

Student Health and Safety

Children long to belong to, or feel connected to, something bigger than themselves. Schools that integrate this truth into the fabric of their policies, procedures and programs will find ways for all students to discover success. Children will not feel part of school if they are afraid or uncomfortable at school. Children will not engage in school if they are affected by abuse or violence at home or in the community.

The foundation of academically successful schools will be healthy students attending safe schools and returning home to nurturing families.

Stable, healthy families play a critical role in efforts to reduce violence among youth. Children who have a strong connection to family values, customs and beliefs develop both the confidence to reach for a star and the talent to grab one; however, if children cannot find, and rely on, positive connections at home, they will settle for any substitute that satisfies their longing to belong, and that could be gangs, harmful relationships, and the abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Alaskans must work together as citizens, parents, students and educators to create an environment where violence cannot take root or survive in our streets, classrooms or homes. Schools, families and communities each have a distinct and critical role to play in any thorough effort to reduce violence. The degree to which these roles are collaboratively designed and aligned will make the difference between long-term success and flashy programs that fade away.

Apart from having no tolerance for harmful behaviors at school, schools must provide support and intervention services for parents and students, a broad range of activities, rigorous academic and vocational programs and learning alternatives that are flexible and inclusive enough to meet the unique interests and diverse learning needs of every child and family. Communities should not wait for children to go to crisis before reacting. Effective intervention programs must not take second place to prevention efforts.

Teachers and school staff must receive appropriate training to be able to enforce the school's expectations. Students, parents, educators and community members must design, teach, model and reinforce a consistent set of values and beliefs as the basis for every activity, program, lesson or expectation. Alaskans are concerned about school bullying, the ethical use of technology and character education.

Educators, parents, community members and those state and private agencies charged with the well-being of youth must work cooperatively to ensure that children are not the victims of physical/emotional abuse, hunger, neglect or other circumstances that cause harm.

Participants in the work group may address some of these questions:

What programs enhance and promote student health and safety?

What are the biggest issues that we face pertaining to student health and safety?

What are the obstacles or roadblocks that get in the way of addressing issues of student health and safety?

What must schools do to engage families in an effort to reduce violence?

What partnerships in the community and government should schools cultivate in this effort?

What must schools do to eliminate bullying, harassment, violence, alcohol use and drug use at school?

How is character development fostered?

What supports and/or programs must be in place to assist “Bringing the Kids Home”?

What social services, health services, and mental health services should be provided at schools? What should be provided offsite?

What steps and programs need to exist to provide parenting skills for teenage parents? Where does pre-natal care regarding FAS and FADE come into play?

What should schools do to foster students’ physical health and emotional health?

What steps should schools take so that students, parents, educators and others create a model for healthy and safe schools?

What elements should schools’ safety and crisis plans contain?

What assistance do small rural schools need to address the issues of health and safety?

Students come to school hungry. What ways can we insure all students have their nutritional needs met?

What role do activities play in promoting positive connections for students?

Healthy lifestyles and self sufficiency can reduce health issues that have increased in the past years: i.e. obesity, diabetes, etc. What preventive health services should be provided at schools?

What questions will you want to consider?

Co-facilitators: Sylvia Reynolds, member, Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development; Karen Perdue, Associate VP, University of Alaska Health Programs.