

What Does *Getting Results* Say About Violence Prevention and Safe Schools?

Schools have a responsibility to provide safe, orderly, and drug-free environments that enable students to focus on the academic and social tasks that will foster their development into healthy, productive adults. In California the responsibility to create safe schools is mandated by law (California Constitution, Article 1, Section 28), as is safe school planning at every school site (*Education Code* Section 35294). Each school must assess the extent of crime on its campus, identify programs and strategies to provide school safety, and have procedures for complying with school safety laws (*Education Code* Section 32282). Violence among public and private secondary students is assessed through the California Student Survey (CSS).

Types and Consequences of Youth Violence

The term “youth violence” includes instances of physical assault and possession of weapons as well as pushing, taunting, and socially isolating classmates. *Update 4* of *Getting Results* discusses three forms of youth violence that are seen in schools.

- 1. Bullying.** Bullying is defined as repeated acts of peer aggression intentionally designed to harm a person who is weaker than the bully. Bullying is therefore an exploitive relationship between students rather than one specific event. Studies show that three of ten U.S. students in grades 6 to 10 report moderate to frequent involvement in bullying: 10 percent of those students are victims, 13 percent are perpetrators, and 6 percent are both. The “Double I/R” criteria — *Intentional*, *Imbalanced*, and *Repeated* — distinguishes bullying from other forms of peer aggression. This process-oriented view of bullying suggests that schools should implement programs that (1) guide and educate (rather than punish) bullies on appropriate social interactions; and (2) address the use of power over other students to meet the bully’s need for control, a primary function of bullying. Bullying harms both bullies and victims. Bullies come to see this form of coercion as an effective social tool, and victims experience chronic intimidation and social isolation that can lead to emotional and psychological problems (*Getting Results, Update 4*, pp. 20–30).
- 2. Other Forms of Peer Aggression.** Boys and girls tend to exhibit different forms of aggressive behavior. Boys often display overt forms (e.g., hitting, pushing, teasing), while girls may use relational forms of aggression that harm others by damaging peer relations (e.g., excluding someone from group activities, spreading rumors or gossip). This type of subtle aggression has a significant impact on children’s social adjustment. Helping children to increase their use of positive social behaviors as they reduce their negative behaviors can lead to greater acceptance by their peers (*Getting Results, Update 4*, pp. 31–34).

3. Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence. Sexual harassment is unwelcome and unwanted behavior that is explicitly sexual, unambiguous, and repeated and interferes with a student’s right to an equal educational opportunity. Sexual violence through action or word creates physical, emotional, psychological, and, possibly, material damage. Sexual harassment and sexual violence appear around seventh grade and continue throughout high school. Both boys and girls are victimized, and victims usually know their perpetrators, either casually or well. Although sexually violent behavior results in criminal prosecution of the perpetrator, liability for sexual harassment lies with the school. Because there is considerable ignorance about and tolerance of sexual harassment, schools should educate students and staff about these issues and develop disciplinary and preventive policies, strategies, and interventions (*Getting Results, Update 4*, pp. 35–38).

Responses to School Violence

1. Violence-Prevention Programs. Four school-based programs were evaluated and shown to be effective in preventing youth violence and aggressive behavior.

Effective School-Based Violence-Prevention Programs

Program Title	Outcomes	<i>Getting Results</i> Reference
Second Step Grades PreK–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in behaviors related to risk factors (physical aggression, discipline referrals, weapon offenses) • Improvements in behaviors related to protective factors (social interaction, positive social goals) 	Update 4, pp. 43–46
Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Grades K–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in behaviors related to risk factors (aggression, frustration) • Improvements in behaviors related to protective factors (social competence, problem solving, self-control) 	Update 4, pp. 43–46, 51–54
Olweus Bullying Prevention Grades K–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in behaviors related to risk factors (vandalism, fighting, theft, truancy) • Improvements in behaviors related to protective factors (classroom order, positive attitude toward schoolwork and school) 	Part I, pp. 119–121
Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP) Grades 6–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases in substance abuse • Reductions in behaviors related to risk factors (violations of the school disciplinary code, violent behavior, fight-related injuries) • Improvement in behaviors related to protective factors (increased prosocial attitude and peer support) 	Update 4, pp. 47–49

2. Violence-Prevention Policies. School or district *zero tolerance policies* mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for particular offenses regardless of the circumstances or the disciplinary history of the students involved. Since 1989 schools have used this policy to mandate expulsion for gun possession, drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity. However, there is no evidence that zero tolerance policies contribute to school safety or improved student behavior. Researchers recommend that schools (a) reserve zero tolerance disciplinary expulsion or suspension for only the most serious disruptive behaviors; (b) replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies with a graduated system of discipline in which consequences are geared to the seriousness of the infractions; (c) expand the array of options for dealing with disruptive or violent behaviors; (d) implement preventive measures that can improve school climate and reconnect alienated students; and (e) evaluate all school discipline and school violence-prevention strategies to ensure that they are truly reducing student misbehavior and improving school safety (*Getting Results, Update 4*, pp. 55–60).

Suspension is used for a variety of offenses, including fighting, disobedience and disrespect, attendance problems, and general classroom disruption. Although the impact of suspension on school safety has not been directly studied, indirect data suggest that suspension may be ineffective — rates of repeat offenses range from 35 percent to 45 percent — and may even reinforce misbehavior by removing students from situations that are not to their liking. National studies report that students who have been suspended are three times more likely to drop out of school by their sophomore year.

Developing and enforcing *campus rules* is an effective strategy for preventing violence. Research has found that efforts to prevent school violence through physical restrictions (such as locking doors, installing metal detectors, hiring security guards) are strongly associated with higher levels of problematic student behavior and subsequent student perceptions of a lack of personal safety. On the other hand, ensuring that students know the school’s policy and the consequences for violating the rules and regulations is strongly associated with lower levels of school disorder. This research implies that schools should pay less attention to restrictive security and concentrate on communicating individual responsibility to students (*Getting Results, Update 4*, pp. 61–65).

Resources for Safe Schools

Update 4 of *Getting Results* contains action steps schools can take to ensure safe schools (Chapter 4) and suggests print and organizational resources for creating safe schools (Chapter 5). One important resource is *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action* (2002), developed by the California Department of Education and the Office of the Attorney General. To order a copy, visit the Web site of the California Department of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn> or call the Sales Office at 1-800-995-4099.