Promoting Collaboration among Education Professionals to Enhance School Safety

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Often mass school shootings, such as Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook Elementary, increase awareness of the importance of school safety. Beyond mass school shootings, most schools experience some level of violence. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' *Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report* in 2013-14 approximately 65% of public schools recorded one or more violent incidents of crime (i.e., rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attack or fight with or without a weapon, threat of physical attack with or without a weapon, and robbery with or without a weapon), 22% reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis, and 5% reported that they avoided school activities out of fear of victimization (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016). These incidents, both large and small, disrupt widely held beliefs that schools should be safe and supportive communities for children, educators, and families. While these numbers have been decreasing they prompt the need for ongoing collaboration among schoolwide safety teams.

The Foundation of Safe School Planning: Collaboration

It has long been recognized that effective school safety planning requires a collaborative effort among educators and all member of each school's community. The importance of whole-school collaboration has been the backbone of school safety planning since the 1990s. Furlong, Morrison, and Clontz (1993) noted in the context of safe school planning,

> "Given the complex social conditions affecting schools in contemporary society, educators alone cannot shoulder the burden of reducing school crime and implementing comprehensive school safety plans. The development of safe schools requires the collaboration of school and community individuals, including school staff, students, parents, and representatives from health care, law enforcement and other public and

private agencies" (p. 23).

Articulation of this school safety principle continues to be a foundation of comprehensive school safety planning as expressed in the 2014 National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) position statement on school violence prevention and the NASP PREPaRE school crisis prevention and intervention model (Brock et al., 2016, see Chapter 11 in this volume for additional information). The NASP position statement highlighted that schools should collaborate with students, staff, and community stakeholders, to implement a comprehensive, multitiered, school violence prevention program, engaging in a systematic planning process to understand its school safety challenges and opportunities. Current best educational policy and practice requires schools to annually monitor and update a comprehensive site-specific school safety plan that delineates the valuable contributions of *all* members of the immediate and broader school community (e.g., California Education Code, 2015).

Collaboration among education professionals is essential when developing truly integrated, schoolwide intervention and prevention programs that are necessary for building and maintaining safe school campuses. To fully appreciate each stakeholder's role, it is helpful to identify which members of the school community make key contributions to the development and implementation of comprehensive school safety plans, including: (a) students; (b) parents, caregivers, and extended family members; (c) educators; (d) administrative and district support personnel; (e) education support professionals; and (f) mental health professionals. Table 1 depicts these groups and their respective engagement in school violence prevention and/or schoolwide safety programming. Prior to reviewing each group's critical role in school violence prevention and intervention, we suggest that the formation and enacting of school safety policy and planning should be grounded in school-centric analytics that inform and guide the efforts of

collaborative team members. The subsequent sections of this chapter explore the varying roles and responsibilities of school safety team members in carrying out prevention efforts. We examine an integrated whole school/community approach that promotes collaboration among education professionals to enhance school safety. In addition, this chapter includes a review of strategies that each group can utilize to promote collaboration across the whole school community.

The Foundation of Effective Safe School Collaborative Planning: Data Analytics

Collaborative planning alone will be inefficient and ineffective without relevant safe school analytics. Safe school planning and implementation is optimized by access to real time information about the conditions in each district and its schools. From school crime to school disciplinary practices, Cornell and Huang (in press) recognized that the topics of school safety are multifaceted; consequently, school safety teams should utilize a broad range of information to guide the development of a comprehensive school safety plan and strategies to monitor its effectiveness (Cornell & Huang, this volume, Chapter 8). In other words, school safety planning committees are encouraged to consider which types of data are most needed to implement effective programs in their school or district.

In the context of the science and practice of school violence prevention, there is a critical role for school safety analytics that are grounded more closely in psychological theories with measureable scales (e.g., school connectedness scale), not just single item indicators (e.g., “have you been bullied in the last month?”). By assessing malleable factors associated with prevention of school violence and promotion of school safety, such as school climate, student-teacher relationships, and school connectedness, this broader analytical approach can provide school safety teams with richer information on students’ social-emotional well-being and academic

functioning. This is an important distinction because efforts to foster safe, secure, and peaceful schools, from educational and psychological perspectives, include a focus on crime and injury prevention precisely because their occurrence diminishes school climate and ultimately inhibits students' academic, social, and psychological wellbeing (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994). An illustrative example of informing school safety planning with psychological perspectives is the large body of research on student sense of belonging to school (e.g., Osterman, 2000). Positive student cognitive and affective bonds to school are associated the reduced incidents of negative developmental outcomes and enhanced academic and social-emotional outcomes (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, Brodrick, & Waters, 2016). Given the volumes of research on the promotive and protective effects of student belonging and school connectedness (Furlong, Froh, Muller, & Gonzalez, 2014), its inclusion as a source of school safety promotion planning is strongly encouraged, despite the fact it is often not used in traditional school safety analytics.

The following section briefly reviews two state-level approaches that provide conceptually grounded, relevant information in a manner that informs public policy as well as school level analytics for collaborative school safety teams. The Delaware School Surveys and the Virginia Safe School Surveys are research-based and have been developed and refined for more than a decade; both have been successfully implemented statewide and have been thoroughly evaluated for their psychometric properties. These tools provide current exemplars of the breadth and depth of information needed to guide comprehensive safety school planning, and allow teams to monitor the effects of initiated action plans.

Delaware School Surveys. The Delaware School Surveys (2015-16) provide schools with information for needs assessment, program development, and program evaluation related to

safe and supportive schools. The surveys include five domains that are designed for students in Grades 3-12 (school climate, bullying victimization; student engagement; positive punitive, and social emotional learning techniques; and social and emotional competencies), two domains for teachers/staff of all grades (school climate; positive punitive, and social emotional learning techniques); and two for parents of students in all grades (school climate; bullying victimization, and student engagement). Since the 2004–2005 school year, the Delaware School Surveys (DSS) have been administered annually statewide in Delaware. The scales have been revised and updated periodically based on feedback from participating schools, requests for additions from the Delaware Department of Education, and results of psychometric analyses. The theoretical framework guiding the development of the scales, the results of confirmatory factor analyses and measurement invariance analyses, and the evidence of criterion-related validity (e.g., correlations with achievement and school suspensions) have been reported in journal articles and/or technical manuals (Bear, Yang, Mantz et al., 2014; Bear, Yang, & Pasipanodya, 2015; Bear, Yang, Pell, & Gaskins, 2014). Of most relevance to this discussion of collaboration in school safety efforts is that the fact that the DSS was designed to assess both the schoolwide perspective and the perspective of individual school members. Moreover, the DSS subscales are consistent across student, teacher/staff, and home versions; therefore allowing school teams to compare and contrast different perspectives of school members and often increase the validity and accuracy of the assessment of overall school climate, school safety, bullying victimization, and behavior management techniques, particularly when views converge.

Virginia Safe School Surveys. Similar to the Delaware Surveys, the Virginia Safe School Surveys (n.d.) are a collection of scales designed to assess aspect of school climate and victimization in support of school safety planning and general school improvement. The Virginia

Surveys were developed by Cornell and colleagues at the Virginia Youth Violence Project and have been featured in more than 50 peer-reviewed manuscripts. There is no single safe school survey available that has had more extensive research development, validation, and it has been shown to provide actionable information for policy makers and school site safety teams. Development of these scales began in 2007 and early versions focused on the assessment of bullying in school contexts and aspects of school's disciplinary practices (Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, & Shih, 2010). In recent years, work has validated middle school versions for students (Konold et al., 2014) and teachers/staff (Huang et al., 2015 and most recently secondary school versions for students (Konold & Cornell, 2015) and teachers/staff (Huang & Cornell, 2016).

The Virginia Safe Schools Surveys include items that inquire about core school safety topics such as student engagement, teasing and bullying (by peers and teachers), gang activity, student aggressive attitudes, other non-bullying victimization, dating violence, and sexual harassment. What sets the Virginia Surveys apart from others is its careful development of scales that measure aspects of school disciplinary structure (e.g., school rules are clear and enforced fairly) and student support (e.g., respect for students and high academic expectations). The structure and support variables have been used to identify school discipline subtypes, such as an Authoritative discipline style, which follows from Baumrind's authoritative parenting model (i.e., school high on structure and high on support; Larzelere, Morris, & Harrist, 2013). Schools with an authoritative discipline approach have been found to report lower bullying victimization (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2015) and higher student engagement (Konold & Cornell, 2015), both of which are of interest to safe school collaborative teams across all grade levels.

Further, because of the thoughtful approach to the Virginia Safe Schools Survey scale

development, studies provide examples of how safe school analytics can be used effectively. One unique contribution is the inclusion items with which to evaluate the validity and accuracy of students' responses. In several studies (Cornell, Klein, Konold, & Huang, 2012; Cornell, Lovegrove, & Baly, 2014), Cornell and colleagues have examined the relations between factors such as time to complete the survey and responses to screening items (e.g., "I am telling the truth on this survey" and "How many of the questions on this survey did you answer truthfully?") to identify possible invalid responders. Research has shown that these invalid responders were different from valid responders in that they were, for example, more likely to endorse victimization items and reported more negative opinions about school climate (Cornell et al., 2014). Having access to such information to accurately interpret school safety is invaluable to all school safety teams.

The Delaware and Virginia surveys exemplify two comprehensive and psychometrically sound data analytic systems that are readily accessible to school safety teams. Moreover, these surveys illustrate how schools and districts can assess school violence with an ecological lens. By gathering student, teacher, and parent perceptions of school climate, bullying victimization, student engagement, and the social and emotional functioning within the school, collaborative school safety efforts will be able to quickly identify the salient safety issues specific to their school.

Guiding Principles of an Effective Safe School Collaborative Planning: Balance-Communication-Connectedness-Support Model

Once teams have developed the capacity to access and evaluate relevant school safety analytics, they can begin the task of developing and implementing a data informed school safety plan. The *Balance-Communication-Connectedness-Support* (BCCS) Model comes from the

Interdisciplinary Group (2012) on Preventing School and Community Violence's, which includes scholars in the field of school violence prevention and school safety promotion, most notably Drs. Ron Avi Astor, Dewey Cornell, Dorothy Espelage, Michael Furlong, Shane Jimerson, Matthew Mayer, Amanda Nickerson, David Osher, and George Sugai. The BCCS model was originally disseminated nationally in School Shootings Position Statement following tragic school shootings in Fall 2006. A revised and expanded version of the statement was published in the *Journal of School Violence* (2013) in response to the school shootings on December 14, 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary, which resulted in the death of 20 children and six adults. This was a call to action, for educators and researchers alike, which proposed an integrated pathway to safer schools, guided by four key elements: (a) Balance, (b) Communication, (c) Connectedness, and (d) Support (BCCS; see Figure 1). The sections that follow describe the four cornerstones of the BCCS model and how they can serve as guiding principles for effective collaborative safe school teams.

Balance. Often schools opt to implement intervention programs that focus on youth who have already acted on their aggressive impulses at school, resulting from a physical fight, verbal aggression toward a classmate or teacher, or defacing school property. Yet, regardless of whether it is due to limited personnel or financial resources, or other factors, less attention is often given to prevention programs that reduce the risk of school violence, compared to traditional discipline practices. Instead of responding to crises and solely "putting out fires," under a balanced approach, school safety teams are encouraged to implement well-integrated prevention and intervention evidence-based practices that meet the needs of the entire school population, including students and staff. This approach to violence prevention includes addressing physical safety, educational practices, and programs that support the social, emotional, and behavioral

needs of students, as well as perceptions of school climate. Although it is important to consider protocols and procedures that monitor public entrances to a school with metal detectors, security cameras, guards, and entry checkpoints, these strategies are do not provide protection against all school-related violent attacks. Efforts are needed to assemble and thoughtfully integrate programs that are truly *school* violence prevention programs and not general youth violence prevention programs that are conveniently administered in school settings.

A more balanced approach to school safety is for collaborative teams to start by examining the school climate, which provides a broader sense of how students, educators, and families are interacting with one another on a daily basis and over time. Positive school climate is recognized as an important component of successful and effective schools (CDC, 2009; Cohen & Geier, 2010). It is defined as shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between students, teachers, and administrators, and sets the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the school (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001). Positive school climate is a product of social interactions among students and teachers, influenced by educational and social values, and has been shown to relate to social situations in classrooms and within the school as a whole, resulting in reductions in student misconduct, aggression, and behavioral problems (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Loukas & Robinson, 2004; Wilson, 2004).

A balanced approach: An example from California. The California Department of Education School Coordinated Health and Safety Office developed the School Climate Index (SCI) to measure school climate among high schools receiving Safe and Supportive School (S3) funds (Hanson, 2012). The SCI is a state normed score that is based on a weighted average of three domains (i.e., Supports & Engagement; Violence, Bullying, & Substance Use at School; and Truancy) defined by a measurement model of student perception data collected using the

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS; Hanson, 2012). The SCI, as well as school-level standardized scores on each of the aforementioned domains and their subdomains, are reported on publically available School Climate Report Cards (SCRC).

In order to build capacity to synthesize the SCRC to write comprehensive, measurable school climate improvement goals, a school climate team (i.e., administrators, teaching staff, parents, and students) from each S3 grantee school attended a full-day School Climate Data Use workshop. These workshops began with an overview of current school climate research, with specific attention paid to the relations between school climate dimensions (see Figure 1) and student, staff, and organizational outcomes. The workshop also provided a detailed review of site-specific school climate data (e.g., School Climate Report Card, California Healthy Kids Survey data, California School Climate Survey [staff] data, and incidence data such as suspensions and truancy) including structured activities requiring attendees to confront their own beliefs about their school and to engage in solution-oriented dialogue across stakeholder groups. The workshop concluded with a school climate goal writing activity and an orientation to evidence-based policies, practices, and programs for school climate improvement and youth violence prevention.

Following the first Data Use Workshop, each school climate team attended a Student Listening Circle (Benard & Slade, 2009) where adult participants were given an opportunity to glean additional qualitative information from a group of student volunteers who were asked structured questions about their school experience (e.g., How do you know when an adult at school cares about you?). These two experiences, which provided both quantitative and qualitative representations of school climate, were designed to inform school climate improvement strategies. After the data were synthesized from the two workshops, additional

meetings were held with the school climate team to narrow their focus to two to three dimensions of school climate most in need of intervention at their schools. Intervention strategies were selected based on the unique profile of school climate needs at each school (determined through analysis of SCRCs and feedback from School Climate Data Use and Student Listening Circle workshops). For more information on California's S3 Initiative see www.CaliforniaS3.wested.org.

Communication. The U.S. Secret Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and numerous researchers propose that channels of efficient, user-friendly communication, planning, and commitment throughout the school community are needed to prevent many acts of school violence (Skiba et al., n.d.). When students, staff, and parents are comfortable bringing safety concerns to the attention of school administrators, potential threats are more likely to be reported and subsequently investigated by responsible authorities. However, there are common barriers to effective communication and collaboration within the school. For instance, students' may be reluctant to "tattle" or "snitch" on their peers for fear of retaliation. Likewise, students may believe that even if they report a safety concern to school staff the adults at school will not be able to address the problem. Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan (2007) examined the potential disconnect between student and staff perceptions of incidents of school violence, specifically bullying behavior. They found 52% of middle and high school students reported having "seen adults in the school watching bullying and doing nothing" and roughly one-third of students perceived that school staff members did nothing to follow-up with the incident report. On the flip side, 86% of staff reported they have effective strategies to handle a bullying situation, and between 52-81% of staff believed their school's prevention efforts were "adequate" (Bradshaw et al., 2007).

These findings speak to the need for schools to foster open-lines of communication between students and staff when it comes to school safety prevention and intervention. This starts by school administration sending a clear message to students, teachers, staff, and families that the well-being of everyone in the school community is of the utmost importance for the future success of the school. Thus, it is everyone's responsibility to report potential incidents to school administration, and in turn it is the responsibility of the school leaders to communicate to students, teachers, and families the steps they took to address the situation to the best of their abilities. Furthermore, instead of using checklists of student characteristics to detect imminent violent acts perpetrated by students, school authorities can provide professional development activities that focus on campus safety while seeking long-term solutions that addresses the needs of at-risk students (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012).

Increasing communication: Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG). Currently, the threat assessment approach with the most empirical support is the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG, n.d.). Using a structured approach like VSTAG, under the leadership of the school principal, schools prepare staff members in the use of a threat assessment decision tree that uses principles of threat assessment to resolve problems and identified conflicts (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Having a threat assessment team and a clear communication strategy helps schools to both prevent and prepare for crises. VSTAG addresses the associated needs of the students involved in incidents with the aim of helping them get back on a positive developmental trajectory. In this regard, schools can redefine the occurrence of a threat as an opportunity to more closely evaluate and respond to the needs of the students involved. Although one of VSTAG's aims is to recognize and respond to threats, it does this in a manner that is intended to build an understanding of the circumstances that precipitated the threat

and what corrective responses could reduce the threat risk. This approach is being used in thousands of schools nationally and represents current best practice. The integrated body of research on the VSTAG indicates that it not enough to only have a threat assessment process established as part of the comprehensive safe school plan, but to link it with relevant analytics.

Connectedness. School connectedness is defined as "the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (CDC, 2009, p. 3), and has been recognized by educators and researchers as a developmental protective and promotive factor for all school-aged youth (Furlong, O'Brennan, & You, 2011; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Resnick et al., 1997). Accumulating evidence suggests that school connectedness is a multi-dimensional construct that include school safety, quality of relationships, discipline practices, and aspects of the physical environment (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro & Guffy, 2012). More recently, school connectedness has been the focus of school safety efforts since students most at risk for delinquency and violence are often those who are most alienated from the school community. O'Brennan, Bradshaw, and Sawyer (2009) found that students who were frequently involved in bullying perceived the school environment differently from those not involved in bullying, with both victims and bully/victims reporting feeling equally unsafe and disconnected from their school. Other studies have revealed a similar inverse relation between youth violence and school connectedness, such that students who report positive relationships with teachers and strong feelings of school belongingness tend to have less involvement in youth violence (O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010; Volungis, 2016). As part of whole-school safety promotion efforts, schools are encouraged to devise opportunities for ongoing positive interactions to build positive connections between teachers and students, as well as foster avenues for meaningful involvement.

Initially school connectedness research focused solely on youth's perceptions; however, there is growing evidence suggesting that school connectedness is equally as important for *all* members of the school community (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators). When school staff feel supported and respected, they are able to thrive professionally, thus allowing them to better meet the academic, social-emotional, and safety needs of their students and the school as a whole (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). With over 10% of public school teachers leaving the profession after one year and an additional 12% leaving after two years of teaching (Kaiser, 2011), there is a growing need to take into account staff perceptions of school connectedness, safety, and school climate when developing collaborative schoolwide safety programs.

An oft overlooked aspect of educator's feelings of connectedness is their perceived level of safety of the school environment. Although students' reports of safety are typically the catalyst for schoolwide violence prevention programs, a national study by the National Education Association (NEA) found that 18% of teachers and 14% of educational support professional (ESPs) were bullied by someone at work, and about half of those incidents were perpetrated by another member of the staff (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013). Similarly, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2012) found that 15% high school teachers experienced personal theft, 20% were threatened by a student, and 84% were spoken to in a rude and disrespectful manner; all of these experiences were negatively related to their perceptions of personal safety. Examining this in the context of schoolwide bullying efforts, it seems plausible that educators would be less likely to intervene in bullying situations when they perceive aggressive behavior to be the norm for the school (Kochenderfer-Ladd, & Pelletier, 2008). Conversely, when educators discern there to be a positive and prosocial climate at the school they may feel more comfortable addressing issues of school safety. If schools are able to foster

support and trust among staff members they are more likely to reduce rates of school violence and implement programs with efficacy, thus potentially improving conditions for learning as well as quality implementation of prevention programs (Domitrovich et al., 2008).

Effect of staff connectedness on youth violence prevention: Recent school-based prevention research has focused on enhancing feelings of connectedness among staff members as a way to create a positive school climate, better engage students and staff, and prevent faculty turnover and feelings of professional burnout (O'Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2017; Thapa et al., 2012). Connectedness-promoting activities may enhance staff's dedication towards making the school community a positive and safe atmosphere for their colleagues and students, and in turn increase their empathy for youth involved in incidents of school violence. This finding is consistent with previous research on school climate, suggesting that a positive learning environment is beyond the physical appearance of a school — it is the relationships inside the building that matter most (cf. Plank, Bradshaw, & Young, 2009). Staff's feelings of school connectedness can also increase the likelihood for educators to support schoolwide programming efforts. Specifically, educators' relationships with their school administrators and colleagues has been shown to be important, especially as they relate to implementing schoolwide programs and new initiatives. For example, program implementation research shows that it takes schools roughly 3-5 years to implement schoolwide programs with fidelity (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevans, & Leaf, 2008), thus it is essential for administrators to foster staff buy-in for program success. Strong working relationships among staff and administration are often forged through shared leadership on schoolwide policies and interventions. In terms of school violence prevention, Kallestad and Olweus (2003) found that staff members' openness and communication with one another significantly impacted the implementation of an anti-bullying

program. This association has been found to endure over time, with research showing that when teachers felt supported by their peers and administrators, they perceived the school climate more positively, and delivered more lessons in a prevention curriculum (Gregory, Henry, Schoeny, & Metropolitan Area Study Research Group, 2007). Taken together, it is suggested that school safety teams assess school staff's perceptions of connectedness to their students, colleagues, administration, and families, as the strength of these relationships is likely to indicate their level of buy-in on school violence programming.

One such program that examined the effect of teacher factors on program implementation is the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program (Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli & Peets, 2008). The KiVa program is a school-based, teacher-led intervention designed to change schoolwide attitudes about bullying and beliefs about bystander behaviors among elementary and middle school students. Juvonen, Schacter, Sainio, and Salmivalli (2016) explored effects of program participation on student perceptions of a caring school climate. Results indicated that 12 months after the baseline assessment, students in Grades 4-6 in the intervention condition reported more positive perceptions of school climate than students in the control condition. More recently, Swift and colleagues (2017) examined what teacher factors contribute to KiVa program dosage. Using a sample of 74 teachers in Grades 4-6 who were trained and implementing the KiVa program in their classrooms, the study measured teacher perceptions of professional burnout, principal support, feelings of self-efficacy, expected effectiveness of KiVa, and perceived feasibility of KiVa. The only teacher characteristic that significantly predicted program dosage was professional burnout. In addition, the study found student outcomes (e.g., self-reported bullying and victimization; anti-bullying attitudes; bystander behavior) were directly related to program dosage, thus indirectly related to the classroom teacher's level of burnout. This study

lends support to the idea that teachers' personal connectedness to the school and profession plays a role in their delivery of programs, and consequently the outcomes of students in their classrooms.

Support. At any given time, 5% to 7% of school-aged youth experience emotional, behavioral, and social difficulties (Pastor, Reuben, & Duran, 2012) that need additional mental health support services. A "safe" school must have the resources to maintain programs designed to address all forms of student conflict, as well as the underlying mental health needs of student perpetrators and victims of violence. Yet, not all education professionals have a strong working knowledge on how best to support youth struggling with mental health issues. A study by Reinke and colleagues (2011) examined teachers' knowledge and skills for supporting children's mental health. The survey results showed that of the teachers surveyed, 75% reported working with students with mental health issues in the past year; however, only 28% of teachers surveyed felt that they had the knowledge required to meet the mental health needs of the children in their classes. Teachers have the most contact with children, and are therefore have the potential to identify, intervene, and address mental health issues on the spot. This suggests a need for increased collaboration among school-based mental health professionals and other educators.

Improving support: Youth Mental Health First Aid. In 2014 the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) funded a series of grant programs, *Now is the Time Project AWARE* State and Local Educational Agency Grants, to support the training of school personnel and other adults who interact with youth in both school and community settings to detect and respond to mental illness in children and youth, including how to encourage adolescents and their families experiencing problems to seek appropriate services and supports. A total of 119 state and local educational agencies received grant funding to have their school

personnel receive training in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA, 2013; www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org).

YMHFA is an eight-hour manualized, public education program providing trainees with tools they can use to assist youth who may be experiencing psychological distress. The program is unique in that it is geared towards all adults who come in regular contact with children and teens, including (but not limited to) educators, paraeducators, administrators, law enforcement, mental health professionals, parents, and family members. Through the one-day training participants learn the risk factors and warning signs of a variety of commonly experienced mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, psychosis, ADHD, substance use disorder). The training focuses on teaching participants how to recognize when a child or adolescent is experiencing an emotional crisis and how to best proceed using a five-step action plan, which they term "ALGEE": (a) Assess for risk of suicide or harm, (b) Listen nonjudgmentally, (c) Give reassurance and information, (d) Encourage appropriate professional help and (e) Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

Research on the effectiveness of this program in the United States is still evolving since it originated in Australia and initially focused on adults. YMHFA is a modified version of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), which teaches the general public how to recognize signs of emotional distress or crisis in adults and how to assist them (Kitchener, Jorm, & Kelly, 2009, 2012). A meta-analysis conducted by Hadlaczky, Hökby, Mkrtchian, Carli, and Wasserman (2014) reviewed 15 MHFA studies and found across studies, program participants were better able to identify psychological problems and effective treatments, showed reduced stigma surrounding mental health issues, and reported being more likely to help during a crisis following the one-day training. The research on the effectiveness of YMHFA is still in its infancy, but a recent study by

Aakre, Lucksted, and Browning-McNee (2016) found that following the training, participants showed significant improvements in their applications of four of the five ALGEE steps in their responses to vignettes of youth in distress. While additional research is needed to support the program, it provides a real-world example of how prevention programs can be available to all adults working with youth and not just those with mental health backgrounds.

Applying the BCCS Approach to Groups of Education Professionals

As depicted in Table 1, the various groups that comprise the school community each play a critical role in school violence prevention and intervention, but their roles and responsibilities in carrying out prevention efforts vary greatly. There is no one quick solution for improving school safety, as any effort will need to be systemic and sustained. Below are strategies for how educators can apply the BCCS approach in their school.

1. At the foundation, schools should create and sustain strong multi-disciplinary teams that include educators, school psychologists, counselors, educational support professionals, and principals, students, family members, and other stakeholders. These teams can regularly review data on school safety and climate, identify patterns of student behavioral, academic, and mental health concerns, and develop plans for improving conditions for student learning. Moreover, schoolwide teams can help build relationships across grade levels and develop plans for improving conditions for learning by diminishing the disconnection among school professionals.
2. Although there is role for multiple types of data analytics, we suggest that there is a pressing need at the local school, state, and national levels for increased access to information that is school centric and draws upon sound measurement principles. Most critically, school safety analytics need to organize information not just about youth risk

behaviors, the occurrence of victimization, or lack of school security, but also concerning malleable factors, such as school climate and connectedness, known to play a role in violence prevention and to help foster resilience factors that minimize the effects of victimization when it occurs.

3. As illustrated by the Delaware and Virginia surveys, school safety teams are encouraged to identify resources within their school, district, and community (e.g., higher education institutions) that can support their ability to collect and interpret school safety data. Without access to such a technical resource, efforts to implement safe school plans based on the principles of the BCCS model could be less than well informed and fall short of reaching intended safe school objectives.
4. Encourage administrators to provide more training on school climate, which includes topics like school connectedness and safety. These trainings should be open to educators, ESPs, principals, and school mental health professionals to ensure whole-school collaboration. State and local education agencies may offer in-person trainings that specifically address school climate, connectedness, and safety. In lieu of an on-site training, collaborative safety teams can utilize the CDC's *Fostering School Connectedness Staff Development Program*, a free two-session professional development that focuses on strengthening school staff members' abilities to improve school connectedness (see: www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm).
5. Consider student mental health issues, particularly related to trauma exposure, school context, and student and school culture when developing preventive interventions to address bullying and the link with school climate. School mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, social workers) can help develop schoolwide staff trainings

and professional development workshops, such as YMHFA, aimed at increasing teachers, administrators, and family members' knowledge of mental health issues commonly experienced by youth.

Conclusion

The majority of schools in the United States have developed staff-led teams in order to more effectively and efficiently address concerns of student behavior, office discipline referrals, and school crises. Many evidence-based schoolwide prevention programs, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), require staff to create schoolwide teams that include administrators, teachers, and other support staff in order to streamline data-based decision making (Sugai & Horner, 2002, 2008). Similarly, school psychology best practices encourage educators to form collaborative learning teams made up of teachers, staff, and mental-health professionals in order to efficiently reduce serious behavior problems (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Epstein, Atkins, Cullinan, Kutash, & Weaver, 2008). The Balance-Communication-Connectedness-Support Model provides guiding principles when developing a school safety collaborative group. Strong, working collaborative teams can prevent teacher burnout and help foster feelings of belongingness across school staff, and in turn result in more efficient school safety programming. It is important to remember, however, that change at the school level is incremental, and likely requires a change in norms and behavior (Bradshaw, Koth, Thorton, & Leaf, 2009). Thus, sustained collaborative effort is needed in order to adequately address school safety concerns and result in schoolwide change.

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Table 1

Roles and Responsibilities of the Members of the School Community in School Safety Planning

Group	Roles and Responsibilities
Students	**Who:** General and Special education students in Pre-K through Grade 12 **Role in school violence:** Students are often the targets or perpetrators of school violence through direct (e.g., hitting, verbal abuse, physical attacking with a weapon) or indirect (e.g., relational aggression, witnessing violence, supporting the aggressor) forms of aggressive behavior during school hours or on their way to/from school.
Families	**Who:** Parents, Caregivers, and Extended Family Members **Role in school violence:** Family members may not witness the aggressive act, but they may be the person the student feels most comfortable reporting the incident to. Families look to the school to take action to prevent and appropriately intervene before, during, and after violence behavior is reported on school grounds. Families have an expectation that their child will be safe and secure during the school day.
Educators	**Who:** General and Special Education teachers in Pre-K through Grade 12 **Role in school violence:** Educators are likely to witness incidents of school violence occurring in the classroom setting. Educators are often tasked with completing the needed paperwork resulting from a violent incident (e.g., office discipline referral, suspension notice), thus they need to be knowledgeable of the terms, definitions, and reporting procedures. Educators also tend to be included in professional development trainings

	focused on schoolwide safety promotion.
Administrative and District Support	**Who:** Principals, Assistant Principals, Superintendent, District curriculum coordinator, PBIS and RtI Coordinators, etc. **Role in school violence:** Administrators are the decision-makers when it comes to how to address incidents of school violence. Likewise, those in administrative roles often chose the school violence prevention programs schools will implement. These individuals may also have access to school- and district-wide data, thus allowing them to see trends in violent and aggressive behavior.
Education Support Professionals (ESPs)	**Who:** Paraprofessionals (instructional assistants, teachers' aides), Clerical staff (secretaries, administrative assistants, registration technicians), Transportation staff (bus and van drivers), Maintenance (custodians, grounds crew), and Food Services (cooks, dieticians, cashiers). **Role in school violence:** Many ESPs work in the unstructured areas such as the cafeteria, playground, and school busses (Bradshaw et al., 2007), where a significant portion of bullying occurs, but few bullying efforts have included ESPs as part of their prevention programming. ESPs have the ability to serve as frontline school violence prevention, however they often do not receive professional development trainings focused on schoolwide safety promotion.
Mental Health Professionals	**Who:** School psychologists, School counselors, School social workers **Role in school violence:** Mental health professionals tend to be the most knowledgeable about best practices in school violence prevention and

	intervention, consequently these individuals are the go-to resource for other members of the school community when a school violence incident occurs. Following a school violence incident, mental health professionals can provide psychological and counseling supports to students and families who were impacted by school violence.

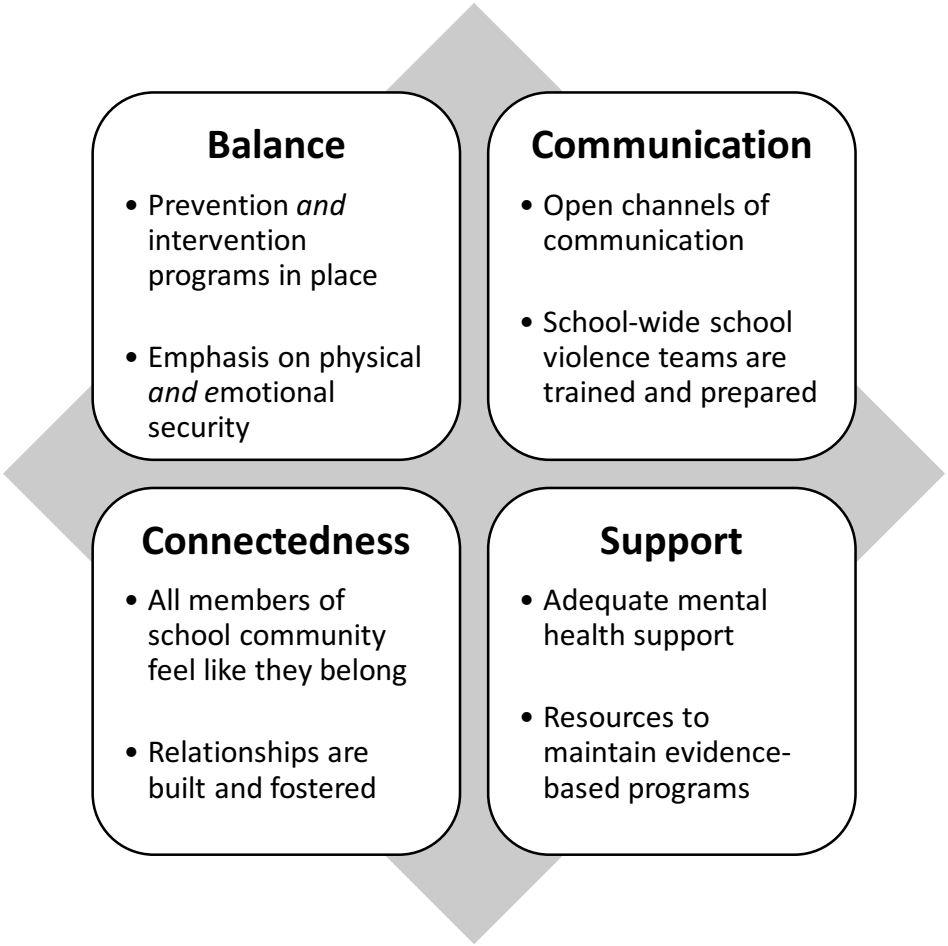

Figure 1. Balance – Communication – Connectedness – Support (BCCS) model for preventing school and community violence.