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Safe Schools/Healthy Students Albemarle County/Charlottesville Project October 11, 2012

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project (SS/HS) completed its third year of federal funding at the conclusion of the 2011-12 school year. The data from our 2012 Spring School Climate survey was tabulated in June and thus far, shows that project outcomes are overwhelmingly positive. Project work to-date has helped make the following reductions possible:

- 26% reduction in the percentage of students (grades 6-12) reporting bullying
- 34% reduction in the percentage of students (grades 6-12) involved in a physical fight on school property in the past 12 months
- the number of high school students reporting drinking alcohol in the past 30 days decreased by nearly a quarter (24.9%)

Initiatives to Support School Safety and Decrease Violence

More than 11,000 students (grades 3-12) completed the annual Spring School Climate Survey in spring 2012. As suggested by the CMT, the middle and high school surveys were revised to eliminate questions dealing with threat assessments and added questions dealing with student perception of school climate. These additional questions were developed in a collaborative process that included student input from the Albemarle County Student Council.

In response to several community incidents of gang activity and a SS/HS-sponsored gang forum, the police chiefs of both localities developed a local steering committee: the **Gang Reduction Achieved through Community Engagement (GRACE)** Team and invited project staff to participate. An SS/HS staff member with former law enforcement experience has been charged with the planning and implementation of a comprehensive gang model to serve the Charlottesville City and Albemarle County communities.

Currently sixteen Albemarle County Schools use the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* to combat bullying in schools. Two schools use *Second Step*, a program aimed at reducing violence by providing reinforcement for positive behavior and development of sound social and emotional skills in

the middle school setting. Other schools use a combination of these and other evidence-based programs and strategies that integrate and build positive school climates.

School counselors and administrators requested information and support for problems that stemmed from relational aggression amongst girls in the school communities. SS/HS formed a panel that included administrators, social workers, school counselors and mental health experts who all shared their perspectives on differences in gender bullying and offered ideas and strategies for addressing social issues between girls. This event has led to ongoing discussions, including a book study discussion group that will review: “Little Girls Can Be Mean: Four Steps to Bully-Proof Girls in the Early Grades.”

Initiatives to Reduce Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use

SS/HS project staff worked to engage and involve high school students in school and community-based prevention efforts. The SS/HS Albemarle/Charlottesville site was awarded a SAMSHA Underage Drinking Town Hall grant award and used the proceeds to hold a parent/teen underage drinking information and prevention event last spring. The event was developed in partnership with the Charlottesville City Office of the Commonwealth Attorney, UVA Teen Health Center, UVA’s Gordy Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and both the Albemarle County and Charlottesville City police departments. After this event, groups of high school students are working with SS/HS project leaders regularly to plan school awareness events that include tailgates at football games, prevention presentations and events around prom and homecoming as well as other events throughout the school year. There are prevention groups in each of the three traditional high schools that are working with SS/HS to build student support for prevention of bullying, underage drinking and teen dating violence.

Initiatives to Promote Positive Student Behavior

SS/HS staff has worked on many and varied fronts to make learning possible for every child by providing support for safe and socially appropriate student behavior.

The SS/HS project continues to receive numerous reports of improved student behavior and classroom environment in schools implementing *Responsive Classroom* (RC). RC is viewed as an effective classroom strategy and more than 300 school staff members have been trained in RC via SS/HS funding. In addition to funding initial training, SS/HS project leaders provide implementation and curriculum support with Community of Practice meetings. These monthly networking sessions have taken many formats, including school site visits to look at classroom set up, facilitated discussion about particular components of RC strategy and/or outside speakers who lead formal presentations about RC.

After reviewing the positive impacts and success elementary school classrooms were experiencing with RC, two middle school administrators approached SS/HS to ask if similar programs could be

investigated for students in grades 6-8. In June, 2012, representatives from *Developmental Designs* provided a half-day information session to representatives from each of the area middle schools. *Developmental Designs* is a teaching strategy that provides the same integration of socio-emotional and academic learning that is the cornerstone of RC. Conversation with middle school administrators is ongoing and several schools continue to consider when and how they can incorporate this strategy into their school communities.

In response to heightened community concern about dating and relationship violence, the Sixteenth District Court Services Unit approached SS/HS project staff to assist with court-ordered education on healthy relationships for students charged with partner/dating violence. *Safe Dates: an Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum*, a model program listed in NREPP, was the evidence-based program chosen to empower change in attitudes and behaviors associated with dating abuse and violence. SS/HS staff worked in teams and individually with students to teach *Safe Dates* lessons and support improved relationship skills for court-supervised youth in the community.

Initiatives to Support In-School Mental Health Services

SS/HS funding continued to make mental health counseling services available in all Albemarle County and Charlottesville middle and high schools. To communicate the availability of these services more broadly, the SS/HS project created an informational brochure about Student Assistance Program for students, parents and school staff. SS/HS staff also provided continued education opportunities for school counselors and community mental health workers. These included a March panel discussion of “How Grief Affects Students” and an April discussion about “Relational Aggression in Girls.” To support students and families whose lives are affected by abuse, SS/HS staff partnered with seven non-profit organizations to sponsor community events focused on Child Abuse Prevention during April. A weekly newspaper co-sponsored a six page insert, which utilized a design created by the SS/HS Project Coordinator and included a calendar of events, community resources, advice on keeping children safe and safeguard tips for parents and caregivers. In response to recent community incidents, SS/HS collaborated with Dr. Peter Sheras, UVA, Region 10 and Albemarle High School to sponsor a panel discussion on suicide prevention.

Collaboration and Community Partnership

SS/HS staff continues to work collaboratively with community partner groups and agencies to respond to community needs and events, and raise awareness for student health and safety issues. Project staff members are routinely invited to present at local events, community days and parent engagement events to strengthen parent/school and student/school connections.

Community events and presentations have included:

Bullying Prevention in the Promotion of a Positive School Climate, Virginia Bullying Prevention Conference, June 2012

- State Superintendents-Judges Committee Meeting, July 2012
- Virginia Olweus Bullying Prevention Networking and Technical Assistance Session, July, 2012, October 2012
- Albemarle County School Health Advisory Board

Finally, in recognition for the impact SS/HS work is having in the local community, the project was awarded the Virginia Department of Health's "Innovative Violence Prevention Award" in June, 2012. The award recognized SS/HS initiatives as a catalyst for reductions in school-based physical fights, incidents of bullying, behavioral referrals for students and reported offenses since the grant award in 2009. Our local SS/HS project has been cited as a successful model in several meetings and publications sponsored by the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative and continues to share experience, program resources and expertise for tools the program is disseminating at the national level.

A recent request was made to us by the National Safe Schools Center requesting to include the Peer Support Survey and Cyberbullying Summits as a bullying prevention resources on stopbullying.gov website. Albemarle/Charlottesville Project was also included the federally produced toolkits, "[Supportive School Discipline](#)" and "[Navigating Information Sharing](#)."

Beyond Federal Funding: What Happens After June 30, 2012

The federal funding for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project in our community ends on June 30, 2013. No reapplication for funding is possible, but our project is eligible for a one year no-cost extension to finalize programming and clear the budget. The extension is an option offered to projects that have consistently met and exceeded the federal project's benchmarks and expectations, and have carryover funds from the 4-year funding period. To sustain benefits to the community after the final federal funding is received in June, 2014, the Albemarle -Charlottesville Project's Core Management Team is discussing the high priority initiatives for long-term sustainability and ways that these elements could be supported with local funding. The goal is to focus on program components that have been successful in both public school systems and could continue to serve students and build stronger school communities in both systems.