



Recommendation Eight

Safety, Resilience, and Health

It is the policy of the State Board of Education (State Board) that all students enrolled in public schools in California have the right to safe schools. The State Board believes that students cannot benefit fully from an educational program unless they attend school regularly in an environment that is free from physical and psychological harm. The State Board also believes that the leadership in providing safe schools, establishing behavior standards, and improving student attendance must come primarily from local educational agency (LEA) boards, superintendents and their staff, and site-level administrators. The leadership must be continuous in order to support comprehensive efforts at each school site to assist students in becoming self-directed and responsible for their own behavior.¹

Recommendation 8 — Safety, Resilience, and Health. Create and sustain a fair, safe, and healthy school environment through a policy of positive discipline; civic and character education; safe and engaging facilities; access to adult mentors and counseling; and school and community health and social services.

Safety, Resilience, and Health is one of the Recommendations in the Focus Area on Social Equity.

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Footnote

¹ School Safety, Discipline, & Attendance State Board of Education Policy #01-02 (March 2001).

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A safe and healthy school environment

Providing students a healthy and inviting learning environment where they are protected from physical and emotional harm is central to the mission of all schools. Safe schools are not just places with advanced security procedures. They are also places that help students develop assets that allow them to succeed even in difficult circumstances. Safe schools encourage healthy behaviors that help students learn about fitness, nutrition, and healthy choices.

This Recommendation is based on the premise that prevention is the key to healthy students and safe schools. Results from the California Healthy Kids Survey join a mounting body of evidence that students' safety, resilience, and health is central to improving their academic performance.

According to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics, schools are relatively safe havens from violent crime in spite of high-profile tragedies. For example, national statistics show that students are twice as likely to be victims of serious violence away from school, and more murders occur at home each year than at school. In addition, the violent crime victimization rate at school declined from 1992 to 2003. However, violence, theft, bullying, drugs, and weapons still pose a threat to students' *perceptions* about their safety at school.¹

There are many factors involved in school safety, health, and resilience for students. A safe, respectful, and positive school environment communicates caring and minimizes fears that might interfere with learning. To emphasize the importance of school climate, the No Child Left Behind Act, Title IV, Part A calls for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act.

A safe school climate includes a safe and clean school facility, caring teachers, and caring, respectful relationships with peers. Researchers and educators agree that school climate affects student achievement.² A report by the National School Boards Association found that a positive school climate was the critical variable differentiating between schools with high and low rates of delinquency, behavioral disturbance, attendance, and academic attainment.³



Information and Resources

The California School Climate Survey (Outside Source) is administered simultaneously with the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) to school staff. The survey gathers information from school staff that, in conjunction with CHKS student data, will enrich a school district's ability to (1) understand the health risk and protective factors that students encounter; and (2) address the impact of substance use and violence on the students and the school. It covers some of the same content areas regarding substance use, school safety, health, and youth development that are in the CHKS student survey. This enables districts to determine whether staff perceptions are consistent with self-reported student behaviors.

Researchers on youth development use the terms **resilience** and **assets** when talking about individual student strengths. When speaking of the collective student body, researchers look at prosocial behaviors, meaning "positive actions that benefit others, prompted by empathy, moral values, and a sense of personal responsibility rather than a desire for personal gain . . . Educators can have a tremendous influence on students' social growth by creating a schoolwide culture in which each student has opportunities to see prosocial behaviors modeled by other students and by adults."⁴

Emotionally and physically safe schools are those where prosocial behaviors are the norm. Schoolwide cultures that foster resilience also set high expectations for academics and behavior, promote caring relationships between students and adults at the school, and provide students with opportunities to participate in decisions about their education and to be involved in the community. Prosocial school communities take note of students who are skipping classes and work closely with them to identify and solve problems.⁵ A positive school climate comprises the following characteristics:

- The school community honors ethnic and linguistic differences among students.
- Adults encourage students to share their personal commitments and find ways to grow morally and ethically through the knowledge and respect gained from their encounters with other students.

- Students with disabilities find an environment that offers genuinely positive acceptance of differences.
- The school community empowers all students to learn and develop as closely as possible to their full potential, and the contributions of all students are recognized and valued.⁶

Use of annual parent and student safety surveys is one way for faculty members to stay abreast of real and perceived threats to safety. Information on safety may be obtained through annual surveys or through informal means such as “bullying boxes” or “safety suggestions” boxes. Students can give anonymous tips about safety issues.



In the Spotlight

Serrano Intermediate School, Saddleback Valley Unified School District

Teachers at Serrano developed an annual **satisfaction survey** for parents. Results from the surveys have alerted the school staff members to many safety concerns. For example, parents alerted the staff to safety concerns in the parking lot and on surrounding streets. Additionally, a student survey gives the faculty regular feedback that helps teachers to monitor the school climate.

- Serrano Intermediate DataQuest School Profile
- Saddleback Valley Unified DataQuest District Profile
- Serrano Intermediate School (Outside Source)

To help students bond with school and be receptive to learning, school faculties need to take time to understand the disconnections students experience during the school day. By talking with students about how they experience less structured environments such as lunchrooms, hallways, bus stops, and buses, teachers can work to address problems that might interfere with students' willingness to come to school. In addition, teacher teams need to discuss how school and classroom practices limit students' social integration. For example, two common school practices that can hinder bonding are selective extra-curricular activities (where some students are excluded) and ability grouping.⁷ As noted in other Recommendations, middle schools take care to provide accelerated intervention classes in certain subjects where students are falling below grade level. However, those schools ensure that a flexible schedule allows students to move into grade-level classes when they are academically prepared for grade-level work.

A middle grades program cannot address the school's culture without also analyzing the student and neighborhood culture or climate. For example, issues such as gangs and gang wannabes often affect students' emotional safety and ability to bond with the larger school community. In addition, when considering subgroups, school staff members need to consider how gangs single out groups such as English learners and further isolate them from the school culture. By involving students in leadership and in discussions of school climate issues, the school community, including all adults and students, can better deal with issues that affect relationships and learning. For example, in some cases, partnerships with community agencies can help to pair students with former gang members who serve as role models for avoiding negative behavior.

Related Links

- A Middle School Culture Supporting Standards-Based Education, Document Library, TCSII.
- California Healthy Kids Resource Center, (Outside Source)
- California Healthy Kids Survey, (Outside Source), WestEd.
- California Healthy Kids Survey Report, California Department of Education.
- Getting Results, California Department of Education.

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¹J. F. DeVoe and others, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2005* (PDF; Outside Source), (NCES 2006–001/NCJ 210697). U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2005, iv.

²Brian K. Perkins, *Where We Learn: The CUBE Survey of Urban School Climate Report* (PDF; Outside Source) New Haven, Conn.: National School Board Association's Council of Urban Boards of Education, 2006, ii.

³*Resilience & Youth Development Module*. Prepared by the Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office and WestEd. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2003, 12.

⁴Yael Kidron and Steve Fleishman, "Promoting Adolescents' Prosocial Behavior" (Outside Source), *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 63, No. 7 (April 2006), 90-91.

⁵Kristi Garrett, "Prepped for life—Part 4: A Day of Reckoning Arrives for Dropouts and Their Schools" (DOC; 47KB; 7pp.) (*California School Boards magazine*, Summer 2006, x, xi).

⁶Adapted from *Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 116-119.

⁷Donna Marie San Antonio, "Broadening the World of Early Adolescents," *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 63 No. 7 (April 2006), 8-13.

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Safety planning and safe school review teams

Education Code Section 32286 stipulates that:

- Each school shall adopt its comprehensive school safety plan by March 1, 2000, and shall review and update its plan by March 1, every year thereafter.
- Commencing in July 2000, and every July thereafter, each school shall report on the status of its school safety plan, including a description of its key elements in the annual school accountability report card prepared pursuant to sections 33126 and 35256.

In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech University shooting in April 2007, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O'Connell said, "School safety plans must be living documents—students and all staff members must be aware of how to effectively respond to any threat to the safety and well-being of students—from bullying to criminal or terrorist activity. I want to remind the public that schools are required to coordinate with local law enforcement, emergency services personnel, and health and social service agencies on plans for crisis preparedness and response."¹

A California Department of Education publication titled *Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action* (2002) provides guidelines for planning a safe school. It outlines a team-based process for identifying and addressing safety issues. The school-based team, as defined in the document, should include administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community representatives such as law enforcement officials.

Related Links

- [Safe Schools, California Department of Education.](#)
- [Safe Schools Planning Checklist, California Department of Education.](#)

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Footnote

¹Jack O'Connell, Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Thanks Officials for Swift Response, Speaks About School Safety, Sacramento: California Department of Education, News Release 07-55 (April 20, 2007).



Conflict resolution

Effective schools teach students how to resolve problems instead of resorting to violence. Many schools employ the school counselor to teach peer counselors and peer mediators how to assist in conflict resolution between fellow students.



In the Spotlight

McKinleyville Middle School (PDF; Outside Source), a Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 model, McKinleyville Union Elementary School District. In addition to strong service-learning and counseling programs, McKinleyville teaches student mediators to help resolve conflicts among peers. The school also runs both an anti-bullying program and a character education program.¹ McKinleyville DataQuest School Profile.

Richard Henry Dana Middle School (PDF; Outside Source), a Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 model, Wiseburn Elementary School District. A full-time counselor works with students and their families and coordinates a conflict resolution program. To meet the growing social and emotional concerns of middle school students, the school developed a peer mediator program.² Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile.

Related Links

- Association for Conflict Resolution: Giving Voice to the Choices for Quality Conflict Resolution (Outside Source)
- "Research on School Counseling Effectiveness," California Department of Education.
- "Sample Policies" (model policies for bullying prevention and conflict resolution), California Department of Education.
- STRYVE: Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (Outside Source)

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Footnotes

¹Joyce Hinkson, "McKinleyville Middle School: Three-Period Core Block Fosters the Learning Community," *Middle Grades Spotlight* (Spring 2006), p. 11.

²Joyce Hinkson, "Richard Henry Dana Middle School: Teaming Builds an Unwavering Commitment to Achievement," *Middle Grades Spotlight* (Spring 2006), p. 14.

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Bullying prevention

Bullying is defined as repeated acts of peer aggression intentionally designed to harm a person who is weaker than the bully. Bullying is an exploitive relationship between students rather than one specific event.¹ Whether the bully uses fists, the Internet, threatening looks or gestures, or carefully worded threats, bullying presents a serious roadblock to student learning by creating a climate of fear. Since bullies often isolate their victims from other peers through group pressure, the isolated students experience rejection beyond the actual bullying. This, in turn, reduces the protective asset of other relationships. Researchers who followed 380 Midwestern children from the ages of five to eleven found that those who experienced chronic rejection by their classmates were more likely to withdraw from school activities and scored lower on standardized tests than their more popular peers.²

Bullying hurts student achievement, the school climate, and the school budget. When students fear going to school because of violence and harassment, their attendance plummets. Average daily attendance money due to the school is lost. In addition, missing class typically affects student achievement. In 2001, results from the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey found that 14 percent of students ages twelve through eighteen reported that they had been bullied at school in the six months prior to the interview. The survey found that victims of bullying were more likely to avoid certain areas of the school and certain activities out of fear of an attack.³ Often students stay home rather than meet bullies or attackers in school or on their way to and from school.

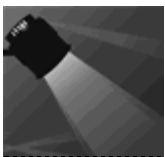


Information and Resources

Effective January 1, 2009, a new law on cyberbullying at public schools went into effect. The new law adds "bullying committed by means of an electronic act . . . directed specifically toward a pupil or school personnel" to the list of offenses that administrators can potentially suspend or expel students according to Section 48900 of the California *Education Code*. For more information, go to the California Law (Outside Source) Web site and select "Education Code." In the search box, type "48900."

In middle schools students are increasingly subject to cyber-bullying. Like face-to-face bullying, cyber-bullying can make students fearful of coming to school. According to a poll released by the nonprofit organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, one-third of teenagers have been subjected to threats or verbal abuse online.⁴ The Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (Outside Source) Web site links to resources and polls about cyber-bullying.

Following a deadly string of school shootings, President Bush and members of his cabinet convened a school safety summit on October 10, 2006. Speakers at the summit emphasized the importance of communication as a means of curbing school violence. Delbert Elliott, director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, said that a school's first line of prevention is to have good intelligence and that school faculty members need to find ways to encourage students to speak up about bullying or rumors about violent plans.⁵ Many schools have experimented with hotlines or anonymous tip boxes where students can alert school authorities to issues that frighten or concern them.



In the Spotlight

Canyon Middle School, Castro Valley Unified School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2007 Model School

Teachers and counselors at Canyon Middle School created a series of "Bully Boxes" that they placed around the school campus. Each year, they teach students to place notes in the boxes to let staff know of physical, verbal, or cyber-bullying incidents. Students have indicated that they feel safer knowing that teachers and counselors take bullying threats seriously

and deal with them in a positive and timely manner.

- Canyon DataQuest School Profile
- Canyon Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Canyon Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

The California Technology Assistance Project Region IV has designed a collection of CyberSafety: Administrator Resources (Outside Source) to support school administrators in providing a safe school environment as advancing technologies present challenges as well as opportunities. CTAP CyberSafety Resources (Outside Source) offer free resources including presentations, games, and handouts to support the safe use of the Internet.

Related Links

- Bullying and Hate-Motivated Behavior Prevention, California Department of Education.
- Bullying at School (PDF; 1MB; 52pp.), California Department of Education.
- Bullying Frequently Asked Questions, California Department of Education.
- Bullying Publications and Resources, California Department of Education.
- CyberSafety: Cyberbullying, (Outside Source) California Technology Assistance Project (CTAP).
- Prevention of Bullying, California Department of Education.

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Footnotes

¹Getting Results Fact Sheet 6: What Does Getting Results Say about Violence Prevention and Safe Schools? (PDF; 230KB; 3pp.), Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2004.

²Gary W. Ladd and Sarah L. Herald, Peer Exclusion and Victimization: Processes That Mediate the Relation Between Peer Group Rejection and Children's Classroom Engagement and Achievement? (PDF; Outside Source). *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (2006), 1–13.

³Jill F. DeVoe and Sarah Kaffenberger, Student Reports of Bullying: Results From the 2001 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (Statistical Analysis Report) (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, July 2005, 9, 10.

⁴"1 of 3 Teens and 1 of 6 Preteens Are Victims of Cyber Bullying", Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (August 17, 2006).

⁵"How to Stop School Violence: Communicate," *eSchool News* (October 11, 2006).

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Violence prevention

Although many sources indicate that youth violence has decreased in recent years, high-profile school shooting incidents in the news alert school professionals to the need to be vigilant in addressing potential sources of violence at school.¹

In general, schools remain among the safest public places in the country. Citizens expect that children will be safe at school, and educational leaders have focused on providing safe and disciplined school environments. Because students often know when fellow students are planning dangerous activities, educators at effective schools try to develop processes and an atmosphere in which young people are willing to report what they know. Some school systems have invested in high-tech security devices that help to identify threats and reduce violence. Others have hired SWAT teams to practice emergency evacuation drills. Evidence indicates the efforts are paying off. Recent statistics show the number of violent crimes on school campuses is small and continues to decline. Although improvements have been made in school security, safety remains the most important responsibility school leaders face today.²

Violence prevention is part of a comprehensive school safety plan as developed by the safety planning and safe school review teams. Regular review of school data will help the school faculty to notice any negative trends and address them immediately.

Although violent crimes in schools are down, a survey by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) (Outside Source) found that 80 percent of the programs designed to prevent youth violence are untested for effectiveness. Out of more than 500 programs tested by the center's "Blueprints for Violence Prevention" project, only ten programs proved to be effective and 30 more showed promise. The ten programs that exhibited a measurable impact on school violence are listed on the Blue Prints for Violence Prevention-CSPV (Outside Source) Web site.

The following resources may be helpful to schools in developing a violence prevention strategy:

Related Links

- National School Safety Center (Outside Source)
- Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention School Violence Resources (Outside Source)
- Safe Schools, California Department of Education.
- Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (Outside Source)
- Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates (PDF; Outside Source), United State Secret Service and United States Department of Education.
- Violence Prevention, California Department of Education.

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¹California Arrest Rates 1960-2003 (Outside Source), Sacramento: Office of the Attorney General. Accessed on May 9, 2007.

²William Bainbridge, "Public Schools Are Safer Than Ever, Despite a Few Sensational Incidents," *The Florida Times-Union* (March 4, 2006).

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Internet safety

Internet safety is a hot topic and a big concern for schools and districts. Many middle grades students go online every day through computers, cell phones, personal digital assistants, and even video game consoles that allow players to compete with and to instantly chat with competitors from around the world. Much of the time, online excursions in the cyberspace community are safe. However, it is important to remember that, like any community, there are some people and places that should be approached with caution and others that should be avoided entirely. Even though many students believe themselves to be technology experts and often feel that they know more about cyberspace than their parents or teachers, they need to be made aware of potential dangers.

Schools have a legal obligation to make Internet use as safe as possible for students. In 2000, Congress enacted the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) (Outside Source), a federal law to address concerns about access to offensive content over the Internet on school and library computers. Schools and libraries must comply with CIPA requirements to receive federal funding support for Internet access or internal connections from the federal E-rate program. CIPA requirements for schools and libraries include:

- Having software installed to block or filter Internet access to sites that might be "harmful" to minors
- Implementing an acceptable use policy (AUP) that addresses online safety concerns (e.g., monitoring online activities of minors, unauthorized access, and unauthorized dissemination of personal information)

In 2006, California enacted legislation (*Education Code* Section 51871.5) requiring schools to educate pupils and teachers on the appropriate and ethical use of education technology in the classroom. State-approved technology plans that meet certain criteria must be in place before federal funding for technology may be secured by a school district. *Education Code* Section 51871.5 requires the addition of a component to educate students and teachers on Internet safety, among other topics.

In addition to the responsibilities of the school, there are several ways teachers can help students stay safe online. For example, teachers can collaborate with the school's library/media teacher to teach information literacy skills (refer to Information literacy in Recommendation 1, Rigor) related to Web site evaluation. Teachers can help students determine the appropriateness of sites. Even with these skills, it is still incumbent upon the teacher to monitor students' Internet use. Some aspects of information literacy/Internet safety include the following:

- Teach students to use extra vigilance when participating in threaded discussions, newsgroups, or other forms of Internet communication to ensure their safety. Students should understand that the Internet is an open forum so they should not communicate anything over the Internet that they would not want to say in public.
- Alert students to the danger of sharing their personal information, including phone numbers, address, photos, etc.
- Strictly monitor (or block) Web sites that require registration or sharing of personal information. Teach student to be aware that contests or pop-up ads promising "free" goods or services often sell personal information. However, many newspapers and other free, information-rich sites also require registration. If students use these sites, they should be cautioned against giving out any authentic personal information (i.e., home address, phone numbers, birth date) as it may be used or sold to other entities.
- Warn students of the danger of using personalized e-mail addresses that provide information about their age, gender, or interests (e.g., AptosGirl 13). Instead, a combination of numbers and letters can be used to help mask the identity of the individual.
- Teach students that they should *never* share their passwords or agree to meet someone "F2F" (face-to-face) if they know only the online persona of the individual.
- Alert students to the fact that, when opening e-mail message attachments from unknown senders, they might unknowingly allow unwanted programs (also known as computer viruses) to infect their computers. These viruses can cause many problems ranging from slowing the computer's speed to damaging or deleting existing files. Teachers can help students refrain from unwittingly opening malicious files by providing information related to identifying the message sender.
- Teach students to exercise caution if they do not recognize the sender, or if the subject line is misspelled or appears to be put together from randomly generated words. If students receive messages that are belligerent or threatening or contain material that is inappropriate, such messages should be reported to the school district as well as to the Internet service provider for investigation. If students receive material that appears to be illegal (i.e., evidence of crimes, threats to life or safety, etc.), the incident may be reported to CyberTipline (Outside Source) (affiliated with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children) for referral to the appropriate law-enforcement agency. Reports may be made online at any time during the day or week or by calling (800) 843-5678.

As students become more familiar with technology and the power of the Internet, one of the unfortunate outcomes has been cyber-bullying, the sending or posting of harmful or cruel text or images on the Internet or other digital communication devices. According to researchers, cyber-bullying has increased in recent years. For example, in nationally representative surveys of ten- to seventeen-year-olds, twice as

many children and youths indicated that they had been victims and perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared with 1999/2000.¹

Teachers, parents, and students should be aware of cyber-bullying and the harm it can do to others. Prevention of cyber-bullying may include the following measures:

- Specific policies to address cyber-bullying in the district's acceptable use policy (AUP)
- Monitoring of students' computer use at school by teachers and at home by parents
- Use of filtering or tracking software
- Following up actively on any reports of cyber-bullying
- Identifying victims of cyber-bullying and following up with school counselors and parents
- Following up with police or other authorities as warranted.

Related Links

- California Healthy Kids Resource Center (Outside Source)
- Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (Outside Source)
- Infrastructure, Hardware, Software, Technical Support (PDF; Outside Source), Santa Cruz County Office of Education, Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership.
- NetSmartz (Outside Source), National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.
- Stop Bullying (Outside Source)
- WiredSafety (Outside Source)

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Footnote

¹R. Kowalski and others, "Electronic Bullying Among School-Aged Children and Youth." Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. (August 2005).

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Threat assessment

Safe schools are those that have developed a comprehensive strategy for identifying problems, analyzing the cause, and implementing a plan to address them. The analysis of potential threats needs to include the following considerations:

- Areas on campus that may be unsupervised or provide opportunities for student on student harassment or violence
- Routes to school that may pose a risk to students who must walk or wait for public transportation
- Access points that could allow intruders to enter the campus without being screened by school personnel
- Facility threats such as exposed lighting fixtures that could be broken during sports activities, underground pipelines that could be damaged during renovations, or damaged electrical wiring (refer to the section on Disaster preparedness/crisis response for detail on how to deal with crises).
- Threats to student health (drug or sexual abuse, depression, or suicidal thoughts)

Schools that are successful in preventing safety problems are those that carefully monitor situations in the school building, on school grounds, or on routes to school that present actual or potential problems. Direct observation, surveys, overheard conversations, and formal data can provide an effective school and community profile of gang behavior, student harassment, drug trafficking, emotional crises, and other threats. Effective schools often gather and analyze the information in cooperation with parent/guardians, other students, and local law-enforcement agencies.

High-profile school shooting incidents always raise the question about how schools should assess which students may pose a threat. A threat assessment approach developed by the Center for Mental Health in Schools (Outside Source) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), guides the inquiry to determine whether the evidence suggests movement toward violent action. The questions focus on:

- Motivation for the behavior that brought the person being evaluated to official attention
- Communication about ideas and intentions
- Unusual interest in targeted violence
- Evidence of attack-related behaviors and planning
- Mental condition
- Level of cognitive sophistication or organization to formulate and execute an attack plan
- Recent losses (including losses of status)
- Consistency between communications and behaviors
- Concern by others about the individual's potential for harm
- Factors in the individual's life and/or environment or situation that might increase or decrease the likelihood of attack

The information gathered from interviews with the student, family members, friends, teachers, classmates, and from school and mental health records helps staff members to determine if the student is moving toward violent action and to develop a risk management plan. For example, what steps will minimize factors that could put the student at greater risk for violence? Strategies might include referral to appropriate services or monitoring the student for changes that could increase the student's risk as either a perpetrator or victim.¹

The American Academy of Pediatrics (Outside Source) also offers a collection of resources to help parents, teachers, students, schools, and pediatricians cope with the aftermath of school violence. Its Web site provides additional resources on violence prevention, school safety, and mental health.

Another aspect of threat assessment is to determine threats to student health. Counselors and community health practitioners can provide training to help school staff members recognize the signs of health risks faced by young adolescents and help teachers and others know what to do when they identify any of the following signs:

- Depression
- Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia
- Cutting or other forms of self-mutilation that signal depression
- Glue sniffing
- Self-strangulation
- Drug use
- Sexual victimization

These and other types of at-risk behaviors become more common in the middle grades, making it imperative that staff members know how to recognize and react to signs of risk. (These types of threats to students' mental and physical health are covered in the later sections on Counseling and Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use awareness and prevention.)

Counselors can help teachers develop "openers" for conversation about possible health or behavior concerns among young teens. For example, many middle grades teachers require their students to keep a journal and to write one page a day. Not only does it help students to organize their thoughts and become more fluent writers, it provides insight to the teachers about students' concerns, hopes, and dreams.

Teachers can begin the process and build a sense of trust by giving students a daily prompt to get them started. For example:

- Sometimes I wonder about . . .
- My favorite foods are . . .
- My favorite teacher is . . . because . . .
- I've noticed that I am growing up and changing because . . .
- I've developed a career interest in . . .
- When I graduate from high school, I . . .
- My most embarrassing moment this year has been . . .
- I wish I had a fairy godmother who could help me with . . .
- It makes me sad when . . .
- Things that make me laugh out loud are . . .It scares me when my friends . . .
- My circle of friends are known as the . . . I like to be part of their group because...
- If I had three wishes, they would be . . .
- I wish I could convince my mother/father/parents that I'm old enough to . . .
- If I had \$1,000 I would . . .

To establish safety, teachers generally allow volunteers to read their entries aloud but do not require it. Teachers also avoid commenting on sensitive subjects. For example, if a teachable moment arises about a health concern raised by a student's journal, the teacher can ask questions in a nonjudgmental way.

Teachers generally tell students that they will read the journals periodically and that the content does not affect their grade. If warning signs appear in the journal, the teacher can first talk to counselor to get ideas about how to talk privately with the student and whether or not to refer him or her for intervention and counseling. Through this process, teachers often identify students who need referral for eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, and delusional or violent preoccupations. In some cases, a caring conversation will be enough to help the student pass safely through a time of crisis. At other times, the issue requires contacting Child Protective Services or having a conversation with the parent.

Getting to know young adolescent students well should be a deliberate proactive process. Safe schools develop a system for sharing information on potential threats with students, their parents, and the community and work to eliminate circumstances likely to result in violent crimes. Actions may range from changing the school environment (for example, improving lighting or using concealed cameras in areas where bullying is likely to occur) to using hall and grounds monitors, obtaining assistance from law-enforcement agencies, and having offenders prosecuted. Parents and the community share responsibility with the school in guaranteeing the safety of all students at all times before, during, and after school.²

Related Links

- California Healthy Kids Survey Reports, California Department of Education.
- Health Framework for California Public Schools (2003) (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.), California Department of Education.
- Safe Schools, California Department of Education.

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Disaster preparedness/crisis response

Footnotes

¹Assessing Whether a Student Might Commit a Violent Act (PDF; Outside Source), prepared by the Center for Mental Health in Schools (Outside Source) at UCLA.

²*Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 206-209.



Disaster preparedness/crisis response

A comprehensive safe school plan includes the specific roles and responsibilities of personnel and strategies to respond to any kind of crisis or emergency. Crisis response and disaster preparedness plans help teachers to know:

- Where to store and retrieve class lists
- How to respond to different types of alerts (lockdown, shelter in place, evacuate, etc.)
- How to alert parents
- Where to take students during an evacuation
- Where emergency supplies are stored in case of extended lockdowns or isolation from the community
- How to respond to types of medical emergencies that occur during a disaster

The California Department of Education Web site contains a Crisis Response page that includes helpful resources to assist school districts with the ongoing mental health aspects of crisis planning and response.

For local information, contact the school district or county office of education coordinator for crisis response. Community counseling and student support specialists (school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses) and local mental health specialists can assist schools in helping individual students and staff members cope with the emotional reactions to a crisis.

Related Links

- Be Prepared California (Outside Source), California Department of Public Health.
- Crisis Preparedness, California Department of Education.
- Crisis Response, California Department of Education.
- Guide and Checklist for Nonstructural Earthquake Hazards in California Schools (PDF; Outside Source), A Project of Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Department of General Services—Division of the State Architect, Seismic Safety Commission, Department of Education.
- Prepare Your School and Students, (Outside Source), American Red Cross.
- Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools, (Outside Source) (also available in Spanish (Outside Source), Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice.
- How You Should Prepare Schools, (Outside Source), Governor's Office of Emergency Services.
- Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities (PDF; Outside Source). U.S. Department of Education: Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, May 2003.

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Threat assessment

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Safe and engaging facilities



Safe and engaging facilities

It is hard to study or concentrate when lighting is poor, when the temperature is uncomfortable, or when the desks and chairs are broken or ill fitting. In addition, the cleanliness and functionality of a school building, including restrooms, play areas, and lunchrooms, communicate care and respect. Finally, community access to schools can leave students feeling at risk for school shootings, even though the publicity surrounding such events is far greater than the likelihood of them happening. All of these subtle components of schooling send a loud message about how much the community values learning. Many of these factors either support or hinder a student’s appreciation of education and ability to concentrate.

The landmark Williams case provides all students with equal access to instructional materials, quality teachers, and safe schools. School districts must assess the safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities, including any needed maintenance to ensure good repair.

Research shows that safe, healthy, and uncrowded school facilities are a basic part of a good educational program. When teachers work in well-designed and highly functional school buildings, they are able to be more effective than when they must teach in inadequate facilities.¹

Safe facilities encompass many aspects:

- lighting
- sound
- temperature
- adequate space to accommodate student learning and movement
 - ◆ pull-out rooms for special purposes such as counseling
 - ◆ lunchrooms
 - ◆ parking areas
 - ◆ pedestrian walkways
- bathroom supplies and safety
- supervision
- playground equipment and safety
- pleasing surroundings (paint, landscaping, graffiti abatement)
- and handicapped access.

Safety features include:

- fire sprinklers and alarm systems
- proper storage and handling of hazardous materials
- air quality, and potable water.

The health and safety of students must be a prime consideration in the learning environment. For example, “the school staff must consider how to reduce allergens in the classroom and other health issues that are impacting students.”²

As noted at the beginning of this Recommendation, California State Board of Education (SBE) policy states that all students enrolled in public schools in California have the right to safe schools. The SBE policy on School Safety, Discipline, and Attendance (PDF; 103KB; 4pp.) is posted on the California Department of Education Web site.



In the Spotlight

Granite Oaks Middle School, Rocklin Unified School District, a California Middle Grades Partnership Network School
Staff members at Granite Oaks build student pride in having an engaging school. For example, teachers guide students in

learning to respect the school campus as their home and engage students as partners in keeping the campus clean. The message faculty members convey is, "This is a professional place of learning."

- Granite Oaks DataQuest School Profile
- Granite Oaks Middle School (Outside Source)
- California Middle Grades Partnership Network School

Related Links

- Bicycle Head Injury Prevention Program (Outside Source), California Department of Public Health.
- California Bicycle Coalition (Outside Source)
- Facilities, California Department of Education.
- Free Publications from the School Facilities Planning Division, California Department of Education.
- Health & Safety, California Department of Education.
- Healthy Children Ready to Learn: Facilities Best Practices (PDF; 2MB; 66pp.), California Department of Education.
- Indoor Air Quality, A Guide for Educators, California Department of Education.
- Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program (Outside Source), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (Outside Source)
- Resources for educational facilities planning. California Department of Education.
- Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center (Outside Source), California Department of Public Health.
- Safe Routes to Schools Program (Outside Source), California Department of Transportation .

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Disaster preparedness/crisis response

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School design and supervision

Footnotes

¹ Flora Ida Ortiz, Essential Learning Conditions for California Youth: Educational Facilities (Outside Source), Teachers College Record (Outside Source) Vol. 106, No. 10 (2004), 2015-2031.

² *Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 214.

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School design and supervision

Although most school teams do not have the luxury of designing a new school, school design features contribute significantly to safety. Redesign and renovation are also opportunities to improve school design and facilities and should allow for handicapped access (a mandate under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.) Whenever possible, school design, redesign, and renovation should allow for:

- Teaming (Buildings are clustered in “pods” to accommodate small learning communities for student bonding and professional learning communities among teachers.)
- Supervision (Staff members can supervise unobstructed hallways, restrooms, and playing fields at all times from central viewing areas or through security cameras.)
- Adequate lighting, air quality, and water faucets
- Developmental responsiveness (The school design includes areas for art, drama, music, recreation, and socializing.)
- Academic excellence (Classrooms are equipped with technology, smartboards, phones, projectors, computer labs, and library media centers.)
- Appropriate management of public access. For example, all visitors during the school day enter only through the main reception area. The school and district develop policies and procedures that allow for the safe use of facilities by community groups.

Related Links

- 8 Strategies for Middle School Design (Outside Source), American School Board Journal: The Source for School Leaders.

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Transportation



Transportation

In response to increasing budgetary and safety concerns, school transportation officials have cut costs and increased safety by using new software and technology to improve route management and safety, security, and operation costs. Software enables school transportation officials to adjust routes and schedules quickly. In addition, video cameras and other technology increase bus safety by monitoring student behavior and driving violations by adults on and around buses.¹

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School design and supervision

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Resilience—Strengthening Protective Factors and Developmental Assets

Footnote

¹Michael Levin-Epstein, "Tech helps slash costs, enhance safety" (Outside Source), *eSchool News* (June 7, 2006).



Resilience—Strengthening Protective Factors and Developmental Assets

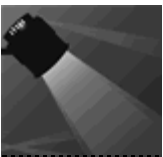
The field of youth development focuses on research about protective factors that build students' strengths and protect them from social, emotional, and physical harm. Youth development shifts the focus from fixing negative behaviors to building youths' strengths and capacity, their resilience, or assets. The Search Institute identified 40 developmental assets as building blocks of healthy development. The list of assets contains both external and internal assets that families and schools can nurture to help students succeed. To view the list, go to the Search Institute (Outside Source) Web page on assets.

Resilience research identified three principles that protect students from risk and help them succeed:¹

- Caring relationships
- High expectations
- Opportunities for participation and contribution

"These supports and opportunities, referred to as protective factors, have been linked to the development of resilience—broadly defined as the ability to rebound from adversity and achieve healthy development and successful learning. They should be available in all environments in a young person's world: home, school, community, and peer groups."²

In California, much of the youth development research comes through the Safe and Healthy Kids initiative. The Resilience & Youth Development Module provides findings from the California Healthy Kids Survey (Outside Source) between fall 1999 and spring 2002. In the fifth and seventh grades, students take the survey, giving school professionals a look at how safe the students feel and whether they perceive that adults care about them and their success (external assets). It also measures their internal assets such as cooperation, communication, empathy, problem solving, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and goals and aspirations. Research indicates that these internal assets protect a young person from involvement in health-risk behaviors and contribute to improved health, social, and academic outcomes. Results from the surveys can be an extremely useful tool in applying for grants such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.



In the Spotlight

Kastner Intermediate School, Clovis Unified School District , a 2008 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

Kastner promotes adolescent resilience by developing student assets. The mission of the school is to provide a safe and nurturing environment that promotes character, respect, and academic excellence. To help students develop those assets—or strengths—staff members support students through small learning communities. The grade-level teams are staffed by a vice principal, a counselor, and a secretary.

In addition, all students benefit from a wide range of support services provided by a part-time school psychologist, a full-time nurse, a part-time school liaison officer, and a full-time district police officer. All staff members serve as mentors and proactively interact with all students, with a special focus on students exhibiting at-risk behavior. An annual needs assessment and climate survey help to inform staff members about potential needs for staff development and targeted strategies.

An active Student Human Relations committee helps to give students a voice about the school climate and to keep staff members alert to any potential areas of concern. Ethnic student clubs help to connect students and build a sense of belonging. In addition, students at Kastner can receive training as peer counselors, peer mediators, or eighth grade WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) mentors for seventh grade students. In addition, Kastner students are invited to participate in

Challenge Day sensitivity training that teaches them to identify their own issues and biases and how they can challenge themselves and others accept each other as who they are and celebrate everyone's contributions. All of these services are available to address the unique needs of adolescents facing very challenging issues in today's world.

The Kastner population includes 1,200 students in seventh and eighth grade. The demographic profile is 52 percent white, 23 percent Hispanic, 13 percent Asian, 5 percent African American, 3 percent other, and 1 percent Native American/Alaskan.

- Kastner Intermediate DataQuest School Profile
- Kastner Intermediate School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Kastner Intermediate (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

Several research studies show a positive correlation between academic achievement and developmental assets. Among other things, the research suggests that:

- Schools that establish high expectations for all youths while giving the support necessary to achieve them, have high rates of academic success. "The graphs for caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation all show a similar pattern—as assets go up, API scores go up. In general, the results for school assets are consistent with prior research that has shown that school bonding is fundamental for students to achieve success in school."³
- High expectations are important in the social and emotional realm, as well as for academic performance. Students who learn social and behavioral norms are more likely to succeed in school. Good behavior, particularly the ability to manage emotions, is an important part of a positive school climate.⁴
- Schools that foster high expectations, caring, and meaningful participation also have lower rates of problem behaviors (such as dropping out, alcohol and other drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and delinquency) than other schools do. When teachers and other school staff members communicate their belief in students' ability to be successful, those students develop self-efficacy, self-awareness, and goals and aspirations.⁵
- "Schools communicate expectations in the way they are structured and organized. The curriculum respects the way humans learn. Such a curriculum is thematic, experiential, challenging, comprehensive, and inclusive of multiple perspectives—especially those of silenced groups [students who are ostracized for a variety of social/emotional/physical reasons such as deformities, sexual orientation, smell, etc.]. Instruction that supports resilience focuses on a broad range of learning styles; builds from perceptions of student strengths, interests, and experience; and, is participatory and facilitative, creating ongoing opportunities for self-reflection, critical inquiry problem solving, and dialogue."⁶

One key asset that schools help students develop is self-discipline. Research found that the amount of self-discipline students reported at the beginning of school was "more than twice" as important as intelligence quotient in terms of student choices. Researchers included final grades, high school selection, school attendance, hours spent doing homework, hours spent watching television (inversely), and the time of day students began their homework in the measures of success. These findings suggest that failure to exercise self-discipline is a major reason for students falling short of their intellectual potential.⁷



In the Spotlight

Fortuna Middle School, Fortuna Union Elementary School District

Eighth-grade science students brainstormed methods to study the various effects of drugs and the situations and environments in which a student might encounter drugs. The students decided to develop board games that incorporated the effects of drug abuse and presented scenarios of what to do if students encounter drugs. The students discussed the importance of early education on drug use and decided to teach the sixth-grade students how to play their new drug education game. The eighth graders also created a presentation that explained the project in its entirety. Students copied the presentation and project onto compact disks so the service-learning activity could be shared with other teachers and students.

The students incorporated the language arts content standards through the design and production of the board games. This service-learning activity also included the health education content standards for middle schools in the following manner:

- Study the role legal and illegal drugs play in high-risk situations.
- Learn to recognize where students may be put at risk for drug use.

- Analyze the long-term health effects of substance abuse.
- Promote positive behavior among peers within their community.

After creating their board games, the eighth graders explained what they learned about short-term and long-term effects of substance abuse to the sixth-grade classes. The eighth-graders followed up the discussion by teaching the sixth graders how to play the board games and coached them on avoidance strategies.

Ventura County Office of Education

In 2007, the office of the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools published **Creating Asset Rich Environments for Children and Youth-- A Call to Action: Ventura County CAREs**. The document reflects the vision of the Ventura County Building Assets Strengthening Individuals and Communities Commission (BASICO), which was convened by the County Superintendent of Schools. *Creating Asset Rich Environments for Children and Youth* presents the work of the Commission, including:

- A community profile based on a comprehensive needs assessment
- Research about proven strategies and best practices of successful youth programs locally and nationwide
- An action blueprint for local residents, schools, policy-makers and community groups to use in establishing a caring and nurturing environment for young people.

Three basic youth resilience tenets form the basis for the *CAREs* action plan:

1. Promote caring adult relationships with children and youth
2. Facilitate meaningful participation for young people
3. Foster high expectations.

- Fortuna DataQuest School Profile
- Fortuna Middle School (Outside Source)
- Ventura County Office of Education DataQuest Profile
- Ventura County Office of Education (Outside Source)
- **Creating Asset Rich Environments for Children and Youth-- A Call to Action: Ventura County CAREs**(PDF; Outside Source)

Related Links

- 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (PDF; Outside Source), Search Institute.
- Academic Achievement and Youth Development, California Department of Education.
- Getting Results Fact Sheet 7: What Does Getting Results Say About Youth Development? (PDF; 236KB; 3pp.), 2005, California Department of Education.
- Healthy Kids Resilience Module (HKRM) (Outside Source), WestEd.
- Resilience & Youth Development (Outside Source), California Healthy Kids Survey, WestED.
- Snapping Back (Outside Source) Education Update, Volume 48, Number 1, January 2006, ASCD.

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Classroom management

Footnotes

¹Resilience & Youth Development Module. Prepared by WestEd and the Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2002, 1.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 14.

⁴Ibid., 47.

⁵Getting Results: Developing Safe and Healthy Kids Update 5; Student Health, Supportive Schools, and Academic Success (PDF; 895KB; 89pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2005, 34.

⁶Bonnie Benard, *Fostering Resilience in Children* (Outside Source), ERIC Digest (August 1995).

⁷Angela L. Duckworth and Martin E. P. Seligman, "Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents," *Psychological Science*, Vol. 16, Issue 12 (December 2005).

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Classroom management

As most veteran teachers know, classroom management strategies lie at the heart of good teaching. Fair, consistent, schoolwide rules of conduct reinforce classroom management, which is one of the reasons that professional learning communities and small learning communities are so powerful. Students know that every teacher holds all students to the same high standard for ethical, respectful classroom behavior.

Good classroom management is evident by the following practices:

- All teachers adhere to a common set of classroom rules, homework procedures, and disciplinary practices so that behavior norms are consistent throughout the school.
- Teachers walk around the room and observe student note taking, binder organization, and consistency in writing down homework assignments and test dates.
- The teacher knows all student names and calls on a variety of students.
- Regular classroom discussion, projects, and cooperative learning experiences make learning relevant to the students.
- Teachers assess progress often and in a wide variety of ways so they can provide timely academic interventions for students who do not grasp concepts. Timely interventions help to prevent behavior problems from students who are frustrated or struggling with the content.
- Teachers greet students by name outside the classroom and show interest in their lives.
- The faculty uses alternatives to out-of-school suspension when other means of correction are feasible. For example, many middle schools use supervised suspension classrooms for disruptive or defiant students to promote completion of class work and tests missed by the student during suspension. Pursuant to *Education Code* Section 48911.1, students in supervised suspension classrooms should have access to appropriate counseling services as well. (For more on discipline, refer to the next section.)

Research on classroom management shows that effective teachers often incorporate social-emotional learning with clear classroom behavior rules. In addition, they offer rewards for good behavior and emphasize warm and supportive relationships among teachers and students.¹

Related Links

- Classroom Management, California Department of Education.
- Classroom Management: A California Resource Guide (PDF; Outside Source), California Department of Education and the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

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Resilience—Strengthening Protective Factors and Developmental Assets

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Discipline: a fair, consistent, and positive approach

Footnote

¹Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, January 2005, 26.

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Discipline: a fair, consistent, and positive approach

Positive rules and discipline policies focus on helping students learn prosocial behaviors rather than on controlling behavior. Effective schools make sure the behavioral expectations are clear to both parents and students, and the school staff is careful to adhere to the rules and be fair. The following strategies are effective for reminding students about school rules:

- Post school rules in classrooms.
- Provide student planners that include behavioral expectations, rules, and the discipline policy.
- Host award celebrations that honor students for exemplary behavior related to each of the school's rules.

In high-performing middle schools, regular data review sessions (such as monthly reviews of suspension data) help the staff ensure that no group receives a disproportionate percentage of disciplinary actions. If there is a “cluster” of discipline referrals related to gender, race, ethnicity, or other subgroup, the teaching team can analyze data and develop strategies (including community mentors) to remedy the situation. Ideally, at least once a year, the school staff will review the rules and policies for appropriateness, equity, and consistency with the school's mission and culture.

Most faculty teams soon learn that they need to “pick their battles” and focus on essentials rather than on a laundry list of rules. As one former principal noted, “After much thought, the faculty chose to focus on five rules outlining a code of behavior in harmony with our work as educators, not prison guards. We posted these rules, simple but reflective of our deepest beliefs, in every classroom:

- Show respect for all people in the school community.
- Keep hands, feet, and all other objects to ourselves.
- Finish class work and all homework.
- Read.
- Learn as much as we are able.”¹



In the Spotlight

Serrano Intermediate School, Saddleback Valley Unified School District

Several years ago, the school staff implemented a data management system for tracking discipline called Effective Behavior Support (EBS). Teachers at the school found that it helped them to distinguish between major and minor infractions so school administrators could work with students who needed the most guidance. Teachers at Serrano use EBS as a data management tool; it is not intended to replace good classroom management by teachers.

- [Serrano DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Serrano Intermediate School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Saddleback Valley DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Saddleback Valley Unified School District \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Effective Behavior Support \(EBS\) \(Outside Source\)](#)

Related Links

- [2008-09 School Accountability Report Card Template \(DOC; 586KB; 13pp.\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [California State Board of Education Policy #01-02: School Safety, Discipline, and Attendance](#), California Department of Education.
- [School Accountability Report Card \(SARC\)](#) California Department of Education.

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Attendance, tardiness, truancy, and the School Attendance Review Board (SARB)

Footnote

¹Joanne Rooney, Picking Our Battles (Outside Source), Educational Leadership, Vol. 63, No. 7 (April 2006), 88.

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Attendance, tardiness, truancy, and the School Attendance Review Board (SARB)

Student attendance affects both student learning and the school budget. Many times, at-risk students are those who are most likely to be chronically tardy or absent. As a result, proactive attendance policies and strategies will help to close the achievement gap.



In the Spotlight

Rancho Cucamonga Middle School, Cucamonga Elementary School District, a 2006 On the Right Track School

The middle school staff members work with the city police department to issue tickets to students who miss school. A student who receives two tickets cannot receive his or her driver's license until age eighteen, making attendance a much higher priority.

- [Rancho Cucamonga DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Rancho Cucamonga Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires each school to keep track of truancy data. However, truancy data is like a car's temperature warning light—it indicates a problem but does not give specifics. The truancy rate merely indicates what percentage of students has been absent from school without a valid excuse for more than any 30-minute period during the school day on three occasions in one school year (*Education Code* Section 48260). Merely complying with the law to put truancy data on the Consolidated Application does nothing to keep the at-risk student from further disengaging from school. Instead, a high-performing middle grades team will review truancy data to determine:

- What does the data mean?
- How should the school use the data?
- Does it indicate a need for changes in instruction or parental notification?
- Does it indicate neighborhood problems (such as gangs or substance abuse) that require partnership with the community (government, business, and family)?

When a student is first classified as a truant, *Education Code* Section 48260.5 mandates parental notification by first-class mail or other reasonable means. This notification can have a significant impact on truancy, and **sample letters** for parental notification of truancy are available on the Child Welfare & Attendance California Department of Education (CDE) Web site in both English and Spanish.

In cases where individual tardiness and attendance problems become chronic in spite of normal avenues of intervention, the School Attendance Review Boards (SARB) becomes an invaluable tool to get families involved in attendance improvement. *Education Code* Section 48325 (a)(4) charges the SARB board "to increase the **holding power** of schools . . ." In this light, SARB is not merely a punitive body but rather serves as another safety net to help students stay in school. SARB efforts are minimally effective if they do not link youths who have persistent attendance problems and their families to all appropriate school and community resources.

The ACSA (Association of California School Administrators) position paper on Equity (March 2005) (Outside Source) emphasizes the important role played by SARB.

Leaders frequently scan the school environment for opportunities that can be leveraged to help all students achieve, even when those opportunities are outside of the classroom. For example, a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) process can become an opportunity to work with the family and staff to garner the support a student needs to stay in school, regain access to the standards and learning. As such, SARBs can be leveraged to achieve equity and access for a student and divert

parents and students from the court system by focusing, instead, on an opportunity to help a student stay in school and achieve standards.¹

The SARB's challenge is to use the expertise and resources of the entire board to diagnose the problem and collaborate with the student and family to remedy the factors that led to truancy. The goal is to reduce the dropout rate by increasing the holding power of the public school.

Effective middle schools can work with SARB and use youth development strategies to reengage struggling students (rather than use scare tactics). For example, the school and local SARB can collaborate to send congratulatory letters for improved attendance and promotion to the next grade. A sample of a SARB letter in English (DOC; 28KB; 1p.) is on the CDE Web site.

Student Study Teams and Student Success Teams (SSTs) focus teachers, counselors, and other appropriate professionals on the specific needs of at-risk students, including attendance and truancy issues.



In the Spotlight

Fontana Unified School District

Administrators in Fontana Unified grew concerned about the high rate of suspensions reported monthly by most middle schools in the district. They found that they could dramatically reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions by providing funding for middle schools to establish a supervised suspension classroom pursuant to *Education Code* Section 48911.1.

If the disruptive student posed no imminent danger or threat and was not recommended for expulsion, the principal or the principal's designee would assign the student to the supervised suspension classroom rather than suspend the student to home. The teacher would provide all the work that the student was missing during the period of the suspension to the supervised suspension classroom teacher. In addition, the student would have access to the school counselor.

When parents received notification that the student was in a supervised suspension classroom, most of them indicated that they felt it was more effective than sending the student home.

Because of the program, suspensions to home were reduced dramatically, and most of the middle schools found teachers who could work well with students in the supervised suspension classrooms.

- [Fontana Unified DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Fontana Unified School District \(Outside Source\)](#)

Related Links

- [Attendance, California Department of Education.](#)
- [Attendance Improvement, California Department of Education.](#)
- [School Attendance Improvement Handbook \(PDF; 1MB; 92pp.\), California Department of Education.](#)
- [School Attendance Review Boards Handbook & Forms, California Department of Education.](#)

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Discipline: a fair, consistent, and positive approach

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Counseling

Footnote

¹ACSA Equity Position Paper (Outside Source), Sacramento: Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), March 2005, 11.

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Counseling

Nonacademic interventions, such as counseling, help students learn the social and emotional skills they need for succeeding in relationships with others just as timely academic interventions help students get back on track to attaining grade-level standards (see the section on Interventions in Recommendation 2 for more about academic interventions). Teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and support staff all play a role in helping students learn appropriate behavior in dealing with others, in coping with disappointments, and in managing anger.

Adolescents come to school with many challenges and dilemmas. Counselors help professional learning community members and after-school staff deal with adolescent issues, including:

- Relationship problems at school
- Anxiety disorders (including test anxiety)
- Depression or anger
- Cutting (self-mutilation)
- Suicidal thoughts or grief
- Gangs and bullying
- Pregnancy
- Gender confusion
- Sexual abuse
- Boyfriend/girlfriend problems
- Dating violence
- Physical/emotional abuse
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse
- Family traumas (e.g., divorce, blended families, death, substance abuse)

Counselors can help school staff members understand how to listen for specific types of problems.

Students need help in expressing their emotions, needs, fears, and other anxieties in non-threatening ways. When they have access to caring adults with whom to share their feelings, they are less likely to act out. Abused or neglected children experience some of the most profound emotions, including those involving suicidal tendencies. California schools, which are legally obliged to report such situations, should have an established system for prompt referrals. The needs of abused and neglected students are complex. Although community agencies can sometimes provide safe havens, such students may still bring with them to school deep, disabling emotions. Caring teachers and counselors are vital in helping these students.¹



In the Spotlight

Richard Henry Dana Middle School, Wiseburn Elementary School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 Model School

A full-time counselor works with resource staff to train teachers to recognize students with problems.

- Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile
- Richard Henry Dana Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Richard Henry Dana Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)

A comprehensive school counseling program helps students understand and respect themselves and others so they can be contributing members of the learning community. Counselors also serve as important members on school intervention team meetings.

The California Results-Based School Counseling and Student Support Guidelines (2007) (PDF; 873KB; 85pp.) advocates the use of data to launch a results-based school counseling and student support system. The book lists the four components of a school counseling program: the foundation, a delivery system, a management system, and accountability. In addition, the guidelines include helpful resources in the appendixes.²

Middle grades counselors play a critical role in helping students adjust to middle school life and prepare for high school. Recommendation 6, Transitions, provides two sections about the roles counselors can play in helping to smooth the transition processes. In addition, counselors are important members of each school team as they help students set goals that will shape their middle grades experience in preparation for high school and beyond.

Counselors also reinforce positive behaviors such as helping students set high academic, career, and personal goals. Since mentors are an invaluable resource for middle grades students in helping them with goal setting, self-esteem, and positive behaviors, counselors often coordinate mentor training and oversee the pairing of mentors with students. For more on adult mentors, see the section in Recommendation 5, Relationships.

California developed the Support Personnel Accountability Report Card (SPARC) to provide schools and districts with an accountability structure for their school counseling and guidance programs. Each year, the California Association of School Counselors (CASC) gives **Academy Awards** to schools with outstanding counseling programs as measured by the SPARC assessment. State Superintendent Jack O'Connell recognizes schools as the **Best in the West** for having an exemplary program of counseling and student support for three consecutive years.



In the Spotlight

Granite Oaks Middle School, Rocklin Unified School District, a California Middle Grades Partnership Network School

To help each student succeed, the school faculty has three main goals:

- Create a strong academic system.
- Develop a strong support system for those who need help.
- Create an inviting and fun environment with student-centered activities.

Once each quarter, teaching teams meet with the principal and counselor to talk about each child and to check specifically on the progress of any students who have been struggling. This “checks-and-balances” system helps the faculty to make sure no child slips through the cracks.

- Granite Oaks DataQuest School Profile
- Granite Oaks Middle School (Outside Source)

Related Links

- Counseling/Student Support, California Department of Education.
- Middle & High School Counseling, California Department of Education.
- National School Counseling Model and Standards, California Department of Education.
- Research on School Counseling Effectiveness, California Department of Education.
- SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (Outside Source)
- Support Personnel Accountability Report Card (SPARC), California Department of Education.
- The Current Status of Mental Health in Schools: A Policy and Practice Analysis, (PDF; Outside Source) UCLA.

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Footnotes

¹Adapted from *Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 208.

²California Results-Based School Counseling and Student Support Guidelines (PDF; 873KB; 85pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2007.

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Sexuality and family-life education

In the middle grades, students typically develop an increased interest in sex and relationships as hormones cause changes in their physical bodies and emotions. As a result, it is important for teachers and counselors to offer sex- and family-life education for both the students and their parent/guardians. Recognizing the importance of sex and family-life education, *Education Code Section (EC) 51220.5* requires that schools serving students in grade seven or eight “shall include the equivalent to a one-semester course in parenting education and skills so that students will acquire basic knowledge of parenting.” In addition, *EC Section 51934* requires students in grades seven to twelve to receive AIDS prevention instruction once during middle school and once during high school. According to the Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (2003) (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.), “A note of caution is in order here. Because parental notification is legally mandated (*EC 51555*) before a discussion of human reproductive organs may occur, schools may wish to limit the integration of sex education with other topics.”¹

Although curiosity about sexuality is common in the middle grades, many young adolescents are shy about their changing bodies and wonder whether what they are experiencing is normal. As a result, many students are not likely to seek guidance from an adult (teacher or counselor) if a preexisting trust relationship does not exist. Ongoing staff development will help teachers build small learning communities and relationships (refer to Recommendation 5, Relationships) so that all students have an adult mentor in whom to confide.

Small learning communities provide students with adult guidance that may be missing in their home lives. The adults at home may not possess the knowledge, habits, and skills to model and discuss healthy and safe choices with their child. Adolescents without significant adults often pattern their behaviors (good and bad) from their peers, television, music, video games, the Internet, and unqualified external sources.

Counselors and other health professionals can help school staff members deal with issues by discussing the following questions:

- How does the school staff educate students about responsible sexuality and the consequences of sexual activity?
- How can teachers, counselors, and mentors discuss the often common practice of high-risk sexual behavior among young adolescents who have misinformation and misconceptions about sexual behavior and its consequences?
- What dialogues help young adolescents to develop the confidence to say no to peer pressure?
- What information can staff members share about the damage to self-image and respect when students submit to sexual acts outside of caring relationships?

Related Links

- [Comprehensive Sexual Health & HIV/AIDS Instruction, California Department of Education.](#)

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Footnote

¹ The Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2003, 35.

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Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use awareness and prevention

As young adolescents enter the teen years, many of them encounter peer pressure to try harmful and illegal substances. This exposure comes at a time when they are eager to identify with peers and distance themselves from adults. However, a strong resilience and health focus at the middle grades level can help students make healthy choices even when peer pressure makes unsafe choices appear more attractive.

According to *Getting Results: Part I, California Action Guide to Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities*, (PDF; 2 MB; 192 pp.), schools have a responsibility to provide safe, disciplined, and drug-free environments that enable students to focus on the academic and social tasks designed to foster their development into healthy, productive adults. **Getting Results** was developed to help simplify the task of educators in determining which programs to use by linking legislative requirements to what research and evaluation say about exemplary and promising strategies for preventing the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs among young people.

Drug abuse prevention is an important part of a comprehensive approach to developing adolescent resilience and health. A growing body of research indicates that students who feel confident and have strong goals for the future are less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors. For example, *Ensuring That No Child is Left Behind: How Are Student Health Risks and Resilience Related to the Academic Progress of Schools?* (Outside Source) uses data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (Outside Source) to underscore the importance of risk and youth development factors to academic achievement. According to the report, policies and practices that focus exclusively on raising test scores while ignoring the comprehensive health needs of students are likely to leave many children behind.

The *Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.) provides guidelines for developing a prevention program for illegal substances (pages 59 and 60).

Related Links

- Alcohol, Tobacco, & Other Drug Prevention, California Department of Education.
- Getting Results, California Department of Education.
- Getting Results: Part I: California Action Guide to Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (PDF; 2 MB; 192 pp.), California Department of Education.
- Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.), California Department of Education.
- NREPP: SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
- Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, California Department of Education.

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Character education

Education Code Section 233.5(a) states:

Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government. (b) Each teacher is also encouraged to create and foster an environment that encourages pupils to realize their full potential and that is free from discriminatory attitudes, practices, events, or activities, in order to prevent acts of hate violence, as defined in subdivision (e) of Section 233.

Many of the hallmarks of a Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage program match those of good character education programs, including:

- Relationship building
- Academic rigor and respect that all students can achieve
- Celebrations of student achievement in academics, behavior, and service
- Respect for diversity and multicultural sensitivity
- Service projects
- Leadership building
- Honesty policies



In the Spotlight

Serrano Intermediate School, Saddleback Valley Unified School District

The seventh-grade teachers at Serrano integrate two character education programs into all seventh-grade science classes. Serrano's seventh-grade science teachers cover one of those lessons each week (on Monday or Friday) for about 15-20 minutes. They chose this approach because it provides students with the information all year long, not just in one trimester. The program complements the school's Effective Behavior Support (EBS) system that has been in place at Serrano for several years.

The character programs provide a "Teacher Integrated Resource Package" notebook that contains 34 weekly lesson plans, video segments on CDs, extension activities, and 10-point quizzes. Each teacher notebook comes with an in-service CD. The students' agenda planners contain supplemental work sheets for each of the 34 lessons. These are integrated into the planner in front of each weekly calendar (students are required to purchase the planners in September). Some of the lesson topics are character, goals, principles, emotional bank account, being proactive, vision, mission, priorities, genuine listening, and win-win thinking.

- [Serrano DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Saddleback Valley DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Serrano Intermediate School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Saddleback Valley Unified School District \(Outside Source\)](#)

Related Links

- Character celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, *TCS//*.
- Character Education, California Department of Education.
- Character Education, (Outside Source) Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University.

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Civic literacy

Civics education fits within the social sciences. However, the entire school culture can be an object lesson in democracy, the social contract, and good citizenship. Schools are at the forefront of communicating the civic values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. Those values include freedom of religion, speech, and press; equal protection; nondiscrimination; and fairness and due process under the law. Schools also promote shared social values, such as responsibility, honesty, kindness, and respect for others. Recognizing that parents are the primary moral educators of their children, the schools must work in partnership with them.¹

Mike Schmoker ties civic literacy to authentic literacy. Just as students need to read, write, and speak about what they have learned, he argues they also need to “think, discern, and make distinctions that inform our conversations, our decisions, how we vote.”²

A federal requirement, enacted in 2005, designates September 17th of each year as Constitution Day. The requirement calls on schools to “hold an educational program on the United States Constitution” on that day. When September 17 falls on a Sunday, schools can hold their educational activities on the following Tuesday.

In September 2006, the offices of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Secretary of State formed a partnership called the Student Voting Project (Outside Source) to promote civic engagement and participation in the elections process by students and young people.

Recommendation 2, Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, includes a discussion about civic education in the section on history/social science instruction. Additional resources on civics education are noted below.

Related Links

- Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids (Outside Source), Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Center for Civic Education (Outside Source)
- Civic Literacy and the Civic Mission of Schools, Document Library, TCSII.
- Civility, Ethical Behavior, and Social Consciousness: Needs and Commitments for Students, Parents, and Teachers, Document Library, TCSII.
- Constitution Day (Outside Source), Constitutional Rights Foundation: Educating Tomorrow's Citizens.
- Constitution Day and Citizenship Day Resources, California Department of Education.
- Constitutional Rights Foundation: Educating Tomorrow's Citizens (Outside Source)
- History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 846KB; 68pp.), California Department of Education.
- History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools (PDF; 3MB; 249pp.), California Department of Education.
- Library of Congress (Outside Source)
- National Constitution Center (Outside Source)
- The Bill of Rights Institute (Outside Source)
- The National Archives (Outside Source)
- U.S. Constitution (Outside Source), Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE): Teaching and Learning Resources from Federal Agencies.

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Footnotes

¹“Taking Center Stage”. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 209.

²Mike Schmoker, “Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning”. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006, 72.

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Health Supports

Coordinated school health supports (e.g., counseling, school nurse, and nutrition and fitness courses) are an important component of a comprehensive school plan to close the achievement gap. Most adolescents face new health challenges as they enter puberty, face peer pressure, and cope with physical, emotional, and social changes. Students often come to school without medical care, reading glasses, or support for emotional or mental health problems. When the family cannot address these issues, schools and community groups must step in before the health problems affect attendance and learning.

Researchers find that there is a correlation between education and long-term health. In one study, the researchers suggested that increasing levels of education lead to different thinking and decision-making patterns that increase the likelihood of greater health.¹ Thus, addressing health so that students can learn will affect their health as an adult and possible job prospects, both of which affect the economic health of the community.

Comprehensive school health addresses many aspects of student life that ultimately affect the community:

- Obesity and its effects cost millions of health care dollars annually. Prevention is much less expensive than intervention.
- Asthma-related breathing problems at school could lead to many days of missed school.
- Many students have allergies and other chronic conditions that require them to take medications that affect performance. Many of those medications must be locked in the school office for safety reasons.
- Diabetes, autism, and other chronic conditions affect increasing numbers of students.
- Mental health issues, such as depression, suicidal thoughts, grief, and anxiety, affect many adolescents, influencing their ability to study.
- Drugs, alcohol, and sex become important topics that affect adolescents. For example, teachers need information about “new” kinds of drugs such as exhalants. The computer dust removal sprays that students use for quick highs hold risks for health complications and death.



In the Spotlight

Gaspar De Portola Middle School, San Diego Unified School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 Model School

The school nurse employs “Diagnostic Dog” as her assistant. The trained dog cuddles sick students and ignores those who are well, thus saving on missed class time for those looking for an excuse to avoid work.

Reyburn Intermediate School, Clovis Unified School District

To ensure that health problems do not go undiagnosed, Reyburn hosts group physicals at the school.

- De Portola DataQuest School Profile
- Gaspar De Portola Middle School (Outside Source)
- School to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Gaspar De Portola Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

- Reyburn DataQuest School Profile
- Reyburn Intermediate School (Outside Source)

Related Links

- Adolescent and School Health (Outside Source), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Alliance Working for Antibiotic Resistance Education (Outside Source)
- California Department of Public Health (Outside Source)
- California Healthy Kids Resource Center (Outside Source)
- California Healthy Kids Survey Reports, California Department of Education.
- California School Health Centers Association (Outside Source)
- Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development (Outside Source)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Outside Source)
- Exploring Essential Components: Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Young Adolescent (Outside Source), National Middle School Association.
- Getting Results: Developing Safe and Healthy Kids Update 3: Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drug Use, and Violence Prevention: Research Update (PDF; 813KB; 73pp.), California Department of Education.
- Health, California Department of Education.
- Health and Wellness, (Outside Source), National Middle School Association.
- Health education, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, *TCSI*.
- Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.), California Department of Education.
- Instructional Materials, California Department of Education.
- Learning Support, California Department of Education.
- Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2MB; 72pp.), California Department of Education.
- Success Stories, (Outside Source), National Middle School Association.
- Wellness Policy Resources, (Outside Source), National Middle School Association.
- Youth Development, California Department of Education.

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Footnote

¹David M. Cutler and Adriana Lleras-Muney, Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence (Outside Source), NBER Working Paper No. 12352 (July 2006).

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School nurses

School nurses help schools close the achievement gap by providing prevention and wellness services for students. Unfortunately, because schools in California are not required to have school nurses, there were only 2,835 school nurses in California in the 2005-06 school year.¹ "School site student support personnel (school nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists) can provide immediate and early help that may reduce the need (and associated cost) of sending students to outside services."² Personnel perform the following services:

- Help disabled students.
- Monitor students with diabetes, asthma, or other chronic health problems.
- Assist students in wheelchairs.
- Store and dispense student medicines.
- Care for injuries.
- Oversee vision, hearing, and other health screenings.
- Counsel students on nutrition and wellness.
- Help teachers deal with rising incidence of autism. As many as 5.5 out of every 1,000 school-age children in the U.S. have been diagnosed with autism, and boys are nearly four times more likely than girls to have the condition.³

Related Links

- Diabetes Management in Schools, California Department of Education.
- Guide for Vision Testing in California Public Schools (PDF; 3MB; 41pp.), California Department of Education.
- Guidelines for the Management of Asthma, California Department of Education.
- Health Services & School Nursing, California Department of Education.
- Medication Administration, California Department of Education.

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¹DataQuest query: State—number of pupil services staff by type, 2005-06

²"Taking Center Stage". Sacramento: *California Department of Education*, 2001, 207.

³Shankar Vedantam, "300,000 Children in U.S. Found to Have Autism" (Outside Source), *Washington Post* (May 5, 2006), A09.

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Nutrition and fitness

Diet and exercise have become popular topics in the media due to America's obesity epidemic, which is affecting adolescents dramatically. For example, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 1976–80 and 1999–2002, the prevalence of overweight children six to eleven years of age more than doubled from 7 to 16 percent, and the prevalence of overweight adolescents twelve to nineteen years of age more than tripled from 5 to 16 percent.¹ As a result, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (PDF; Outside Source) requires school districts receiving federal funding for child nutrition programs (including lunch and breakfast) to establish local school wellness policies beginning in the 2006-2007 school year.²

Middle grades teachers can help raise awareness about healthy eating habits by choosing healthful snacks if snacks are part of rewards or a celebration. For example, pizza parties might be replaced by light popcorn, fruit popsicles, pretzels, or award certificates.

National recommendations call for adolescents to engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. To meet that objective, both the President's Challenge program and the California Superintendent's Challenge engage students in at least 60 minutes of physical activity that contributes to fitness. In addition, California requires Physical Fitness Testing (PFT) in grades five, seven, and nine. However, in 2005, only 25 percent of the students in grade five, 29 percent in grade seven, and 27 percent in grade nine performed within the healthy fitness ranges for all six areas of the test.

Studies link nutrition and fitness to higher academic achievement, but they do not tell why school test scores and health resilience are related. For example, API scores increase substantially as the percentage of students who report that they eat breakfast increases.³ As a result, middle schools with large populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students need to provide breakfast programs. "Missing breakfast is associated with reduced cognitive performance among nutritionally at-risk children . . . as well as among otherwise well-nourished, middle-class children."⁴

Although fitness falls under the subject area of physical education (PDF; 2MB; 74pp.) and nutrition is part of a comprehensive health education program as outlined in the Health Framework (PDF; 2MB; 263pp.), the two naturally complement one another in an effective school curriculum. Standard 4 of the Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools for Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2.27MB; 72pp.) states, "Students demonstrate knowledge of physical fitness concepts, principles, and strategies to improve health and performance." The Health Framework (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.) states:

Students learn that food choices are intimately linked with physical, mental, emotional, and social health; energy level; self-image; and physical fitness. This content area provides students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation needed to make wise food choices throughout their lives. Ideally, nutrition education uses the school's child nutrition programs as an essential part of the educational process. Food-tasting and preparation experiences at all grade levels can provide an excellent opportunity for classroom teachers to work cooperatively with school nutrition personnel and use the cafeteria as a learning laboratory for classroom lessons as required by federal and state legislation. (Public Law 95-166 provides funds to states for the development of comprehensive nutrition education programs that make full use of the school cafeteria.)⁵

School Nutrition . . . By Design! (PDF; 721KB; 45pp.) is a tool that provides the design principles for developing a healthy school nutrition program. It provides quality indicators within each design principle and recommends strategies that support the development of healthy lifestyles during and after school. The report includes practical steps schools can take, including scheduling lunch times when students are more likely to eat healthy food, how to create a school health council, and ways to enlist students in planning healthful and student-friendly menus. The report contains resources and examples from school districts and organizations that have already implemented successful strategies to improve the school nutrition environment.

Healthy Children Ready to Learn, Facilities Best Practices PowerPoint, is another resource developed by the California Department of Education. It includes information about design of school food services facilities and facilities for physical education programs.



In the Spotlight



Cesar Chavez Middle School, San Bernardino City Unified School District

Students at Chavez Middle School were introduced to a wide variety of foods and nutritional information as a part of the school district's Steps to Healthy Living campaign. For example, they learned that one Big N' Tasty burger contained 470 calories, and one large order of fries contained 370 calories. The district campaign is designed to span a two-week period. One goal is for each student to walk 10,000 steps a day. Each student receives a pedometer to track progress.

- [Cesar Chavez DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Cesar Chavez Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [San Bernardino City Unified School District \(Outside Source\)](#)

The CDE publication [Taking Action for Healthy School Environments \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#) illustrates promising practices in nutrition and physical activity policy development and implementation that have been field-tested and found successful in over 18 California middle and high schools. It also provides recommendations for leaders at every level—school, district, community, and state—to take action toward ensuring school environments support health for students of all ages.

Many before or after school programs promote health and fitness. The After School Education & Safety Program provides grants to schools and districts that collaborate with community partners to provide safe and educationally enriching alternatives for children and youths during non-school hours.

To promote healthy eating, the California Department of Education initiated the California School Garden Network ([Outside Source](#)). Gardens on school campuses help students learn about healthy food choices and how to become more physically active. Children who grow and harvest their own fruits and vegetables are more likely to eat those fruits and vegetables. School gardens also provide an opportunity for agricultural literacy and bridge the connection between food production and food choices. In a garden, children and youths learn in a social and physical environment.



In the Spotlight

[Richard Henry Dana Middle School, Wiseburn Elementary School District \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#), a Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 model. Students work with a community volunteer to plan, build, and tend the school's gardens. "Farmer Ed" not only helps guide the effort but also serves as a caring mentor for the students.

- [Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Richard Henry Dana Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [School to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Richard Henry Dana Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

Related Links

- [California School Garden Network \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Childhood Obesity and Diabetes Task Force, California Department of Education.](#)
- [Coordinated School Health Programs \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Health, California Department of Education.](#)
- [Health education, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.](#)
- [Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve \(PDF; 2MB; 264pp.\), California Department of Education.](#)
- [Healthy Children Ready to Learn, California Department of Education.](#)
- [Healthy Schools Program \(Outside Source\), Alliance for a Healthier Generation.](#)
- [Instructional Materials, California Department of Education.](#)

- Nutrition, California Department of Education.
- Nutrition (Outside Source), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.
- Physical education, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2.27MB; 72pp.), California Department of Education.
- Physical Fitness Testing (PFT), California Department of Education.
- Resources of Health and Fitness Organizations (Outside Source), The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.
- School Nutrition . . . By Design! (PDF; 705KB; 45pp.), California Department of Education.
- Strategies for Success II: Enhancing Academic Performance and Health Through Nutrition Education—A Resource Manual for Educators and Child Nutrition Programs (PDF; 760KB; 73pp.), California Department of Education.

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Footnotes

¹Health, United States 2005, With Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans (PDF; Outside Source). Hyattsville, Md.: National Center for Health Statistics, 2005, 9.

²California Healthy Kids Resource Center, Local School Wellness Policies (Outside Source), Web page with links to legislation and sample policies.

³Getting Results: Developing Safe and Healthy Kids Update 5: Student Health, Supportive Schools, and Academic Success (PDF; 895KB; 89pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2005, 30, 35.

⁴Ibid., 17.

⁵Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (PDF; 2MB; 264pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2003, 62.

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Family services and community health connections

To help close the achievement gap, effective schools can serve as a link to resources for families facing medical or mental health crises. Providing help for families lifts the burden of fear and distraction from the student, helping him or her to focus on learning.

Related Links

- [Achieving Academic Success Through Coordinated School Health \(PDF; 265KB; 2pp.\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Coordinated School Health](#), California Department of Education.
- [Getting Results: Involving Parents in Prevention Efforts \(PDF; 147KB; 6pp.\)](#), California Department of Education.

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Technology Supports

School staff members have access to many technology support systems for improving the safety, resilience, and health of students on their campuses. The following support systems are available:

- Data tracking systems to monitor behavior [Effective Behavior Support (EBS) systems (Outside Source)—refer to the section on discipline]
- Automated attendance calling systems
- Automated emergency calls to all parents
- Security monitors, sensor lights, and cameras
- Anti-theft devices
- Computer security
- Visitor registration systems
- Communication systems

For example, the National Library of Medicine, the largest medical library in the world, has created a free application for emergency responders called Wireless Information System for Emergency Responders (WISER) (Outside Source) that runs on smartphones and handheld devices. Emergency responders use handheld products paired with the software as wireless or stand-alone reference tools for gathering information on hazardous substances and receiving support on making decisions.

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Conclusion

Safe schools are those where students develop strengths (resilience) that enables them to make healthy choices and where staff members work with community partners to ensure safe facilities. Schools that take time to develop plans and strategies that promote positive student behavior and prevent crises will help students learn. Attendance improvement, bullying prevention, a fair and consistent discipline plan, a strong counseling program, and a schoolwide character education program are all parts of an effective school plan for safety and health. A comprehensive plan also involves partnerships with community health services for students and families.

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