

Understanding Violence Prevention Priorities in Chicago's Public Schools

Overview

The impact or even the threat of violence on elementary and high school students is a key obstacle to success for Chicago's public school students, according to a new analysis of information collected by Communities In Schools of Chicago.

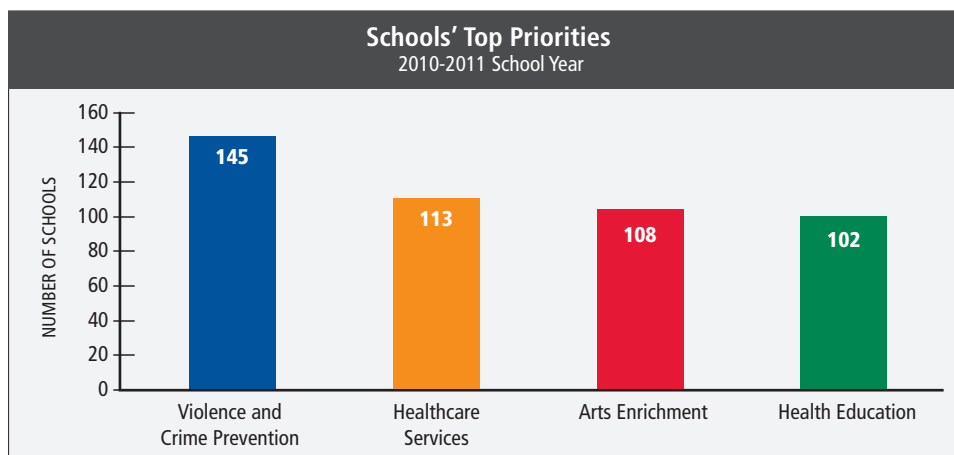
This report identifies the most pressing areas of concern about violence from the perspectives of students, teachers, counselors and principals, and offers insight into the importance of violence prevention programming for elementary and high school students. The report was prepared by Communities In Schools of Chicago, a non-profit organization that has been working for more than 20 years with Chicago's public schools to identify the key social and emotional barriers to learning. Communities In Schools of Chicago partners with community organizations to support students in their schools in a wide array of areas - from health and vision screenings, to arts enrichment and mental health counseling. The data in this report directly informs how the organization responds to the growing needs for violence prevention programming.

Key Findings

Communities In Schools of Chicago has collected and analyzed data that add to the ongoing conversation around the need for violence prevention in schools. For the first time, the organization is reporting on information collected from a network of 166 Chicago public schools, representing 25 percent of the school system and 61 of Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. The responses clearly demonstrate the level of concern about violence, and highlight the importance of violence prevention education and programming for students at the elementary school level.

Violence Prevention Is A Clear Priority

Communities In Schools of Chicago conducts annual surveys with principals, administrators, counselors, nurses, faculty and students. Violence prevention is consistently at the top of the list of sought-after services and programs by schools. For the 2010-2011 school year,



Comments from Principals

“Violence is evident and prevalent in my school and in my community. We all know that if we start young and help support children through these early years, some of the challenges presented by violence are improved over time.”

“We need more social workers in our schools; more groups for trauma and abuse, and more individual therapy sessions for our students.”

“The economy has contributed to placing the city on the edge of something potentially awful – students are far more at risk in their neighborhoods!”

“Dating and sexual violence should have special attention. Students need seminars, after-school programs, clubs, and other avenues for meeting and discussing these topics with adults.”

“Home and community violence are on a rise and continue to be the source of our youths' problems.”

nearly 90 percent of partner schools identified violence and crime prevention as one of their top priority areas; this includes 131 of 149 elementary school partners. When schools listed multiple priorities, violence prevention outpaced other essential school programming needs, including arts enrichment, health care services and health education.

Schools Are Targeting Specific Issues For Violence Prevention Programs

Violence prevention education covers many interrelated issues: bullying, crime and violence, dating violence, domestic violence education and prevention, sexual assault and sexual harassment, conflict resolution, self-esteem, gang awareness, anger management, life skills and mental health support. School partners most often request support in the areas of comprehensive crime and violence prevention and conflict resolution. These are followed by a growing number of requests for dating violence prevention and sexual assault prevention.

Among schools seeking violence and crime prevention help, 40% of requests are specifically for conflict resolution programs.

Students Demonstrate The Need For More Programming And Education

From 2007 to 2010, Communities In Schools of Chicago surveyed more than 4,000 Chicago Public School (CPS) students in fourth through eighth grades to assess their knowledge, behavior and attitudes toward violence in their schools, communities and lives. The responses, captured through an assessment called the Personal Health Inventory, illustrate both signs of encouragement and particular areas for concern.

- **A majority of students feel safe in school and at home.**
 - 63% of students report always feeling safe at home
 - 59% of students report always feeling safe at school
- **For most, the feeling of safety does not extend to their communities.**
 - Only 22% of students report always feeling safe in their community
- **A majority of students say they do not engage in bullying.**
 - 55% of students report never or hardly ever bullying other students
- **Yet, many students report they are bullied.**
 - 28% of students report being bullied often

Principals Cite The Ongoing Impact Of Violence On Their Students And The Need For More Violence Prevention Resources

In a January 2011 survey, 27 CPS principals from across the city were asked which issues have the greatest impact on their student population: gang and street violence, dating and sexual violence, violence in the home, violence in school, witnessing violence against youth or adults, intimidation by – or fear of – potential violence, and mental health issues.

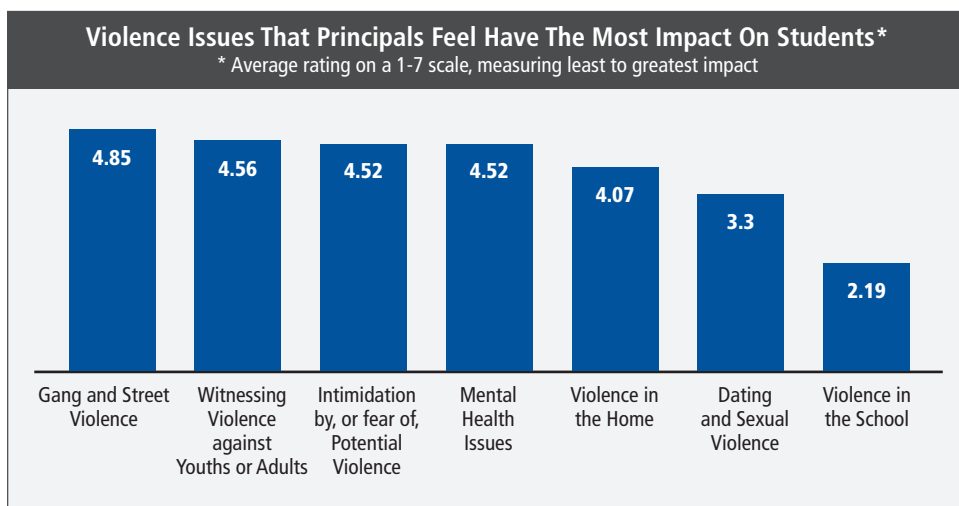
- 37% identified gang and street violence as having the greatest impact on their students, followed by mental health issues and intimidation by – or fear of – potential violence.
- More than 50% of principals identified violence in schools as having the least impact on students.

Principals Feel Violence Prevention Program Programming Should Begin In Kindergarten

Communities In Schools of Chicago and many other groups are identifying a large and growing need for violence prevention initiatives among elementary schools. Eighty-six percent of the organization's school network is made up of elementary schools, but the current focus of many violence prevention initiatives is on high school students. In the January 2011 principal survey, 80% of participants cited the importance of early intervention, saying programming should begin no later than third grade. And, 40 percent believe it should start in kindergarten. A significant gap in available violence prevention services exists for the youngest elementary school students in kindergarten through third grade.

We need more programs related to bullying and intimidation.

- School Principal



Principals were asked how these issues have changed over the last three years.

- **The challenges**
 - 44% said that mental health issues have worsened
 - 40% said that intimidation by – or fear of – potential violence has worsened
- **The good news**
 - 63% report that the impact of violence in school has lessened
 - 20% report that violence in the home is having less impact

Some violence concerns are persistent.

- 70% report that gang and street violence have stayed the same or worsened
- 85% say that dating and sexual violence have stayed the same or worsened
- 90% say that witnessing violence has stayed the same or worsened

The survey also revealed that principals are challenged to address violence issues both by strains on, and the need for, additional resources.

- 93% of principals said that the services available within the school system are not sufficient to address their students' violence prevention needs.
- 63% said that time constraints have led to less programming.
- 56% said that school funding cuts contributed to a fall off in programming.

The good news is that 37% of participants said that parental and community involvement has led to increased programming.

How The Data Was Collected

School Priorities

School priorities are identified through individual discussions, group conversations, and surveys administered with faculty, administrators, support staff and students at partner schools.

Student Assessments

The Personal Health Inventory (PHI), an online assessment tool developed by Clerysis Inc., is used to collect student input. The PHI assesses students' knowledge, attitude and behavior around nine health issues, including violence prevention. PHI surveys were conducted during the last three years with more than 4,000 students in grades 4-8 across 60 Chicago schools.

Principal Perspectives

Twenty-seven principals participated in a special violence prevention-related survey in January 2011. They responded to questions addressing the roots of violence with students and the availability of effective education and programming.

Changes in School Environment

In spring 2010, 45 school principals and 74 counselors, vice principals and other school staff, completed surveys on the impact of Communities In Schools of Chicago-connected programs and services. Responses address changes over the course of the relationship with schools ranging from one to 14 years of partnership.

Changes In The School Environment

There are many factors that contribute both to a greater sense of safety and stronger academic achievement for students. Survey results, along with anecdotal comments from school staff and principals, point to encouraging signs that violence prevention programming is highly valued and productive. During the 2009-2010 school year, Communities In Schools of Chicago connected 29 different violence prevention service providers with nearly 22,000 students; the vast majority of students served were in elementary schools.

Principal & Staff Survey Responses

Since partnering with Communities In Schools of Chicago, how have the following changed among students at your school?

	Greatly Improved or Improved	
	Principals	School Staff
Sense of Safety	81.8%	66.2%
Self-esteem	84.1%	71.8%
Decision-making	72.8%	73.6%
Student Behavior	72.1%	56.4%
Conflict Resolution	75.0%	71.8%
Attendance	70.5%	45.7%
Academic Performance	70.5%	63.9%

Conclusion

Violence prevention is not easily defined and not easily addressed. Communities In Schools of Chicago is sharing these findings to add more detail to the ongoing conversation about violence and the impact on Chicago schools. This report highlights the continued need for more programming, more resources and more involvement from the community to understand and address students' priorities. Communities In Schools of Chicago plays an essential role in linking schools with community services delivered at no cost by dedicated, high-quality community partners. These findings direct the organization's work in important ways and can help others recognize the particular challenges facing our schools, administrators and students.



If you would like learn more about what Communities In Schools of Chicago is doing to address violence prevention in schools, please call 312-829-2475, ext. 16.

Communities In Schools of Chicago

815 W. Van Buren Ave., Suite 300
Chicago, Illinois 60607
Telephone: 312-829-2475
Fax: 312-829-2610
www.chicagocis.org