

Culture Proposal #3

Reducing Violence in Schools

School violence—in the form of bullying, fighting, and assault—remains a stubborn problem. Recent studies, however, reveal that early detection and effective intervention can significantly reduce violence and improve classroom performance in the short and long term. To reduce violent behavior in schools, we need to fund proven school violence prevention initiatives aimed at the “tweens” and help schools and teachers address, manage, and reduce school violence.

THE PROBLEM

Early intervention school violence prevention strategies are needed

The most common acts of school violence are not headline-grabbing mass killings, but garden variety beatings, bullying, and intimidation. These everyday acts of violence not only physically scar, they negatively impact overall academic achievement and the school environment. Increased security measures and better student preparation for violent attacks may be necessary, but study after study has shown that early intervention programs that address warning signs greatly reduce future problem behavior.¹ To effectively reach the teens, school violence prevention programs targeting the “tweens” are needed.

School violence is pervasive.

Although the level of school safety has improved through the years, school violence continues to plague a majority of schools. Seventy-eight percent of public schools experienced at least one violent criminal incident during the 2005-2006 school year.² In 2005, over 628,000 students ages 12-18 were victims of violent crimes committed at school.³ School violence also spans across regions, affecting urban, suburban, and rural schools. In 2005, the victimization rate of students ages 12-18 was 64 victimizations per 1,000 students in urban schools, 55 victimizations in suburban schools, and 50 victimizations in rural schools. Bullying is another form of violence affecting youth nationwide. Some surveys have found up to 75% of American children have been victims of bullying,⁴ and almost one-third of all teens who use the Internet say they have been the targets of cyberbullying.⁵

These numbers may just be the tip of the iceberg. Current *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* reports do not use the most current data available on K-12 related crime and are based on surveys, research, and self-reported data. In his testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor, Kenneth Trump, President and CEO of National School Safety and Security Services stated, “One of the ‘dirty

little secrets' in our nation's education community is that there is no comprehensive, mandatory federal school crime reporting and tracking of actual school crime incidents for K-12 schools...Federal school crime and violence data by-and-large consists of a hodgepodge collection of just over a half-dozen academic surveys and research studies."⁶

School violence affects academic performance.

The impact of school violence causes more than just surface bruising; it can affect both the perpetrator and victim academically and emotionally. Students who fight at school may have difficulty succeeding in their studies;⁷ students that exhibit violent behavior are more likely to drop out of school;⁸ bullied students are more prone to do poorly in school;⁹ victims of bullies are more likely to be depressed;¹⁰ and both victims of bullies and bullies themselves have an increased risk for suicidal behaviors.¹¹

Violence in a school can also create a school environment where students are afraid, affecting their readiness and ability to learn.¹² In 2005, approximately 6% of students ages 12–18 reported that they were afraid of attack or harm at school during the previous 6 months.¹³ Only asking about the 30 days previous to the survey, a 2007 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported approximately 6% of students feared an attack to such an extent that they avoided school activities or certain areas of school.¹⁴ School violence can also result in a disruptive classroom, which is associated with lower student achievement.¹⁵ If students do not feel safe, they are more likely to have academic problems and are more likely to drop out of school.¹⁶

There are early warning signs, if not properly addressed, that can lead to school violence and other future violent behavior.

Based on several studies cited by the Surgeon General's report on youth crime, "the youths who commit most of the violent acts, who commit the most serious violent acts, and who continue their violent behavior beyond adolescence begin during childhood."¹⁷ Although no single warning sign can predict whether a child will become violent, research indicates that there are certain risk factors and indications that can signal that a child needs help.¹⁸ Early indicators include social withdrawal, excessive feelings of isolation and loneliness, feelings of persecution, feelings of rejection, lack of interest in school and extracurricular activities, expressions of violence in writings and drawings, intolerant and prejudicial attitudes, and actual threats of violence.¹⁹ Violence perpetrated by children is almost always preceded by early warning signs and usually manifests itself only when these signs are not adequately addressed.²⁰

Effective early intervention strategies are available to address school violence and its early warning signs.

There are numerous school-based programs aimed at preventing youth violence that have proven effective in steering youth away from drugs and violence. For example, a study on Second Step, a violence prevention curriculum aimed at elementary and middle school children, found that participants were 42%

less aggressive, and were 37% more likely to choose positive social goals compared to children in a control group.²¹ Another program, PATHS, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, is aimed at elementary school-aged children and works to promote positive behaviors and skills such as self-control, problem-solving, and peer-relationship building. The PATHS curriculum, named a Blueprints Model Program by the Center for the Study of and Prevention of Violence, has been shown to improve thinking and planning skills, conflict-resolution strategies, and self-control. It has also proven to reduce aggression, sadness and depression, and anxiety.²²

...but are barely funded.

Federal funding for school violence prevention has been steadily cut under the Bush Administration. In 2008, the Department of Education budget was over \$68 billion, yet less than 1% was allocated for school violence prevention and mental health programs.²³ Most recently, President Bush's 2009 budget has requested \$282 million for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, the federal government's major initiative to prevent drug abuse and violence in and around schools, a staggering cut of 45% from 2008.²⁴ A 2005-2006 Department of Education survey reported that, "inadequate funds" and "lack of or inadequate alternative placements or programs for disruptive students" were cited by public schools as the top two reasons why their efforts to reduce or prevent crime were limited in a major way.²⁵

THE SOLUTION

An Early Intervention School Violence Prevention Strategy

Making our schools safer poses a serious challenge, but fortunately there are proven early intervention strategies and programs available for schools to implement. Congress must ensure accurate and up-to-date information on violence in schools and resources to implement comprehensive school-based programs are available. Updating the current reporting system on school violence will provide schools with a more accurate account of school violence. Creating a violence prevention grant within the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act specifically targeting youth in elementary and middle schools will effectively reach children earlier rather than later to prevent school violence.

Improving current school violence reporting systems will help better inform schools, the public, law enforcement, and legislators about violence in schools.

Modeled on the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) Act introduced by Representative Carolyn McCarthy of New York, information on school related violence available through the FBI's National Incident's Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and Uniform Crime Reporting System (UCR) would be included in the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* reports.²⁶

Creating a grant program for proven school-based violence prevention

programs aimed specifically at “tweens” would be effective.

Studies have found that school-based programs are the most effective way to reach young people.²⁷ Addressing social, emotional, and behavioral problems in children early on is necessary to prevent problems from worsening and negative behavior from escalating.²⁸ The federal government fails to track how funds from the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act are distributed by school level. Therefore a specific school-based violence prevention grant aimed at elementary and middle schools is necessary to ensure funds are distributed to programs for students who are at a younger age when they are more amenable to change.

Improvements to current school violence reporting systems and a grant program would be affordable.

Minimal costs would be associated with including the FBI’s National Incident’s Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and Uniform Crime Reporting System (UCR) in the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* reports. No new data would be collected. Rather, existing information on school-based crime would be broken out in a manner to identify school-based crime incidents and incorporated into the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* reports.²⁹

Taking a cue from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant program, a discretionary school violence prevention grant program available to school districts, funding of the violence prevention grant program targeting youth in elementary and middle schools would cost \$58 million per year. This amount is approximately half the level of funding for the FY2001 Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant program and just over 10% of the amount appropriated for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act in FY2008.

The grant program would bring school-based violence prevention programs to students nationwide.

The proposed grant program would be able to reach a significant number of youth, as many early intervention strategies with a proven track record are affordable. For instance, PATHS, highlighted as a proven early intervention strategy above, would cost between \$15–45 a student per year over a three-year period.³⁰ Factoring in the greater cost of the program, the grant program could bring PATHS to almost 1.3 million students across the nation in just one year.

THE ROLLOUT

Ideas for launching and publicizing the early intervention school violence prevention strategy

- **Announce alongside administrators, teachers, parents, and students at a school that has used a proven violence prevention program and had positive results.**
- **Hold a press conference during America's Safe Schools Week, October 19-25.**

CRITIQUES & RESPONSES

An Early Intervention School Violence Prevention Strategy

How much will this cost?

This has a modest price tag with proven results. Only proposals that are proven to be effective would be funded.

Isn't this an issue for parents to deal with at home?

Yes, at home and at school. The most effective programs reach children, their parents, and their teachers.

Wouldn't banning guns in school be more effective?

We already do, but only a small fraction of reported incidents of school violence involve guns. We must address the source of the problem, not simply the means sometimes used to commit acts of violence.

Hasn't school violence declined?

Although overall levels of school violence have declined from 1992 to 2005, violence still poses problems for students, teachers, and schools. While there has been much progress made in addressing violence in school, there is still much to be done to ensure our children receive a quality education in a safe environment to which they are entitled.³¹

Endnotes

¹ Consortium to Prevent School Violence, Fact Sheet #1: Overview of School Violence Prevention, March 2008, http://www.preventschoolviolence.org/resources_assets/CPSV_Fact_Sheet-1-Overview_of_School_Violence_Prevention-March-14-2008.pdf.

² The National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007*, p. 22. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov>.

³ The National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007*, p. iv. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov>.

⁴ National Crime Prevention Council, "Are We Safe?," 2000.

⁵ Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden, *Cyberbullying and Online Teens, Pew Internet & American Life Project*, January 3, 2007.

⁶ Statement of Kenneth S. Trump before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, Hearing on "NCLB: Preventing Dropouts and Enhancing School Safety," April 23, 2007.

⁷ Allison Ann Payne, Denise C. Gottfredson, and Gary D. Gottfredson, "Schools as Communities: The Relationship Between Communal School Organization, Student Bonding, and School Disorder," *Criminology*, Vol.41, 2003.

⁸ Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, National Research Council. *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn*. Available at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/10421.html>.

⁹ T.R. Nansel, et al, "Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 25, 2001.

¹⁰ T.R. Nansel, et al, "Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 25, 2001.

¹¹ Yale University, "Bullying And Being Bullied Linked To Suicide In Children, Review Of Studies Suggests," *ScienceDaily*, July 19, 2008.

¹² S. Scheckner et.al, "School Violence in Children and Adolescents: A Meta-Analysis of Effectiveness." *Journal of School Violence*, 1: 5-34, 2002.

¹³ J.F. DeVoe and S. Kaffenberger, *Student Reports of Bullying: Results From the 2001 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey*, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 2005.

¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance-United States, 2007," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Vol.57 No.55-4, June 6, 2008.

¹⁵ A.L. Lannie and B.L. McCurdy, "Preventing Disruptive Behavior in the Urban Classroom: Effects of the Good Behavior Game on Student and Teacher Behavior," *Education and Treatment of Children*, 2007.

¹⁶ Statement of Congressman George Miller, Chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, Hearing on "NCLB: Preventing Dropouts and Enhancing School Safety," April 23, 2007.

¹⁷ Dr. David Satcher, "Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General's," 2000.

¹⁸ K. Dwyer, D. Osher, and C. Warger, *Early Warning, Timely Response: A guide to safe schools*, 1998. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html>.

¹⁹ K. Dwyer, D. Osher, and C. Warger, *Early Warning, Timely Response: A guide to safe schools*. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html>.

²⁰ "Youth . . . whose problems are not addressed early on are at great risk of developing a wide range of serious disorders and of engaging in dangerous or destructive behaviors." *The Informer: Findings from the Independent Evaluation of the DC Public Charter Schools Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative*, Vol. 2 No. 1, August 2007. Available at [http://www.csss.org/doc/YPI%20High%20School%20Student%20Survey%20Report%202007%20Final%20\(Corrected\).pdf](http://www.csss.org/doc/YPI%20High%20School%20Student%20Survey%20Report%202007%20Final%20(Corrected).pdf).

²¹ KS Frey, SB Nolen, LV Edstrom, and MK Hirschstein, "Effects of a school-based social-emotional competence program: Linking children's goals, attributions, and behavior," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 2005.

²² MT Greenberg, C Kusché, and SF Mihalic, "Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS): Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Ten", Blueprints for Violence Prevention Series, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 1998.

²³ Department of Education, "Fiscal Year 2009 President's Budget," January 23, 2008. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget09/summary/appendix4.pdf>.

²⁴ \$513 million was appropriated in FY2008. Gail McCallion, "Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act: Program Overview and Reauthorization Issues," CRS Report for Congress, May 19, 2008.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005-06 School Survey on Crime and Safety, 2006. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007361.pdf>. Table 10. Percentage of public schools reporting that their efforts to reduce or prevent crime at school were limited in a major way, a minor way, or not at all, by selected factors: 18.9% of schools reported "Lack of or inadequate alternative placements or programs for disruptive students" and 17.3% of schools reported "inadequate funds" limited their efforts to reduce or prevent crime in a major way.

²⁶ The Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act, H.R. 354.

²⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Reducing Violence, Guide to Community Preventative Services." Available at http://www.thecommunityguide.org/violence/CGWebViolence_school-based.pdf

²⁸ K. Dwyer, D. Osher, and C Warger, *Early Warning, Timely Response: A guide to safe schools*. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html>.

²⁹ Statement of Kenneth S. Trump before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, Hearing on "NCLB: Preventing Dropouts and Enhancing School Safety," April 23, 2007.

³⁰ MT Greenberg, C Kusché, and SF Mihalic, "Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS): Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Ten", Blueprints for Violence Prevention Series, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 1998.

³¹ The National Center for Education Statistics, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2007*, p. iv. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov>.