



The YPI Evaluation Newsletter



Central New York Rural Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

A Report from the Independent Evaluator

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The Central NY Rural Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project in Year 3: Issues of Violence

Each year, millions of children in the United States are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, and communities as both victims and witnesses. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Justice in 2009,¹ more than 60% of young people under the age of 17 were exposed to violence within the past year. Nearly one-half of the respondents to this national survey reported they were assaulted at least once in the past year, and more than one in 10 were injured in an assault. It is common, moreover, for children to be victimized multiple times. More than one-third of children surveyed experienced two or more direct victimizations in the past year, with more than one in ten victimized five or more times.

It is well established in the research literature that being subjected to violence and to threats of violence (even when there is no serious physical risk) can be traumatizing. Among school-aged youth, studies reveal a myriad of problems and dysfunctions associated with participating in and being victimized by violence, including: increased truancy; declining academic achievement; difficulties with attachment; and the development of psychosocial disorders including anxiety, depression, and a declining ability to emotionally self-regulate.²

The SS/HS Initiative is implementing a spectrum of prevention and intervention programs to improve the self-regulatory skills of students, promote positive peer relations, and, ultimately, reduce violence in and out of school. Among these research-based programs are Second Step, Resilience Project, Safe Dates, MOST counseling services, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, and a multi-faceted School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

¹ The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. See D. Finkelhor, et al., (2009) Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

² See, for example: Osofsky, J. (1999) The Impact of Violence on Children. *The Future of Children*. 9:3; Margolin, G. and Gordis, E.B. (2000) The Effects of Family and Community Violence on Children. *Annual Review of Psychology*. 51:445-479.

Levels of Violence Experienced and Committed

Victimization by Serious Violence. Students in the participating schools were rarely subjected to serious violence, and victimization rates did not vary over time. During all three years of the SS/HS Initiative, approximately one in twenty students in grades 4-12 indicated that they were severely beaten by another student during the past 30 days or threatened with a gun or sharp weapon. Three to four percent of students reported being attacked in the past month with a sharp weapon.

- ❖ **Frequency:** A small number of students, 1-3%, reported being victimized by serious violence frequently (“several times” or “often”) during the past month (**Table V.1**).
- ❖ **Gender and Race/Ethnicity:** During all three years of the Initiative, more males than females and more students of color than white students were victimized by serious violence within the last 30 days (**Appendices D.2 and D.3**), and these rates of violence did not vary over the course of the project.
 - ❖ In Year 3, for example, 7% of male students reported they were threatened with a sharp weapon in the past month, compared to 1% of female students. Also in Year 3, 11% of students of color³ indicated they were badly beaten by another student in the past month; by contrast, 5% of white students were victimized in this manner.

Table V.1: Percentage of Students (Grades 4-12) Who, During the Past 30 Days, Were Victimized By Serious Violence: Years 1 – 3

	Badly Beaten By Another Student			Threatened By A Student With A Knife or Sharp Weapon			Attacked By A Student With A Knife or Sharp Weapon			Threatened With a Gun By Another Student					
	Never	1 or 2 Times	Several Times/Often	Never	1 or 2 Times	Several Times/Often	Never	1 or 2 Times	Several Times/Often	Never	1 or 2 Times	Several Times/Often			
Year 1	95%	2%	3%	Year 1	94%	3%	3%	Year 1	97%	1%	3%	Year 1	95%	2%	3%
Year 2	95%	3%	3%	Year 2	93%	4%	3%	Year 2	96%	2%	1%	Year 2	95%	2%	2%
Year 3	95%	3%	3%	Year 3	93%	4%	3%	Year 3	97%	2%	2%	Year 3	95%	3%	2%

Key Finding

According to both students and instructional staff, acts of serious violence occurred infrequently and the level did not vary over time. In all three years, a greater percentage of students of color than white students, and more males than females, were victimized by serious violence.

Instructional staff reported levels of serious violence against students that were similar to those reported by students. It is plausible that most incidents of serious violence involving students occur on or near school property and are known to school staff (**App. D.1**).

³ Students of color are those students who identify themselves as belonging to one of the following racial/ethnic groups: Asian American; Black/African American; Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; Multi-racial; Native American; or Other.

Committing Acts of Serious Violence. In all three project years, the percentage of students who reported committing acts of serious violence was nearly identical to those who reported being victimized by such violence (**Table V.2**).

- ❖ **Gender and Race/Ethnicity:** Just as males were more frequently victimized by serious violence than females, they also committed these acts at a higher rate during all three years of the Initiative (**App. D.4**). In addition, more students of color than white students reported that they committed an act of serious violence at least once in the past month (**App. D.5**). The differences in serious violence rates by gender and race/ethnicity did not vary over the course of the project.

Table V.2: Percentage of Students (Grades 4-12) Who, During the Past 30 Days, Committed An Act of Serious Violence: Years 1 - 3

	Badly Beating Another Student			Threatening A Student With A Knife or Sharp Weapon			Attacking A Student With A Knife or Sharp Weapon			Threatening A Student With a Gun					
	<i>Never</i>	<i>1 or 2 Times</i>	<i>Several Times/Often</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>1 or 2 Times</i>	<i>Several Times/Often</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>1 or 2 Times</i>	<i>Several Times/Often</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>1 or 2 Times</i>	<i>Several Times/Often</i>			
Year 1	94%	3%	3%	Year 1	98%	2%	0%	Year 1	99%	1%	0%	Year 1	100%	0%	0%
Year 2	92%	7%	0%	Year 2	94%	5%	0%	Year 2	98%	1%	0%	Year 2	97%	3%	0%
Year 3	92%	7%	2%	Year 3	96%	3%	1%	Year 3	99%	1%	0%	Year 3	99%	1%	0%

Being Hit, Kicked, or Pushed by Other Students. During the course of the Initiative, **fewer** students reported being hit, kicked, or pushed by another student, declining from 32% in Year 1 to 28% in Year 3. By contrast, instructional staff reported a slight **increase** in the percentage of students who were hit, kicked, or pushed by another student in the past month (**App. D.6**).

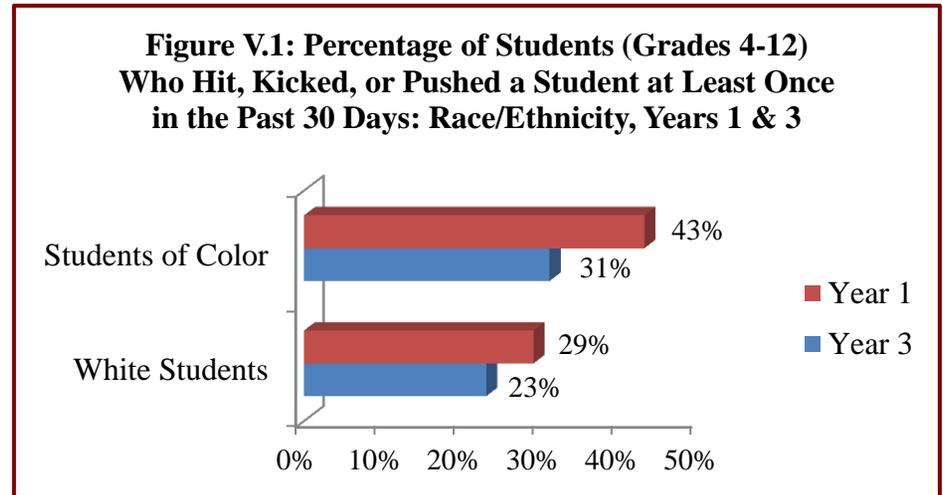
- ❖ **Frequency:** Among students who were hit, kicked, or pushed, most experienced it infrequently. About 70% of those who were victimized this way experienced it only “once or twice” in a month (**App. D.6**).
- ❖ **Gender:** In all three project years, more males than females indicated they were hit, kicked, or pushed at least once in the past month – one-third of males were victimized in this manner, compared to one-quarter of females (**App. D.7**).
- ❖ **Race/Ethnicity:** More students of color than white students were victimized by this form of violence. However, the difference in the victimization rate by race/ethnicity decreased over time (**App. D.7**).
- ❖ **Grade level:** Students reported that the rate of being hit, kicked, or pushed declined particularly among middle and high school students from Year 1 to 3. Instructional staff only noted this decline among middle school students (**App. D.8**).

Key Finding

From Year 1 to 3, fewer students reported they were hit, kicked, or pushed by other students. More males than females and more students of color than white students were targeted by hitting, kicking, or pushing. However, the difference by race/ethnicity decreased over the course of the Initiative.

Hitting, Kicking, or Pushing Other Students. The percentage of students who said they hit, kicked, or pushed other students in the past month **declined significantly**, from 31% of students in Year 1 to 24% in Year 3 (**App. D.9**).

- ❖ **Gender:** From Year 1 to 3, far more male than female students hit kicked, or pushed other students. In Year 3, for example, 16% of females engaged in this form of violence at least once in the past month, compared to 32% of males (**App. D.9**).
- ❖ **Race/Ethnicity:** More students of color than white students were violent in this manner. However the difference by race/ethnicity decreased substantially over time (**App. D.9** and **Figure V.1**).
- ❖ **Grade Level:** From Year 1 to 3, the percentage of students who hit, kicked, or pushed other students declined among students in grades 6-12 (**App. D.10**).



Key Finding

From Year 1 to 3, there was a decline in the percentage of students who reported that they hit, kicked or pushed another student. Consistently more males engaged in this behavior than females. Differences in this behavior between students of color and white students have decreased substantially over time.

Students Who Were Hit, Kicked, or Pushed by Staff. The percentage of students who reported being hit, kicked or pushed by staff did not vary over time. From Year 1 to 3, 4-5% of students reported that a school staff member had hit, kicked or pushed them in the past month (**App. D.11**).

- ❖ **Gender:** In all three project years, more male than female students were victimized by staff violence. In Year 3, for example, 2% of female students reported being hit, kicked or pushed by staff, compared to 6% of male students.
- ❖ **Race/ethnicity:** In each year of the SS/HS Initiative, more students of color than white students were hit, kicked, or pushed by a staff member. However, the difference in the victimization rate by race/ethnicity decreased over time; in Year 3, 8% of students of color were victimized in this manner, compared to 4% of white students (**App. D.11**).

Violence among Boyfriends and Girlfriends. Rates of violence among boyfriends and girlfriends did not change during the three years of the SS/HS Initiative. In all three years, 6-7% of students reported that they were hit, kicked, or pushed by their boyfriend or girlfriend at least once in the past month, a level corroborated by the survey responses of instructional staff (**App. D.12**).

- ❖ *Grade level:* Students reported that dating violence occurred relatively infrequently in all grade groupings. Instructional staff saw no difference in the rates of victimization among middle and high school students, and they did not observe this form of violence at all in grades 4-5 (**App. D.12**).
- ❖ *Gender:* According to students, males and females were equally likely to engage in this form of violence, as were students from different races and ethnicities.

Fighting (Both On and Off School Property). There was a slight decline in the percentage of students who were in fights (regardless of location). From Year 1 to 3, the percentage of students who participated in at least one fight in the past year, on or off school property, declined from 21% to 18% (**App. D.13**). Patterns of participation in fighting by gender, race/ethnicity, grade grouping, and district were similar to patterns for hitting, kicking, or pushing.

- ❖ *Gender:* In all three years of the project, far more males than females participated in fights. In Year 3, for example, 10% of female students were in a fight during the past year, compared to 27% of males (**App. D.13**).
- ❖ *Race/ethnicity:* More students of color than white students reported having fought in the past year. In Year 3, 17% of students of color were in at least two fights in the past year, on and off school property, compared to 9% of white students (**App. D.13**).
- ❖ *Grade level:* During all three years of the SS/HS Initiative, fighting among middle school students was more prevalent than among elementary or high school students. In Year 3, 22% of students in grades 6-8 were in at least one fight in the past year, compared to 17% of students in grades 4-5 and 16% in grades 9-12 (**App. D.14**).
- ❖ *Districts:* In Years 2 and 3, District Z had the lowest percentage of students who reported fighting on or off school property; there was little that differentiated the rates of fighting in the other four districts participating in the Initiative (**App. D.15**).

Key Finding

From Year 1 to 3, fewer students reported participating in a fight, whether on or off school property. Twice as many males than females engaged in this form of violence as did substantially more students of color than white students.

Fighting on School Property. Neither staff nor students reported any change in fighting at school over time. About one in five students fought at least once during the school year, regardless of location, and one in ten fought at school. In other words, one-half of students who participated in a fight did so at school, and half off campus (Table V.3 and App. D.13).

Table V.3: Percentage of Students (Grades 4-12) Who, During the Past Year, Were in a Fight On School Property: Years 1 - 3

	Student Surveys				Instructional Staff Surveys			
	Never	Once	2-3 Times	4+ Times	None to < 1% of students	1-5% of Students	6+% of Students	
Year 1	88%	7%	2%	4%	Year 1	86%	11%	2%
Year 2	87%	7%	2%	4%	Year 2	89%	9%	1%
Year 3	89%	6%	2%	2%	Year 3	87%	14%	2%

- ❖ **Gender:** In all three years of the project, far more males than females participated in fights at school. In Year 3, for example, 5% of female students were in a fight during the past year, compared to 16% of males (App. D.16).
- ❖ **Race/Ethnicity:** More students of color than white students reported fighting on school property. In Year 3, 18% of students of color were in at least one fight on campus in the past year, compared to 10% of white students (App. D.16).
- ❖ **Grade Level:** In each year of the SS/HS Initiative, slightly more students in grades 6-8 than in grades 4-5 and 9-12 were in fights. Instructional staff reported the lowest level of fighting in grades 4-5 (App. D.17).
- ❖ **Districts:** In Years 1 and 2, students in District X reported that a higher percentage of students fought at school, but in Year 3, students reported approximately the same amount of fighting across all five districts. By contrast, staff reported distinctly higher levels of fighting in District W, particularly in Years 1 and 3 (App. D.18).

Key Finding

During all three years of the SS/HS Initiative, one-half of the fights reported by students occurred on school grounds. More males than females and more students of color than white students fought at school.

Student Efforts to Prevent Violence

One objective of the SS/HS Initiative is to create a school climate in which student violence is reduced. Programs such as Second Step, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, and MOST were implemented, among other objectives, to promote pro-social behavior and decrease tolerance of violent behaviors. The School Resource Officer (SRO) program is designed to promote an environment where student efforts to prevent violence are supported.

There is little evidence that the Initiative increased student efforts to prevent or reduce incidents of violence at their schools. The percentage of students in grades 4-12 who reported helping others stay out of fight at least once in the past year increased only slightly, from 43% in Year 1 to 45% in Year 3. In each project year, approximately one in seven students intervened four or more times to help prevent a fight (**App. D.19**).

- ❖ *Gender*: There was little difference by gender in the percentage of students who intervened to help someone stay out of a fight; males were only slightly more willing than females to help defuse violence in this manner.
- ❖ *Race Ethnicity*: Students of color participated in fights more frequently than white students, but a greater percentage also worked to prevent fights at least once in the past year. Furthermore, students of color did so with much greater frequency than white students. Throughout the project, 20-21% of students of color helped someone stay out of a fight four or more times in the past year, compared to 11-12% of white students (**App. D.19**).
- ❖ *Grade Level*. With each advancing grade level (4-5, 6-8, 9-12), a declining percentage of students reported helping someone stay out of a fight. However, by Year 3, more students in grades 4-5 and 6-8 reported helping to stop fights than in previous years. In Year 3, 61% of students in grades 4-5, 52% of students in grades 6-8, and 31% of students in grades 9-12 helped prevent a fight at least once in the past year.
 - ❖ Instructional staff did not observe a consistent pattern from year to year. In general, however, they reported a much lower level of fights being actively stopped than levels reported by their students (**App. D.20**).

Key Finding

Throughout the Initiative, slightly less than one-half of students helped others stay out of fights at least once in the past year. More students of color than white students engaged in this pro-social behavior. Younger students reported a greater willingness to prevent fights than older ones.

Feeling Safe at School

From Years 1 to 3, about one in ten students did not attend school for at least one day in the past 30 because they felt unsafe getting to school, being at school, or returning home from school. One in twenty students missed three or more days in the past month because they felt unsafe.

- ❖ *Race/Ethnicity*: More students of color than white students were victimized by violence, which no doubt played an important role in students of color missing more days of school because they felt unsafe than white students (**App. D.22**). There were no other significant differences in missing school by grade groupings, school districts, or gender, even though male students are more likely to be victimized by violence.

Key Finding

From Year 1 to 3, about one in ten students missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. Students of color reported missing more days of school because they felt unsafe.

Over the course of the Initiative, neither students nor instructional staff changed their opinions regarding the effect of School Resource Officers (SROs) on school violence. From Year 1 to 3, 60-65% of students and 75-79% of instructional staff (grades 4-12) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that having a SRO in the school helped reduce on-campus violence (Table V.4).⁴

Table V.4: Did Having an SRO in the School Reduce Violence? Responses of Students and Instructional Staff (Grades 4-12): Years 1 - 3

	Student Surveys				Instructional Staff Surveys				
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
Year 1	14%	23%	35%	28%	Year 1	2%	19%	53%	26%
Year 2	14%	24%	38%	24%	Year 2	2%	19%	54%	25%
Year 3	15%	24%	37%	23%	Year 3	3%	21%	55%	20%

Even though the level of implementation of the SRO program varied by district, there were no significant differences across the districts in student and staff opinions on the impact of the SRO program on school violence (App. D.24). In addition, student responses regarding the effect of SROs on violence did not vary by gender or race/ethnicity.

- ❖ SROs spent significantly more time in the secondary schools than in elementary schools, and slightly more time in high schools than middle schools. The greater presence of SROs notwithstanding, fewer high school students thought that the officers reduced violence than students in the lower grades (App. D.23).

Key Finding

The majority of students (six in ten) and instructional staff (eight in ten) each year believe an SRO at their school reduced violence.

⁴ Jordan-Elbridge did not have an SRO in Years 2 and 3 and was excluded from this analysis. In Year 1, when an SRO did work in the district, student and instructional staff reported that the SRO had a less positive impact on school violence as compared to other school districts.

Perspectives of Staff Regarding Changes in Levels of Violence during the School Year

At the end of each school year, YPI asked instructional staff in all grades (Pre-K-12) to indicate whether violence at school and in the community worsened or improved during the year. In each year, about 80% of staff respondents saw no change in violence in either context. However, in Year 3, 10% of staff responding felt there was more violence in their schools since the beginning of that year, up from 5% in prior years (**Table V.5**).

- ❖ ***District and Grade Levels:*** Instructional staff opinions about changing levels of violence did not vary significantly by district. However, they did vary by grade level. In Year 3, 19% of high school staff, far more than in prior years, reported a worsening of violence in school that year. By contrast, only 4-5% of teachers from Pre-K to 8th grade agreed with this report (**App. D.25**).

Table V.5: Changes in Violence at School and Violence in the Community According to Instructional Staff (Grades Pre-K-12): Years 1 -3

	Violence at School Since the Beginning of the School Year				Violence in the Community Since the Beginning of the School Year				
	<i>Somewhat - Significantly Worse</i>	<i>No Change</i>	<i>Somewhat Better</i>	<i>Significantly Better</i>	<i>Somewhat - Significantly Worse</i>	<i>No Change</i>	<i>Somewhat Better</i>	<i>Significantly Better</i>	
Year 1	5%	80%	12%	3%	Year 1	4%	88%	6%	2%
Year 2	5%	81%	9%	4%	Year 2	7%	83%	6%	4%
Year 3	10%	79%	10%	1%	Year 2	6%	88%	5%	1%

Key Finding

A large majority of instructional staff reported no change in school or community violence during the academic year. In Year 3, however, the percentage of high school instructional staff who reported that violence in school had worsened over the course of the year increased significantly.

Aggregate Violence Variable, Implementation Quality, and Program Effect

Violence rates, just as bullying rates, varied across the SS/HS Initiative school buildings. As noted in prior editions of the *YPI Evaluation Newsletter*, variation in indicators of school climate, bullying, and mental health is affected by the Implementation Quality (IQ) at each school. This edition of the *Newsletter* revisits the question, asking whether schools with higher levels of implementation of SS/HS Initiative programs have lower levels of violence.

As in prior editions of the *Newsletter*, this analysis of the relationship between IQ and program effects at the building level uses only student data; there are too few responses from instructional staff to permit statistical analysis at the building level. YPI developed an aggregate indicator, a **Violence** composite variable, which combines survey data about the extent to which students have been violent in one or more of the following manners: hitting, kicking, or pushing a student, a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a school staff member; badly beating a student; threatening someone with a sharp weapon; attacking someone with a sharp weapon; and/or threatening someone with a gun.

The **Violence** composite variable was correlated with IQ levels for the participating buildings during Year 3 of the Initiative (the 2011-12 school year). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was $-.473$, indicating a *strong, negative relationship* between the level of implementation of SS/HS programs in a building and the extent to which students engaged in violent behavior (statistical significance of $p < .044$). In other words, the greater the IQ, the lower the level of violence in a building.

Key Finding **During Year 3 of the SS/HS Initiative, higher levels of implementation of the project's evidence-based programs were strongly associated with lower levels of student violence.**

At the building level, this has important ramifications. Buildings with higher levels of violence are also buildings where students report lower levels of safety and orderliness (Spearman rank correlation coefficient of $-.834$, $p < .001$)⁵ and poor student-teacher relationships (Spear rank correlation coefficient of $-.886$, $p < .001$).⁶

Furthermore, there are strong and positive correlations at the building level between the **Violence** composite variable and:

- ❖ The **Bullied**⁷ composite variable (Spearman coefficient of $.925$, $p < .001$);
- ❖ The average number of days that students received In-School Suspensions (Spearman coefficient of $.873$, $p < .001$); and
- ❖ The average number of times that students were sent to the principal's office for discipline (Spearman coefficient of $.877$, $p < .001$).

⁵ A correlation of the Violence composite variable and the Safe and Orderly Environment composite variable, which includes the following variables: student perceptions of how discipline is maintained in their school, student perceptions of school safety, and the extent to which students in a building report engaging in disruptive behavior.

⁶ A correlation of the Violence composite variable and the Student-Teacher Relationships composite variable, which includes the extent to which students believe that: there are opportunities to interact one-on-one with teachers, their opinions matter, and mutual respect exists between students and teachers.

⁷ The Bullied composite variable combines student reports about the extent to which they were targeted by physical, verbal, and/or sexual bullying in the past month.