



Strong minds. Strong bodies. Strong schools.

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thrive report

Vol. 1, Number 8, October 2007

October Issue: School Safety

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Violence and What Schools
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thrive by the numbers

160,000 Number of kids, nationally, that stay home from school each day to avoid peer torment or being bullied.

40 Percentage of teenage girls, nationally, ages 14-17 that say they know someone their age that has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.

9.6 Percentage of Rhode Island high school students that reported being physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend.

12 Percentage of RI high school students that

October's Focus: School Safety

Welcome to the October edition of the *thrive report* that focuses on school safety.

Schools should be a safe haven for teaching and learning and be free of crime and violence. Any instance of crime or violence at school not only affects those directly involved but also has implications for the broader school community and the community at large.

School safety encompasses a variety of issues, including bullying, harassment, substance abuse, violence, teen dating violence, crime, shootings, security, disasters and emergencies, and gangs. Therefore, our response to these issues must be broad as well as deep.

Rhode Island state law requires schools to have policies and plans for school safety, bullying and harassment. Most recently, laws have passed requiring schools to address teen dating violence education policy, and to conduct additional lockdown drills. The Rhode Island Departments of Education and Health and the Emergency Management Agency have been collaborating to assist schools by providing [guidance and model policies](#), [toolkits](#), [data](#), and trainings around these issues.

At the same time, education reform efforts have focused attention on the social climate of schools. [RI middle and high school regulations](#) require personalized learning environments and an advisory structure to help students develop relationships with caring adults. Yet data from the 2005-2006 school year show that only [16% of middle school students](#) and [17% of high school students](#) report that they can talk to a teacher or staff member about personal or family problems most or all of the time. Moreover, students were [suspended over 15,000 times](#) for safety-related issues. Clearly more efforts are needed.

Reference: [National Education Association](#)

reported carrying a weapon, down from 18% in 1997.

30 Percentage of RI high school students that reported someone tried to sell them drugs one or more times in school.

39.1 Percentage of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender students that reported being physically harassed.

133,700 Average annual number of violent crimes against teachers at school.

Sources: [National Education Association](#), [U.S. Department of Justice](#), [R.I. YRBS 2005](#), [Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network](#), [U.S. Department of Justice](#), [Office of Juvenile Justice](#)

School Safety Links

[thrive - Social Environment](#)

[thrive - Mental Health](#)

[Talk About It](#)

[Love Is Not Abuse](#)

[Stop Bullying Now](#)

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The Core Issue: Teen Dating Violence and What Schools Can Do to Prevent It

[The Rhode Island Abuse Prevention Education Network](#) defines teen dating violence as, "a pattern of behavior used by someone to maintain control over his or her partner, which can include verbal abuse, isolation of the partner, sexual coercion, emotional manipulation, and physical abuse." Teen dating violence (TDV) is seldom talked about among parents, teachers, and even among teens. Victims of TDV tend to cover up the issue because of fear, shame, and/or not knowing where to turn for help. Because teens in abusive relationships often suffer in silence, many people are shocked to learn that the problem is widespread.

Teens involved in violent relationships experience detrimental short and long-term consequences. This has a negative impact on their academic performance, due to missed classes, difficulty paying attention, and avoidance of school and/or social events. Given the pervasiveness of this problem, and its implications on student engagement and performance, it is essential to have schools as a partner in prevention.

There has been a growing national trend to actively engage the educational system in the fight against TDV. Rhode Island joined this effort when it passed legislation in 2007 mandating that schools implement comprehensive TDV awareness and prevention. Known as Lindsay's Law, after Lindsay Ann Burke, it honors the memory of a young Rhode Island woman who was murdered by her dating partner in 2005.

The Rhode Island Department of Education, in collaboration with partners statewide, is in the process of developing both a model policy for the prevention of TDV and guidance for schools in addressing this issue. The following illustrate some effective approaches that schools can take to raise awareness of TDV, and promote a respectful, non-violent school environment:

- Utilize school assembly meetings and staff trainings to raise awareness of the prevalence, consequences, and warning signs of teen dating violence, including information about where to turn for help.
- Implement and consistently enforce school-wide policy which promotes a peaceful school climate free from all forms of violence and harassment, including dating abuse.
- Sponsor school-wide social marketing campaigns that decrease the acceptability of TDV and the social norms that perpetuate it, and encourage staff and students to take a stand against all forms of violence.
- Arm students with information about healthy, respectful relationships and how to foster them by consistently teaching these concepts in health education classes.
- Integrate TDV awareness and prevention with other school-wide initiatives, such as bullying prevention, and

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incorporate TDV awareness and prevention into fun and effective classroom activities for mainstream classes to reach as many students as possible.

While there is much work to do towards preventing teen dating violence, schools have considerable power to impact this problem and are ideal places to spread the word about TDV and to change student culture and norms related to violence of all kinds.

References: "[Choose Respect](#)", *Social Norms: How to Prevent Gender Based Violence in your School*, Developed by the [Abuse Prevention Education Network](#), a collaboration of the six member agencies of the [RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#), [Day One](#), and the [Katie Brown Education Program](#), 2007, [National Teen Dating Violence Prevention Initiative](#), [American Bar Association](#)

Fresh from the Field

Submitted by Susan Pfeil, Principal, Jenks Junior High School, Pawtucket

I had never seen two handfuls of hair pulled out of a girl's head. I gasped as I stood in the clinic, to where I was called one afternoon during my third week as the new principal of Joseph Jenks Junior High School in Pawtucket. This was the beginning of many physical fights that took place on a regular basis during the first half of the 2006-2007 school year at Jenks. It seemed to be an acceptable part of the school culture. A few weeks after that first fight an assertive eighth grade girl said to me, "Why do you call the police when we fight; that's what we do here!"

Fortunately, there were many people at Jenks that wanted a safe school and knew that it was possible to build one. We formed a Safe and Orderly Committee which met voluntarily every week after school. These teacher leaders researched and developed systems to form the foundation of a safe school geared towards building a learning community dedicated to the social, emotional and developmental needs of our student body. Fortunately, some basic groundwork had already been established in the building because of the perseverance of our school nurse, Linda Mendonca.

Linda was the contact person who had established a relationship in 2004 with the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence. Members of the institute worked with students through a six week program that showed them how to resolve conflicts without resorting to force. Teachers and staff were supportive of this work and reinforced it in classes and in the hallways.

Another group that contributed to the overall success for a safe and orderly school was the Jenks Teacher Leadership Team. This dedicated team met after school once a week to discuss cultural and academic concerns in the school. Representatives of the student body also contributed with ideas and support on a regular basis. Student ownership is an essential element needed to change a school culture. The common core of all of the above groups and individuals is the belief that the shared vision of a professional learning community is the fundamental key to establishing a safe, orderly and high achieving school. Yes, we still

have physical fights at times, but it is no longer considered 'what we do here'. We challenge our students to work with us to build a safe environment of respect, order and high expectations for learning. It is not an easy task, but we know that together we can do it!

To share your first-person success stories in "Fresh from the Field," please email Annemarie.Silvia@ride.ri.gov.

As always, we welcome and encourage your feedback about **thrive**, Rhode Island's Coordinated School Health model. Please email us at rosemary.reilly-chammat@health.ri.gov or midge.sabatini@ride.ri.gov.

Sincerely,

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