

# CHOOSING AND CREATING SCHOOL WIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMS <sup>1</sup>

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## What This Guide Covers

The goal of this Guide is to describe current information and empirically-supported practices in the process of making schools safer and violence free.

In this Guide, we will cover the following topics:

- Why school wide prevention strategies are critical to comprehensive and effective safe school planning and implementation;
- Four sources of vulnerability to school violence: What we need to know to match our needs with strategies;
- Conducting school safety needs assessments;
- Planning for and implementing school wide prevention strategies; and
- Useful web and print resources.

## Why Prevention and Intervention Strategies Are Critical to Safe School Planning

Many schools in the U.S. are relatively safe places for children, youth, and the adults who teach and support them (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 1999). However, the fears about personal safety of students, teachers, parents, and community members are real and need to be addressed. It also is true that some schools have serious crime and violence problems and most schools are having to deal with more serious problem behaviors (e.g., bullying, harassment, victimization, drug and alcohol abuse, the effects of family disruption, poverty, and so on) (Kingery, 1999). An understanding of the complex, interconnecting relations and factors affecting the safety and climate of schools is necessary for (a) identifying antisocial and violent youth early in their school careers and (b) developing and implementing effective interventions in the contexts of schools, communities and families.

We recommend use of the USEd Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools “Principles of Effectiveness”<sup>2</sup> as an organizing framework for planning and implementing whole-school approaches. The steps outlined include: (1) a local **needs assessment** of the risk and protective factors affecting model sites, (2) establishment of **measurable goals and objectives** by the school in collaboration with project personnel, (3) selection of **research-based and research-validated curricula and interventions**, and (4) a comprehensive and

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<sup>2</sup> See Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Subpart 1, Section 4115(A), <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg52.html#sec4115> or <http://captus.samhsa.gov/Western/resources/bp/step6/bpdoeprn.cfm>.

**rigorous evaluation plan**, which features an experimental research design and includes evaluation of the inputs (resources, staff, materials), outputs (actual costs, description of the process of implementation), outcomes (e.g., student behavior change), and impact (overall satisfaction with project products and outcomes). In this Guide, we will discuss each step and provide sample applications.

The following strategic approaches can move schools in the direction of greater safety and will reduce the likelihood over time of a school tragedy occurring: **(1) Secure the school; (2) Address the peer culture and its problems of bullying and harassment; (3) Create a positive, inclusive school culture; (4) Involve parents in making the school safer; and 5) Develop a written school safety and crisis-response plan.** As a school is perceived to be more at-risk, these strategic approaches become that much more important and the investment made in them should be potentially greater.