

Checklist for factors associated with violence and gang activity in schools

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Student Performance

- During this school year, across all subjects, have your students achieved a GPA of more than 2.85?
- In your classes, how often are your students distracted from doing your schoolwork because other students are misbehaving?

Research evidence suggest that collectively, students in schools with more violence reported an average GPA of 2.85, compared to students in schools with no gang activity who reported a collective average of 3.15. Elevating academic standards at the school should be viewed as a strategy for reducing school violence. Students in schools with gang activity were also more likely to report being distracted from doing school work because of other students misbehaving. Often, in schools with problems with violence, we spend a lot of time confronting problematic students, and not enough time checking in with students who are trying to do the right thing.

Relationship with Teachers

- Are your students likely to report that teachers care about students in general?
- Are your students likely to report that teachers treat students with respect?
- How often do teachers punish students during your classes?
- Are your students likely to report that teachers do or say things that make students feel bad about themselves?

Students in schools with more gangs were less likely to report teachers care about students, and treat students with respect. They were more likely to report teachers punish students during classes, and do or say things that make students feel bad about themselves. Black students were significantly more likely to experience disillusionment with their teacher. Many teachers, particularly in urban school districts, become disenchanted because they feel they have little control over the conditions and circumstances that weaken student achievement. Additional coping resources should be allocated to teachers who work in tough learning environments.

School Environment

- Are your students likely to report that punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who they are (Rules are fair)?
- Are your students likely to report that at school, there is an ADULT he/she can talk to, who cares about his/her feelings and what happens to me?

Schools should measure holistic qualities of their environment based on their: (1) Abilities to make students feel supported and respected; (2) Skill at creating forums for students to express themselves; and (3) Ability to critique students without making them feel bad about themselves. Incentives for teachers to become involved with students outside of the classroom, such as through clubs, sports and other activities, could also cultivate more cordial student-teacher relationships.

School Safety Measures (Direct)

- Does your school have security guards and/or assigned police officers; Metal detectors; or a requirement that students wear badges or picture identification?
- Does your school have locked entrance or exit doors during the day?

Security guards and police officers in school, metal detectors, and picture identification badges are associated with MORE gang activity. If you have them, and find them necessary, you should carefully examine whether these strategies are adding to a culture of violence that increases overall anxiety among teachers and students. However, having a locked entrance or exit doors during the day demonstrated REDUCED gang activity at school.

School Safety Measures (Indirect)

- During the last school year, do many of your students participate in any extra-curricular activities sponsored by your school?

Spirit groups, for example, cheerleading or pep club; performing arts, for example, band, orchestra, or drama; and/or academic clubs, for example, debate team, honor society, Spanish club, or math club, are associated with LESS gang activity. Implementing more extra-curricular activities, particularly those that instill school pride, appreciation of art and culture, and academic identity can reduce violence at the school.

Student Behavior

- During this school year, are your students likely to STAY AWAY from school restrooms because they thought someone might attack or harm them there?
- Do any of your students AVOID any extra-curricular activities at your school or stay home because they thought someone might attack or harm them?

School restrooms were identified as the place in the school where students felt most vulnerable to an attack. Make sure restrooms are secure. One strategy might be to train janitors to discretely monitor suspicious activity. Research also suggests that violence that happens away from school impacts class performance. Students who report higher levels of safety and lower levels of bullying, were more likely to perform better in school. Students at schools with gang activity reported avoiding extra-curricular activities, and skipping school to avoid harm.
