



Violence and Suicide Prevention

Violence impacts the lives of many youth in Washington. School policies, resources, and curricula that address interpersonal violence like bullying, intimidation, and harassment, as well as educational materials and activities that promote prevention and safety can be effective strategies to create safe environments in schools.

About 90 percent of 6th graders and 80 percent of 8th and 10th graders report feeling safe at school.



About 5 percent of 8th graders and 7 percent of 10th graders report carrying a weapon on school property like a gun, knife, or club in the past month.

About 16 percent of 8th graders and 11 percent of 10th graders report getting into a fight at school in the past year.

Student bullying is another threat to feeling safe and potentially a sentinel indicator of school-based violence. For example, according to the national School Crime and Safety Report (2004),¹ 34 percent of schools with one or more violent incidents reported that bullying happened at least once a week, compared with 17 percent of schools with no violent incidents.



About 30 percent of 6th and 8th graders, and 20 percent of 10th graders reported being bullied in school during the past month.

Depression and suicide are both serious problems for teens. Youth suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington youth ages 15–19 after unintentional injury.²

About 14 percent of 8th graders and 18 percent of 10th graders reported seriously considering suicide in the past year.



About 3 percent of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders reported attempting suicide that led to required medical assistance in the past year.

More than a quarter of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks that they stopped their usual activities.

Violence and Suicide Prevention Policies and Procedures

Washington State's Anti-Bullying law requires each school district to have a policy that prohibits the harassment, intimidation, or bullying of any student. It is the responsibility of each school district to share this policy with parents or guardians, students, volunteers, and school employees.

Principals reported that almost all (94 percent) secondary schools have written plans for responding to violence. Principals reported other specific actions taken by schools that may create safer school environments including:

¹ DeVoe, J.F., Peter, K., Kauffman, P., Miller, A., Noonan, M., Snyder, T.D., and Baum, K. (2004). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2004* (NCES 2005-002/NCJ 205290). U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention WISQARS program injury data. Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars>



- 99 percent required visitors to report to the office on arrival.
- 86 percent had staff or adult hall monitors.
- 74 percent had a closed campus all day (including not allowing students to leave during lunch periods).
- 42 percent had uniformed or undercover police or security guards.
- 29 percent conducted bag, desk, and locker checks.
- 16 percent prohibited backpacks.
- 4 percent required student identification badges.
- 4 percent had metal detectors.
- 2 percent required students to wear uniforms.

Schools addressing violence and suicide prevention have shown to be most successful when a comprehensive approach is taken. This includes prevention-focused policies and procedures, staff/faculty training, awareness campaigns, and providing immediate support for youth who are victims of violence or are suicidal/depressed.

Some secondary schools have implemented specific programs for students to address existing problems or to proactively promote safe school environments. Principals reported that schools implement the following programs:

- 68 percent had a bullying prevention program.
- 39 percent had a peer mediation program.
- 28 percent had a gang violence prevention program.
- 4 percent had a safe-passage to school program.

Violence and Suicide Prevention Instruction

Health teachers reported trying to increase student knowledge about safety by including the following specific topics in a required health education course:

- 87 percent taught violence prevention (such as bullying, fighting, or homicide).
- 74 percent taught suicide prevention.
- 80 percent taught accident or injury prevention.
- 88 percent taught conflict resolution.

Violence and Suicide Prevention Staff Development

About half (52 percent) of health teachers reported receiving staff development in violence prevention such as bullying, fighting, or homicide in the last two years. About two-thirds (67 percent) of health teachers would like to receive more.

About 27 percent of health teachers reported receiving staff development in suicide prevention during the past two years, and twice as many (64 percent) wanted to receive more.

Violence and Suicide Prevention Resources

A report on the implementation of Washington's Anti-Bullying Act can be found at:
www.safeschoolscoalition.org/bullyreport.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers a Web based bullying prevention resource kit with fact sheets on best practices in bullying prevention and intervention:
<http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/>.

Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Program (YSPP) provides training for adults who work with youth including teachers and school counselors. Many schools around the state are partnering with YSPP to implement comprehensive suicide prevention programs. Information is available at: <http://www.yspp.org/>.

School-based Youth Suicide Prevention Guide provides tools for assessing school suicide prevention efforts and provides resources for administrators to enhance their programs. Available at: <http://theguide.fmhi.usf.edu/>.