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STEPS TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROJECT

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**Introduction:**

Albuquerque Public Schools' (APS) Health/Mental Health Services Department (H/MH) won a competitive grant from SAMHSA to implement a prevention program during the 2005-06 school year. H/MH's proposal consisted of three goals:

1. Build culturally competent, community-based violence prevention coalitions/neighborhood action teams (NATs).
2. Implement an evidence-based violence prevention curriculum in 12 elementary schools.
3. Implement systems change in school policy and procedures that will institutionalize proactive, culturally relevant, evidence-based violence prevention initiatives across APS and into the larger Albuquerque community.

To implement NATs, H/MH developed two tools, *Youth-Mapping Interview Assessment-Youth Resources* and *Youth-Mapping Interview Assessment-School Resources*, to gather pertinent data on resources, problems and programs facing youth in the schools and in the community. Seven hundred fifty students from twenty-eight elementary schools completed the *Youth Resources* survey, and two hundred six adults from 43 elementary, 5 middle, 1 high and 1 alternative schools completed the *School Resources* survey.

To further assist the development of the NATs, APS' H/MH would utilize community liaisons identified from each NAT to train NAT members in cultural competency and development of mission statements, goals, and strategic planning. Eight NATs emerged from H/MH's numerous recruitment activities across Albuquerque: Five of the NATs were associated with APS elementary schools (Duranés, Marie Hughes, Governor Bent, Matheson Park and Manzano Mesa) and three community groups (La Plazita, Vecinos del Bosque, and Barelas Learning Center). Each NAT received \$1,000.00 and received training and technical assistance throughout the year to sustain community-based, culturally competent, violence prevention coalitions.

To implement the evidence-based violence prevention curriculum, every elementary school in APS was provided with an opportunity to implement the Second Step Violence Prevention Program, specifically *Second Step* curriculum, an evidence-based violence prevention curriculum. Twelve schools were selected for participation. H/MH developed three data collection tools to monitor, record and report findings.

**Results:**

***Goal 1:***

The goals and objectives submitted by H/MH were partially addressed: youth researchers and school-site personnel collected data on resources, problems and programs in approximately 25% of APS elementary schools; evidence exists documenting efforts to recruit and/or create NATs; and 6 of 8 NATs attempted to increase community awareness of violence as a social problem through various activities and by distributing information.

The small response to develop NATs coupled with the very low participation and attendance at established NATs did not support the objectives of creating culturally competent, culturally representative NATs and coalitions that were effective.

The most compelling component of this goal was the data collected by 16 youth researchers. The youth researchers completed 260 one-on-one and group interviews of students, parents and school personnel; and school personnel assisted with survey administration to almost 500 students, parents and school personnel. The results of this effort are:

1. Students' perceptions of their school and neighborhoods – over half of student participants agreed that there are a lot of things to do near their school. Eighty-one percent of the respondents report their school offers before school and after school activities, 50 percent of respondents report play as the fun activity around their school/neighborhood, and only 4% of the respondents report video games, television or computer games as the source of fun in their school/neighborhoods. The most serious problem for kids in school/neighborhood are bullying (23%) and other forms of physical violence.
2. Students' experiences with bullying – forty-two percent of respondent indicate that bullying and violence are a problem at their school, and 37% of respondents indicate that bullying and violence are not a problem at their school. Fifth and sixth grade respondents report higher bullying instances compared to third and fourth grade respondents. The majority of respondents indicate they have not bullied someone at school in the past month (84%); and 16% of respondents report bullying in the past month, some daily (2%). Rationales given for bullying include being bullied themselves (35%), becoming mad as a result of being bullied (16%), being pushed (11%), or being made fun of (5%).
3. Students' sense of safety – The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel safe in school (74%) and they would know what to do if an emergency occurred at school (84%). The responses indicate that who a student feels safe with is as important as where the student feels safe. Respondents agree or strongly agree that if they had a problem, someone at school would help students (77%), and that teachers (41%), friends (29%), and counselors (15%) are the person they go to in the school when they need help.
4. Students' sense of parental involvement in education/school – The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that their parents are involved in their education and/or school (76%).
5. Students' sense of participation in school governance – The majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that students can help make decisions about their school (48%).

The information obtained about school resources from parents and staff provided the following information:

1. Parents and staffs' perceptions of community assets – Generally, the people of the school are considered the most significant asset of the school. The majority of participants (51%) indicate the most-liked features of the school/neighborhood are school personnel other than the principal or counselor (14%), the sense of community

and connection in the community (14%), small size of school (12%) and school location in terms of neighborhood youth services (11%).

2. Parents' and staffs' perceptions of violence solutions – Respondents were asked to describe two violence prevention solutions they wish schools would implement. Respondents indicated that the most significant violence prevention solution is the presence of adults, either the presence of security or police or other adult supervision.
3. Parents' and staffs' perceptions of youth/community needs – Respondents indicate school/neighborhood safety (14%), poverty (7%), bullying (7%), and presence of gangs (7%) are serious problems for their children in the school/neighborhood.
4. Parents' and staffs' perceptions of availability of resources at the school – Generally it appeared that many of the parents and/or staff members were unaware of the “resources” of schools. Strikingly, however, was that a majority of the staff respondents (60%) indicated that school/community safety/violence prevention or intervention programs are **not** present at school, and that these programs are needed.

### **Goal 2:**

The goal and objectives submitted by HMH were met: schools were selected, the *Second Step* curriculum was implemented, and the program was evaluated. Generally, student awareness and behaviors improved after the *Second Step* curriculum was implemented: staff reported a decrease in daily occurrences of negative student behaviors ranging from 6% (students not following rules/directions/showing disrespect) to 13% (violence promoting attitudes from students).

Staff reported an increase in the observed number of positive behaviors of students. Examples include teacher-reported “never occurring” positive behaviors becoming daily or frequently occurring behaviors: students began to display the positive student behaviors introduced and encouraged in the *Second Step* curriculum regularly and consistently. Examples include students choosing goals that leads to fair outcomes for each person, using effective problem solving strategies in a social context, or using calming down techniques or otherwise regulating their emotions.

### **Goal 3:**

Program staff report on-going activities are occurring to recruit parents and youth as part of the Core Coalition. Approximately 8 parents are involved, and the Core Coalition is considering the formation of a youth advisory council.

To increase sustainability of the violence prevention initiative, program staff reported the following:

1. Program staff of H/MH's prevention unit has been instrumental in providing language and suggestions for revised and/or newly developed policies and procedures within APS. Examples include the Substance Abuse Policy, the bullying Prevention Policy, and the District's Wellness Policy.
2. The Violence Prevention Coordinator's position, originally funded by the Steps to Violence Prevention grant, is now a full-time position funded by APS operational funds.
3. Program staff established the Core Coalition, also known as the Prevention Advisory Council (PAC), and provides on-going technical assistance to NATs, program schools, and the District's School Health Advisory Council.

4. The PAC and program staff conducted a district-wide in-service in which principals throughout the district were targeted for attendance in April 2005. The in-service provided an opportunity to obtain information about the Second Step curriculum and other violence and bullying prevention strategies and to provide input on the District's Bullying Prevention Policy.
5. Prevention unit program staff purchased the companion series, *Steps to Respect*, a comprehensive program for bully-proofing the school site Fall 2006. Prevention unit program staff have provided the school-wide implementation portion of the program to all schools in APS.
6. Nineteen schools will implement the *Steps to Respect* program during the 2006-07 school year.

### **Limitations:**

- Instrument design for all tools implemented by H/MH had several elements that significantly impact and limit the ability to accurately interpret the survey results.
- For all data collection efforts and objectives of each goal, the number of participants was a significant limiting factor.
- Due to sampling methods, any generalizations of findings to other APS schools should be done with great caution.
- A great deal of variation occurred in implementation of the *Second Step* program and in collecting data.
- Accessing consistent and accurate attendance and discipline data from school to school is proving to be an on-going system-wide problem that severely impacts the ability to draw correlations and/or ascertain patterns of behaviors.

### **Conclusions:**

Given the limitations (above), the strongest findings are:

#### **Identifying resources, problems and programs in each school—youth voices (Goal 1):**

1. At school or within the neighborhood, most students know what it means to be safe and know where to go to feel safe.
2. Most students feel safe at school, and would seek out a teacher and/or a friend to help with a problem.
3. Most students can describe the characteristics of bullying (e.g., being pushed, being made fun of, being teased).
4. A majority of students positively report parent participation in their education.

#### **Identifying resources, problems and programs in each school – parent and staff voices (Goal 1):**

1. The people make the schools. Repeatedly, parents and staff indicated that staff at school is the most liked, most needed, and most valued part of the school setting.
2. There is a wide variety of programs available at schools for students, staff and families.
3. There is a wide variety of school resources currently in place in schools.

Create and develop Neighborhood Action Teams (NATs), implement NAT activities to increase awareness of violence as a social problem and effectively plan violence prevention initiatives (Goal 1):

1. Eight NATs were identified, and seven of the NATs report their presence as a positive impact on the school and community.
2. Six of the eight NATs report incorporating their activities with other groups in the school community.
3. Three of the eight NATS report provide evidence of planned violence prevention initiatives for each NAT. Examples include designating a neighborhood “crime stopper” contact, inviting Join-A-School partners to meetings and offer to collaboratively plan activities, and planning larger community projects.

Implement an evidence-based violence prevention curriculum (Goal 2):

1. Approximately 1000 staff throughout the district has been trained in the Second Step curriculum.
2. H/MH Program Staff created a Second Step Resource Manual, and distributed copies of the manual to all participants in the training.
3. 12 elementary schools were chosen to participate in the Second Steps Violence Prevention Project, and 47 elementary and middle schools were given curricula, training, technical assistance and implementation resources to support Second Step implementation during the 2006-07 school year.
4. Thirty-two staff members across the district were trained as trainers to support the long-term implementation of the curricula throughout APS. Seventy-one percent of APS’ elementary school and 31% of the APS’ middle school have identified site-based implementation coordinators, and over half of APS’ schools have at least one person trained in the implementation of the Second Step curriculum. H/MH program staff continues to offer implementation support.
5. The majority of staff that implemented the Second Step curriculum utilized the adult coaching behaviors. The Second Step curriculum appears to have instilled confidence in staff to immediately, appropriately and effectively deal with student behaviors, especially if behaviors are emotionally driven.

Implement system-change in school policy and procedures that will institutionalize proactive, culturally relevant, evidence-based violence prevention initiatives across APS (Goal 3):

1. Evidence to support the completion of objectives associated with this goal were either not provided to RDA, or program staff provided anecdotal records to support portions of this goal’s objectives.
2. Generally, this goal was not as well accomplished as Goals 1 and 2. However, the initial efforts to implement systems-change (see Results, above) are impressive and noteworthy first-steps to fully realizing the impact of this goal.