



RESEARCH BRIEF

Center For The Prevention Of School Violence
North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

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THE CENTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE GENERATES A BASELINE PROFILE OF STUDENTS AGAINST VIOLENCE EVERYWHERE CHAPTERS

Research undertaken by the Center for the Prevention of School Violence has generated a profile of Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) chapters. S.A.V.E. chapters exist to involve students in school and community violence prevention efforts. The first S.A.V.E. chapter was started by high school students in 1989 in Charlotte, North Carolina, when a fellow student was murdered at a Friday night gathering.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence serves as the national clearinghouse for S.A.V.E. The Center's generation of the S.A.V.E. profile allows for the development of baseline information about S.A.V.E. chapters which now exist in thirty states and Canada with almost 70,000 students in elementary, middle, and high schools involved. The Center's research also allows for development of best practices for the operation of S.A.V.E. chapters as well as will assist the Center in determining the effectiveness of S.A.V.E. in efforts to make schools safer. Finally, it holds promise with regard to strategies which need to be pursued to promote the growth of S.A.V.E. chapters across the United States.

To develop the profile, in September, 2000, the Center sent 580 questionnaires to the advisors of registered S.A.V.E. chapters. Ultimately, about thirty percent of the chapters responded to the Center's request for information about their operations. Although a low response rate, the thirty-percent rate enables the creation of a baseline of knowledge upon which future research efforts will build. The rate reflects responses from twenty-one states and Canada. Not surprisingly, as most S.A.V.E. chapters are in North Carolina, chapters from North Carolina comprise the bulk of respondents.

S.A.V.E. chapter advisors completed the questionnaire which asked for information about advisor roles, chapter composition, and chapter activities. The questionnaire revealed that school counselors, School Resource Officers (specially trained certified law enforcement officers who are assigned to work in schools), and teachers most often serve as advisors to S.A.V.E. chapters.

They typically have been involved in S.A.V.E. for a little over

two years and spend about two hours per week in their role as S.A.V.E. advisors.

Information garnered concerning chapter composition reveals that student involvement in S.A.V.E. chapters reflects about twelve percent of the total number of students in the schools in which the S.A.V.E. chapters exist. Elementary schools, which tend to pursue S.A.V.E. by infusing the S.A.V.E. curriculum into ongoing school safety efforts, tend to have larger percentages of their student enrollment identified as being involved in S.A.V.E. with some schools indicating that nearly all of their students are involved. The percentage of involvement decreases into middle and high school as S.A.V.E. is most likely pursued as an extra-curricular activity and as students have more choice about activities in which they will be active. Some eighty-two percent of the S.A.V.E. advisors indicated that S.A.V.E. students tend to belong to other school organizations.

Demographically, according to advisors, about sixty percent of involved students are white, thirty-two percent are African American, and the remaining eight percent are Hispanic American, Native American, and Asian American. About sixty percent of the students are female, and forty percent are male.

The vast majority, ninety-three percent, of advisors who responded indicated that they consider their chapters to be "active." Just under a majority of the chapters are new with almost thirty-five percent of the chapters one year old or less, and twelve percent, two years old. Chapters which are two years old or less likely were created at least partially as a result of the violent incident at Columbine High School in Colorado. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence experienced a surge of interest in S.A.V.E. after Columbine when many communities and schools began looking for ways to involve students in school safety efforts. This interest has not subsided despite the recent unveiling by the United States government of very encouraging statistics with regard to the safety of schools in the United States.

Eighty-nine percent of advisors responded to a question

concerning the initiation of their S.A.V.E. chapter by indicating an intent to prevent school violence. Eighty-four percent wanted the promotion of peaceful methods to resolve conflicts. Sixty-one percent wanted to provide opportunities for positive social interaction including positive peer pressure. Fifty-three percent indicated they wanted S.A.V.E. to assist students in the development of life and social skills. Fifty-two percent wanted to give students opportunities for community service.

Chapters tend to meet regularly according to advisors, but there is some variation about how often with some thirty-seven percent meeting once a month, thirty-two percent meeting twice a month, eighteen percent meeting once a week, and four percent meeting twice a week. A majority of the meetings take place after school although some take place during the school day. The typical number of students who attend these meetings is thirty with a range identified by advisors that spanned from five to two hundred fifty. Recruitment of members occurs through personal appeals by current members and advisors as well as through awareness campaigns which often use Center for the Prevention of School Violence materials.

Chapter activities which were identified as promoting the largest involvement of students were S.A.V.E. school rallies, the Center for the Prevention of School Violence's annual S.A.V.E. summit, participation in school-wide pledges of nonviolence, and observations of weeks set aside for emphasis of nonviolence and safer schools.

The most important projects undertaken by the S.A.V.E. chapters included participation in service learning projects by which students typically become involved in efforts to help their communities, provision to the school by the S.A.V.E. chapter of guest speakers who tend to be motivational and serve as role models, and training in conflict management and peer mediation. The training of students in peer mediation is particularly interesting as it appears to have impact in two directions. For some chapters, this training was identified as increasing the number of peer mediations which took place and therefore was cited as being successful because students went to peer mediation instead of becoming involved in conflicts. For some chapters, the training was said to decrease the number of mediations as students were seen as less likely to have conflicts for which mediations were needed.

To pursue these projects, sixty-two percent of the advisors indicated that their chapters must spend time and energy on fund raising activities such as dances, car washes, and contests. Some chapters charge nominal membership dues to pay for educational materials, expenses associated with involvement in service projects, and operating expenses.

The "biggest challenges" identified by advisors to chapter success included obtaining financial resources to sustain project efforts such as those described above by forty-seven percent, increasing and maintaining student involvement by forty-two percent, getting parents more involved with S.A.V.E. by twenty-nine percent, obtaining program materials by twenty-six percent, and getting businesses involved by twenty-one percent.

Determining whether meeting these challenges is worth it with regard to S.A.V.E. is simple enough to answer given the advisors' responses to whether S.A.V.E. makes a difference in their schools. Eighty-six percent of advisors answered "yes" to the critical question of whether S.A.V.E. makes their school a "safer place." The evidence advisors offered in support of their affirmative responses included seeing decreases in fighting and in office referrals and increases in awareness of school violence issues and attitudes of nonviolence.

The profile of S.A.V.E. chapters developed by the Center for the Prevention of School Violence is grounded in the increasing research which indicates that young people need avenues to connect to their schools and communities and need to become involved in meaningful ways so that they can develop as resilient successful participants in our schools and communities. The profile provides baseline information about what S.A.V.E. chapters look like and how S.A.V.E. is implemented. It offers evidence in support of S.A.V.E. as a potentially effective initiative which can be undertaken to assist school and community efforts to prevent violence. Importantly, through the uncovering of the "biggest challenges" associated with S.A.V.E., it provides some sense of direction with regard to what needs to be addressed so that S.A.V.E. growth can continue in the future.

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence intends to follow up on several aspects of the profile with more in-depth analysis, research, and assessment. Potential differences among elementary, middle, and high school applications of S.A.V.E. as well as potential differences between newer and older S.A.V.E. chapters will be analyzed. Evidence of S.A.V.E. chapter success with regard to making schools safer will be researched and assessed. The baseline itself will be updated again next year with increased efforts to enhance response rate.

Overall, the Center's profile enhances understanding of S.A.V.E. in a way that enables future steps to be taken both in terms of research and with regard to S.A.V.E. operations. The Center will take these steps and continue to promote S.A.V.E. so that schools can enhance student involvement and, ultimately, student efforts to positively impact school safety.