

Safe Schools/Healthy Students Albemarle-Charlottesville Project October 2013

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During the fourth year of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Albemarle/Charlottesville Project (SS/HS) grant, staff focused on identifying program priorities for sustainability and developing action plans to move forward during a year of "No Cost Extension" (NCE) provided by carryover federal funds. The Core Management Team (CMT) continued to advise the project and established clear parameters and priorities for the fifth year of additional funding.

Project work to-date has helped make the following reductions possible since 2009:

- 36% reduction in the percentage of students (grades 6-12) reporting bullying
- 35% 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 (23%)

To support school safety and decrease violence, SS/HS continues to administer the school climate survey. More than 10,000 students (grades 3-12) completed the 2013 Spring School Climate Survey between March and April. At the request of our community gang task force: GRACE (Gang Reduction through Active Community Engagement), the CMT approved the inclusion of questions about community gang activity in the spring 2013 middle and high school surveys. The SS/HS project continues to make bullying prevention a priority, providing support and technical assistance for schools addressing bullying issues through improvements to overall school climate and schools that continue to utilize the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. To observe Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month in February, SS/HS provided audio and video public service announcements and posters for high schools and linked school staff and other adults who work with teens to informational webinars. Additionally, a workshop focused on social media and helping teens safely navigate cyberspace was jointly sponsored by SS/HS and a local non-profit organization, Children, Youth and Family Services.

To reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, in January the project sponsored a Facebook-based scavenger hunt during Drug Facts Awareness Week. The Facebook page posted information to raise awareness for the risks and consequences of substance use and provided information about the "Big Bowl Challenge" during the week of the Super Bowl. The "challenge" is an online resource to educate teens about some of the overt and covert messages used by advertisers to influence behavior. During the Super Bowl this often means ads that subtly (and not-so-subtly) promote risk behaviors including consumption of alcohol. To raise awareness prior to the 2013 spring prom and graduation season, the SS/HS project and the Virginia Department of Alcohol and Beverage Control partnered to bring speakers from "Enduring Regret" to Charlottesville. Chris Sandy and Eric Krug are speakers from the organization who travel across the country to share the consequences they experienced after incidents involving drinking and driving. Their presentation's goal is to encourage safe decision-making and choices about alcohol. More than 600 high school students from across the community attended the presentation. The two men spoke very eloquently about the legal, health and personal consequences that resulted from their separate experiences. The teens were extremely attentive

and receptive to the honesty and sharing of both presenters. On the same date, an evening event for parents and teens was held to share similar messages. After the presentation from Chris Sandy and Eric Kruge, parents and teens attended small group sessions about trends in college drinking, how parents can approach conversations about alcohol with their teens and how “contracts for life” may be a useful tool to for families to support their teens as they face the challenges of peer pressure and risky behavior.

To make learning possible for every child through fostering safe and socially appropriate behavior, the SS/HS project continues to receive positive feedback on the changes in student behavior and classroom environments from schools implementing *Responsive Classroom* (RC). Five sessions of RC were funded and hosted this summer by the SS/HS project. *Developmental Designs* (DD) is a middle school model that is founded on the same integration of socio-emotional and academic learning that is the cornerstone of RC. SS/HS funded a week-long DD training session for a school that used “The Advisory Book: Building a Community of Learners Grades 5-9” as a book study during the 2012-13 school year. Another middle school sent staff to the DD training and plans to complete the same book study this school year.

To improve access to and availability of family-focused mental health services, the project participated in National Mental Health Awareness Month during May. Green awareness ribbons were distributed throughout the public schools to raise awareness for the importance of positive mental health. Also during May, the project drew attention to stress and its affect on teens during exams and other standardized tests. Messages focused on the importance of seeking help and formulation of positive coping skills, working with student-led groups to create and distribute a “stress prevention kit” during exam week in all public high schools in the area. Also during the spring, the SS/HS project director was invited to participate in a one-day Mental Health First Aid training. This model can be successfully utilized in the two local public school systems and the SS/HS project director is scheduled to become a trainer in Mental Health First aid by November. Both the CCS and ACPS school systems will have easy access to staff trainings and information that will strengthen their ability to identify students in need of mental health supports.

To promote early learning experiences and social supports for at-risk students and families, the SS/HS project staff created activities for preschools to celebrate the 100th day of school in February. SS/HS staff also developed a Restorative Methods for Parents training modeled on the school-based Restorative Practices trainings for teachers and administrators. The parent trainings were designed to promote common approaches and language between conflict and behavior management methods at home and at school. To further support parent engagement, SS/HS staff led a collaborative team of community partners to host a one-day *Parenting Power* workshop on topics related to positive parenting skills. Finally, in June, two groups of early childhood educators attended professional development sessions sponsored with SS/HS funds that reviewed Proactive Behavior Management and Anecdotal Note Taking for Evaluations.

To promote community partnerships and raise project awareness, SS/HS staff continues to work collaboratively with community partner groups and agencies to raise awareness for student health and safety issues. Many of the events and trainings during 2012-13 were planned and developed with a wide variety of groups and partner organizations. Finally, in recognition for the impact SS/HS work continues to have in the local schools, both public school systems in the community and the SS/HS project received Virginia SAVVY (Substance Abuse Awareness Vital for Virginia Youth) awards. The SS/HS Project Director and Project Coordinator were invited to the Governor’s Mansion for the award ceremony.

Beyond Federal Funding: What Happens After June 30, 2014?

The federal funding for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project in our community ends on June 30, 2014. The priority program components that will require continuation funding after the No Cost Extension year are the mental health counseling positions in the middle and high schools and evaluation of the student climate survey data each year.