

# Preface

The recent publicity surrounding schoolyard shootings resulted in nothing less than a frenzied reaction by schools around the country as they scrambled to implement violence prevention programs to protect their students. These violence prevention programs were developed quickly, often with little empirical information on proven methods, effective program content, or design. Even worse, in most cases these programs, and often hefty expenditures, were based on a need that had been assumed as a result of media hype, not a need that had been proved through the examination of local data (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

The field of violence prevention is still in its infancy. Even though more than 80 violence prevention programs are currently being marketed, few of them have undergone evaluation studies of their outcome effectiveness. Only a dozen of them have been evaluated in the scientific literature, but none have been adequately measured postprogram (for at least 2 years) to show effectiveness in changing student attitudes or behaviors. That puts the burden of proving effectiveness back on the school or agency that uses these programs (Drug Strategies, 1998).

During the last 30 or so years, substance abuse prevention has been through this same process of responding to crisis, failing to be effective, being assessed and reassembled more thoughtfully, and finally being successful. We can learn by examining drug prevention efforts and not make the same mistakes a second time in this new arena of violence prevention.

The primary source of funding for school-based drug and violence prevention programs has been the federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities program (Title IV), a part of the U.S. Department of Education. Since 1986, all schools, public and private, have received this entitlement money. This is one of those wonderful programs that, following an application to the state education department, sends money directly to local districts to be used for prevention efforts they select themselves, based on their individual needs.

As is often the case with programs this large, accountability at the local level has been lacking. Despite the growing availability of information on effective programs, schools continue to use programs that have not been

proven effective. Some are using model programs but have changed the content or design enough so that the features that once made the programs effective are gone. Or worse, they are using programs that have been proven *ineffective* simply because that is what is easiest or most familiar (Bangert-Downs, 1988).

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education, in an effort to improve accountability, move schools away from ineffective prevention, and increase the use of “proven” programs, issued a list of Safe and Drug Free Schools Principles of Effectiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 1998b) (see Resource A). The Principles of Effectiveness outline a process for using data to reassess violence and substance abuse prevention needs, select effective programs based on measurable objectives, and evaluate the resulting programs for effectiveness in meeting those objectives.

To underscore the necessity of determining program effectiveness, consider the results of a recent survey of drug education programs conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s School of Public Health (and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation). Lead researcher Dr. Hallfors found that 82% of schools are still using the DARE program despite repeated studies showing that DARE is ineffective in reducing later substance use behaviors. Even with a growing body of research identifying prevention programs that are effective, DARE remains the most widely used program among schools studied. In fact, the three most widely used programs—DARE, Hear’s Looking at You, and McGruff’s Drug Prevention and Child Protection—have little to no peer-reviewed research to show that they are effective in preventing drug use and other risk behaviors. Dr. Hallfors found that a significant number of the schools involved in her survey were not familiar with the Principles of Effectiveness. Of the schools familiar with these principles, only 14% said they had developed an evaluation plan for their current program.

In November 2000, the Rand Corporation conducted a similar review of delinquency prevention programs (Rand Corporation Drug Policy Research Center, <http://www.rand.org/centers/dprc>). Peter Greenwood, a crime-prevention expert, found that funders tend to support programs that are high profile and eye-catching, but ineffective. His recommendation was quite simple: *Read*. Read the growing body of research and select prevention programs that we know work.

But even when schools implemented “proven” curricula, there were problems. Of all the schools in the Chapel Hill study that had selected the Reconnecting Youth program, a program with proven effectiveness, only one was using it as prescribed. All the other schools had made adaptations and changes to the delivery model despite the lack of research supporting the effectiveness of such changes.

It has been suggested that these ineffective programs continue because they are easy, low-to-no-cost, and often require no teacher training or commitment from the district. In contrast, adhering to the Principles of Effectiveness or assessing a program requires tremendous commitment, some-

times rigorous teacher training, substantial budgeting of time and money, and ongoing measurement and data collection.

This task is particularly overwhelming because you and I both know who will end up doing all that work. The job of developing and implementing effective prevention programs will fall to the District Health Coordinator, the Prevention Specialist, the Drug Counselor, or the Student Assistance Professional—a person with little to no training in research methods and no spare time.

This book is written for you, the guy or gal in the trenches. Use this as a guide, a reference. Each chapter should stand on its own so that it will meet you where you are in the process. Mark the pages, copy the worksheets. Follow the process that's outlined here from beginning to end, and not only will you have an effective prevention program, but you'll be able to prove it. I've even included tips for preparing your results for public presentations, for the media, and for securing additional money.

We can no longer afford to implement ineffective programs. Even if the Principles of Effectiveness do not apply to you, your programming, or your funding, it's still a good idea to establish careful outcome measures that show your program was effective in changing student behavior. Use this guide if you are a student, program staff, board member, police officer, or parent who needs to know whether a program is making a difference. If you are new to the process of measuring program effectiveness, this guide will walk you fearlessly from start to finish.

I hope this book is a help to you as you create and implement programs to meet the needs of your students and prepare them for safe and healthy lives.

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—Cynthia R. Knowles