



An Overview of the Initiative

In 1999, the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice responded to rising concerns about youth violence and school safety by creating the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative. This unique collaboration recognizes that violence among young people can have many causes, including roots in early childhood, family life, mental health issues, and substance abuse. No single activity can be counted on to prevent violence. Thus, SS/HS takes a broad approach, drawing on the best practices and the latest thinking in education, justice, social services, and mental health to help communities take action.

Through grants made to local education agencies (LEAs), the SS/HS Initiative provides schools and communities in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal areas across the United States with the funds and resources to build or enhance the infrastructures to strengthen healthy child development, thus reducing violent behavior and substance use. In order to qualify for the SS/HS grant, the LEAs must mirror the Federal collaboration within their communities by formalizing partnerships with local mental health and juvenile justice providers.

The faces of the SS/HS Initiative across the country are enormously diverse. Some of the LEAs are school districts while others are individual schools, charter schools, or boarding schools. These diverse LEAs are partnering with law enforcement officials, local mental health authorities, juvenile justice officials, and community-based organizations. In some SS/HS communities, funds are being used to implement science-based programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention program, while in others resources are directed toward educating teachers, encouraging parent involvement, or even purchasing and installing safety equipment. SS/HS collaboratives have been funded in all but four States and have served a variety of populations such as African American, Hispanic, Laotian, American Indian, Hmong, and families of migrant workers.

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With financial and technical support from the three Federal partners, more than 150 communities are creatively linking new and current services to reflect their own specific needs, all with a vision to prevent violence among youth. While grantees work to correct problems as they arise, they also strive to prevent violence before it starts. Science-based approaches are being used to achieve aims such as promoting students' cooperation with their peers, setting standards of behavior, developing healthy student/family relationships, increasing parental involvement in schools, building emotional resiliency, and strengthening communication and problem-solving skills.

Results are important. As communities try different strategies, they are measuring their progress. The following pages in *The Faces of Safe Schools/Healthy Students* takes a look at what SS/HS grantees across the country are achieving. These pages make up a snapshot of the impact that the SS/HS Initiative is having on our youth, schools, communities, and families nationwide.