



Family Wellness Conference Leads to Academic Success

A family wellness conference, held at Maxwell Air Force Base Elementary School (MES), brought together representatives from the entire Maxwell Air Force Base community to provide families with wellness advice, coping mechanisms, and academic skills. The conference focused on the contribution of personal wellness to academic success. The program was the brainchild of Principal Melissa Hayes, but quickly grew into a community-wide effort. Educators, community leaders, and health care professionals hosted two dozen workshops for students and parents. Even Georgia/Alabama District Superintendent Lois Rapp pitched in, leading an interactive science workshop for children.

“Parents were excited by the sheer variety of sessions, all of which were offered free of charge,” noted Mrs. Hayes. Their responses afterward were overwhelmingly positive. During a “Raising Readers” workshop, several parents admitted that while they had always read aloud to their children, they were not aware that children benefit from seeing their parents reading for their own enjoyment.



While parents and students attended the conference to learn about fitness, conflict resolution, deployment coping skills, and cyber safety, among other topics, Mrs. Hayes observed that the school also benefitted. By giving parents useful information about how to support their children academically, the conference empowered parents to get involved at school. “There really is a connection between child wellness, the family, and academic success,” Mrs. Hayes remarked. “We had about fifty families here in the school that day and a lot of the workshop discussions were about ways we can all support one another.”

The conference also benefitted community organizations. A family advocacy nurse approached Mrs. Hayes after the event to say that she had forged a strong connection with a group of teens during a workshop. “Sometimes it is hard to get teens to open up,” explained Mrs. Hayes. She credits the support of the Airman and Family Readiness Center, the installation, and the entire MES family for making the event a success. “It’s a huge sense of accomplishment. The wellness program I originally envisioned grew into something much larger,” she said. “That comes from being part of a strong community, that is committed to the well being of our children.” ■

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Mail Security Reminder

On May 5-6, 2011, over three dozen letters were sent from a Post Office in Texas to public schools in the Washington, D.C. area. They contained a harmless white powder and a letter referencing Al Qaeda. According to press reports, the incident appeared similar to mailings that have targeted schools, churches, and businesses since the start of the academic year. Administrators can highlight this incident as a reminder for school personnel who regularly handle mail.

Ensure that students do not open mail, and that adults know the signs that might indicate a suspicious package. If possible, designate a separate location where mail can be opened. Signs that a package might contain a bomb or dispersal device include:

- ◆ Stains or unusual smells (indications it might contain explosives).
- ◆ Powder, liquid, or protruding wires.
- ◆ No return address.

If an envelope or package appears to contain a potential chemical or biological hazard, use the school's established response procedures to minimize the number of people exposed to the substance. These include:

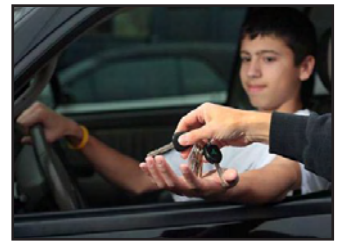
- ◆ Call 911 or the equivalent emergency number.
- ◆ Do not open, shake, or empty the package.
- ◆ Do not carry the package, show it to others, or allow others to open it.
- ◆ Leave the room and warn others not to enter.
- ◆ Wash with soap and water to limit exposure.
- ◆ List the names of individuals who were in the room and others who might have handled the envelope or package, and give this information to the emergency responders.

Post site-specific procedures for use if a suspicious package is discovered. Remember, for any questions

regarding security procedures in school, administrators can consult their district or area safety and security officer. For additional information, visit the DoDEA Office of Safety and Security at www.dodea.edu/offices/safety. ■

Three Mistakes Teen Drivers Make

Teen drivers are involved in fatal crashes at four times the rate of adults. A study published recently in the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention* analyzed crash data from 800 accidents involving teen drivers and identified patterns of errors teens commonly make when they are driving.



Seventy-five percent of the crashes studied were due to teen driver error. Rarely was thrill-seeking the cause of a crash. Instead, the study found teenagers tend to make the following three mistakes while driving:

- ◆ Twenty-one percent of accidents were due to lack of visual scanning for possible hazards.
- ◆ Twenty percent occurred when drivers were distracted.
- ◆ Twenty-one percent occurred when teens drove too fast for road conditions.

According to researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, "scanning" is a higher-level skill that experienced drivers develop over time. It involves observing the surroundings far ahead of the vehicle and side-to-side, not just immediately in front of the hood. Pilot tests of programs designed to help teens develop this skill are underway. In the meantime, parents and educators can remind students to drive slowly, visually scan the landscape for possible dangers, and, most importantly, turn off their cell phones while driving. ■

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U.S. Secret Service Provides Process for Assessing Students Who Threaten Others

Although incidents of school violence in U.S. public schools are extremely rare, the severity of the potential consequences requires procedures for determining whether an individual student who makes a threat is dangerous. An extensive investigation by the U.S. Secret Service in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education resulted in a framework for school administrators to use to assess whether a student poses a credible threat to others.

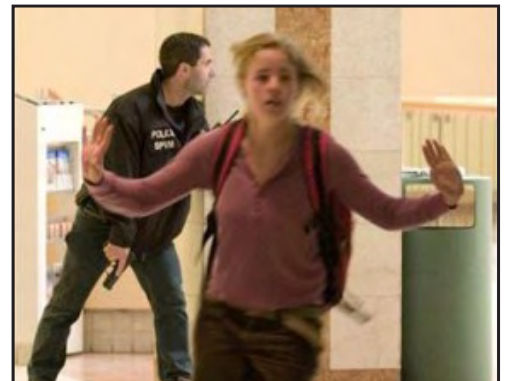
In the first report, published in 2002, titled *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative*, veteran educators joined the team of investigators and psychiatrists who study adults who threaten to assassinate the president. This team identified 37 shooting incidents that had occurred in schools from 1974 to 2000, and interviewed all of the attackers who were still alive (usually in prison). The researchers talked with the attackers' families, teachers, and classmates to learn as much as they could about the circumstances.

The investigators concluded that although no consistent personality profile identified students who might pose a threat, the following indicators were evident in several incidents:

- ▶ **Plan:** 93 percent of attackers formulated a detailed plan. Sixty-nine percent of the attackers planned the attack at least two days in advance.
- ▶ **Enemies List:** 54 percent of the attackers specifically planned to shoot the principal, an administrator, or teacher. Less than half of the attackers planned to harm fellow students.
- ▶ **Revenge Motive:** 71 percent of the attackers planned to retaliate because they felt bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured.
- ▶ **Others Informed:** In 81 percent of the incidents, the attacker told someone else about their plan and in 59 percent of the incidents, more than one person knew.

By 2004, the Secret Service issued a second report, titled *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. In this report, the team of educators and investigators recommended that all schools:

- ✓ Designate a central point of contact (i.e., administrator, counselor, school psychologist).
- ✓ Establish and publicize a procedure to use when reporting concerns.
- ✓ Create a positive school climate and encourage students, parents, and community members to report "any activity that evokes concern."



In the 2004 report, the Secret Service provided a detailed list of questions that Crisis Management Teams can use to objectively assess whether a student poses a threat. The questions help identify: the facts that drew attention to the student, relevant details in the student's background, attack-related behaviors that caused concern, possible motives, and potential targets of violence. The report concludes with a set of eleven questions to help the team determine whether the matter should be referred to law enforcement for formal investigation.

Both reports are available online. The *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative* (May 2002) is available at www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_final_report.pdf; and *Threat Assessment in Schools* (July 2004) is available at www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf. ■

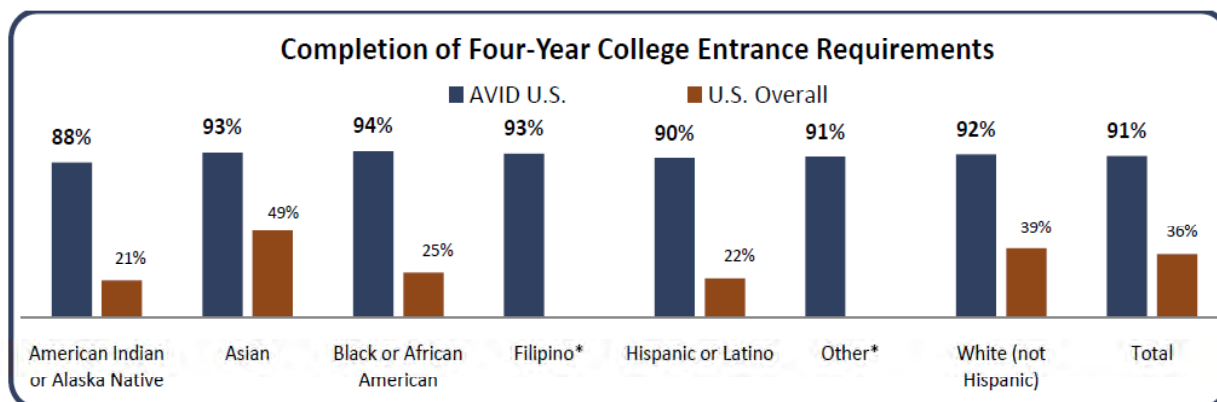
Connecting with Students in the Middle

Middle children, as popular thinking has gone, are often overlooked. Middle-achieving students are in the same plight. They are neither identified as at-risk, nor are they tracked and placed into challenging, advanced classes. Sometimes, these students can feel stuck in the middle. Fortunately, DoDEA administrators have access to Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a college readiness program designed to close the achievement gap between under-performing students and their college-bound peers by providing support and motivation, instead of remediation.



DoDEA educators have shared anecdotes regarding how the AVID program helps prepare their students for college from the Dahlgren School in Virginia, to Patch High School and Baumholder Middle/High School in Europe, to schools in South Korea, Japan, and Guam. Approximately 10 percent of DoDEA students are enrolled in AVID. Since the start of the program 30 years ago in public schools, it has spread to nearly 4,500 schools in 47 states and 16 countries. As Rebecca Almeter, AVID Program Director for Albuquerque Public Schools, succinctly described it, “This program is designed for students who want to go to college but don’t know what it takes to get there.”

AVID has demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. According to a 2004 report to Congress (www.avid.org/res_research.html), 91 percent of AVID students complete four-year college entrance requirements, compared to only 36 percent of all students (<http://avidcollegeready.org/college-career-readiness/2010/11/3/waiting-for-superman-the-rest-of-the-story.html>). The completion of college entrance requirements by AVID students covers many sectors of the population, as shown in the graph below. For example, the proportion of Latino students taking Advanced Placement exams is almost five times higher among AVID students than U.S. students overall.



AVID teaches a “hidden curriculum” — avenues for students to take to achieve success. Students learn how to set goals, organize their time and materials, take notes, study material, and pose meaningful questions. While students work with tutors several times each week during the regular school day, AVID *is not* a remedial program. In fact, students in the program must take accelerated classes, such as Algebra in seventh or eighth grade, and AP or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes in high school. Another facet of the program involves informative and motivational excursions, such as college campus visits or study trips to experience technology in action.

Normally, the AVID program coordinator is chosen from the existing staff, while tutors are sometimes recruited from local colleges and universities. Schools provide staff development and curriculum materials. For more information on supporting students in the middle, visit www.avid.org. ■

Digital Bread Crumbs: Smart Phones and Satellite Technology

Advancing technology on cell phones – most of which are now “smart phones” – has undoubtedly increased the convenience for users. The enhanced capabilities, however, can also increase the threat to a user’s personal security and private information.

A modern smart phone is all of the following: phone, camera, media player, game console, portable computer, and Global Positioning System (GPS). The various programs that manage these features on smart phones, as well as many third-party applications installed by users, silently record information that the user cannot easily access.

For example, many applications on smart phones use GPS to track a user’s location, sometimes unknowingly. Most camera phones with GPS technology can record the exact location of each picture captured. This information is encoded in a digital picture file as “metadata,” or a hidden description of the file. When posted on a photo-sharing Web site, the picture may provide more information than the original poster intended to share with online viewers.

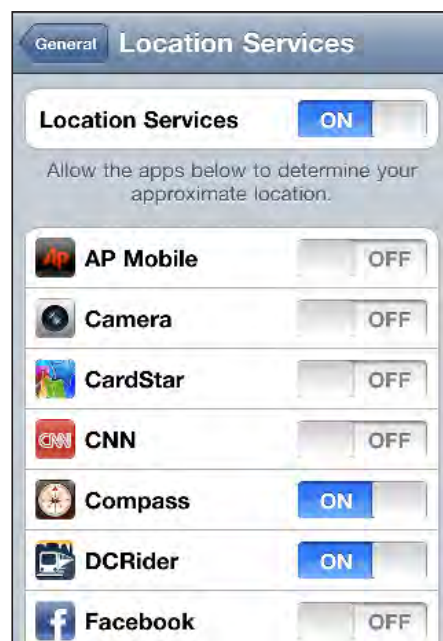
By thoroughly inspecting photographs and metadata, digital perpetrators can find out where a person lives, works, or travels. A simple photo, whether or not it includes a recognizable geographic landmark, can identify any one of these specific locations. For military personnel, this can compromise the location of sensitive facilities, deployment locations, or their families.

Additionally, some applications on smart phones have the ability to track a user’s daily movements. As a person goes to work, runs errands, and returns home, digital bread crumbs are saved on the phone using GPS coordinates. Should passwords, pass codes, or account information become compromised, this information could be accessed by unauthorized visitors. Hacked smart phones used by military personnel could reveal location information that might endanger troops and missions.

The news, however, is not all bad – GPS tracking can be disabled. To do so, simply go to the phone or application’s “settings” menu. On some phones, GPS or satellite services may be referred to as “location services.” Users may disable all location services or designate which applications may use these tracking functions. For example, a user may want to disable location services for all applications except mapping programs.

As a best practice, using a pass code to “unlock” a cell phone before each use can enhance the security of personal information saved on mobile devices. As a last resort, most smart phones and service providers offer an option for a user to remotely (and permanently) delete all information from a misplaced mobile device. Mobile devices and computers alike should be regularly updated with the most recent operating software. These updates frequently include security “patches” that can protect digital devices from malicious attacks or other vulnerabilities.

Posting pictures with GPS coordinates might endanger troops, missions, or families.



The U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team offers tips for protecting personal information on mobile devices at www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips/. For specific instructions on disabling location services on a mobile phone, contact safeschools@csc.com. ■

Pre-Summer Pep Talk Can Prevent Alcohol-Related Injuries



As the school year draws to a close, students and educators are looking forward to summer vacation. Unfortunately for some teenagers, research shows that increased alcohol consumption features heavily in their summer leisure plans. This could be due to the increase in free time students have during summer vacation. Other studies have drawn a correlation between illicit substance use and the amount of disposable income a student has from part-time work. Regardless of the reasons for the rise in alcohol use during the summer break, there are steps educators can take to reverse this trend.

Research has shown that taking a few minutes to offer a simple “pep talk” to teens about the importance of avoiding alcohol can statistically reduce rates of consumption. A study conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan Health System over three years also found that a brief, motivational talk reduced by half the chances that teenagers would experience peer violence or problems due to drinking.

The pep talks were delivered by a therapist in an emergency room setting, noted the study, published in August 2010 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA). While two studies in recent years have pointed to the power of parent discussions to prevent teen alcohol use, the conversations in this study were more complex than a parent reminding a child of the dangers of drinking.

During the talks, therapists used a technique called Motivational Interviewing (MI), which involves asking open-ended questions, offering affirmation and summation, and engaging in reflective listening. Rather than preaching or telling teens what to do, MI allows adolescents to weigh the pros and cons of their choices in reference to their own goals. The therapists’ talks with teens also included role playing exercises and coping skills to highlight ways the students can avoid the risky situations which often occur when their peers are drinking.

Reminding graduating seniors of all they are putting at risk when they consume alcohol is especially important. While teen alcohol use generally rises during the summer, it actually peaks during the first year of college. The costs of this peak are real: According to the National Association on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), drinking by college students contributes to an estimated 1,825 student deaths, 599,000 injuries, and 97,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year.

Motivational Interview Example

Avoid closed and leading questions like:

“Would you like to quit?”

“Do you know that alcohol is bad for you?”

Instead ask:

“What do you think about your alcohol use?”

“What do you know about the risks of drinking?”

A reminder at the end of the school year can still be effective. Educators need not roll out a new prevention program in the final weeks of school, although if there is one already in place, this would be an ideal time to use it. A few comments challenging students to reflect on the importance of making smart choices could make a difference in a young person’s future. For more information about how to use MI to reduce substance abuse, the NIAAA offers a training module at www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/media/mod4motivationalinterview1.ppt. For a list of fact sheets developed by the NIAAA for high school administrators, visit www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/HSAdministrators/Default.aspx. ■