptable as long as the program's active or core elements are delivered as planned.

Many coordinators began implementing their programs on a small scale. They would start in one classroom or one grade level.



“It is nice to think big but in reality, small wins and baby steps provide the essential foundation on which later, larger, and enduring successes can rest,” writes Maurice Elias. “The smaller steps must be studied in detail and the learnings of these studies widely shared and built upon.”

And not every intervention should continue after a pilot run.

“We've had good luck in a few initiatives that had results that showed that these interventions worked and the schools made long-standing commitments to them,” Adler said. “But if we find some that aren't making the grade, they're not showing enough improvement or they're difficult to implement, no matter how evidence based or research based our schools aren't going to really accept them.”

For more information see online course [“Implementing Research-Based Prevention Programs for Your School”](#).

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Conduct Continual Staff Development

One of the most important jobs of a prevention coordinator is to conduct on-going professional development. In fact, [teacher training](#) is a critical component of a prevention plan. Teachers will be the main school staff implementing these programs, which often require an interactive, active-learning style that they may not be trained in. Because these programs are comprehensive and seek to involve the whole school, coordinators need to involve and train custodians, cafeteria staff, secretaries and paraprofessionals as well. Many schools have high turnover so new staff need to be trained in prevention.

“We would come to a school for a whole day and have teachers rotate through on their off periods,” said Karen Smith, coordinator at Alief Independent School District in Texas. “We focused on prevention strategies for all teachers-not just the ones in health, or advisory periods or social studies. We helped them with classroom management and helping them to recognize that just an ounce of prevention in the way they structure their routines and class, just the way met their students at the door, the way they made eye contact with them and how they heard them helped them to be effective in whatever curriculum or instructions they had. And then reinforcing the program with the teachers who were actually using the prevention program. So all teachers felt like they had a piece of the prevention even though the other teachers were teaching the program.”

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Work with Community Members to Implement Programs



Community members are equally important partners in prevention programs. They can bring needed resources and expertise to schools. What's more, students are a product of their community as well as their family. Prevention coordinators need to have their finger on the pulse of the community and know what the key players are doing around prevention issues.

Fred Poteete, a middle school coordinator in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, needed the help of the community in combating a serious bullying problem. Many families attended church, which were a key part of the community. Poteete invited youth pastors from the area to school and presented a bible study curriculum about bullying. Poteete gave them the curriculum along with some ideas about how they could address bullying in their youth groups. He explained that bullying not only means hitting or calling someone names but excluding people from groups, which can happen as easily in church groups as in other groups.

Poteete also pointed out to the youth pastors that many youth groups are small, which increases the chance the someone in the group will be bullied.

“That's because if you're a little bit different there is less chance of someone being able to identify with you in a small group as there is in a large group [where it is more likely that there is someone like you],” Poteete said. “And they took that back to their faith communities because they felt that it was important that what the students were hearing at school about bullying they heard at church too.”

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Communicate Findings and Results



The most successful coordinators constantly communicated with their key audiences—principals, teachers, students, parents and community members. They kept their stakeholders apprised of their findings, their data, and their progress in prevention. They also made the link between their work and school achievement, said Amalia Cuervo, program officer at the U.S. Department of Education.

"I noticed that coordinators that were really savvy and successful know how to use the data that they collect in their initial needs assessment in year one and sell the program based on hard core data," Cuervo said. "And then they continue to inform the schools as they gathered more data about their impact. So that there were knowledgeable consumers, the district and the parents and the community were involved and knowledgeable about what was being done in their schools and with their students. The most effective coordinators were able to make the link between what they were doing and the impact of their efforts on school achievement in areas such as decreased disciplinary referrals and higher achievement scores in science and math and reading."

Marie Rogers, a middle school coordinator in Nassau County, Florida, made it a point to consistently communicate the results of her work to two main constituencies: school boards and the teachers implementing the prevention programs. For school boards, she did a power point presentation. For busy teachers she created a one-page information sheet with key findings. She put the one-pager in all the teachers' mail boxes to make sure they got them.

[Click here](#) for example of an information sheet.

"I'd show them comparison data." Rogers said. "They could see they were doing something. If you ask somebody to do something and never tell them what they accomplished, why should they keep doing it?"

See online course [What Now? Communicating Effectively About Prevention Data](#)

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Evaluate and Refine the Programs

It is critical that coordinators undertake a systematic evaluation of the prevention programs that they have implemented. Evaluations are crucial in learning more about the results of a program and how to improve it. It is important for coordinators and their school team to agree on the outcomes they want to measure at the beginning so they can or an outside evaluator can collect the appropriate data and information.

“We developed a data collection system that allows us to look at our interventions,” Adler said. “It allows us to look at which students we sent to which intervention and if that intervention worked for that student. It is critical to get a baseline of data that you can agree on with your school. If you're in an individual school or a group of schools, talk it over with the principal and say this is what I see, what do you see? What would you like to see changed? And have some agreement on that. If it's going to be a survey, school districts have a very difficult time with the thousands of surveys that every organization would like to have given to students. You have to get in line so to speak to get approved. It's very important if you know ahead of time that you're going to be doing a survey that you get that done.”

For more information see online course [Are You Making Progress? Increasing Accountability Through Evaluation](#)

All of this work is described in more depth in the coordinators manual and in online courses that is available for districts to use in training their own prevention specialists at <http://www.k12coordinator.org>



Click [here](#) to print today's materials in PDF format.



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](#) .

- Looking at the steps taken by coordinators, which ones have you taken?
- Reflect upon the steps you have taken, what worked and what didn't?
- Looking at where your school district is now, what would be your next step?

Why?

This completes today's work.

Please visit the [Discussion Area](#) to share your responses to the discussion questions!

References for Day 4:

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Steps to Sustainable School Improvement

In “Safe, Supportive and Successful Schools: Step by Step” David Osher, Kevin Dwyer and Stephanie Jackson that states that research and practice suggest that sustainable school improvement requires at least 14 ingredients:

- ❖ **Address the needs of your school and community.** Take into account school and community characteristics throughout the change process.
- ❖ **Be strategic and comprehensive.** Develop a strategic plan for addressing the needs of all children through universal prevention, early intervention, and individualized intensive intervention.
- ❖ **Be systemic.** Effective change aligns improvements in key areas simultaneously: curriculum, teaching and teacher training, school culture and environment, and student support systems.
- ❖ **Don't do it alone.** Serving all students requires interagency collaboration.
- ❖ **Involve the entire community.** Include all stakeholders—students, families, and policymakers—in program development, monitoring, and evaluation.
- ❖ **Understand and manage change.** Change is not easy. A well-trained team, representative of and accessible to all stakeholders and skilled in cooperative problem solving, should manage change.
- ❖ **Build a learning organization.** School staff should have the time and support to discuss, plan, and reflect on new approaches.
- ❖ **Value and address diversity.** Programs and practices should be sensitive to and respectful of the culturally and linguistically diverse students, families and staff who are part of the school and community.
- ❖ **Assess and address strengths and challenges.** Build on existing resources and leverage what is working in your school and community. Some interventions, however, may not work or may not have sufficient power to realize your goals. Others may

even have harmful effects. Improve or eliminate ineffective programs; identify and eliminate harmful programs and practices.

❖ **Employ evidence-based programs and practices.** Select evidence-based programs and practices that fit your school. Be an intelligent consumer. Make sure the programs and practices have produced results under conditions that suggest that they will work in your own school and community.

❖ **Build capacity.** Develop and fund organizational capacity, including necessary staff and training to ensure that programs can be implemented effectively.

❖ **Employ data.** Collect and assess data on an ongoing basis and use the data to refine programs and procedures. Whenever possible, employ or refine existing data sources.

❖ **Evaluate outcomes.** Evaluate programs to ensure that they produce sufficiently positive outcomes.

❖ **Focus on the long haul.** Change is neither easy nor cheap. Don't focus on symbolic actions and quick fixes. Develop an organizational capacity to maintain and sustain school improvement.


Source: Osher, D, Dwyer, K. Jackson, S. (2004). "Safe, Supportive and Successful Schools Step by Step." Sopris West Educational Services.


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Why School-Community Partnerships?

 **School and community members provide varied perspectives on community problems and populations at risk.** They can play key roles in helping you conceptualize your needs assessment, they can provide a context for understanding the information you collect, and they may be able to direct you toward other assessment efforts that have already been undertaken in your community. In addition, partners can help you determine whether your community is ready to address a given problem or likely to support a particular type of program.

 **Participation in a successful, multifaceted group often produces increased involvement and commitment.** People who are engaged in a collaborative process will feel a greater sense of "ownership" of the prevention plan and will be more invested in obtaining positive outcomes. They will also be motivated and better prepared to make decisions about which prevention strategies or programs should be selected to meet identified needs.

 **Partners bring a variety of complementary skills to support prevention efforts.** A well-selected group of partners can provide you with access to many systems and resources that can help you get things done. For example, elected officials can host town meetings that allow you to share assessment findings; local artisans can help you design a newsletter; school committee members have the "know how" to influence policy change; area businesses can donate goods and services not allowable under your grant; and local graduate students can help you develop your evaluation plan. Ultimately, the more involvement school and community members have in the design and implementation of your prevention plan, the greater the likelihood that the research-based strategies you and your team select will be effective.

 **Activities that are initiated and maintained through a deliberate planning effort are of higher quality than programs that are simply "installed" in the organization.** Well-planned activities tend to possess many of the characteristics associated with higher-quality programming. These include a high level of local staff participation, more and better training, greater

standardization, and a higher degree of supervision. They are also more likely to be research-based.

Source: Middle School Coordinator's online course, "[Promoting Prevention Through School-Community Partnerships.](#)"

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Teacher Training Critical in Effective Prevention Programs

Trained teachers are more likely to implement, and to implement more of the curriculum than untrained teachers, according to the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative, which identifies effective violence prevention and drug prevention programs that have been evaluated in rigorous, controlled trials. In addition, fully trained teachers complete a greater percentage of the program with greater fidelity. They also are more effective and have more favorable student outcomes than untrained teachers. Teachers without follow and support over time often fail to fully implement or continue use of a program.

Source: Mihalic S, Irwin, K, Fagan, A, Ballard, D. and Elliott, D. (July 2004 "Successful Program Implementation: Lessons from Blueprints." *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Office of Justice Programs, Washington, D.C.

Educational Leaders for Effective Practice

To: Project Alert and Second Step Teachers

From: L. Marie Rogers, Middle School Coordinator Drug & Violence Prevention

You are making a difference! The following should encourage and direct us to place Project Alert and Second Step as an integral part of your curriculum planning.

The spring 2004 NEFEC Survey results are available. Nassau County is showing the following results for the gateway drugs emphasized in Project Alert:

The 2002 survey was used as the baseline data. As of October 2004, the following comparison for past 30-day use indicates we are making a difference:

Past 30-day Use	2002	2004
Alcohol	9.4%	8.8%
Wine coolers & flavored alcohol drinks	10.4%	7.2%
Cigarettes, or cigars	7.6%	6.9%
Smokeless tobacco	2.4%	4.3%
Marijuana	5.6%	6.0%
Inhalants	5.2%	1.9%

Three indicators of violence in the survey show an improvement from the baseline data.

Students who answered "Never True"	2002	2004
If another student hits me, I usually hit him/her back.	12.0%	15.3%
It is ok to hit someone who hits you first.	19.4%	25.7%
It's fun to pick on or make fun of someone who smaller or weaker than I am.	59.5%	74.1%

If I were going to fight, I would want to use a knife or gun.	80.0%	89.1%
If someone teases or makes fun of me, I can't get him/her to stop unless I hit him/her.	37.9%	40.3%

When students in 2002 were asked “what has helped you to not use alcohol, tobacco, other drugs or engage in violence”, 55.9% answered that education about the harmful effects of drugs and violence has helped “A Lot”. By 2004, that number had increased to 63.2% of the students. These indicators show that education and awareness are helping to make a difference in Nassau County. The 2004 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey results are not available at this time. It is hoped that those results will reflect the positive outcomes that support our prevention efforts as well

Please share this information with your students in class. Call if I can assist you or your students.

Source: Marie Rogers, Middle School Coordinator for Drug and Violence Prevention, Nassau County, Florida.