

# **State Board of Education**

## **Guidance for School Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention Policy**

It is the goal of the State Board of Education to 1) eliminate the use, distribution, and/or possession of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, inhalants, and misuse of prescription and over-the-counter medications on or around school grounds, school buses or at school-sponsored functions; 2) eliminate verbal and physical violence including bullying on or around school grounds and at school functions including acts that may or may not be related to gang participation; and 3) eliminate students' involvement in self-destructive acts including self-mutilation and suicide. Elimination of these factors is known through research to contribute to healthy youth development and overall academic success. Conversely, the research is conclusive around the connections between student involvement with alcohol and other drugs, violence and academic difficulties.

Ohio's data demonstrates that youth involvement with alcohol and others drugs, violence and suicide are problems that cannot be ignored. Twenty percent of all high school students reported seriously contemplating suicide over a 12 month period in 1999 (Youth Risk Behavior Survey). In 2003, 12 percent attempted suicide. Of the respondents, 32 percent were in physical fights and 12 percent carried a weapon. Also in the 2003 survey, 27 percent reported episodic heavy drinking and 21 percent used marijuana in the past month. These risk factors contribute to truancy, discipline problems, and ultimately poor academic performance and inability to graduate.

Under the Board Approved Priority of Closing the Achievement Gap, the Ohio State Board of Education recommends that the following be addressed when working to build a safer, more caring school community that prevents students from engaging in risky behaviors, protects students, builds resiliency and promotes pro-social behaviors in students.

**All Ohio school districts** should evaluate their current ability to provide safe, caring learning environments and provide programs and services that address students' needs and prevent alcohol and other drug use/abuse and violence. The following are critical areas to address when establishing and/or improving upon current policies, programs and practices.

1. **Data should drive decision-making around policies, programs and practices.** School district and building decision-makers should collect and analyze data to understand the scope and nature of the problem and how current policies, programs and practices are influencing student outcomes. As new components are put into place, evaluation should be a central part of the plan to assess effectiveness. Districts may want to consider the following as areas on which to collect data:

- a. The use, possession, and distribution of alcohol and other drugs on or around school property and at school functions;
- b. Age of onset of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use;
- c. Incidence and prevalence of violent acts including self mutilation and suicide;
- d. Incidence and prevalence of bullying;
- e. Incidence and prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use;
- f. Perceptions of social disapproval (peers) of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use;
- g. Perceptions of risk or harm of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use;
- h. Truancy rates;
- i. Graduation rates;
- j. Suspensions and expulsions related to bullying, violence or alcohol and other drug use, possession, or distribution on or around school grounds or at school functions;
- k. Number of children transitioning through the child welfare system; and
- l. Number of incidents of contact students have with the legal system.

2. **District and school building policies and implementation thereof are fair, consistent and create the conditions for a safe, caring school learning environment.** These policies take into consideration the home culture and environment of students and the individual needs of students. Schools should be aware of the fact that problems that occur outside of school time can have a major effect on in-school time.
3. **Each school district should create its own comprehensive plan for implementing their policies, at the building level, that ensure that students are safe, supported and drug free.** This plan should align with academic goals, include plans for professional development, provide supports for students including prevention and early intervention, and address the relationship to discipline codes. The State Board of Education's School Climate Guidelines offer clear guidance on the core components that should be addressed in a comprehensive plan. In addition, the current student cultural context should be considered and addressed, including but not limited to, consideration that the Internet is a vehicle conducive to education as well as verbal abuse and risk-taking behaviors.
4. **Each school building should work toward a safe, caring school climate,** an element that researchers demonstrate is essential in order for students to achieve academic success. This includes ensuring that the educational system is culturally responsive, provides supports that meet students' needs and takes into consideration school and community risk and protective factors.
5. **Schools provide adequate professional development to prepare teachers and administrators on how to create a safer, more caring school community, prevent problems and promote resiliency.** Educators must be prepared in a

number of ways in order to ensure that students have the right conditions and motivations for learning. They must be able to:

- a. Prevent problems from escalating to violence;
- b. Practice fair and consistent discipline methods that result in retaining the dignity of the student and teaching valuable lessons;
- c. Identify students' needs, provide appropriate early interventions or refer students to services through in-house expertise or community partnerships to address needs;
- d. Teach skills in conflict management, perspective-taking and interpersonal communications to promote resiliency, confidence and competence.

- 6. Schools should adopt research-based programs and practices** that teach students to recognize the dangers of risky behaviors and skills to deal with problems including refusal, conflict management and coping. The stronger programs define an active role for students, families and communities in promoting a safer, more caring school community.
- 7. Schools should develop a continuum of services designed to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors** as they pertain to individuals, the family, peer groups, school and community; as well as a system of early identification and referral that ensures youth in need of services are connected with the appropriate community services that address the student and family's needs. Clearly defined linkages with the courts and foster-care systems will provide access to information on students who need additional supports, whether it be in reintegration after incarceration or additional attention during a change in foster-care homes.
- 8. The policies, plans and practices of a caring school community must engage families and communities as true partners.** Schools are only one critical component of keeping a student safe, drug free and learning. It requires the skills, talents and resources of the entire community, especially including parents, families and guardians, to ensure students are provided every opportunity to succeed. Foster care, child welfare and the court systems act often as guardians and should be critical partners communicating with one another about what students are undergoing at school and in their home life. Schools and systems must work together to provide the most supportive structure possible in order to prevent high-risk behaviors and promote resiliency.
- 9. Youth can act as powerful advocates and models for their peers as they work to create a safer, drug-free school community.** Although it may take more effort and forethought to provide opportunities for students, youth can play critical and unique roles as models, leaders and advocates. They can be involved in informing school leaders about students' thoughts and needs and be a part of key decision-making in the development of the school's comprehensive approach to providing a safe and supportive learning environment.

- 10. Schools should offer out-of-school-time activities and clubs in addition to sports teams that incorporate skill building in cooperation and communication.** The vast majority of youth high-risk behaviors take place between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Providing activities and clubs not only gives students constructive and organized social time with their peers, but also teaches (in a more informal setting) skills that prevent risky behaviors and promote resiliency and pro-social behaviors.
- 11. Additional supports and considerations should be given to the periods of transition from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school to life beyond secondary school.** Researchers have found higher numbers of violent incidents, suicides and other problem behaviors during major transitions in students' lives. Providing additional support systems during this time is a preventative measure that can ensure that students feel safe and cared for while undergoing significant change.
- 12. Schools may consider employee supports for faculty, staff and administrators to ensure that they are able to maintain their own overall well-being.** If we have an expectation that teachers and administrators need to work to create a safe, caring learning environment, they also need to work in an environment where they feel supported and can access help and services. Schools are encouraged to provide professional development to support their mental and emotional capacity for dealing with challenging behaviors students may present.

**Definitions:**

**Alcohol and Other Drugs** include but are not limited to the following drugs of abuse — alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, inhalants, prescription and over-the-counter medications. We chose not to use the term *substance abuse* because it is often interpreted as not including alcohol, which is the most widely used and abused drug by youth.

**Violence** is an act of aggression against a person (another or oneself) or groups of persons that causes physical and/or emotional harm. Violent behaviors may include but are not limited to, aggressive gang activity, bullying, self-mutilation or suicide.

**Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying** all refer to repeatedly annoying or attacking a person using physical, verbal, written or electronic actions that create fear of harm or an intimidating and/or hostile education or work environment. These actions occur without displaying a weapon and without subjecting the victim to actual physical attack (i.e. bullying, hazing, threat of harm).

**Protection or prevention** includes safe, caring learning environments, skill-building in communications, problem-solving and interpersonal relationships, and a proactive continuum of services that empower individuals, families and communities. These services help participants meet the challenges of life events and transitions by creating and reinforcing conditions that impact physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive well-being and promote safe and healthy behaviors and lifestyles.

**Ohio's Shared Prevention Framework**, developed by all Ohio human services agencies, presents a shared definition, vision, mission and priorities for prevention. The framework is based on the principles of effective prevention practice and incorporates strategies and programs to provide greater consistency and coordination of state resources in meeting school and community needs.

**Collaborators on the development of this State Board of Education Policy include:**

Ohio's First Lady Hope Taft  
Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Stratton  
Ohio Department of Education  
Ohio State Board of Education  
Ohio Department of Mental Health  
Ohio Department of Drug and Alcohol Addiction Services  
Ohio Resource Network for Safe and Drug Free Schools  
The Ohio State University, College of Social Work  
Miami University, Center for School-based Mental Health  
Putnam County Educational Service Center