Report to the Legislature

Gangs in Schools Task Force Report 2011

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 3

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................................... 4

Three Activities the Task Force is Pursuing This Year .................................................................................. 5
  Policy Guidance ............................................................................................................................................... 7
  Data/Information Sharing ............................................................................................................................. 8
  Training/Professional Development ............................................................................................................. 10

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................................... 11
  Next Steps ...................................................................................................................................................... 11
  Implications for the Legislature .................................................................................................................... 11

References .......................................................................................................................................................... 13

List of Tables

Table 1: Healthy Youth Survey: Self-Reported Gang Involvement 2006–10 ................................................. 9

List of Figures

Figure 1: Interrelated Areas: The Gangs in Schools Task Force 2012 Work Plan ................................. 7
Executive Summary

History

In 2007, the Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5097, which required the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene a task force to examine how gangs are affecting school safety. This task force was directed to “outline methods for preventing new gangs, eliminating existing gangs, gathering intelligence, and sharing information about gang activities.” The task force was also directed to annually report its findings and recommendations to the education committees of the Legislature.

Three Activities the Task Force is Pursuing This Year

Policy Guidance:
Rather than create statewide policy at this time, we will be working with local communities that have found some success in dealing with gangs in schools and developing guidelines and processes that other communities can effectively use. This will also give us findings that can be used to advise creation of state policy in the future.

Data and Information Sharing:
We will be working with law enforcement, corrections, juvenile justice, social service agencies, and school districts to make key improvements in inter-operability in reporting gang activity. We are working with Yakima and other communities that are developing local/regional Web-based platforms for information-sharing around prevention, intervention, mitigation, suppression, and reentry related to school gang activity.

Training and Professional Development:
While we recognize that never before have school administrators and other school staff had more demands on their time, we believe that working with the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), the Criminal Justice Training Commission, and other organizations, we will be able to improve the saturation of job-embedded professional development related to awareness about and prevention of gang activity (as well as the other stages in the process listed above).

Implications for the Legislature

Currently, no legislative funding is being provided for the Gangs in Schools Task Force. We are making no policy recommendations at this time. We invite legislators and staff to work with us to the extent possible on the three activities we are pursuing this year.
Introduction

Legislative History

In 2007, the Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5097, which required the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene a task force to examine how gangs are affecting school safety. This task force was directed to “outline methods for preventing new gangs, eliminating existing gangs, gathering intelligence, and sharing information about gang activities.” The task force was also directed to annually report its findings and recommendations to the education committees of the Legislature.

In 2008, 2009, and 2010, the Gangs in Schools Task Force submitted legislative reports that included seven recommendations (including: revising school definitions of “gang” and “gang activity,” establishing school safety zones, funding grants for school-based gang prevention/intervention, developing a dedicated apportionment for transition programs, establishing school district policies to prohibit gang activity, funding for ongoing anti-gang training, and development of an information-sharing Web site).

While none of these recommendations were passed into law by the Legislature, Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill (E2SHB1418 that passed in 2009, may end up creating systems between community colleges and school districts that might address some of the issues related to school-aged former gang members transitioning back into school.

Due to the conversations that have occurred in the Legislature and the task force over the past four years, and the lack of fiscal resources available to the Legislature, OSPI, educational service districts, schools, and communities, this year the task force has chosen to approach our legislative report differently.

Current Reality of Gangs in Schools

In prior versions of this report, we indicated that gang activity in schools is on the increase. In preparing this report, we looked at several potential sources of data, and have determined that it is unclear about the state of gang activity levels in Washington schools. There is anecdotal data from both community law enforcement and security resource officers (SROs) and newspaper accounts that gang activity in schools and communities is on the increase. However, results from the Healthy Youth Survey and other student surveys show a steady decline in student-reported gang involvement since 2006. What we have learned from this discussion is that the nature of data and reporting is an area where the task force members can make a difference.

Other key trends that we have noticed and analyzed relate to the increasing use of technology in gang recruitment and activity, and in some instances, gangs using younger and younger children to assist in criminal activity. Again, we do not have solid data and reporting systems to support these trends, but law enforcement and SROs are noticing patterns.
**Recent Successes**

At our most recent Gangs in Schools Task Force Meeting, we heard stories from Pasco, Vancouver, and other communities showing how some new and innovative strategies were making a real difference for individual students and the communities where they live and attend school.

In Pasco, efforts to improve a dilapidated building near a mobile home park brought the entire community together, turned the building into a thriving community hub for positive youth and family activities, brought additional fiscal resources to the neighborhood, and brought down gang and other criminal activity as well as drug use, *without specifically targeting gangs*.

In Vancouver, students who had been incarcerated and were gang affiliated were provided with wrap-around services and graduation coaching, and the students began to positively affect their peers, creating positive social norms, and encouraging one another’s educational success. The staff person reported that students were able to influence each other across lines of gang affiliation.

These and other stories have caused the Gangs in Schools Task Force members to specifically address “success stories” in our work on data and reporting systems, and also in our work to spread effective practice through statewide professional development and training processes and strategies.

**Change in Approach for Gangs in Schools Task Force**

Due to the lack of implementation of this task force’s earlier recommendations (while we validate that many of the recommendations still have merit), we are changing our approach. Our work over the coming year will focus less on waiting for funding to appear that will allow school districts to address gangs and gang activity, and more on providing tools, information, and processes that will allow school communities (that face ever-dwindling resources of both time and money) to create success at the local level.

**Three Activities the Task Force is Pursuing This Year**

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We will be working with law enforcement, corrections, juvenile justice, social service agencies, and school districts to make key improvements in inter-operability in reporting gang activity. We are working with Yakima and other communities that are developing local/regional Web-based platforms for information-sharing around prevention, intervention, mitigation, suppression, and reentry related to school gang activity.
Training and Professional Development:
While we recognize that never before have school administrators and other school staff had more demands on their time, we believe that working with the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), the Criminal Justice Training Commission, and other organizations, we will be able to improve the saturation of job-embedded professional development related to awareness about and prevention of gang activity (as well as the other stages in the process listed above).

The Gangs in Schools Task Force was directed to recommend methods to prevent and eliminate gangs in schools, gather intelligence on gangs, and share information about gangs. The task force members recognize that gang activity in schools overlaps with gang activity on the street, but that the two cannot be addressed in the same ways. In addition, while charged specifically with addressing the issue of gangs in schools, it is also clear that schools cannot address the problem alone. To achieve collective impact, cooperative communitywide programs are necessary to effectively reduce both youth gang activity in school and overall gang violence. With respect to gang activity in schools, schools can be an effective avenue to provide prevention, intervention, and mitigation support services to a large segment of the gang-involved youth population. With respect to dropout and reentry issues, as long as students are attending school, they can receive reentry and transition services which they need to remain in school and to complete their education. This report will review the three interrelated action item areas of the Gangs in Schools Task Force for 2012. As shown in the diagram below, the three action items focus on the development of policy guidance, training and professional development, and data and information sharing. Not one of these can be taken in isolation; they are all very much interrelated. The order in which these three areas is discussed in no way implies a priority for work in that area. The report will conclude with three specific recommendations to the Legislature.
Policy Guidance

Gang activity and school-related gang activity is often community specific and will vary from one school, district, jurisdiction, or community to another. Culture, ethnicities, ages, economics, mobility, or intergenerational gang involvement are examples of the diverse aspects of community which impact that community’s gang problems. As a result, a single, statewide policy around gang activity in schools is impractical, if not impossible. The task force recommends a different approach. The task force recommends the creation of a set of guidelines to be used by local school districts and their communities to address their own specific gang problems. Included within the guidelines will be clear and consistent definitions, sample policies from across Washington and around the country, recommendations for best practices around interventions, discipline, mitigation, and re-entry of gang-involved youth, and methods for information sharing within and across agencies. These guidelines will be created by the task force. The development process will model a process for the development of local policy and procedures.

of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, representatives from the state House and Senate, the Legislative Youth Advisory Council, selected community based organizations (CBOs), and others to participate. Throughout the process, underrepresented groups will be invited, encouraged, and supported, to the extent possible, to participate.

As noted above, guideline development will begin with the development of common vocabulary for common understandings. Using the example of tagging, definitions might more clearly differentiate among graffiti, vandalism, and gang tagging. The clarification would then allow schools to better recognize and document words and symbols sprayed on a wall as traditional vandalism versus gang-related activity. Aside from providing specific gang information, it would also allow for better tracking of activity and inform prevention and intervention possibilities.

In addition, policy development guidelines will encourage communities to build around what is currently working—their success stories. To underscore the interconnectedness of the three activity areas of the task force, these success stories will also be gathered as data pieces and shared through trainings. Several are noted in the resources list at the end of this document.

Another component of the policy guidance, the task force will collect and provide national models of what is working in other parts of the country. This information, along with its incorporation into the guidance process, will also become part of the data and information sharing activities. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP’s) gang assessment model is an example of the kind of resource to be used as a basis for local policy and procedure development.

At the local level, this policy guidance will be shared with stakeholder groups as they develop specific district and school policies and procedures. Modeling the guidance development process, local stakeholder groups would include representatives from the school community, law enforcement, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, families and students, and whatever other local organizations and groups are appropriate for their community.

Data/Information Sharing

The task force recognizes the need for clear and consistent data across agencies and for a process and a vehicle for cross-jurisdictional information sharing. At present, the only consistent longitudinal data on youth gang affiliation comes from the Washington Healthy Youth Survey (HYS). The Healthy Youth Survey is a collaborative effort among six state agencies, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Department of Health, Department of Social and Health Service's Division of Behavioral and Health and Recovery, Family Policy Council, Department of Commerce, and Liquor Control Board. It is comprised of survey items from across several national surveys and is consistently administered, in even-numbered school years to Grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 across Washington State. When the information from the HYS is examined, student self-reported gang involvement has decreased approximately 30 percent from 2006–10.
Table 1: Healthy Youth Survey: Self-Reported Gang Involvement  
2006–10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>-27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>-30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>-32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snohomish</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakima</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD 105</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>-22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD 121</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>-36.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data is taken from the 2010 Healthy Youth Survey. Numbers indicate percentages of 10th grade students who self-reported gang involvement statewide in selected counties and educational service districts (ESDs).

Although this is, in and of itself, good news, it also raises questions. For example, are gang-involved students present within the K–12 system to take the survey? Has gang indoctrination become so sophisticated as to educate youth about revealing their gang involvement? These questions, along with the anecdotal, on-the-street experience of law enforcement, social service agencies, and educators, underscore the need for clear and consistent definitions of gangs and gang activity, as well as coordination and cooperation among agencies.

The task force recognizes that data and information are not the same. It also recognizes that both data and information around gang activity in schools can be gleaned from sources which may not, on the surface, appear to be related to the issues. Organizations that have data and information that can be used to address gang-related issues include, but are not limited to, the Department of Social and Health Services, Department of Health, Department of Corrections, OSPI, various CBOs, and other service agencies.

To address these needs, the task force plans to do the following:

1. Generate a consistent set of definitions and talking points to be used in cross-agency conversations.
2. Include adult corrections personnel in those conversations.
3. Establish processes where schools and school districts can share information within and across districts and with their ESDs.
4. Work with the Attorney General’s Office to establish processes for schools, law enforcement, service providers, and other community agencies to share information across organizational boundaries.
5. Spotlight and train around successful community-based initiatives and efforts. One example of such an initiative is the Yakima County Juvenile Gang Court program, a holistic, four-phase program of interventions for youth who want out of the gang lifestyle.
6. Use the OSPI Safety Center Web site as a clearinghouse for information on research, best practice programs, resources, and effective community-based efforts.

With better data and information, the task force will generate a tiered approach to prevention, intervention, mitigation, suppression, and re-entry as applied to gang activity in schools and to gang involved K–12 students.

Looking at the example of tagging, when this activity is better understood by all, and when educators and others are better able to recognize both the activity and the meaning of the tags, they will be better prepared to document gang-specific activity at their schools, track that activity both as it relates to students, as well as to the cost of mitigation (re-painting, for example). They will be better prepared to contact law enforcement as to potential escalation of activity, and better prepared to intervene with their own students.

**Training/Professional Development**

Throughout all the conversations within the task force is the recognition that training and professional development are vital to the success of effort to address gang activity in schools. As recognized by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), it is widely understood that educators at all levels either do not recognize the issues or choose to not address them directly due to lack of understanding, clear polices, or because admission of a gang problem will reflect badly on the school.

The task force further recognizes that school resources are extremely limited, both in time and in monetary resources. To address these challenges, the task force is currently developing a set of training materials for educators through the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC). The CJTC has begun to roll out the first of these training modules on gang recognition and awareness. Advertised through the CJTC and OSPI, the first, four-hour module was presented on November 7, with over 70 participants in attendance. Insofar as training time is a concern for educators, the task force is looking at alternative ways in which this critical training component can be delivered. Among the possibilities are the development of DVDs and the use of social media, such as YouTube.

School-related gang activity is not a stand-alone issue. Prevention, intervention, mitigation, suppression, and re-entry concerns are not gang-specific. The development of clear and consistent policies and procedures is also not gang-specific. Nor is the targeted audience only school-based educators. To help ensure a collective impact, the task force will work with not only educational professionals, but law enforcement, community and faith-based agencies, and others to ensure common understandings, goals, and outcomes. Therefore, a component of the training will be dedicated to the creation of common terms and understandings and agreement of the data and information which organizations and agencies have and can share.

To accomplish this, the task force will actively seek to participate in conferences, professional training opportunities, and community-based events. These conferences, trainings, and events include, but are not limited to, local, regional, and statewide conferences around harassment, intimidation, and bullying prevention, the education of incarcerated youth, mentoring, Positive
Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS), coordinated school health, and local town-hall style meetings, among others.

Recognizing, too, that there is a need for a cadre of trainers, the task force will also develop a training-of-trainers model that ESDs, local districts, and others can adapt to their specific needs. Paralleling the mandate to the Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying Work Group, the task force has also discussed the possibility of developing a preservice training component to better prepare the newest education professionals.

With respect to tagging, gang tags are different from graffiti as a result of vandalism. Gang tags are messages. They are a vehicle for gang members to share information, claim territory, and challenge rival gangs. Included among the training opportunities will be opportunities for educators to learn to recognize and read gang tags which may appear in and around their schools. This will both raise awareness and allow school officials to gather information. When fed into a database, documenting gang tags will also provide details on current and potential gang activity, and allow schools to be better prepared to deal with situations which may arise.

Conclusion

Next Steps

By way of next steps, the Gangs in Schools Task Force will:

1. Identifying specific activities to implement the three areas discussed in the report.
2. Establish a timeline for the year.
3. Identify stakeholders to participate in the activities. The stakeholders will represent the educational, legal, law enforcement, community, and other entities mentioned throughout the report.
4. Identify outcomes and indicators of success. These indicators of success may include, but not be limited to:
   a. Attendance data.
   b. School climate survey data.
   c. Decreased street gang activity.
   d. Continued decreased self-reported gang affiliations as reported by the 2012 HYS.
   e. Data and information from other organizations and agencies which can be correlated to gang and gang-in-school activity.
5. Use the OSPI Web site as a clearinghouse to share information, data, resources, and success stories.

The 2012 report to the Legislature will review the task force’s progress toward implementing the steps above.

Implications for the Legislature

Given the significant work ahead, the Gangs in Schools Task Force has three recommendations to forward to the Legislature:
1. Provide funding to support the work of the task force. Task force members come from all corners of Washington. Although some communications and some of the work can be done virtually, it is also important for task force members to meet face-to-face periodically. Costs of travel, food, and lodging make this very difficult when no funding has been appropriated. In the recent past, the task force has relied on the good will of its membership; however, many members have not been able to fully participate due to lack of funding. In addition, there are staff costs related to the administrative support required to move the work forward. Therefore, the task force recommends that funding be allocated to support the work of the task force, itself.

2. Provide funding for innovative, community-based programs and promising practices. Community-based programs such as the Yakima County Juvenile Gang Court and the Sunnyside Community Center Clean-up Program have shown promise and the potential for replication. However, funding to support such efforts would be very beneficial. Therefore, the task force recommends that funding be allocated to support the work of promising, community-based efforts.

3. Finally, the task force continues to recognize the importance of wrap-around educational services for students who are suspended or expelled for gang activity. Therefore, it also reiterates its previous recommendation for dedicated apportionment for transition/re-entry programs for adjudicated youth.

As previous reports of the Gangs in Schools Task Force noted, the problem of youth gangs does not have simple or quick solutions. Gangs are not a new problem, and when gang activity increases, it is a symptom of larger societal problems which push youth toward anti-social and criminal behaviors, including gangs. The definitive treatment for gangs is to address the individual and societal issues that push our children and youth to the point where gangs become an attractive alternative.

The Gangs in Schools Task Force was specifically charged with addressing the problems associated with youth and adult gangs in and around schools. However, before schools can effectively address their issues around gang activity in schools, they must have clear definitions, policies, and processes in place. These will also inform the gathering of valid data and assist the ability to share information across agency and jurisdictional boundaries. They also imply that everyone have both awareness and implementation training, and training on effective communication mechanisms between and among agencies. The task force reiterates its position that addressing the problem of youth gangs requires essentially the same actions as addressing the overall needs of at-risk youth. The state must ensure that a comprehensive and coordinated system of prevention and intervention services is available for at-risk youth, combined with educational opportunities that meet the needs of this segment of the youth population.

The members of the executive steering committee of the Gangs in Schools Task Force thank the Legislature for the opportunity to work on this critical issue.
References

Maryland State Gangs in Schools Policy:

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Gang Model:

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Report: Responding to Gangs in a School Setting:

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s School Safety Center Web Site:

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Gangs in Schools Resources:

Washington State Regional Gang Prevention, Intervention, Mitigation, and Suppression Efforts:
- Clark County: Parent’s Guide to Youth Gangs in Clark County.
- Tacoma: Tacoma Gang Project Tacoma Gang Project to reduce and prevent gang violence through prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts.
- Spokane: Stop Spokane Gangs A joint effort of The Spokane Violent Crime Gang Enforcement Team and the Greater Spokane Substance Abuse Council (GSSAC).
- Yakima: Yakima County Say NO to GANGS Information and resources for community, families, law enforcement and gang involved youth.
- Yakima: Yakima County Gang Court.