The United States Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

Turning a National Initiative into Local Action

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Abstract

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) initiative is a competitive grant program involving the United States Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice. Between 2000 and 2010, these agencies blended resources in support of innovative school-community coordination to improve school safety, reduce student substance use, and enhance the social-emotional well-being of youth from preschool through grade 12. This chapter provides an overview of the SS/HS initiative’s core elements by describing its implementation in two California communities. Examples demonstrate how local education agencies conducted needs assessments, implemented evidence-based programs, and organized schoolwide data management systems, while addressing local and federal needs. Discussion of lessons learned and sustainability challenges provide guidance for similar school-community efforts.

Schools are generally safe (Cornell, 2006; DeVoe, & Bauer, 2010), but students and staff may experience day-to-day disruptions such as bullying that decrease their sense of school safety (Mayer & Furlong, 2010; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Awareness that frequent incivility diminishes safety, combined with concerns over high-profile incidents such as school shootings (Voskuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002), provided the catalyst to launch the Safe Schools/Health Schools (SS/HS) initiative in the United States. Between 2000 and 2010, more than 350 urban, rural, suburban, and tribal school local education agencies (LEAs), in collaboration with local mental health and juvenile justice providers, received SS/HS funding, making it the most prominent and coordinated effort to promote safe and drug-free schools in the United States. This federal initiative encouraged schools and communities to design and implement comprehensive programs to improve school safety, reduce substance use, and enhance students’ social-emotional well-being. It emphasized the need for prevention, student support, cross-agency coordination, and the use of evidence-based practices. SS/HS aimed
to bring about “structural change with a school system, within a community,” and create conditions where school systems “collaborate and coordinate with others who had a responsibility for working with kids—namely the mental health system and the juvenile justice system” (Center for Mental Health Services [CMHS], 2005, p. 5).

Theoretical Orientation to the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

In order to accomplish the broad goals set forth by the SS/HS initiative, structural change needed to occur at various levels simultaneously (Telleen, Kim, & Pesce, 2009). This is largely based on an understanding that there are multiple individual and contextual influences that affect schools and students throughout the lifespan. A social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has been central in guiding the development of local SS/HS initiatives. In this conceptual model, students are at the center of a series of concentric circles, each representing increasingly expanding, mutually influential microsystems. These microsystems include families, communities, schools, cultures, and societies, and ultimately affect the child’s well-being. This framework highlights the need for a comprehensive, collaborative, and coordinated system involving multiple agencies and has provided a theoretical background from which to design and organize SS/HS program goals.

Organization of SS/HS Program Goals

SS/HS aims to increase and improve services to at-risk students and their families, link service agency functions in a complementary way, decrease violence and drug abuse while diminishing school discipline problems, and foster the healthy development of all youth (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention [NCMHPYVP], n.d.). To address these goals, LEAs partner with mental health, juvenile justice, local law enforcement, and other community organizations. Prior to initiating services, SS/HS grantees developed comprehensive written plans that address five core elements:

Element 1: safe school environments and violence prevention activities;
Element 2: alcohol and other drug prevention activities;
Element 3: student behavioral, social, and emotional supports;
Element 4: mental health services; and
Element 5: early childhood social and emotional learning programs.

Developing and implementing an integrated plan that addresses all five elements could be challenging for many LEAs. To assist, each SS/HS project crafts a logic model addressing areas of need that are linked with selected programs, evaluation strategies, and desired outcomes. These organizational practices are helpful when identifying the desired outcomes for any school safety project (Furlong, Jones, Lilles, & Derzon, 2010). Figure 36.1 illustrates how one SS/HS project organized its goals and strategies reflecting its coordinated effort to address the five core elements.

SS/HS Outcome Data to Date

A National Evaluation Team (NET) works with each SS/HS grantee to collect and provide data for an evaluation of the SS/HS Initiative as a whole (Safe Schools/Healthy Students, 2010a). Accordingly, LEAs are required to dedicate a percentage of their budget to evaluation activities that support the national evaluation and address local needs. The NET carries out site visits, collects survey data, conducts telephone interviews with key stakeholders, gathers partnership inventories that address contributions to activities, and requires agencies to report on measurable
Figure 36.1  Example of condensed local education agency Safe Schools/Healthy Students logic model elements and strategies.
performance goals consistent across grantees (i.e., required by the Government Performance Results Act of 1993; GPRA). The NET targets whether or not SS/HS grants (a) enhance collaboration, (b) reduce the frequency of violent incidents in schools, (c) reduce rates of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, (d) improve access to mental health services, and (e) improve school climate. Towards this end, the NET examines pre-grant conditions and resources, monitors SS/HS activities, and examines common near- and long-term outcomes.

The NET publishes current information about the evaluation on its website (http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/community/evaluation.aspx). The most recent update (Safe Schools/Healthy Students, 2010b) indicated that grantees reported an 11% decrease in the number of students involved in violent incidents, a significant decrease in the number of students who had experienced or witnessed violence, and that most staff report the SS/HS Initiative made their schools safer. As the NET continues to provide an overall picture of the impact of SS/HS, it is important to review the details of individual sites to understand the numerous steps to implementing comprehensive programs in schools.

Developing an Integrated Plan: Needs Assessment

The SS/HS initiative and its national evaluation have requirements that we describe via the implementation of two SS/HS projects in California, for which several of the authors were co-principal investigators. Initially, assessments were conducted to inform needs for SS/HS’s five core elements and to set local priorities. A thorough needs assessment supports intervention planning and is the critical first step for a comprehensive school safety project (Furlong et al., 2010). Regardless of the method employed, the needs assessment should involve multiple stakeholders, whose potentially diverse preferences are aggregated into a single set of priorities, as well as a cost-utility analysis to prioritize needs (Ross, 2008).

Given numerous options for evidence-based and promising programs to address school violence and school safety concerns, planning teams should carefully select interventions that match community needs. Needs assessment guides the selection of appropriate programs and authenticates an LEA’s rationale for SS/HS funding in the initial grant writing stage, providing baseline indicators for evaluation. In our two California SS/HS sites, LEAs were already using school-wide questionnaires, thus archival data were available to help inform need. Specifically, the sites used the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS; WestEd, n.d.) and the Communities That Care Youth Survey (Glaser, Van Horn, Arthur, Hawkins, & Catalano, 2005), both of which assess risk (e.g., substance use, perceptions of safety) and protective factors (e.g., school connectedness, peer relations) among school-aged youth. The following sections present examples of how this information was organized and examined under the five SS/HS elements with illustrations from our two sites, one that was funded from 2007 to 2011 and another that was funded from 2008 to 2012.

Element 1: Safe School Environment

For one SS/HS site, data sources indicated increasing violence across grade levels during the four years leading up to grant implementation. Discipline data revealed that expulsions had increased by 75% in the year prior to the project and suspensions had increased by 91% over a four-year period. The CHKS survey yielded results for the five years prior to the project showing that the percentage of 11th graders reporting harassment rose dramatically from 18% to 53%, more than double the state average of 23%. Students reporting physical fighting had increased from 13% to 23%, and those reporting being afraid of being beaten up at school doubled to twice the state average.
The SS/HS team surveyed school staff about bullying to identify school safety concerns to inform intervention planning. Results indicated that staff perceived a need for increased supervision on school grounds and additional training in recognizing and responding to bullying behavior. With a sprawling high school campus, supervision challenges were substantial; hence, additional campus security measures were needed. Data were considered relative to staff input regarding priorities, and available community resources. Additional needs were identified: a comprehensive K–12 violence prevention curriculum, an LEA-wide system of conflict resolution and mediation, alternative resources for students with disciplinary problems, a school-justice coordinator for youth on probation, and resources for parents with youth engaged in violent and delinquent behaviors.

**Element 2: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug (ATOD) Prevention Activities**

Similar to school safety trends, data from one site suggested ATOD was a pervasive community problem. County probation department records revealed that 80% of juvenile referrals for felony and misdemeanor offenses were marijuana, methamphetamine, and alcohol related, which was an increase from 61% seven years earlier. Moreover, the CHKS results indicated that past 30-day use of alcohol and marijuana, respectively, were at unacceptably high levels the year prior to the project for Grade 7 (17% and 6%), 9 (28% and 13%), and 11 (41% and 16%). Use of tobacco, cocaine, and methamphetamine followed a similar pattern, all of which exceeded the statewide average. In light of these ATOD data, the county’s SS/HS coalition identified the following needs: (a) effective, consistent, and coordinated ATOD curricula across participating LEAs; (b) leadership training for youth; (d) early intervention services; (e) teacher and staff training; (f) parent involvement services; and (g) coordination of activities, referrals, and links between the school and the community.

**Element 3: Student Behavioral, Social, and Emotional Supports to Enhance Academic Performance**

The CHKS includes the Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM; Hanson & Kim, 2007), which measures youth internal assets and external resources. The RYDM for the pre-project year revealed that 40% of 9th and 45% of 11th graders had moderate or low internal assets. Low or declining resiliency scores were reflected behaviorally with 70% of all suspensions in the prior school year attributable to defiant behaviors. These data suggested a climate where disrespect occurred, communication was challenging, and some students had limited problem-solving, anger management, and self-awareness skills. Thus, teacher training in how to foster asset development in students was identified as a critical need.

Rates of meaningful participation at school declined for 9th and 11th graders over the two pre-project years and were lower than the state average. This suggested the need for increased opportunities for leadership and engagement activities. In addition, only 44% of 7th, 36% of 9th, and 34% of 11th graders reported they had meaningful participation in the community. Additionally, an increasing proportion of low-income families coupled with the high cost of housing in this area forced many parents to work several jobs, which left over 85% of students unsupervised during after-school hours. SS/HS grantees addressed these needs with a school-based mentoring program for primary-age students, asset development training of all staff, an expanded after-school program to create opportunities for leadership, and youth-driven community service projects that also met the need for structured supervision.
Element 4: Mental Health Services

At one site, the number of youth who received services from County Mental Health was stable from 1998 to 2000, but increased by 20% to 2,705 in 2006, highlighting an increasing need for mental health services. Although the biggest school district at this site comprised 30% of the County’s total high school enrollment, 41% of the County’s students identified with emotional disorders attend this district. Moreover, local CHKS results revealed that 7th (29%), 9th (31%), and 11th (30%) graders reported high levels of sadness. Since 49% of youth receiving mental health services in the county were of Mexican American heritage, this indicated the need for culturally responsive services. Taken together, the LEA’s SS/HS coalition identified the following key concerns: (a) inadequate early identification and purposeful screening for mental health problems; (b) limited access to qualified therapists to provide evidence-based counseling services and link families to psychiatric and multidisciplinary services; and (c) insufficient coordination of school-based mental health services, other than for the most severe and complex problems.

Element 5: Early Childhood Psychosocial and Emotional Development Programs

A strong need for additional preschools was identified at one site with an estimated 54% of children ages 0–6 years needing access to childcare. However, the supply of licensed childcare programs in the community could only meet 34% of the need, leaving the remaining 66% of families without service options. Similarly, a parent survey showed that less than 50% of the incoming students had attended preschool and most of the non-attendees were English language learners, a group requiring supports for early language development. Students without preschool often entered kindergarten lacking critical academic readiness, particularly social-emotional skills. This combination of factors resulted in many students falling behind academically during the first three years of school. Additionally, given the dire financial circumstances of area families, there was a need for subsidized childcare as a part of the preschool program.

Given the needs assessment, the LEA determined that it was essential to increase its preschool capacity, providing wraparound childcare. To address the need, the LEA proposed an expanded full-day preschool/child care program. As part of this service, the project proposed increased professional development for preschool staff in early childhood development and a parent education component to assist parents, particularly those who speak little or no English.

Summary of Integrated Planning Linked to Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is the first step in a program evaluation that identifies and prioritizes the shortages within a system (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). Although LEA and community partners may have an excellent understanding of local needs based on personal experience, existing data provide quantitative support necessary to justify the identified needs and potentially identify overlooked or new needs. Using LEA data, state and local surveys, and service-level data from partner agencies, it is possible to develop an objective model that maps needs to program structure and resource allocation. Once these data are compiled, the next step in program development and evaluation design is to organize the service plan by need, goals and objectives, type of service activity, data needed to track progress, and process and outcome measures.

Developing an Integrated Plan: Constructing a Logic Model

A logic model is an efficient way to summarize a comprehensive program in terms of strategies, objectives, and outcomes. The logic model is a blueprint for SS/HS programs that provides links between the necessary components of an evaluation plan. SS/HS provides a Logic Model.
Worksheet and Evaluation Plan Worksheet that are used together to guide the overall evaluation. For each SS/HS element, evaluators input the following data: goals, baseline data, objectives, activities, process measures, partners, and indicators (see Figure 36.2 for an example of a partial logic model). For instance, under Element 1: Safe School Environments and Violence Prevention Activities, the goal identified was to “Maintain safe, secure, and peaceful schools by decreasing the incidence of violence on school campuses and increasing students’ sense of personal safety.” This goal was identified through CHKS data on perceptions of safety, which revealed several areas of concern (Figure 36.2). An objective was matched to each need to guide progress towards the overall goal. Next, specific activities were planned to achieve each objective and partners were identified to implement each activity. Finally, evaluators identified measures to document that each activity was implemented as planned (i.e., process measure) and had the intended effect (i.e., outcome indicator).

### Developing an Integrated Plan: Program Design and Implementation

Our SS/HS coalitions identified a core of evidence-based strategies and services to reduce violence, ATOD use, and related delinquent behaviors. The goal was to use a prevention approach that fosters optimal youth development so that over time, students learn how to manage conflicts when they arise, develop multiple solutions to challenges they face, and seek appropriate help when needed. Three levels of intervention are commonly used to guide prevention activities and for ease of understanding, we named them: For All (i.e., universal), For Some (i.e., selective), and For a Few (i.e., indicated).

Services For All are universal prevention strategies designed to improve school climate and promote well-being for an entire student body. At the universal level, it is crucial to implement context-focused strategies and programs to provide support for all students. To meet SS/HS goals across elements, the universal level includes individual-focused activities.
such as teaching all students ways to avoid ATOD, peer conflicts, and delinquent behaviors. Following a social-ecological model of influence on youth behavior (Sameroff, Peck, & Eccles, 2004), one SS/HS coalition decided to include context-related activities, including purposeful development of safe school plans, truancy intervention and response, enhanced school security personnel, and positive behavioral supports. Examples of Services For All include: (a) a training program designed to meet the unique needs of school crisis teams (Prepare, Reaffirm, Evaluate, Provide, Respond, Examine [PREPaRE]; National Association of School Psychologists, 2007); (b) a curriculum designed to promote prosocial skills, positive character traits, and violence- and drug-free norms (Too Good for Drugs and Violence [TGDV]; see Mendez Foundation, n.d.); and (c) a comprehensive, multiyear program to prevent violence and create caring communities of learning (Responding to Conflict Creatively [RCCP]; Aber, Brown, & Henrich, 1999).

**Services For Some** are intensive programs designed to target students with risk signs for negative outcomes such as dropping out of school or delinquency. These programs are designed to serve youth with behaviors associated with violence, delinquency, and dropout such as poor school attendance, academic failure, substance use, and gang activity. Based on an understanding that dropping out of school represents a “long-term process of disengagement from school that often begins in the elementary grades” (Rumberger, 1995, p. 618), the SS/HS coalition aimed to increase successful school participation and completion by increasing student engagement with school. Thus, the programs included specific efforts to improve safety and reduce high-risk behaviors as well as enhance student academic and social-emotional outcomes. For example, one SS/HS grantee chose to implement a program they called Check, Connect, & Respect (CC&R), a local modification of the Check and Connect program (see Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003), to address emerging behavior challenges for students in upper elementary grades and to assist in dropout prevention. Once at-risk students are identified, the CC&R model provides a mentor who checks in with the at-risk students, monitors their progress, and provides them with feedback and support.

**Services For Few** include highly specific and rigorous services designed to target students who have been involved in more chronic or severe risky or delinquent behavior. Figure 36.3 provides an overview of the activities implemented by one SS/HS project, including the element(s), level, and grades served by each activity. For example, *Multidimensional Family Therapy* (MDFT) was selected as a modality to provide intensive treatment for adolescent students at the highest level of risk. MDFT is a strength-based treatment model that includes individual, group, and family sessions (Liddle, 2002). MDFT is recognized as a promising intervention for adolescent drug abuse (Liddle et al., 2002). This approach was chosen for students at the indicated level of need, based on its strong empirical research base.

**Developing an Integrated Plan: Interagency Collaboration and Methods of Operation**

At the core of the SS/HS Initiative are the principles of mutual interdependence and synergistic effects. Mutual interdependence is based on the observation that addressing school safety requires the integration of school and community resources and strategies. Schools alone cannot address the complex issues that affect the safety of school campuses (Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2003). The synergistic effects principle in the SS/HS model is that effective, sustained services integrate and blend the skills and resources of multiple community agencies in a manner that leads to high levels of collaboration and innovation (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006).

In their analysis of the interagency collaboration of an SS/HS project, Cross, Dickmann, Newman-Gomchar, and Fagan (2009) found that effective organization is characterized by the
## Services and Strategies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Services and Strategies</th>
<th>SS/HS Elements</th>
<th>CEO ¹</th>
<th>Elementary &amp; Junior High Schools</th>
<th>High Schools</th>
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<td>PreK</td>
<td>K</td>
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<td><strong>Student-Focused Universal Strategies</strong></td>
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<td>Class Action</td>
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<td>RCCP = Resolving Conflict Creatively Program</td>
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<td><strong>Student-Focused Targeted/Indicated Strategies</strong></td>
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<td>CATCH = Second Step PreKindergarten</td>
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<td>Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile</td>
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<td>Behavioral Emotional Screening System</td>
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<td>Loving Solutions (Parent Project)</td>
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<td>Parent Project</td>
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<td>Multidimensional Family Therapy</td>
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<td><strong>Context and System-Focused Strategies</strong></td>
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<td>PREPaRE ²</td>
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<td>Targeted Truancy Prevention Program</td>
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<td>SPO = School Probation Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check, Connect, &amp; Respect</td>
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*Note.* The K-3 follow-up of students' behavioral and academic achievement is an on-going science-to-practice research project being supported by the First 5 commission in the School District. SS/HS funds will be used to expand this program to two other school districts. In SS/HS column, the **bolded elements** are the primary element for the activity.

¹ = County Office of Education and Early Child Commission; ² = Prepare, Reaffirm, Evaluate, Provide and Respond Examine

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*Figure 36.3 Example SS/HS project integrated activities matrix by grade level*
Jill D. Sharkey et al.

development of a formal network of community linkages and by the strength of the bonds between partners. In modifying Borden and Perkins (1998) collaboration model, Cross et al. identified five general types of community linkage structures: networking, alliance, partnership, coalition, and collaborative. Along these lines, the SS/HS Initiative requires projects to identify their formal organizational structure and to monitor its evolution with the aim of each project moving toward collaboration-level linkages, which are characterized by having a shared vision with clear agreed-upon desired outcome benchmarks, systems to respond to emerging issues, and access to new resources (Cross et al., 2009).

School districts alone cannot build an SS/HS collaboration, but they can be the lead agency in supporting its development. We emphasize “development” because the process of building a viable collaboration will require a written interagency agreement that includes fostering a shared vision of measurable desirable outcomes, implementing a consensus decision-making process, identifying partner roles and work tasks, and implementing a formal evaluation plan (Cross et al., 2009). As was done by the SS/HS projects described in this chapter, this will always include some form of a logic model.

Evaluating an Integrated Plan: Data Management

Data driven decision making is a critical component of prevention and intervention efforts. Data informs ongoing service provision decision making, supports program oversight and design refinement, and enables longer-term program evaluation goals, including effectiveness and cost-benefit studies. Thus, it is important to support administrators, teachers, and staff, highlighting their positive roles in identifying critical data elements and participating in data collection. To promote the success of data gathering efforts across stakeholders, evaluation efforts should employ a participatory research model (Green, 2001) that relies on stakeholder (including students) involvement in design, data collection, and analysis. For community stakeholders, participation makes the evaluation more responsive to their needs, gives access to information useful to their work, promotes cohesion among participants, and helps to develop organizations (Chataway, 1997).

To evaluate programs locally, we employed three levels of evaluation strategies. In accordance with GPRA requirements to establish objective, quantifiable, and measurable performance goals for federally funded programs, the first level of our evaluation collected data on referrals to and from the agencies, types of services provided, and number of clients served. Fidelity checks, referral dates, and service data were collected for all programs. These data required by the SS/HS program provided accountability for grant-supported services, thus, it was possible to document the increase in services via SS/HS funds and in which of the five elements the initiative was focusing services.

The second level involved gathering data generated by partner agencies so they could monitor the data from their interventions. Conclusions about program effectiveness based on pretest and posttest data alone are limited by a number of threats to internal validity such as selection bias, history, and maturation, which only random assignment with a control group comparison can overcome (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Thus, additional evaluation strategies to achieve quasi-experimental design are needed to support formal empirical research. For example, one partner agency was interested to obtain feedback about program implementation in addition to required GPRA level data. They selected several programs for local evaluation measures and, with input from evaluators, identified surveys to address their desired outcomes. The evaluators assisted the agency by creating a web-based system to streamline data entry, management, and reporting. To assist with sustainability and ensure that all interested parties could manage and report their own data, the evaluators set up user-friendly, efficient data collection and
management systems. Inexpensive Web-based survey applications were used to allow program participants and staff to complete surveys from any Web-accessible location, and allow project managers to instantly access descriptive statistics on multiple facets of the program. For example, the surveys provided information regarding youth emotional and behavioral reports before and after program participation, such as changes in mental health status and positive psychology indicators.

The third level of evaluation involved a higher research purpose requiring university human subjects’ approval and a more rigorous evaluation strategy. Generally speaking, the SS/HS initiative is not highly compatible with rigorous evaluation designs, primarily because random assignment to groups is not supported given that the mission of SS/HS is to serve all youth who demonstrate need. Most programs selected already have evidence of effectiveness; therefore, measures of the fidelity to the program are important to ensure adherence to program standards. However, outcome data can, and should, continue to be collected to ensure that the programs are effective for the intended population, especially if different from the population with which the program was developed. Also, if modifications are made to the existing programs, data should be collected to monitor any changes in effectiveness. Rigorous repeated measures designs can be utilized in the absence of random assignment to provide documentation of program effectiveness (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Additionally, existing data sources (such as common cross-sectional surveillance surveys) can be gathered across time to establish longitudinal trends.

Data Dissemination

Data dissemination is a first line of defense against the research-to-practice gap, with strong bi-directional communication between university researchers and community-based practitioners, along with allied stakeholders, as an essential element. Sharing evaluation results has the potential to foster commitment among a variety of stakeholders, facilitate support of the overarching goals, and allows for agencies and individuals to celebrate successes (Patton, 1997). Additionally, shared information can lead to data-based decisions regarding programs and resource allocation (Patton, 1997).

Various audiences may have different interests in the findings. School board members may wish to learn about the specific problems occurring within their student population and the percentages of students who report feeling unsafe at school. Students may benefit from learning about the large percentage of students that are not using alcohol or drugs. Teachers may want to hear about what strategies are being implemented to increase students’ feelings of connectedness to school, and how they can help facilitate those goals. Finally, coordinating agencies may be primarily interested in data to facilitate grant writing so they can obtain financial support to continue and implement evidence-based practices. Results can be organized and disseminated in a variety of different ways so that the information will be of optimal interest to the intended audience. Furthermore, results can be shared through a variety of different modalities including presentations to the school board and school staff, newsletters to parents, orientation meetings for new staff, and pamphlets distributed to community members or students. Students can assist in the development of these products.

As evaluators, we employed various strategies to disseminate data resulting from the SS/HS project. In addition to frequent presentations to key stakeholders, we regularly distributed releases via the Web and in print that were available to the public and primarily targeted teachers and staff. These releases provided information about the current project and reinforced awareness of the SS/HS project’s mission and goals. Consistent with the primary elements in which services are offered, fact sheets were organized around a variety of topics such as alcohol and marijuana
use, bullying, gang involvement, mental health functioning, school connectedness, and school dating violence, including current prevalence information for the LEA. In addition to data from the CHKS on these topic areas, teachers and school staff were given resources and suggestions about how to support students and the SS/HS project goals (see Figure 36.4 for an example fact sheet on school connectedness), with information targeted specifically for the intended audience, such as a specific school, LEA, or affiliated agency.

**Sustainability and Leaving a Program Legacy**

SS/HS programs are based on time-limited funding. Project components such as data management and school-home-community partnerships can be sustained through early planning, community support, and strong leadership (Johnson, Hays, Center, & Daley, 2004). Maintaining key program components takes financial planning and well-developed evaluation practices in order to help schools access necessary and available resources (Tibbits, Bumbarger, Kyler, & Perkins, 2010). Although research is inconsistent on which factors affect sustainability (Tibbits et al., 2010), NCMHPYVP (2009) identified six strategies that support sustainability planning. First, identify programs that are most valuable in producing positive outcomes supporting the project’s goals. Second, determine which of these programs need additional financial support in order to be effectively sustained. Third, prioritize the list of programs through consultation with members of the coordinating council and other key stakeholders. Fourth, examine and understand the key functions of these programs and/or activities (e.g., create safer schools, reduce alcohol and drug use). Fifth, identify strategies to sustain these functions, and consequentially the positive outcomes associated with the program. Finally, develop specific action plans for implementing these strategies.

One of our SS/HS sites formed a coalition of invested partners to promote sustainability. The coalition’s overall mission was to strengthen collaboration among community organizations and federal, state, local governmental units to support efforts to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors among the target youth population. The SS/HS project design represents a comprehensive model of collaboration among key agencies and programs in the community to address the six elements. Each of the coalition members committed to: (a) work towards an understanding of the needs of the youth in the community; (b) lend their name, power, prestige, and efforts to strengthen the coalition; (c) advise and make recommendations on the future direction of the coalition; (d) support the goals of the coalition through fund-raising; (e) advise the project director; and (f) arbitrate disputes regarding program funding.

The evaluation team implemented specific strategies to foster sustainability. Stakeholders were taught about the importance of utilizing data to evaluate programs so that only the most effective services were sustained. Practitioners were guided on ways to collect, enter, and analyze their own data through user-friendly data management strategies. Highly qualified practitioners were trained to be trainers of certain programs, such as PREPaRE, so they could not only implement the program but also train others on how to implement the program. Additionally, data were provided to a variety of different agencies so that they could demonstrate need and seek additional grant funding.

**Overall Lessons Learned/Conclusion**

Communities often come together to address social issues that are affecting the lives of their children and families. Many communities across the United States have done this through the SS/HS initiative. Collaborations that focus on achieving results through data-based decision
Getting Connected & Staying Connected  
*The Importance of School Connectedness*

**What is School Connectedness?**

School connectedness is “The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment.”

Students who feel connected to school are less likely to use drugs/alcohol, act aggressively, and drop out of school. “Students who are “connected” to their teachers and fellow students have higher levels of overall life satisfaction, emotional health, and are more likely to reach their future goals and dreams.

**How Connected to Schools Are Students in the SS/HS Region?**

Overall, local schools are working hard to keep students connected. Younger students feel the most connected and 10th graders are the least connected.

![Graph showing percentage of SS/HS students reporting high levels of connectedness](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>% of Students Reporting High Levels of Connectedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What Teachers Can Do?**

- Stand at the classroom door and greet each student.
- Spend the first 5 minutes of class on Monday to allow students to share about their weekends.
- Rotate seating arrangements so students get a chance to meet everyone in class.
- Discuss and educate students on the importance of individual differences.
- Relate coursework to students' interests (e.g., analyze a music video; use local sports teams stats in math).
- Use progress monitoring to chart student's growth and reward successes.
- Collaborate with students on the creation of classroom rules.

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**Figure 36.4** Example SS/HS project school connectedness information fact sheet for teacher audience
making, implementing evidence-based practices, fostering strong interagency connections and communication, and planning for sustainability will likely foster positive changes in their schools and broader community. In this chapter, we discussed the real-world logistics of implementing and evaluating these comprehensive, complex local efforts. The key points of the chapter are summarized in Table 36.1. Additional guidance and evaluation case examples can be found in a special issue of the *Journal of School Violence* (e.g., Felix, Furlong, Sharkey, & Osher, 2007). These case examples highlight that there are several effective models of SS/HS programs that have left schools better off than prior to the SS/HS program. We hope that the practical examples in this chapter will be useful in helping communities plan for and share the results of their comprehensive efforts to improve the lives of youth.

Note

For more information about the Safe Schools/Healthy Student initiative, see http://www.SSHS.samhsa.gov/initiative/currentinit.aspx

References


Table 36.1 Implications for Practice: Tips for Evaluators of Comprehensive Safe Schools Projects.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Conduct a needs assessment to get a picture of known, emergent, and possibly overlooked community needs and assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Discuss data and community needs with stakeholders across disciplines and agencies (e.g., mental health, law enforcement, education).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Develop an organizational framework for connecting needs, services, and results through a logic model or similar techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Identify evidence-based strategies and services, across service levels (i.e., services for everyone, for some, for a few).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>For evaluation design, choose the most rigorous design possible, given real-world constraints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Use existing evaluation measures, surveys, interviews, etc., when available. If something needs to be created, consult research and evaluation professionals with experience in survey construction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Select a user-friendly data management system. Take the time to set this up at the start of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Have a variety of communication methods for sharing evaluation results with different audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Plan for sustainability from the start.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


