

## **School Safety**

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### **Introduction**

Based on the "School Safety Roundtable" facilitated at the ASSE PDC in San Antonio in 2009, combined with operational experiences of a four-year Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) project, the paper is designed to address safety practitioners who would like to "bring safety home." With a passion to assist public schools in safety and security, it is often a case where there are limited community resources, and we need to look within for intrinsic wealth. This paper will focus on examples, components and tools to reference successful practices for SS/HS, supported by data from evaluation and communications teams. The principles used in this SS/HS project apply readily to all forms of political subdivisions.

Emerging issues facing school safety, from unfunded mandates to federal, state and local guidelines, will be addressed, with suggestions to prepare the safety practitioner who chooses the mission to contribute professionally to safe schools and healthy students. The paper will engage in professional discourse on matters concerning priorities and too much information, safety and project management best practices and ways that communication, community building, and partnerships can overcome barriers.

The school shooting events at Columbine, Paducah, Red Lake, Springville, and Virginia Tech help us to identify school safety challenges. Highland Local Schools in Sparta, Ohio, was awarded a \$3 million SS/HS federal grant initiative by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice in the fall of 2005. A goal for the Highland school system and Amy Stewart, the first and only safety-degreed, certified safety professional (CSP) employed as a SS/HS Project Director, was to become a safe schools model for the nation. Through increased collaboration with community partners and implementation of program activities, Highland addressed the SS/HS initiative from 2005 to 2009 per federal contract.

While this paper will serve as a springboard from last year's ASSE PDC School Safety Roundtable as it pertains to leaders, professionals and practitioners of safety, the ASSE PDC School Safety Roundtable 2009 promoted lively face-to-face discussions. To expand knowledge about school safety community examples, methods and approaches, we prepare for challenges. References of Safe Schools/Healthy Students' successful practices can be transferred beyond school settings to project and safety management for all forms of political subdivisions or private sector organizations.

## Leaving the Legacy in School Safety

Beginning with the end in mind, the goal to leave a legacy, as a model for the nation in school safety, is how the Highland legacy started, knowing there were plenty of schools that were not granted the millions of dollars for funding this type of effort. Utilizing federal funds as a public servant, this initiative addresses emerging issues, successful practices in project management, and the professional perspective of the safety practitioner's challenges.

### Year One

Three million dollars! That was a phrase that was celebrated by Highland Local Schools in 2005: "We Won!" After several revisions of the budget to March 8, 2006, the funds were released for programs, functions, activities and services. The reporting for the first six months was brief, due to the team building and initial construction of the project. The money for first six months was minimally expended in preparation for what was to come. Funds were authorized for the project director's salary beginning October 10, 2005, and nothing else was to be expended until the Federal Project Officer (FPO) approved the entire budget, other than the New Grantee meeting in Washington, DC, and the National Mental Health conference in Cleveland at the end of October 2005, where the Project Director was able to personally meet the FPO. Once the money started flowing in March 2006, contracts and functions were fulfilled, and the program implementation as well as student services, began. February and March 2006 were effective dates of employment for the local evaluation firm, as well as five licensed social workers (LSWs), who were titled "student services specialists (SSS)," due to the negative connotation of social workers initially in this community. The Highland Behavior Intervention Specialist (BIS), Data Manager, Community Builder, and deputy were contracted in April of 2006. Contracts were established with five formal partners (Morrow County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), Morrow County Juvenile Court, Morrow County Health Department, Child Care Choices, the Mental Health Board-DMMHRB), the JRA evaluation firm, the communications specialist, and the Central Ohio Mental Health Center (COMHC), for the licensed independent social worker (LISW) to provide clinical supervision. Increased engagement with the leadership of the school system was also a part of startup operations. Minor equipment purchases, such as laptop computers and office furniture and supplies for the remodeling or startup of offices, were expended the first year.

The summer of 2006 was spent implementing programs and training stakeholders, purchasing materials and getting more familiar with SS/HS through local staff and partner meetings, as well as meetings in Maryland and Washington, DC, for evaluation, communications, and the first regional SS/HS Meeting. The later part of Year One involved preparing for the collection of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) baseline, which did not occur until the first days of Year Two, which set Highland back in expenditures and implementation to achieve project completion within three years. Communications expenditures were higher than expected in Year One, as the need grew tangentially from brochures to graphic projects that were beyond internal school staff capabilities.

### Year Two

The second year began with the significant event of collecting the baseline of the YRBS (October 3, 2006); implementation of programs were more fully engaged, with increased expenditures in resource materials, program expenses and momentum. Our first Community Builder resigned in Year Two, and a second person attempted to fill the position with a focus on newsletter and Family Friendly programming. The CLFC program was clearly not going well with our court

partner and in the schools, due to lack of parental engagement. Strategic planning began with the local JRA Evaluation Team and school/community stakeholders to seek replacement programming (ultimately Parenting Wisely), which would not happen for another year. The Ohio Administrative Code changed in Year Two for home child care providers, and through FPO-approved changes in budget and program structure, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Step Program was expanded to four counties through the Child Care Choices partner, which revised the budget to include partial cost for evaluation. Other budgetary changes surfaced, as Highland identified the need for school bus cameras, and a \$70k change was approved for purchase, training provided by the vendor and installation for 30 buses, with a revision of the Year 2 budget. The Family Friendly program, under the second community builder, determined the value of Instant Alert, and the district agreed to pay subsequent years if SS/HS would begin the initial payment of approximately \$5,000, with FPO approval. During Year Two, it was decided not to renew one of the LSW employment contracts, and to reorganize the LSW/SSS structure to assign one LSW to each school building. This involved FPO approval in the middle of Year 2, with redistribution of staffing to reflect hiring two LSWs for the last six weeks of Year Two, and to provide orientation, training and familiarity with the SS/HS programs. The two LSWs that were hired for SS/HS were previously funded by a state Department of Education's "21<sup>st</sup> century grant" in the school district and were most qualified, with familiarity with the building principals, their students and families. The end of Year Two, the Highland grant writer and project director's eyes were opened through attendance of the National Association of Rural Mental Health (NARMH) conference.

### Year Three

The third year began with a surprise request for unemployment benefits for the LSW whose contract that was not renewed, effective October 1, 2007. Due to the costs associated with fighting the claim, Mid Ohio Educational Services (MOESC) chose not to pursue denial of it. This precipitated discussion in Denver, Colorado, at the SS/HS Sustainability meeting with the Treasurer, Superintendent, U.S. Department of Education FPO, and the Highland project director on what steps could be taken to avoid four more social workers from staking unemployment claims at the end of the SS/HS initiative. Truly a sustainable outcome is that all four LSWs have been retained; two are from an elementary counseling Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS) grant, and the Middle School and High School LSWs are now school-board funded, effective July 1, 2009. Year Three proved valuable in sustaining relationships with the mental health partners, with SS/HS funding a NARMH annual conference attendance with the Associate Director of DMMHRB and the newly appointed, COMHC Executive Director, with the SS/HS Highland Project Director. The relationship was strengthened and a deeper understanding of SS/HS was attained through collaborative partnership. The last half of Year Three was also the celebration through the Highland Board of Education-funded Appreciation dinner for SS/HS Partners. Over 75 people were invited, and almost 50 attended, complete with SS/HS Technical Assistant (TA) edited press release and SS/HS plaques, which were presented at the Highland Local Schools Board of Education meeting.

### Year Four

There was a formal request, which was approved due to the late start of the entire project of Year One, from the delayed release of funding to program implementation that did not begin until Year Two. There were programs to further implement, functions to support, and funding to expend, less than a typical year of SS/HS expenditures at Highland. Most SS/HS-funded activities, functions and contracts ended in June of 2009, with the Evaluation and Project Director contracts continuing for close out September 30, 2009. Communications continue to be key to success, and

the Communications Specialist assisted in Year Four with the design, layout and printing of the Highland Legacy, Fall 2009, that involved distilling over 50,000 documents, not including emails, to a reference manual for not only Highland and also for the nation. Year Four was the year to strengthen and sustain successful programs that will continue beyond the funding of the grant: 2<sup>nd</sup> Step, Character Counts, Project SUCCESS, Teen Screen, Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Parenting Wisely, Partnerships, Safety, and Family Friendly Schools, as well as the infrastructure that was built seemingly from ground zero, including and not limited to crisis plans, mental health referrals, meeting agendas, incident command and contact information For Your Eyes Only (FYEO) lists, and foundation for future building of safety systems. Highland was recently awarded \$50 million through the Ohio Facilities Commission for building and renovation of three school buildings, as further infrastructure opportunities abound. Effective October 2005 through September 30, 2009, all SS/HS / Highland financial obligations have been met.

## **Lessons Learned from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (HS/SS) Project**

Most *purchases*, such as computers, furniture, books, program resource materials and supplies, have been fully utilized and retained as an integral part of Highland school operations and continued Safe Schools/Healthy Students activities and other federally funded activities. Items that were purchased with SS/HS funding for SS/HS promotion included: materials, samples and grant products to include 2-way radios for each school building and District office staff person; 75 - \$10 Amazon certificates for Character Counts successes; books and resource materials for the Community Coalition for Healthy Highland (CCHH), Character Counts, 2<sup>nd</sup> Step, Teen Screen, Project Success, PBIS, Family Friendly, Parenting Wisely and Safety programs.

*Communications services* included the "Highland Herald" newsletter, consulting for brochure, promotional materials, branding, web mapping and design. Family Friendly purchases included: flashlight keys, magnetic "In Case of Emergency" refrigerator calendars, pencils, balloons, chess sets, microphones, signage and shirts, ice scrapers and bags, and one digital camera for each school building. The Legacy Binders— So far, midway in 2007, and the Highland Legacy Fall 2009 documents/CDs were created for SS/HS partners, the Highland Board of Education, Ohio Education & Mental Health state departments, SS/HS TAS, TA, FPO, and for nationwide distribution. Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) purchases involved raffle tickets for iPods, gift cards and student awards and recognition, rulers, cups, pencils, and shirts. There were purchases of plaques for SS/HS partner appreciation and safety items, ranging from wind-up flashlights, retro-reflective safety vests and gloves, emergency supply kits, first aid kits, bucket kits, and reflective jackets to safety stickers.

The SS/HS grant application was written and proposed without input of the appointed Project Director, as the \$3million loomed as a worthy pursuit for the school system. From October 2005 to September 2009, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) federal grant initiative was in operation for Highland Local Schools, with the project director contracted by Mid Ohio Educational Services (MOESC). The Project Director led the Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative for Highland Schools by managing the project and budget, hiring and supervising staff, collaborating and synthesizing partner, student, parent, and community involvement to meet federal guidelines toward sustainability through the U.S. Departments of Justice, Education, and Health and Human Services. Reporting obligations were fulfilled on time

and within budget, leaving the Highland SS/HS Legacy as a model for the nation. As a result, licensed social workers (LSWs) and programs, as well as infrastructure and systems, were sustained with a different culture and outlook toward safe and healthy students.

Leading the SS/HS staff plus contractual agreements and establishing an office, an infrastructure and a systematic process was introduced through weekly, monthly and quarterly staff and partner meetings; fostering verbal and written communications through monthly and semi-annual reporting and “tracks” in the name of documents, ranging from interview questions and job descriptions to crisis flow charts, In Case of Emergency (ICE) incident command contacts, consent forms, copies of IRB letters, program and element summaries, and checklists. The Highland Legacy document is referenced per each SS/HS element (safety, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, Pre-K early childhood development, connecting schools and communities, and safety policy), as well as sections addressing evaluation, communications, and project direction. It is available in hard copy to Highland leadership and partners; and also electronically duplicated on a CD to tell the Highland SS/HS story and to leave the legacy. At this time, over 300 electronic CD copies of the Fall 2009 Highland Legacy have been distributed nationwide to fellow SS/HS project directors, technical assistants, state entities, stakeholders, safety practitioners, and those who seek to understand how to implement safe schools and healthy students. The Highland Legacy is a great success. The greatest and most rewarding challenge is making it happen.

Highland local schools had to collaboratively establish an *evaluation* plan for all of the programs proposed in the grant application. Enough data was provided to propose and approve program change with the federal project officer through the local evaluation team. This took more time than partners, program staff and community stakeholders would have liked. Baseline was an issue. We collaboratively discussed degrees of engagement through staff and partner meetings. We also explored evidence-based programs to propose to replace the program that did not work, and illustrated differences and potential of replacement programming, based on data. Some of the factors in evaluation were: timing and flexibility; the logic model; consent; program and survey length and structure; as well as location and support. Based on the data collected by our local evaluation firm, our LSWs (licensed social workers) made themselves available to meet families at school home and in libraries to help new programs along.

#### Collaborative Partnerships

Contingent on funding, the SS/HS initiative required three *collaborative partnerships*: law, mental health, and the court system. We were able to partially fund a school liaison deputy through the SS/HS funding; an LISW for weekly clinical supervision with the licensed social workers, and contracted training with all partners, enriching the community by bringing training entities to the county and expanding the availability of resource materials and curriculum to those interested stakeholders and school staff, students, families and interfaith community where appropriate. Highland Local Schools opened training opportunities to county stakeholders who might be interested, such as Children’s Services and neighboring schools, to saturate the “market.” There were also mandated SS/HS Partner meetings in Washington, DC and out of state that provided a setting for face-to-face time without local distractions that would occur in the county. Through off-site meetings, training and professional development, the partners and leadership learned more about each other. Through the creation of FYEO (For Your Eyes Only) and ICE (In Case of Emergency) lists of contact information and regular communications and reports, the Highland community grew together to work around constraints to help each other,

with the best interest of safe and healthy students, working with the SS/HS Highland *mission statement*: Positively impact student learning through direct coordination of community resources in a focused and timely manner.

Identifying the problem/opportunity with an audience of partners who share the same mission, combined with “seed money/resources” and increased communication prompted further support, resources and cooperation, in terms of leverage. For example, when mental health services were identified for students, our Mental Health Partner funded a school liaison above and beyond the scope of the grant. When internet safety and stranger danger became apparent, our Morrow County Sheriff’s Office provided a detective “in kind” to talk to elementary classes. When parenting wisely needed to be presented to families, the judge facilitated classes on Saturdays “in kind.” Highland's Child Care Choices partner expanded the 2nd Step program to four counties through Head Start. The Morrow County Health Department’s part-time health commissioner worked behind the scenes, connecting with townships and the Ohio Department of Homeland Security to increase capability in crisis planning and safety in the schools.

#### Staff Meetings

When professionals can do more synergistically than the one person alone, many times it is better to stay out of the way. Although there is a degree of accountability that must be met, our contracted people are working with students, staff, community and stakeholders, and they are happy in their element. It was an adjustment for the staff to have to attend weekly staff meetings, and it took some time for them to realize that through a one-hour weekly meeting, there were fewer interruptions throughout the week (“It can wait until Tuesday”). There were times when it was best to cancel the weekly meeting on occasion due to the situations the staff were involved in to “get the job done = serve students,” and we became more flexible, finding substitutions in other ways, from training sessions to electronic connection and reporting. Working with people and relationships is all about give and take and sharing while building trust. Toward the end of the four-year SS/HS grant period, during the no-cost extension (NCE) year, there were times when it was proposed to cancel face-to-face meetings. The leadership grew accustomed to finding SS/HS staff at the district office at noon on Tuesdays, and meetings happened anyway. The work was accomplished as the project direction became progressively unnecessary and owned by those who originally protested.

#### SS/HS Highland Final Report

Over 1,000 pages of the *SS/HS Highland Final Report 524B* was submitted to the US Department of Education & US Department of Health and Human Services through the Freedom of Information Act. In that report is this disclaimer: "The local evaluators did not assist in the preparation of the evaluation section of the Legacy binder and did not identify which documents should be included. The information contained in the evaluation section does not provide a complete representation of the evaluation as it only contains pieces of the evaluation and data and other documents prepared during the first few years of the evaluation. Please refer to the Final Evaluation Report for a complete report of the evaluation by JRA, Inc."

## **Summary**

It is generally agreed that Highland Local Schools is better for having experienced this Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) award in 2005. Safety is recognized in the school culture, violence prevention has been addressed, alcohol and other drug data has been gathered and

documented, and partnership and connectivity with community stakeholders is realized. Although no single action can be counted, the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative takes a broad approach, drawing on the best practices and the latest thinking in education, justice, social services, and mental health to help communities take action. The Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative has provided financial and technical support to the Highland school district, law enforcement, public and private mental health services organizations, and community-based organizations. The result is a coordinated, cooperative effort that recognizes the complexity of youth violence. Funds were used creatively to link new and existing services, making it easier for children and families to get the comprehensive support they need. Incorporating strategies for prevention as well as intervention, grant funding allowed the Highland Local Schools and the community to address issues of youth violence as they appear, while *working to prevent violence before it starts*.

Additionally, programs and services with a proven track record of success helped to achieve many goals. These “evidence-based” programs include efforts to promote students’ cooperation with their peers, set standards of behavior, develop healthy student/family relationships, increase parental involvement in schools, build emotional resiliency, and strengthen communication and problem-solving skills. Results are important. *As strategies were implemented, outcomes are evaluated and progress is measured*. Collectively, Safe Schools/Healthy Students made an enormous impact on the quality of life for the children, families, and communities they serve. We believe this project serves as a [rural] model for the nation, an internal goal that will be determined over time.

The following Table of Contents from the SS/HS Highland Legacy, Fall 2009 CD publicly serves as a reference for safe schools and healthy students, as well as safety practitioners for years to come for a variety of safety management projects, with the request that it is utilized in the public servant spirit for which it was written, and not for profit, resale or marketing purposes.

# Highland Local School District Safe Schools/Healthy Students Legacy Binder

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