

CHAPTER ONE

Relationship- Driven Classroom Management and Resilience

“For the resilient youngster a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidante and positive model for personal identification.”

—Werner and Smith (1989, p. 162)

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

In this chapter the reader will learn:

- The definitions of resilience, risk factors, and internal and external protective factors
- Research on teacher-student relationships and resilience
- The importance of resilience and social-emotional skills in learning
- How teachers can develop student resilience
- The importance of resilience and relationships in violence prevention

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UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

Most of us have heard stories of people who give teachers credit for having a great influence on their lives. Stories about teachers who encouraged students to improve, to overcome, and to be better than they believed they could be. Some people can even recount the exact assignment and the exact words or phrases that the teacher used that changed their lives. These stories are inspiring and reflect the impact teachers can have on the lives of their students. However, the influence of the individual teachers is lessened due to the time it takes for students to realize the impact a teacher had on them. Students usually do not attribute their success to their teacher until the students are long out of school. Most of the time teachers do not know which students they had a profound effect on. We tend to forget in our day-to-day dealings with students the powerful impact we can have on their lives.

Werner and Smith (1989) studied children with multiple risk factors (poverty, strained parental relationships, poor role models, etc.) for 40 years. They found that one out of three of these children developed into competent adults. They then studied the children who were able to succeed despite living with much stress and adversity and identified factors that were present in these successful children; these factors form the basis of resilience. Werner and Smith found, among other things, that these children often credited a favorite teacher who went beyond academics and became a mentor, confidant, and positive model for personal identification. This chapter is about the positive power of teachers to influence the quality of life of their students.

There is a large and growing body of evidence of the tremendous impact teachers can have on students' quality of life, including affecting whether students engage in harmful behaviors and affecting their emotional health and resilience (Resnick et al., 1997). How can teachers have such an impact? As we shall see, much of this research points to one critical factor in the classroom: positive and personal teacher-student relationships.

Most teachers want to connect with students. Time constraints, curricular demands, accountability, and testing pressures can interfere with the teachers' desire to have positive and personal relationships with students. In addition to these constraints, many discipline models operating in schools, especially those that rely heavily on punishment, hurt teacher-student relationships.

Unfortunately, many school reform initiatives focus on inadequate solutions, such as vouchers, increased testing and accountability, year-round schooling, harsher punishments, and zero-tolerance policies. These solutions are shortsighted and ignore critical factors such as the importance of positive teacher-student relationships and the development of social-emotional competencies and resilience. If we are going to have a working knowledge of resilience, we must first understand risk and protective factors.

Risk and Protective Factors

The goal of the relationship-driven classroom is not only to prevent student misbehavior in the short term but also to help students learn the skills that prevent the development of more serious personal and socially destructive behaviors. To prevent destructive behaviors such as violence, substance abuse, mental disorders, early pregnancy, and school dropout, we must strive to prevent the development of known precursors to them. These risk factors include, among others, poor self-control, early onset aggressive behavior, academic failure, social conflict, poor interpersonal skills, poverty, broken homes, and poor parental attachments. Although educators are unable to control many of these risk factors, we can gain an understanding of protective factors—how some children beat the odds and succeed despite serious adversity. If we understand protective factors, we can teach and nurture them in all students.

Protective factors are attributes or assets that when present protect the child from developing harmful, destructive, and ineffective behaviors. It may help to remember what protective factors are by viewing them as assets. Protective factors contribute to students' resilience. Researchers have isolated the critical protective factors by studying the lives of those children who overcame adversity, despite having many risk factors. Generally speaking, the more protective factors children possess, the more resilient they are said to be. Simply stated, a resilient child is one who "works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well" (Benard, 1995). Resilient individuals are able to manage and rise above adversity and stress in their lives. While it is necessary to strive to prevent risk factors, it may be more important to build protective factors or assets, so students are better able to cope with inevitable adversity. To do this, teachers must understand the distinction between external and internal protective factors.

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Figure 1.1 Protective Factors of Resilience

<u>External Protective Factors</u>	<u>Internal Protective Factors</u>
<p><u>Care and Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Close bonds ➤ Positive role models ➤ Support of friends <p><u>Setting High Expectations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High expectations for all students ➤ Provide support necessary to achieve high expectations <p><u>Encouraging Meaningful Roles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Valued for their contributions ➤ Genuinely needed ➤ Given meaningful roles, responsibilities within the home and school 	<p><u>Social Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Self-awareness ➤ Empathy ➤ Communication skills ➤ Conflict resolution skills <p><u>Problem-Solving Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Generation of alternate solutions ➤ Abstract and flexible thought <p><u>Self-Control</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delayed gratification ➤ Mood regulation ➤ Thought of consequences before action <p><u>Self-Efficacy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Belief that they can have influence on own life ➤ Belief that they can accomplish goals <p><u>Optimism</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hope for better future ➤ Goal directed/persistent ➤ Nonnegative explanation of events

Internal and External Protective Factors

External protective factors are present outside the student and involve the family and school environment. High expectations, supportive and caring adults, and significant relationships are some examples of external protective factors. Internal protective factors, or social-emotional skills, are characteristics or attributes that the student possesses, such as self-control, relationship or

social skills, problem-solving skills, optimism and hope for the future, and a sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can accomplish a given task and that one possesses the power to exert some positive influence in one's life. The internal protective factors, or social-emotional skills, can be taught and are very similar to the components of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Figure 1.1 summarizes the internal and external protective factors. Throughout the rest of the book the term *social-emotional skills* will be used instead of internal protective factors.

Strengthening of social-emotional skills has been shown to reduce aggressive behavior and violence (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999), mental disorders (Rutter, 1990), academic failure (Rathvon, 1999), chemical abuse and early pregnancy (Hayes, 1987), and delinquency (Michelson, 1987). Teaching and modeling these social-emotional skills are critical to a relationship-driven approach to classroom management. I address building these social-emotional skills in the classroom in Chapter 5. Resilience research can be summarized and simplified using three terms: *I have*, *I am*, and *I can*, such as in the following list (adapted from Grotberg, 1995):

I Have

- People in my life whom I trust and who love me, unconditionally and no matter what
- People who set limits on my behavior
- People who model how to do things right
- People who assist me when I am ill, in danger, or need to learn

I Am

- A likable and lovable person
- Respectful of myself and others
- Willing to accept responsibility for my own behavior
- Sure things will work out for me

I Can

- Talk to others when I am frightened or troubled
- Solve my problems
- Control my actions
- Find someone and ask for help

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CAN TEACHERS FOSTER RESILIENCE?

Can teachers make an impact on these critical risk factors? Can they prevent future destructive behavior in their students? Ideally, both home and school work to develop protective factors for children. However, the school alone can make a significant impact on these protective factors. In fact, a recent underreported study of 12,118 adolescents by Resnick et al. (1997), titled "Protecting Adolescents From Harm," found that positive emotional connections to parents and teachers was the strongest protective factor. School connectedness was protective of every health-risk behavior (e.g., emotional health, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, violence, use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana) except history of pregnancy. This study is significant to educators because these positive relationships and connections at school can prevent and protect adolescents from engaging in unhealthy behaviors in their future.

The study also found that having positive relationships with teachers was more important than class size, amount of teacher training, classroom rules, and school policy in protecting adolescents from destructive behaviors. Resnick et al. (1997) state, "Of the constellation of forces that influence adolescent health-risk behavior, the most fundamental are the social contexts in which adolescents are embedded; the family and school contexts are among the most critical" (p. 832). When students feel connected at school, they are less likely to engage in violence, drugs, alcohol, sex, or other harmful behaviors.

Positive teacher-student relationships are also cited as a significant contributor to academic achievement and motivation (Elias, 1997) and the prevention of dropout (Thurlow, Christenson, Sinclair, Evelo, & Thornton, 1995), bullying (Olweus, 1999), substance abuse (Resnick et al., 1997), and violence (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998). In summary, teachers can have a tremendous impact on resilience development in their students. This research is important and should lead us to seriously examine school and classroom practices. Are we doing everything we can to increase positive school relationships and to decrease student alienation? Do our school and classroom behavior management practices increase student connection or alienation?

WHOSE JOB IS IT?

One might argue that building relationships and resilience is not the role of teachers. They might argue that it is the role of the parents to develop these skills or that there is no time to teach these skills in addition to an overloaded curriculum. However, as families experience increasing amounts of turmoil and stress, schools take on additional responsibility for the well-being of children.

Is It Our Job to Help Students Be Effective Learners?

To be an efficient and effective learner certain social-emotional skills must be present. If students do not have positive peer relationships, feel supported and cared for, and possess problem-solving skills, beliefs that they can accomplish tasks, and self-control, they are not ready to be effective learners. The same social-emotional skills that foster resilience also are prerequisites for effective and optimal learning. In addition, when students possess well-developed social-emotional skills, they are less likely to misbehave.

Is It Our Job to Maximize Student Learning?

Learning, socialization, and emotions are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated and inseparable. If we neglect any of these components, we fail to tap into the full learning potential of the individual. The brain does not differentiate emotions from cognition, either anatomically or perceptually (Caine & Caine, 1994). Emotions either impede or enhance students' abilities to think and plan, to pursue training for a distant goal, and to solve problems (Goleman, 1995). We as educators need to fight the temptation to falsely separate academic and emotional competencies.

Is It Our Job to Prepare Students for the Workforce?

According to Goleman (1998), two out of every three of the abilities deemed necessary for effective performance in the workforce

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are social-emotional competencies. The skills often cited as most important are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In addition, the most frequent cause of job failure is lack of self-control and an inability to get along with others.

In an article titled “The Other Side of the Report Card” (Wang, Elias, Walberg, Weissberg, & Zins, 2000), the authors state, “Students who are actively engaged in class, who cooperate with their peers, who can resolve conflicts, who are motivated to complete their work, and who demonstrate initiative and leadership are more likely to succeed in school, and ultimately in life” (p. 1). The authors conclude that even though some parents and teachers are willing to give up a few test-score points for enhanced social-emotional competency, they do not have to because “recent research [shows] that enhancing children’s social, emotional, ethical, and academic development are inseparable goals rather than competing priorities” (p. 3).

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO TO FOSTER RESILIENCE

We know that resilience helps our students overcome adversity. Adversity occurs in everyday life for our students and comes in the form of friendship problems, divorce, illness, death, loss of job, moving, accidents, abuse, alcoholism, robberies, and so forth. Take a minute to consider the many adversities that your students experience. Do these adversities hinder your students’ performance in school? You can foster resilience in your students to assist them in overcoming and coping with these adversities.

According to Benard (1995), teachers who promote resilience provide and model three protective factors: caring relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities to participate and contribute. I explain these factors in the following sections and show how they are integrated throughout the relationship-driven approach to classroom management.

Caring Relationships

Teachers convey love by communicating that they care, by listening, and by being compassionate, and they strive to establish

personal and positive relationships that go beyond academics. The prevention and discipline strategies advocated throughout this book help to preserve and enhance these caring relationships. According to Benard (1995), the presence of at least one caring person provides support for healthy development and learning. This person is someone who conveys an attitude of compassion, provides unconditional regard, and does not take the behavior of their students personally because the person understands that the students are doing the best that they can given their circumstances. Students who experience caring relationships develop the belief “I am cared for and worthwhile.” Strategies such as relationship building, classroom community building, social skills training, mentoring, advisory groups, and school within a school (for larger schools) help to ensure that all students are noticed and have at least one adult who knows them well. The degree of caring and support within a school or classroom is a powerful indicator of positive outcomes for youth.

Some classroom management practices may hinder the development of caring relationships. Classroom environments where there is a high degree of emotional or physical threat, ultimatums, and inconsistency hurt the development of trust, security, and respect, which are critical to the development of caring relationships. Students need appropriate consistency, structure, and behavior limits to develop resilience. Classroom management strategies that are inconsistent, harsh, coercive, and reactive, and those that lack empathy and understanding, hinder the development of resilience through caring relationships.

The importance of caring relationships in resilience is the basis of the entire relationship-driven approach to classroom management. Every prevention strategy and corrective strategy used in the classroom is chosen with caring relationships in mind.

Positive and High Expectations

Teachers who recognize students’ strengths and interests and use these as starting points for learning bolster resilience. These teachers are able to help students recognize their strengths. For example, teachers could examine students more extensively for interests and strengths rather than for deficits. Once teachers are aware of the personal affinities and interests of the students, they

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can build in time daily or weekly for students to work in these areas. When students work within their areas of affinity and interest, high expectations are naturally set. When we allocate precious instructional time to a student's strengths and interests, rather than on remediating weaknesses, we send a powerful and affirming message to our students. Teacher expectations are often subtle but always powerful predictors of future outcomes. Teachers who maintain high expectations are able to challenge students to go beyond what they believe they can do. These teachers have a keen understanding of the negative and self-fulfilling effects of low expectations. Teachers set high expectations when they see something in students that the students may or may not see in themselves; they set low expectations when we see only labels, deficits, and past test scores.

Not only do they provide challenge and high expectations but also they provide the necessary supports to achieve these expectations. Teachers can do this by offering a varied curriculum and varied instructional formats (teacher directed, cooperative, small groups, etc.); valuing different cognitive styles or intelligences; allowing student participation, choice, and decision making on issues important to the classroom; and by matching the curriculum with the instructional level of individual students. In addition, teachers can provide more individualized instruction, guided practice, and support when necessary.

Teachers can assist students to be optimistic by helping them to not take adversity personally (i.e., blame themselves) and to see that their adversity is not permanent. Students who experience high expectations develop the belief "I am capable and competent."

In some classrooms references to negative behavior far outnumber acknowledgments of positive behavior. When negative statements and interactions outnumber positive interaction and statements, expectations may inadvertently be diminished. In addition, when adults hold grudges or frequently bring up past behavior, a discouraging message is sent to students. It is critical that teachers hold positive and high expectations not only for academics but for behavior as well. When we hold positive and high expectations for behavior, we send students the message that we believe they can choose more effective behaviors.

Effective teachers often have the unyielding belief that their students will learn better behaviors. These teachers use behavior

management strategies that rely on positive feedback and effective praise to help maintain positive and high expectations. Positive classroom management strategies teach more effective behaviors and can assist in building resilience.

Opportunities to Participate and Contribute

Student resilience is enhanced when they have the opportunity to engage in meaningful roles and responsibilities in the classroom, school, and community. Teachers can assist students in this area by allowing them to express their opinions, use creative expression and imagination, work with and help others, give back to the community, and have a voice in curriculum planning and classroom rule development. Teachers who use cooperative learning, peer helping, cross-age mentoring, and community service facilitate resilience. These strategies create a connection or bond between the student and school, allow for practice with social skills, and decrease students' likelihood of engaging in destructive behaviors.

During the Christmas season the seventh-grade staff members at Canfield Village Middle School involve their students in a community service project. The students raise money, purchase and wrap gifts and food, and deliver these packages to needy families in the area. The most interesting aspect of this project is the noticeable lack of misbehavior and conflict. Students who normally were in trouble are engaged, and groups of students who normally are in conflict cooperate with each other.

One elementary teacher uses an interesting technique to increase opportunities to participate and contribute in meaningful ways. Each year her students pick a classroom charity. The students brainstorm the possible needs of the particular charity, and throughout the year the students engage in activities that target these needs. These strategies allow for meaningful contribution, which helps students feel like they are genuinely needed. In the past our students found these meaningful roles and contributions at home. At young ages they were needed to contribute with chores and responsibilities, or even financially, to the family. Most of our students no longer have these opportunities at home. When these opportunities are provided at school, they allow students to develop the belief "I am important and can contribute in meaningful ways."

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Discipline procedures that prohibit students with behavior problems from participating and contributing hinder the development of resilience. Strategies that look for positive ways for all students—especially difficult students—to gain positive recognition and meaningful involvement help develop resilience. Students with behavior problems will often rise to the occasion if given an opportunity to help or contribute. This is especially true if it involves one of their strengths or interests. I remember one student with severe behavior problems who was an excellent “teacher’s aide” in a class for children with developmental disabilities. The problematic behaviors normally present in his classes were virtually absent in this helping setting.

SCHOOLWIDE EFFORTS

While teachers can foster resilience in their classroom, a schoolwide effort is even more powerful. Positive schoolwide recognition for student accomplishments in social, behavioral, and artistic realms is one way to increase resilience. Asking your principal if you can send down a student or group of students for good behavior is another useful strategy. It can be very rewarding to students when principals call parents for good behavior. Creation of schoolwide social skills programs, rules, and expectations is another powerful strategy. In this strategy every classroom teaches and practices the same social or behavioral skill of the week or month. The assemblies, activities, and announcements for the entire school address this specific social skill. The entire school staff uses a common language for rules, expectations, and valued social skills. In situations where schoolwide programs are not feasible, a team of teachers can have a similar effect by focusing on specific rules, expectations, and social or character traits and use common language and strategy across all members of the team. A final strategy, schoolwide mentoring or advisory programs, helps to ensure that each student has the opportunity for at least one caring relationship.

I have briefly described several ways that we can foster resilience in students. When we build protective factors, all students are better equipped to handle adversity and resist destructive behavior. Why should we try to develop student resilience? One

answer to this question is just because we are able to. Next I turn to the importance of resilience and relationships in violence prevention programs.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Resilience and relationship building also play a key role in violence prevention. Relationship-driven classroom management strategies preserve and enhance relationships and have the added benefit of helping to prevent violence. Schools that are safe are also effective learning environments. The recent cases of extreme violence in our schools have put the prevention of violence or safety at the forefront of all educational issues. Sadly, much of the focus goes to adding security guards, metal detectors, and security systems.

In a report titled *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (Dwyer et al., 1998), the authors described 13 essential components of safe, well-functioning, and responsive schools. I chose to highlight the six following components because of their relevance to the theme of resilience in this chapter (although many of the 13 components are related to resilience): involve families in meaningful ways; focus on academic achievement; offer extended day programs for students; work in partnership with parents to promote shared values; have close ties to community support services, police, families, and churches; and support students in making the transitions to adult life and the workplace. Safe and responsive schools also do the following:

- *Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff.* Research shows that a positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence.

- *Treat students with equal respect.* A major source of conflict is perceived or real bias based on race, social class, physical appearance, and sexual orientation, either by staff or peers. Effective schools communicate in words and action that all children are valued and respected. They establish a climate that demonstrates care and a sense of community.

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- *Make sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality/personal time with students.* Schools that allow time for relationship building send a strong caring and supportive message to the students. By making sure opportunities exist for bonding, student alienation is reduced.

- *Help students feel safe in expressing feelings, needs, and anxieties.* When students are encouraged to express feelings and concerns, they feel cared for and important. The opposite of this occurs when we discourage or punish emotional expression.

- *Teach students how to deal with feelings, manage anger, and resolve conflicts.* Safe schools teach and model positive strategies to deal with emotions and conflicts. Conflicts are seen as opportunities for growth not punishment. Teachers can model effective ways to manage emotions in the classroom.

- *Create ways for students to share their concerns.* Safe schools discuss safety issues openly and often. It has been well documented that peers are the most likely group to know in advance about potential school violence.

The majority of the components that the authors cite as critical to a well-functioning and safe school involve positive relationships with and among students and teaching students to express and deal with feelings. In your school or classroom are building positive relationships, encouraging students to express feelings, and teaching students how to manage feelings a significant and regular part of the student's education?

Interestingly, a common factor cited in more than 75% of the 37 cases of U.S. school shootings was the attacker telling someone beforehand that the shootings would occur (U.S. Secret Service Safe School Initiative, 2000). However, according to the report in almost no cases did the students seek out or tell any adults. This should tell us that we should be instructing all students in what to do if they hear such threats and give them a way to anonymously report them.

In addition, this finding hints that students may not seek advice or trust adults enough to go to them in these situations. A recent national survey by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (2000) of teens, parents, and teachers confirms this hypothesis: Lack of trust was the reason given most frequently by

teens for not seeking teachers for advice or help. The report indicated that when students were asked whom they would seek help if feeling depressed, “friends” was listed by 77% of the teens, “family” by 63%, and “educators” by only 33%. Are we doing everything we can to foster student trust? Are we doing everything we can to keep the communication lines open between adults and students?

The U.S. Secret Service Safe School Initiative (2000) study also reported some interesting findings that relate to the topic of resilience and coping with adversity. In more than 75% of the incidents, the attackers had difficulty coping with a major change in a significant relationship or had experienced a personal failure prior to their school attack.

It seems that our money, time, and effort should go not toward physical security measures but toward enhancing and preserving relationships at school and giving students the coping skills to handle adversity and conflict. Social skills training, bullying prevention, and conflict resolution programs are excellent steps in this direction and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Resilient students have certain protective factors both inside them and in their environment that help them to “work well, play well, love well, and expect well” (Benard, 1995).
- Internal protective factors or social-emotional skills, such as social skills, problem solving, self-efficacy, optimism, and self-control, can be taught and can help students be more effective learners and resist destructive behaviors.
- Teachers can foster resilience in their students by developing a caring and personal relationship with their students; by having positive and high expectations, with the necessary supports to live up to these expectations; and by providing opportunities for meaningful roles, participation, and contribution.
- We must go beyond external security measures such as cameras, metal detectors, guards, and zero-tolerance policies and focus on positive relationships and resilience if we are going to deter the threat of violence in our schools.

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**QUESTIONS FOR
DISCUSSION AND SELF-EVALUATION**

1. What are some ways you already increase resilience and social-emotional skills in your classroom or school?
2. What are some other ideas for increasing resilience for your school or classroom?
3. Does your school put more efforts toward identifying and remediating risk factors or building protective factors? Which is more important?
4. What can we do as educators to help prevent student alienation?
5. Does your schoolwide and classroom discipline practices help or hinder the resilience goals of caring relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities to participate and contribute?

ACTION PLAN

As a result of something that I learned in this chapter I plan to (be specific in your answer):

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Benard, B. (1995). *Fostering resilience in children*. Urbana, IL: ERIC. (ERIC Document Reproduction No. EDO-PS-95-9.) Benard is a leading researcher on resilience and provides an excellent summary on resilience and schools.
- Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. This document was created as a result of a U.S. Department of

Education commission on the study of school violence and contains numerous violence prevention ideas and programs.

Krovetz, M. L. (1999). *Fostering resiliency: Expecting all students to use their minds and hearts well*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

This book provides an excellent resource for educators who are interested in resilience. The author describes promising resilience projects in different school systems around the country and provides tools for assessing the resilience factors in your school.

U.S. Secret Service Safe School Initiative. (2000). *An interim report on the prevention of targeted violence in schools*. Washington, DC:

Author. This report highlights the findings and implications for schools from the systematic study of the 37 school shootings and 41 attackers. The report calls for resources to be put toward prevention rather than law enforcement.