



Suicide & Bullying: How Schools Can Reduce Risk & Improve School Climate



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FOR SUCCESS

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Community
Matters

*Empowering Youth
Transforming Communities*

Rick Phillips, M.S. Ed.
Founder of Community Matters

www.community-matters.org

Community Matters Mission

*“To wake up the courage
of students and adults to create schools that
are safe, welcoming and inclusive.”*





Living in a Disconnected World

"We are living in an unprecedented social experiment. We have systematically changed the patterns and connections that have characterized human life as long as there has been human life."

Wachtel, Dreaming of a New Reality

School Safety: The Changing Landscape

- School Shootings (1995 – 99)
- Violence / Bullying (2000 – 09)

(2009 – present)

Cyber-Bullying
Relational Aggression
Indifference



Intolerance & Incivility

It's not your typical playground bully anymore...



Younger

Meaner

More Pervasive

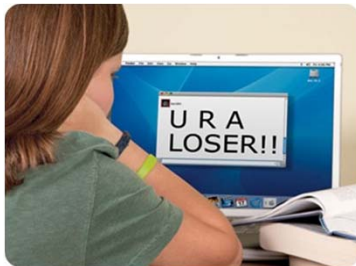
Harder to Identify

24/7 On & Off Campus



Other's Pain as "Entertainment"

More Accepted as Normal



The Link: Bullying and Suicide

- “...within the context of other important factors, bullying was associated with odds of suicidal ideation **TWICE** that of non-victimized youth.” Prevention Science: Understanding Linkages Between Bullying and Suidial Ideation 2015
- “Being involved in bullying in any way – as a person who bullies others, a person who is bullied, or a person who both bullies and is bullied, is one of several important risk factors that appears to increase the risk of suicide among youth” CDC: The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide 2014.

The Link: Bullying and Suicide

- **What do we know from research:**
 - Youth who report frequently bullying others are at high, long-term risk for suicidal-related behavior
 - Youth who report both being bullied and bullying others have the highest rates of negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and thinking about suicide.
- **What can we do about it:**
 - Empower youth by providing concrete, positive, and proactive ways that they can influence the social norms of their peer group so that bullying is seen as uncool behavior
 - Encourage more work on bystander approaches to violence prevention in general CDC: The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide, 2014.

The Realities, for our most vulnerable youth...

- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are up to **four times** more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. (Massachusetts Youth Risk Survey 2011)
- 49.2% of San Francisco Unified School District LGB middle schoolers have seriously considered suicide, and 33.5% have attempted suicide. (SFUSD Youth Risk Behavior Survey, N =2,730)
- Nearly one-third (29%) of LGB youth had attempted suicide at least once in the prior year compared to 6% of heterosexual youth. Kann L, Olsen EO, McManus T, et al. [2015](#).

Cyberbullying: what role does this play?

- 24/7 access to each other, with a large audience; embarrassing photos and content can develop a life of it's own online.
- “Cyberbullying victims were almost twice as likely to have attempted suicide compared to youth who had not experienced cyberbullying.” Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. (2010). Cyberbullying research summary



Positive School Climate: The Antidote

- For youth to thrive in schools and communities, they need to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and supported.
- A positive school climate has been associated with decreased depression, suicidal feelings, substance use, and unexcused school absences among LGB students

CDC: Lesbian, Gay, Bixexual, and Transgender Health Report 2015



The Cost

- Based on the 2011-2013 Healthy Kids Survey:
 - 10.4% of students statewide reporting missing at least one school day in the last month because they **felt unsafe.**
 - Not only does this damage students' emotional health, it also costs schools districts \$276 million annually in California due to absenteeism

A Window of Time: Suicide Intervention

- 13.6% of students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide in the previous 12 months CDC 2015 Suicide Fact Sheet
- 8% of students attempted suicide one or more times in the previous 12 months CDC 2015 Suicide Fact Sheet
- There is typically a window of time in which the friends of a suicidal youth see signs or know of suicidal plans before the attempt.
- If they are trained to Notice, Think, Act, Follow Through, they can save a life.

Peer intervention is key.



Positive School Climate Characteristics

- Strong relationships among and between students and staff
- Discipline using formative / restorative processes
- Engagement, recognition and leadership opportunities for students in a wide variety of activities

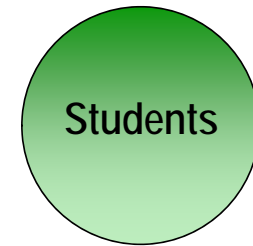


CDC: Strong Connections at School Can Lead to Healthier Choices

1. School connectedness was found to be the strongest protector against substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence, and risk of unintentional injury
2. School connectedness was second in importance, after family connectedness, in protecting adolescents from emotional distress, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

(Source: CDC)

Leveraging the Power & Potential of Students



- See, hear and know things adults don't
(In 88% of bullying incidents, peers are present)
- Can effectively intervene in ways adults can't
- First to arrive on the scene of mistreatment; first to detect changes in their friends
- Set the tone and social norms on campus

Empowering Youth: The Formula

The 3 “P’s”

(Purpose, Power and Place)

+

The 3 “E’s”

(Engage, Equip, and Empower)

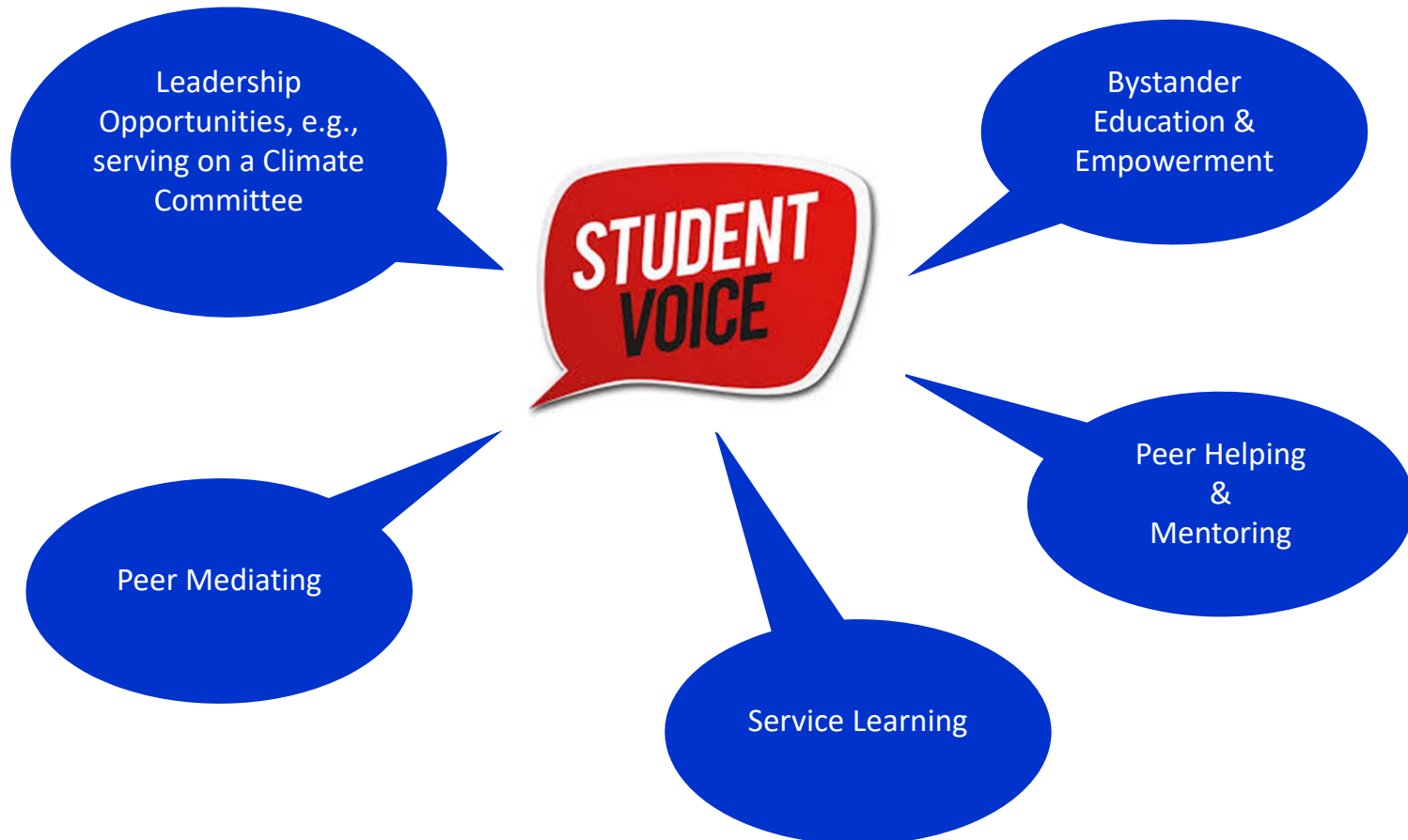
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The 3 “C’s”

(Competent, Caring and Contributing)

Increasing Student Voice

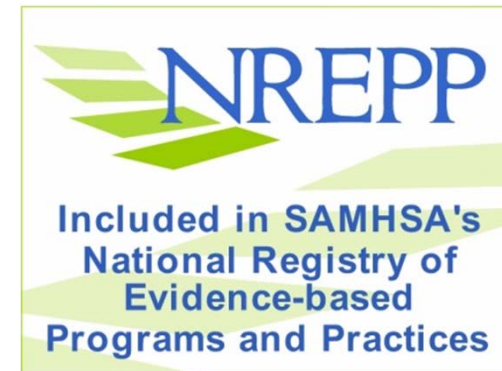
(in both formal & informal settings)



Criteria for Strong Youth Development Programs

1. Enroll diverse student leaders
2. Equip students with skills
3. Provide staff support and guidance
4. Collect data and measure impact
5. Celebrate successes

Safe School Ambassadors®



An evidence-based, field-tested program to engage, equip and empower student bystanders to reduce bullying and other forms of mistreatment.

Developed by



Community
Matters

Empowering Youth
Transforming Communities

Safe School Ambassadors®



16 years

Nearly 2000 schools

**Over 70,000 students trained across
34 states, Canada, Guam & Puerto Rico**



An iceberg floating in a blue ocean. The tip of the iceberg is above the water line, and the much larger base is submerged. The sky is a gradient of blue with a few birds. The water is a deep blue.

Fights
Weapons
Gangs
Physical bullying

Reactive
Catch
Discipline
Suspend
Expel

Unwanted contact
Relational aggression
Exclusion
Put-downs
Rumors
Cyberbullying
Harassment

Pro-active
Prevent
Intervene
De-escalate

The Dynamic of Bullying & Other Mistreatment

Targets

Aggressors

Bystanders = 85%
The Passive Majority



5 Types of Mistreatment

1. Exclusion
2. Put-downs
3. Intimidation
4. Unwanted physical touch
5. Acts against campus

** Cyber-bullying amplifies all*



How Ambassadors can support their peers combat cyberbullying

Ambassadors can use their Actions to combat cyberbullying:

- 1. Balancing:**
- 2. Supporting:**
- 3. Reasoning:**
- 4. Distracting:**
- 5. Directing:**
- 6. Getting Help:**

Safe School Ambassadors® Are Active

A minimum of
2 “Actions” per week
x 40 Ambassadors =
80 Actions per week



34 Weeks x 80 Ambassador Actions =
More than 2,700 Actions per school year

Safe School Ambassadors® Are Effective

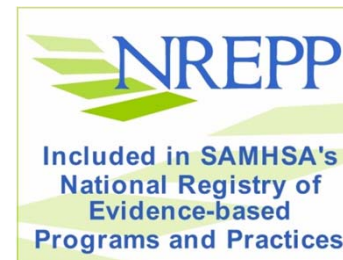
A two year study by two different universities found statistically significant evidence of positive impact:

Suspension rates were 33% lower than prior to SSA implementation while suspension rates at demographically matched non-SSA control schools increased 10% in the same period.

<http://www.communitymatters.org/downloads/EvaluationReportSSA2011.pdf>

Based on the results of this study, the Safe School Ambassadors® Program is now listed in SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices

<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=331>



TRUSD – SIA Partnership

2012 – SIA began by supporting TRUSD's climate change efforts with a training and conflict resolution workshop with the Public Safety Officers (PSO's) and the district police department.



TRUSD – SIA Partnership

2012 – Training for district administrators in the importance of focusing on school climate improvement as an essential path to safer schools, reduced suspensions, better attendance and improved academics.



TRUSD – SIA Partnership

Spring 2013 – SIA & the district extended their partnership with a pilot climate change initiative in three schools that included:

- ✓ The Safe School Ambassadors program (SSA)
- ✓ Waking Up Courage Assemblies
- ✓ Staff Development Workshops on School Climate Improvement

*Genesis matched SIA's contribution and another third of the total funding was contributed by Community Matters via a grant from the San Francisco Giants Community Fund



TRUSD – SIA Partnership

Fall 2013 – Maintained the momentum of the pilot by conducting expansion trainings of the Safe School Ambassadors program (SSA) at the three pilot schools



Community Matters Whole School Climate Framework



“It’s easier to build strong children
than to repair broken men.”



Frederick Douglass



Community Matters

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